

I'M BEING HARASSED
AND NEED YOUR HELP

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 who is harassing me is someone with whom I used to be socially or sexually involved.

I am giving you this document because I want your help. I need you to understand that this environment makes it harder for me to do my job, and I want you to take steps to make our workplace better.

A WHAT I NEED FROM YOU – MY PRIVACY PREFERENCES

- ☐ Keep this anonymous — please don't try to find out who I am.
- ☐ Keep this private — don't tell anyone I've complained.
- ☐ At this time I don't want my complaint investigated, so I am not naming the person who is harassing me.

B WHAT I WANT YOU TO UNDERSTAND

- ☐ Know that it is workplace harassment even when people were previously involved.
- ☐ This environment makes it harder for me to do my job.
- ☐ I'd like to talk with you about what's happening and what would make me feel okay at work.

C WHAT I WANT YOU TO DO

- ☐ Treat it as a workplace issue: Make clear that any involvement where there is a power differential will be handled as harassment, not as “personal business.”
- ☐ Set expectations for senior staff: Remind people in positions of power that mentoring and sponsorship are professional responsibilities, not personal perks. Make clear that they are expected to act in ways that would withstand scrutiny if disclosed.
- ☐ Make clear that nobody is allowed to harass others, regardless of past involvement.
- ☐ Make clear that sexual gossip and rumour mongering are not okay at work.
- ☐ Ensure that people who complain don't experience retaliation.
- ☐ Please take steps to repair any 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 FUZZINESS OF CONSENT

Consent in workplace relationships is often complicated, especially when there are power differences or career stakes involved.

- ◆ People may agree to a relationship or sexual involvement with someone at work because they believe that if they say no, they will be punished. They may fear career damage.
- ◆ If someone gives consent and later withdraws it, any sexual behaviour after that is harassment.
- ◆ What matters isn't the consensual behaviour, but what's happening now.

TYPE 1: PEER-TO-PEER INVOLVEMENT

WHAT HARASSMENT LOOKS LIKE

- ◆ Gossip, jokes, or ridicule about the prior involvement.
- ◆ Sharing intimate photos or details without consent.
- ◆ Persistent advances to restart the relationship.

WHY EMPLOYERS MISS IT

- ◆ They interpret the harassment as an interpersonal or romantic dispute.
- ◆ They see gossip, jokes and ridicule as none of their business.
- ◆ They hesitate to get involved in something they perceive as sensitive or embarrassing.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO

- ◆ Treat gossip, exposure, or persistent pursuit as harassment, not personal drama.
- ◆ Protect confidentiality when somebody complains.
- ◆ Ignore consensual involvement and focus on unwanted behaviour.
- ◆ Shut down gossip, jokes and ridicule.

TYPE 2: UNEQUAL POWER INVOLVEMENT (SENIOR → JUNIOR)

WHAT HARASSMENT LOOKS LIKE

- ◆ Mentoring or sponsorship offered, but entangled with private time alone that involves flirtation or sexual attention.
- ◆ Once the junior person cools things down, career support is withdrawn — fewer invitations, less mentoring, fewer opportunities.
- ◆ The worker may lose years of investment they believed were building toward advancement.

TYPE 2: UNEQUAL POWER INVOLVEMENT CONT'D

WHY EMPLOYERS MISS IT

- ◆ They may not notice that the senior person has withdrawn support.
- ◆ If they do, they may assume it's because the junior person's work was disappointing.
- ◆ If they know about the relationship, they may believe it was consensual and overlook the power imbalance.
- ◆ They may simply feel relieved the relationship is over and hope everyone will move on.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO

1. **Set clear standards:** Mentorship and sponsorship are professional, not personal. Career support must never depend on sexual interest.
2. **Respond to complaints:** Don't dismiss reports as messy or drama. Know that power dynamics make consent complicated.
3. **Restore lost opportunities:** Ask the worker what they feel they've lost (training, projects, conferences) and do your best to provide them.
4. **Be alert for subtle retaliation:** It often shows up as silence or distance — less support, fewer opportunities, or a cooler tone. Counterbalance reputational damage with active praise.
5. **Protect confidentiality and dignity:** Ensure the worker is not further harmed by rumours or gossip.

WHY THIS MATTERS

- ◆ Workers in these situations often feel confused and unsure, silenced by shame, guilt, or fear of being blamed.
- ◆ Treating these cases as "personal" sends a message that workers lose protection if they ever consented in the past.
- ◆ Junior people should be experiencing rapid career growth: a withdrawal of mentoring can freeze or even reverse it.
- ◆ Early in their careers, workers don't yet have a track record. A single senior person's opinion can make or break them.
- ◆ Gossip about sexual behaviour can directly affect workplace reputation and career advancement, especially for women.