

# **PRESENTER'S GUIDE**

## **"WORKPLACE HARASSMENT IN THE OFFICE"**

**Part of the General Safety Series**

# **OUTLINE OF MAJOR PROGRAM POINTS**

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The following outline summarizes the major points of information presented in the program. The outline can be used to review the program before conducting a classroom session, as well as in preparing to lead a class discussion about the program.

- **The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has established that employees have the right to a safe and healthy workplace.**
  - Employees also have a right to be treated with respect and dignity while they're on the job.
- **But every year, tens of millions of U.S. workers report that they have experienced some type of "harassment" at work.**
  - This offensive behavior is bad for people and for business.
  - It's also illegal.
  - And it doesn't have to happen.
- **A day on the job can often pass more pleasantly when workers keep things "light", by sharing humor, banter and maybe even a little "horseplay".**
- **But sometimes an employee's verbal or physical "jabs" might get too pointed... so a coworker begins to feel more than a little uncomfortable.**
- **The "joker" may not know when to back off... or they may not want to.**
  - For reasons of their own, or maybe no real reason at all, they keep "needling" their target... pushing buttons... testing boundaries.
- **This is called "harassment".**
  - It is unwelcome and offensive, and can make a workplace feel hostile and abusive for the victim.

- **There are many types of harassment. It includes:**
  - "Verbal abuse" (things that people say that are hurtful or disturbing to another).
  - "Physical abuse" (horseplay that can hurt a victim's body as badly as it hurts their feelings).
- **While much of the harassment that takes place at work is done intentionally, it's important to remember that it is not always meant to be "harassing".**
  - As you interact with your coworkers keep in mind that each individual is the judge of what they feel is offensive.
  - Something that doesn't bother one person may be very hurtful to another.
- **The impact of harassment on a workplace is not limited to the victim alone.**
  - It can create a tense and hostile atmosphere that can affect everyone, even those who are not exposed to the harassment directly.
- **This toxic work environment can damage employee morale and reduce job satisfaction throughout the organization.**
  - It can drive down productivity, directly affecting a company's business.
- **But that's still not the whole story, because all too often harassment can escalate into workplace violence.**
  - People can be hurt, even killed.
- **Everyone involved in a violent incident may also be subject to disciplinary action by their company.**
  - They could even lose their jobs.
- **And regardless of who started it, violence can get you into serious trouble with the law.**
  - So complaints of workplace harassment should always be taken very seriously.

- **Workplace harassment is considered to be a type of discrimination... and as such, it is against the law.**
  - The 1964 Civil Rights Act made it illegal to discriminate against anyone because of their race, color, religion, sex or national origin.
  - Other laws have been passed to protect people against discrimination on the basis of age, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation.
  - Many instances of harassing behavior focus on personal characteristics like these.
  
- **There are many types of workplace harassment, some of which involve "discrimination".**
  - Someone who was harassing an older coworker by constantly questioning whether they could work with the company's "new-fangled" computers would be discriminating against them based on their age.
  - Someone might harass a coworker by purposely telling ethnic jokes within earshot, which could be discrimination based on ethnic origin or race.
  
- **One type of harassment that's received a lot of attention recently is sexual harassment.**
  - Sexual harassment can include any type of sexually-oriented conduct that the victim finds unwelcome or offensive.
  - Propositioning or sexually assaulting a coworker are examples of blatant forms of sexual harassment.
  
- **But sexually harassing behavior can also be more subtle, and includes:**
  - Making sexual and sexist remarks.
  - Assigning a person demeaning tasks because of their gender.
  - Displaying suggestive objects or pictures in a work area.

- **While we may usually think of men as the harassers and women as the victims, women can be harassers as well.**
  - Victims can also be harassed by persons of their own gender.
  - Harassers can be virtually anyone, from co-workers and supervisors to customers, clients and vendors.
  
- **Like other forms of harassment, sexual harassment can be devastating for victims and witnesses as well.**
  - It's critically important to be able to recognize all types of harassment in a workplace, and take action to end it.
  
- **When harassment occurs in a workplace, it can turn the environment hostile not only for its victims but for employees throughout the organization as well.**
  - That's why it's so important to take action to end workplace harassment whenever it does occur.
  - Experience shows it won't go away on its own.
  
- **Some employees may resist taking action because they don't want to "get involved", "be a tattletale" or get anyone "in trouble", so they may:**
  - Dismiss harassment as something that "comes with the job".
  - Worry that they're being "too sensitive" about it.
  
