

# Respect at Work: Promoting Safety, Preventing Harassment

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a serious and widespread problem.

It is a form of sexual violence, and includes unwelcome comments, visuals, or physical contact of a sexual nature. The effects of sexual harassment can be severe for individuals, workplaces, and whole communities. The good news is that prevention is possible, and it's happening. Today, employers increasingly recognize the importance of taking proactive steps to create and sustain a safer workplace for their employees.

Whether an employer is beginning to think about sexual harassment prevention for the first time or is building on long-standing prevention efforts within their workplace, community-based rape crisis centers offer an extraordinary wealth of expertise to guide and support employers in this work. The best available research indicates that preventing workplace sexual harassment requires more than liability-focused employee training on definitions and policies. It requires shifting norms and changing behaviors within the workplace to create a culture of safety, equality, and respect. This is work that rape crisis centers have been leading and facilitating with their local schools, colleges/universities, faith communities, and other community institutions for decades. By partnering with local employers, centers have the opportunity to extend these efforts to previously unreached community members, leaders, and settings.

Developed by the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR), Preventing Sexual Harassment at Work is designed to support rape crisis centers in partnering with local employers to implement a holistic approach to preventing workplace sexual harassment.

This approach includes customized training and consultation to:

- **Assess** workplace climate related to sexual harassment prevention and policy;
- **Strengthen** workplace policies and procedures;
- **Build** employees' knowledge about sexual harassment and skills as engaged bystanders;
- **Enhance** the abilities of managers, supervisors, and Human Resource professionals to respond to reports of sexual harassment and promote a safe and respectful workplace.

*"We all play a role in eliminating sexual harassment. If you feel uneasy, you must act. If you see it happening, you must act. If someone reports harassment to me, I must act." -Training participant*

Over the past 30 years, the traditional approach to preventing workplace sexual harassment has largely consisted of stand-alone workshops that highlight legal definitions and liability concerns. A growing body of research, however, suggests that such trainings by themselves have little impact on changing employees' attitudes and behaviors. In fact, prevention training programs that focus solely on reducing legal liability may actually have the opposite effect (Bingham & Scherer, 2001; Rawski, 2017; Tinkler, 2011)!

What we now know is that to be effective in stopping sexual harassment, training must be part of a holistic sexual harassment prevention program which also includes strong leadership, meaningful accountability, effective policies and procedures, and an organizational culture of safety, equality, and respect. In fact, it is workplace culture "that has the greatest impact on allowing harassment to flourish, or conversely, in preventing harassment" (Feldblum & Lipnic,

2016).

Preventing Sexual Harassment at Work differs from traditional workplace training models in several key respects:

**Holistic**

Discusses not only the legal aspects of sexual harassment, but also emphasizes the importance of personal ethics and organizational culture and provides strategies employees and managers can use to proactively create a safe and respectful workplace.

**Comprehensive**

Extends beyond training, providing resources to promote organization-wide buy-in for prevention, assess the current workplace climate related to sexual harassment, strengthen workplace policies and practices, and implement accountability measures throughout the organization.

**Collaborative**

Leverages the expertise of community-based rape crisis centers to ensure the most effective and meaningful implementation of sexual harassment prevention and response.

**Customized**

Enables consultants and trainers to tailor the approach so that it's relevant and responsive to the needs of the specific workplace and workforce.

**Multi-session**

Includes an interactive, online course for all employees and follow-up, in-person trainings customized for employees and managers.

**Bystander-focused**

Engages all employees as bystanders and teaches skills for encouraging respectful behavior in the workplace and taking action to interrupt and discourage disrespectful or harassing behavior.

*“An organization’s commitment to a harassment-free workplace must not be based on a compliance mindset, and instead must be part of an overall diversity and inclusion strategy.”*

*-EEOC Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace*