

## Have you been affected by bad behavior or sexual harassment in the workplace?

If you have been exposed to misconduct that is sexually-charged or has tinges of gender bias, you're probably wondering what your options are for addressing the behavior. If the behavior exhibited is severe or extreme (physical conduct of a sexual nature, for example), then making a formal report of harassment to the appropriate company leader is appropriate.

But if you're like most people, you're more likely to see less extreme behavior - verbal jokes, sexist comments, inappropriate emails or images, unwanted flirtation, etc. Don't get us wrong, we understand that even this behavior is wrong and can be incredibly harmful, especially if it goes on for some time. But in the event you do see or hear this type of behavior, you have a few choices in terms of how to respond. Here are some guidelines and best practices to help you.

### Handling the situation on your own

If you're comfortable and feel safe doing so, you can consider addressing the situation yourself in a way that is direct and professional. So if your boss or colleague makes sexist remarks, sexually-charged advances, or gets too close for comfort, here are some suggestions for handling it on your own:

“That joke was ‘not safe for work,’ Jerome. A lot of people would be offended by it...I know I am. I’m all for having fun at work, but let’s not cross the line.”

“Jamie, I’ve told you several times that I’m not interested in going out with you. I want to make sure I’m being clear, I’m not interested in dating you, and I don’t think it’s professional for you to continue to ask me. I’d like to keep a good professional working relationship.”

“Listen, Chris, I really value my personal space so give me some room, please.”

### Reporting the misconduct to your manager, HR, or legal team

- 1 If you are not comfortable approaching your colleague on your own, decide the best way to report your concerns internally. Map out a plan to make sure your communication is precise and persuasive.
- 2 Second, make sure your report is precise and persuasive.  
**Precise** means that you should report facts: “I’m bothered by the fact that Chris talks about his dating life constantly. He shows us pictures of the women he’s dating and he constantly makes comments at meetings about his ‘type.’”  
**Persuasive** means that you indicate why this is bothersome and how the behavior makes you feel. For example: “I’ve tried to tell Chris that I’m not interested in hearing about his romantic life, but he doesn’t seem to understand that it makes me uncomfortable to hear my boss talking about his girlfriends. I also find it really unprofessional. Plus, the fact that he talks about this so often makes me think he views women as possible romantic partners, not as professional equals.”
- 3 Third, be careful not to use legal words inaccurately, since doing so might put the company in “defense mode” and that reduces the likelihood of a positive outcome. As described above, if you are exposed to severe or threatening behavior, then reporting it and calling it harassment is appropriate. However, if what you are experiencing is behavior that is bothersome or unprofessional, it may or not be illegal harassment and you’re better off using language that describes behavior, how the behavior made you feel, and if there is an outcome you’re seeking. You might say: “It’s important to me that we nip Chris’ behavior in the bud so that he stops. If he doesn’t understand how bothersome his behavior is, there’s a good chance that his behavior will escalate and become even worse.”



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