

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. The person harassing me is more senior than me, and there is a clear power imbalance between us.

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

☐ Protect my confidentiality.

B WHAT I WANT YOU TO UNDERSTAND

☐ This environment makes it harder for me to do my job.

C WHAT I WANT YOU TO DO

- ☐ Acknowledge this as workplace harassment.
- ☐ Make clear to senior staff that mentoring and sponsorship must remain professional.
- ☐ Ensure I am not excluded from opportunities.
- ☐ 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.

WHAT HARASSMENT LOOKS LIKE

Harassment in situations of power imbalance often arises inside what looks like a professional or social relationship. A senior person may be a mentor, sponsor, or informal supporter, and a junior worker may spend time with them socially — over coffee, after work, at events — because that is often a path to career advancement.

When the senior person crosses a line into sexual comments, advances, or pressure, the junior worker is in a bind. The same relationship that was supposed to support their career now makes it hard to set boundaries or walk away. They may fear that if they do, they will be punished.

WHY THIS KIND IS ESPECIALLY DAMAGING

- ◆ It distorts the purpose of mentoring.
- ◆ It leaves the junior worker unsure how to respond without risking their career.
- ◆ It often results in lost training, sponsorship, or advancement when the worker pulls back.

THE CAREER AND FINANCIAL IMPACT

- ◆ This kind of harassment typically happens early in a career, when opportunities matter most.
- ◆ Withdrawal of support from a senior person can seriously damage a junior worker's reputation, advancement, income, and confidence.
- ◆ Harassment by someone with more power can drive people to leave jobs or entire fields.
- ◆ Junior workers who leave a job because of harassment may never fully recover the lost ground.

WHY WORKERS WITH LESS POWER ARE VULNERABLE

- ◆ **They are new to the working world:** Junior staff may not recognize harassment right away or may be unsure how to respond.
- ◆ **They rely on mentoring:** Senior staff are expected to guide them. When mentoring is sexualized, it creates confusion and vulnerability.
- ◆ **Their expected behaviour makes them vulnerable:** Junior people are expected to stay late, take on extra tasks, and say yes to requests. These behaviours, which signal ambition, can also create openings for harassment.
- ◆ **They depend heavily on references and reputation:** Early in their careers, workers don’t yet have a track record. A single senior person’s opinion can make or break them.
- ◆ **They lack power to push back:** Because they depend on the goodwill of senior people, it is risky for them to say no or cool things down.

WHY EMPLOYERS SOMETIMES GET THIS WRONG

- ◆ They dismiss sexual advances or flirting as “personal” rather than a workplace issue.
- ◆ They underestimate how much harm it can cause to the junior person.
- ◆ They fail to recognize subtle retaliation, which often shows up as silence or distance — less support, fewer opportunities, or a cooler tone.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO

1. **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.”
2. **Set expectations for senior staff:** Remind people in positions of power that mentoring and sponsorship are professional responsibilities, not personal perks.
3. **Acknowledge blurred boundaries:** Work and social lines often overlap. Senior staff are expected to act in ways that would withstand scrutiny if disclosed.
4. **Respond quickly:** Act without delay when junior staff raise concerns.
5. **Protect opportunities:** Ensure the worker is not excluded from projects or advancement because they set boundaries.
6. **Repair where possible:** If opportunities have already been lost, ask the worker what they feel they’ve missed (a project, training, a conference) and make efforts to provide them. Counterbalance reputational damage with active praise.
7. **Protect confidentiality:** Stop gossip or rumour-spreading that can further damage reputation.

CLOSING NOTE

Sexual harassment in situations of power imbalance is one of the most damaging forms of harassment. It can quietly alter the course of a worker's entire career. Your responsibility as an employer is to set clear expectations for senior staff, respond quickly to complaints, and ensure that junior workers are protected and supported.