

THE Advisor

Harassment: Taking Action



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If you learn that harassment is occurring in your workplace, it is essential to contact HR immediately.

For managers, there are few issues more frustrating or difficult to address than harassment. Learning that one team member or group is targeting a colleague or group is disheartening. It could also undermine confidence in your leadership and damage morale.

Creating expectations for appropriate behavior is the best defense against harassment. Begin by having a clear understanding of what constitutes harassment, including sexual harassment. Behaviors that would fall under this definition include:

- **Ridiculing, insulting, or bullying other people.** While this behavior is always inappropriate, it is particularly problematic if it is on the basis of:
 - Gender or gender identity
 - Sexual orientation
 - Race or ethnic background
 - Religion
 - Age
 - Political or other personal views
 - Appearance or physical features
 - Disability
- **Verbal abuse.** This may include disrespectful or abusive language, name-calling, spreading malicious gossip, the unwelcome use of profanity, or “poking fun” at people.
- **Disrespectful actions.** Any behavior that ridicules, intimidates, or demeans, including humiliating practical jokes, unwelcome horseplay, or insulting social media posts.
- **Physical intimidation.** This may include displaying intimidating objects (such as weapons), making threatening gestures, or destruction of property (such as keying someone’s car).
- **Sexual harassment.** Making comments or engaging in harassment that is sexual in nature, asking



Workplace harassment could take place at work, during an employee's off hours, or on social media.

someone out on a date after they have said no, or requesting sexual favors as a condition of employment or for advancement.

When a person engages in these behaviors toward one or more people in the workplace, it may lead to a hostile, threatening, or disrespectful environment. For instance, if an employee is bullying a co-worker, others may feel threatened or opt not to speak out about the behavior for fear that they will be targeted.

If you become aware that a team member is harassing one or more colleagues, regardless of when or where it is taking place, it is important to take action. (See "How Do I Say That?" for guidance.) In addition, you can take an active role in creating an environment that fosters respect

and discourages harassment. Ways to establish a respectful tone include:

- **Examine your own behavior and biases.** When in doubt, ask a trusted colleague for their perspective.
- **Recognize that you set the standard.** Be a good role model by practicing common courtesy and treating others with respect and fairness.
- **Make respectful behavior a performance expectation.** Address disrespect promptly.
- **Contact the LifeMatters Management Consultation Service.** LifeMatters can suggest ways to foster a respectful work environment and help you determine when it's time to consult with HR. We're here to help.



The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service is available to assist with any management concern. Call 24/7/365.

How Do I Say That? Addressing Harassment

If you become aware that an employee is being harassed by a colleague, whether in a work setting, while on their personal time, or on social media, the following steps will help guide you through the situation:

- 1. Document.** Write down both what has been reported to you and anything that you have personally observed. If the person provides screenshots or other documentation, save them in a secure location. Assure the employee that you will only share this information on a need-to-know basis.
- 2. Consult with Human Resources.** Review your documentation and observations, as well as any relevant policies. If the information you have is only secondhand or the harassment has occurred outside the workplace, it is best to notify HR and let them determine next steps. The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can provide guidance as well.
- 3. Meet privately with the accused employee.** If the situation is already being investigated by HR or Legal, follow their protocols and procedures. In the absence of a formal investigation, address the behavior as a performance issue.
- 4. Explain why the behavior is inappropriate.** Focus on the specific behavior and its impact



The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can guide you through the best way to address a harassment concern.

on the workplace. Set aside your personal feelings about the individual's behavior and maintain your composure.

- 5. Outline expectations.** Clearly state what behaviors are inappropriate. For example, if the complaint is that an employee is sending offensive emails to a co-worker, be clear about what words will no longer be tolerated.

Sample language: "If you [state problematic behavior] again, you will be subject to disciplinary action."
(Consult with Human Resources prior to the meeting regarding appropriate next steps.)



LifeMatters offers 24/7/365 assistance with management concerns. We're here to help.

6. Make a referral to LifeMatters.

Explain that LifeMatters is available to help address concerns that may be impacting the employee's behavior and interactions with colleagues.

Sample language: "LifeMatters can help you deal with anything that may be affecting how you behave toward others. I urge you to call."

7. Follow up. Check in separately with both the employee who was targeted and anyone who has been accused. If the behavior continues, contact HR.

Management Consultation

Whenever you need it, as often as you need it. Reasons to call:

- Confronting an employee about performance issues
- An employee's personal problem
- Suspected drug or alcohol use on the job
- Interpersonal conflicts between team members
- Establishing expectations for performance
- Addressing crisis situations, such as a violent incident, the death of an employee, or a natural disaster
- Your own personal concerns
- Any other work-related issue

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