- **But every employee has a responsibility to help their company deal with workplace harassment.**
  - We each need to do our part to shut it down and prevent it from escalating into violence or sexual assault.
  
- **When a coworker says or does something that disturbs you, you should let them know how it makes you feel.**
  - What offends you may not be offensive to them.
  - They may be unaware that what they're doing could bother someone else.

- **You don't have to be confrontational, but you need to let them know that what they are doing is offensive.**
  - Sometimes that's all it takes to resolve the problem.
  - If the behavior continues, you should report it to your supervisor or the HR Department.
  
- **When harassment includes threats of violence the situation can be much more serious, and you should report it immediately.**
  
- **Whenever possible, it's important to take the time to write down the details of a harassing incident. This documentation:**
  - Substantiates your report.
  - Helps others to fully understand the situation.
  
- **Note the date and time, what happened during the incident, who was present and why you feel it was harassing.**
  - If you have received offensive memos, emails or pictures, bring them along with your notes when you make the report.
  
- **When harassment occurs on the job, it can:**
  - Damage employees' morale.
  - Reduce their job satisfaction
  - Drive down productivity.
  
- **These effects are serious enough, but harassment can lead to violence as well.**
  - As a result, people can be hurt physically... and professionally.
  
- **If a harasser becomes agitated or physically aggressive, there are guidelines you should follow to try to defuse the situation and prevent people from getting hurt.**
  - First, you need to stay calm.
  - Don't argue or get into a shouting match.

- **Maintain a non-threatening posture.**
  - Don't make fists or fidget.
  - Keep your arms low.
- **Stay at least 5 feet away from the other person, and avoid physical contact.**
- **You might suggest involving a neutral party to help resolve the conflict, or try to change the subject.**
  - If all else fails, you should just walk away.
- **If a harasser shoves or tries to hit you, do not push them back or try to hit them.**
  - See if you can get away instead.
- **If they grab or corner you so that you can't leave, call out for help.**
  - There's usually someone around who can come to your aid.
- **Don't allow yourself to be drawn into a fight. Fighting on the job can have serious personal, professional and legal consequences. You could be:**
  - Injured.
  - Disciplined or fired by your employer.
  - Arrested and charged with assault.
- **And even if they started the fracas, the other person could take you to court over it.**
- **The behavior that we call "stalking" is a type of harassment that can be difficult to precisely define.**
  - In general, a stalker makes repeated, unwanted and inappropriate contact with another person in a way that alarms, annoys, or intimidates them.
- **Victims of stalking may find themselves being followed, and spied on.**
  - They may receive unwanted gifts, email messages or telephone calls.

- **All this would be disturbing enough, but in some cases stalking can lead to physical assault or murder, so it needs to be reported immediately!**
- **If you feel that you are being stalked by someone who works with you, there are a number of things that you can do to deal with the problem.**
  - First, trust your instincts.
  - If you ever feel that you are in physical danger from a stalker, call your company's security department or local police immediately.
- **Never confront a stalker or return the gifts that they give you.**
  - This can encourage them to continue their behavior, or provoke them to violence.
- **Write down details about each stalking-related incident.**
  - Make note of the dates and times, what happened and who might have witnessed it.
  - Bring this material along when you make your report about the stalker to management or your HR Department.
- **There are several things an employer can do to address a stalking situation.**
  - They may try to discourage the stalker or get them to lose interest by relocating the victim's work station or revising their schedule.
  - The company could also install a silent alarm or surveillance camera, or even post a security guard in a victim's work area.
- **In the most serious cases it may be necessary for a victim to obtain a protective court order to get a stalker to leave them alone.**

**\* \* \* SUMMARY \* \* \***

- **Harassment is any type of unwanted behavior that creates a hostile or abusive work environment for the victim.**
- **If someone says or does something that offends you, you should let them know.**
- **If harassing behavior continues, you need to report it to your company.**
- **Never confront a stalker or return the gifts that they give to you.**
- **Anytime you feel you are in physical danger, you should contact company security or your local police right away.**
- **If harassment looks like it may be turning violent, remain calm and don't allow yourself to be drawn into a fight.**
- **Now that you understand what can be involved with workplace harassment, and know what you can do to avoid it, you can help to make your company a safer and more respectful place to work... every day!**