

Sexual Harassment

Did you know that sexual harassment is a form of discrimination? Workplaces take sexual harassment very seriously. Because of that, it is important to know what is considered sexual harassment.

There are two forms of sexual harassment: Quid Pro Quo and Hostile Work Environment.

Quid pro quo means “this for that.” This type of harassment occurs when an employment benefit is offered in exchange for some type of sexual favor. For example, a supervisor might offer a promotion to an employee if they agree to go out with them. Quid pro quo sexual harassment is illegal. It can be the grounds for a lawsuit.

Hostile work environment is the type of sexual harassment that occurs when there is frequent unwanted sexual comments, advances, requests, or other similar conduct. It can also occur when there is other verbal or physical conduct that is sexual in nature. This could include:

- Displays of inappropriate or offensive materials;
- Sexual jokes;
- Interference with someone’s ability to move freely; and
- Persistent, unwanted interactions, such as asking for dates continually.



Is it Sexual Harassment? (Activity)

For each scenario below, decide whether it would qualify as sexual harassment. Circle Yes if you believe the statement is sexual harassment, circle No if you do not think it is sexual harassment.

1. A manager tells an employee applying for a promotion that the job would be theirs if they just “treated her right.” **Yes or No**
2. One employee experiences repeated advances from another asking them for dates or “just to go out for drinks after work.” The employee says they are not interested, but the co-worker won’t take “no” for an answer. **Yes or No**
3. Two coworkers are telling sexual jokes in the workplace. A third coworker overhears and feels very uncomfortable. They ask them to stop, but they continue to tell the jokes. **Yes or No**
4. An employee asks out a coworker who politely declines. The employee spreads a rumor around the workplace that the coworker won’t go out with them because they are gay. **Yes or No**
5. A manager has a sexually suggestive screen saver on their computer. The computer is in the warehouse where everyone can see it. Employees have mentioned it makes them uncomfortable but the manager won’t change the screen saver. **Yes or No**
6. An employee was out sick and asked a coworker to take notes during an important meeting. When the employee asks the coworker for the notes the next day, the coworker says they will not give them up unless the employee goes on a date with them. **Yes or No**

Answer Key

1. **Yes:** This is Quid pro quo harassment. The manager is offering a promotion in exchange for favors from the employee
2. **Yes:** This is Hostile Work Environment harassment. The coworker continually asks even though the employee has declined, and this creates an uncomfortable environment for the employee.
3. **Yes:** This is Hostile Work Environment harassment. Though their coworker asks them to stop, they continue to make the jokes, making their coworker uncomfortable.
4. **Yes:** This is Hostile Work Environment harassment. The employee spreads a rumor about him throughout the office, which creates a hostile work environment.
5. **Yes:** This is Hostile Work Environment harassment. The manager will not change their screen saver even though it makes employees uncomfortable.
6. **Yes:** This is Quid pro quo harassment. The coworker is using the meeting notes to get the employee to go out on a date with them.

What to do if you experience sexual harassment in the workplace: First, talk to the other person. Let them know that their behavior makes you uncomfortable and ask them to stop. If they do not stop, report the behavior to your supervisor or human resources. Consult your employee handbook to see if your company has a specific process for reporting sexual harassment. It is against the law for coworkers or other employees to retaliate against you for reporting sexual harassment.