

SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF
MEN BY WOMEN

DATE

WHY I AM GIVING YOU THIS

I am disclosing to you, my employer, that I believe I am being sexually harassed. In this case, the person harassing me is a woman. This may be peer-to-peer or it may involve a power differential.

I am giving you this document because I want your help. I want you to understand that this kind of harassment is real, that it can be as stressful, upsetting, and damaging for a man as for anyone else, and that I need you to take it seriously as a workplace issue.

A WHAT I NEED FROM YOU – MY PRIVACY PREFERENCES

- ☐ Protect my confidentiality.
- ☐ At this time I do not want my complaint investigated, so I am not naming the person or people involved.

B WHAT I WANT YOU TO UNDERSTAND

- ☐ This kind of harassment is real and it can be as stressful, upsetting and damaging for a man as for anyone else.
- ☐ I would like to talk with you further and explain more about what is happening.

C WHAT I WANT YOU TO DO

- ☐ Acknowledge this as workplace harassment.
- ☐ Take my complaint seriously — don't minimize or dismiss it.
- ☐ Make clear to all staff, regardless of gender, that mentoring and sponsorship must remain professional.
- ☐ Ensure I am not excluded from opportunities or mocked for speaking up.
- ☐ Take steps to restore opportunities I may have lost.
- ☐ I'm not sure yet — I would like to talk about options.

Thank you for reading this request and taking it seriously.

This handout was created by Aftermetoo, a Canadian charity that helps people who are experiencing workplace sexual harassment. Its goal is to make it easier for workers and employers to talk about these situations — to help workers explain what's wrong, and to help employers understand and respond in ways that make things better.

THE CONTEXT OF HARASSMENT OF MEN

Harassment of men by women is often minimized or disbelieved because it runs against stereotypes. People sometimes assume that men cannot be victims, that men should "be flattered," or that it isn't serious when the harasser is a woman.

None of that is true. Harassment is harmful regardless of gender. It undermines dignity, safety, and career opportunities. It also places men in a difficult position socially: if they speak up, they may be mocked or not believed; if they stay silent, the harassment continues.

When the harasser is more senior, the dynamic is even harder. A young man may feel dependent on a woman in authority for references, mentoring, or opportunities, making it risky to push back. Women in positions of authority need to understand power imbalances just as men do and conduct themselves accordingly.

THE CONTEXT OF GROUP HARASSMENT

Harassment of men can also happen in majority-female environments where men are in the minority. Groups of women may tease or objectify a man in ways they see as playful or flattering — comments about his body, jokes about his attractiveness, asking for hugs, or physical contact such as touching his arms or shoulders.

Even if framed as humour, this creates a sexualized work environment. Men may feel pressured to laugh along, even when they find it upsetting or unwelcome. Being singled out and objectified because of gender is harassment, regardless of who is doing it.

THE CAREER AND PERSONAL IMPACT

- ◆ Men who are harassed often feel shame or self-doubt because the situation contradicts gender stereotypes.
- ◆ Harassment can make men withdraw socially or professionally, leading to lost opportunities.
- ◆ If the harasser is more senior, refusal can mean loss of mentoring, projects, or advancement.
- ◆ As with any worker, harassment can create stress, anxiety, distraction, and long-term damage to career confidence and development.

WHY EMPLOYERS SOMETIMES GET THIS WRONG

- ◆ They dismiss complaints as not serious or even "funny."
- ◆ They assume men should be grateful or "tough enough" to handle it.
- ◆ They downplay the situation because men as a group have advantages in society.
- ◆ They forget that harassment is about power and unwanted conduct, not about which gender is involved.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO

1. **Treat it as harassment:** Don't minimize or laugh it off. Respond as you would to any other complaint.
2. **Address stereotypes directly:** Make clear that men can be targets and deserve protection.
3. **Set expectations for all staff:** People in positions of power, regardless of gender, must understand that mentoring and sponsorship are professional responsibilities, not personal.
4. **Respond quickly:** Take reports seriously and act without delay.
5. **Protect opportunities:** Ensure the worker is not excluded, ridiculed, or disadvantaged for asserting boundaries.
6. **Repair where possible:** If opportunities were lost, ask what the worker feels he's missed and make efforts to provide them.
7. **For majority-female environments:** Remind staff that joking or teasing about a male colleague's looks, body or attractiveness is still harassment. Objectifying or singling someone out based on gender is unacceptable, even if it seems lighthearted.

CLOSING NOTE

Sexual harassment of men by women is less common than other forms, but it is no less serious. All workers deserve to be protected against harassment, regardless of gender. Your responsibility is to respond promptly, challenge stereotypes, and ensure that men who come forward are treated with dignity and fairness.