

Building Inclusion:

Recognizing and Preventing Sexual Harassment

What is sexual harassment?

McMaster's Sexual Harassment Policy defines sexual harassment as "comment or conduct of a sexual nature directed at an individual or group by another individual or group of the same or opposite sex where it is known, or ought reasonably to be known, that this attention is unwanted." Here are some examples of behaviour and language that may constitute sexual harassment:

- Asking for sex in exchange for improving a grade or getting promotion at work.
- Repeatedly asking someone out on a date and refusing to take **no** for an answer.
- Demanding hugs or engaging in other forms of unwanted and unnecessary touching.
- Using insulting language or making comments that stereotype men, women, boys, girls, trans persons and non-gender conforming persons.
- Making comments about a person's physical appearance; for example, "grading" their physical attractiveness.
- Leering (suggestive staring).
- Persistent unwanted contact or attention after the end of a consensual relationship. Posting or sharing pornography, sexual pictures, cartoons, graffiti or other sexual images (including online).
- Making sexual jokes, bragging about sexual ability and/or spreading sexual rumours or gossip (including online).

Did you know...

- Unwanted sexual contact including hugging, kissing and touching may constitute sexual assault. Not only does sexual assault contravene McMaster's Sexual Harassment Policy, it is also illegal.
- Sexual harassment can also include inappropriate gender-based comment or conduct that is not sexual in nature. It can occur when someone harasses you because they don't think that you act, look or dress according to stereotypical gender-based rules; for instance, they bully you because they think that your clothes are too colourful for a man. It may also mean that someone is making derogatory comments about your real or perceived sexual orientation.

If you are being harassed,

✓ **Seek help and support:**

- Discuss the situation confidentially with a Human Rights Officer in the Office of Human Rights & Equity Services (HRES). They will listen to your concerns and review your options with you.
- Consider talking with a supportive friend or colleague or to your union steward or supervisor.
- If you are experiencing health-related problems, see your doctor or contact the University's [employee assistance program](#).

- ✓ **Document:** Record dates, times, the specific nature of the incident(s), names of witnesses and your response at the time of the harassing behaviour. If you know of others who are being harassed, consider asking them to document their experiences as well.

- ✓ **Protect Yourself:** If possible, avoid being alone with the harasser. If you must have contact, avoid being alone with the harasser.
- ✓ **Tell the harasser to stop if you can do so safely:** Communicate with the harasser in-person or by email, depending on the circumstances. Identify the incident(s) and what you found objectionable. State clearly that you want the harassment to stop immediately.

If you witness harassment:

- ✓ **Offer support:** Let the target of harassment know what you witnessed and that you object to what happened. Offer support should they wish to take action to stop the harassment.
- ✓ **Put the harasser on notice if you can do so in a manner that does not jeopardize your safety or the safety of the target of harassment:** Tell the harasser what you witnessed and that the behaviour is not okay.
- ✓ **Document:** Record dates, times and the nature of the harassment you witnessed.
- ✓ **Take action on your own behalf:** Witnessing sexual harassment is upsetting. Contact HRES to explore your options under the University's Sexual Harassment policy, keeping in mind that you cannot file a complaint of harassment on behalf of someone else.

If you are a supervisor:

- ✓ **Be a role model.** Refrain from disrespectful, harassing, violent or discriminatory behaviour.
- ✓ **Establish and communicate clear expectations.** Sexual harassment is a serious issue that creates a stressful and disrespectful environment. Communicate your intention to take disciplinary action should sexual harassment be found to occur.
- ✓ **Provide ongoing education on sexual harassment, harassment, discrimination and violence.** Ensure that the people you supervise are aware of their rights and responsibilities. Contact HRES for educational resources or customized training.
- ✓ **Monitor** the work environment and check in with your team members regularly.
- ✓ **Intervene** immediately and appropriately when you witness disrespectful behaviour of any kind, and when concerns are brought to your attention.
- ✓ **Document** any actions that you may have taken in response to sexual harassment.
- ✓ **Seek support.** You are not in this alone. HRES is available to you should you require advice, strategies and guidance.

Additional Resources:

- **[The Office of Human Rights and Equity Services \(HRES\):](#)** HRES offers confidential information and support to all members of the McMaster campus who are dealing with issues related to harassment and discrimination. Contact: 905-525-9140, Extension 27581 or hres@mcmaster.ca
- **[The Sexual Assault Centre \(Hamilton & Area\) \(SACHA\):](#)** If you have questions about sexual assault or if you're a survivor looking for support, call SACHA's 24-hour support line at 905 525 4162
- **[Hamilton Health Sciences Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Care Centre.](#)** Immediate, confidential care for survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. Call 905 521 2100 x73557.