

PREVENTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT... **FOR EMPLOYEES**

COURSE OUTLINE

- **We've all seen it played for laughs in old movies, cartoons or TV, the company president who just can't resist his young female secretary and starts chasing her around and around his office desk.**
 - But "sexual harassment" isn't funny.
 - It can be devastating, personally and professionally.
 - And it's against the law.
- **There are many definitions of "sexual harassment", but in the workplace it is considered a form of "discrimination in employment" that was outlawed by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It includes:**
 - Unwelcome sexual advances.
 - Requests for sexual favors.
 - Other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that the victim finds unwanted or threatening.
- **Blatant sexual acts clearly qualify as sexual harassment whenever they occur. These include:**
 - Sexual assaults.
 - Touching a coworker with sexual intent.
 - Requiring them to engage in a sexual act in order to keep their job or advance their career.
- **Less blatant types of sexual behavior usually have to occur repeatedly to be regarded as "harassment". These include:**
 - Talking about sex.
 - Making offensive remarks about a person's sexual orientation, their gender, gender identification or gender expression.
 - Commenting on a coworker's physical appearance.
- **Other forms of harassment involve:**
 - Looking at someone in an inappropriate way.
 - Displaying "sexually suggestive" pictures or objects.
 - Writing sexually explicit graffiti.
 - Making obscene gestures.

- **The effects of sexual harassment can be emotionally devastating.**
 - Even "subtle" abuse can "tear down" a victim's self-esteem over time.
- **Victims may feel:**
 - Afraid that no one will believe or understand what's being done to them.
 - Powerless to do anything about it.
 - Even somehow responsible for what is occurring.
- **Harassers often rely on their victims being afraid to object to the abuse, or to report it to management.**
 - Ignoring these incidents, or trying to "laugh them off", can actually encourage further harassment.
 - Both the victim and any coworkers who witness sexual harassment have an obligation to speak up when someone's speech or behavior offends them.
- **It's also important for both targets and witnesses of sexual harassment to report the behavior to management or your company's Human Resource Department... no matter who the harasser is.**
 - Shutting down offensive behavior in the workplace is everyone's responsibility.
- **While most reported cases of sexual harassment involve males harassing females, many of the unreported incidents include men who are sexually harassed by women.**
 - An employee can be harassed by a person of any gender.
- **The intended target of sexual harassment is not the only potential victim.**
 - "Victims" can include anyone in the vicinity who doesn't want to be exposed to offensive statements or actions.
- **It's important to remember that each person is the judge of what they find disturbing, and what they would consider to be sexual harassment.**
 - So it's possible for you to "harass" a coworker unintentionally because you're simply unaware that your actions or comments are offensive to them.

- **A friendly waitress may not be offended when a salesman flirts with her in a restaurant, but when he acts the same way with a secretary in his workplace, she could feel that he is sexually harassing her.**
 - The difference is not in what the salesman is doing.
 - It's that the waitress at the restaurant feels the flirting is harmless, while the secretary in the office does not.
- **Employers know that sexual harassment is bad for people and bad for business.**
 - Most companies create a written sexual harassment policy to make it clear just what types of behavior, language and dress are appropriate in their workplace.
- **It's important for you to know your company's policy and follow it.**
 - You can usually find the sexual harassment policy in your employee handbook.
- **One thing the policy may do is discourage or even forbid employees from dating or having romantic relationships with their coworkers.**
 - This helps to ensure that people cannot be coerced into a relationship against their will.
 - But it's not always easy to tell when this is happening.
- **No one should ever have to endure unwanted sexual advances because they're afraid of:**
 - Losing their job.
 - Not getting pay raises.
 - Not being promoted.
 - Facing some type of disciplinary action.
- **You can help prevent harassment in your workplace by not acting in ways that other people might feel are offensive.**
- **For instance, how you look at a coworker could create problems.**
 - "Checking them out" in a sexual way, or staring at them because you think they look "different" definitely qualifies as sexual harassment.
- **While placing your hand on a coworker's shoulder to get their attention might seem innocent enough to you, they may not see it that way.**
 - The best policy is to avoid any unnecessary physical contact with other employees.

- **You should never bring "racy" or pornographic magazines or books to your job.**
 - Don't put up any provocative posters or pictures in your work area either.
- **Because there is never a truly "private" space in a workplace, what you say, write or look at can often be heard or seen by your coworkers.**
 - The conversations that you have, the websites that you visit and the emails that you send are never truly "confidential".
- **So think about what you do and say ahead of time.**
 - That way you can avoid offending or harassing anyone, even inadvertently.
- **Sometimes it can be difficult to tell whether someone's comments or actions are sexually motivated, but if a coworker's behavior offends you, you should call them on it.**
 - If you're the victim, tell them that they've "crossed your line" and that what they did is unwelcome.
 - If you're a witness, let them know that you think their actions or comments are inappropriate (this is called "bystander intervention").
- **You should not accuse a coworker of sexual harassment right off the bat, unless you're sure that's what the person intended.**
- **Usually, when you let them know you don't like what they did, they'll change their behavior, and no further action will be necessary.**
- **It's still a good idea to create a written record of any incident, just in case. Make a note of:**
 - The date and time that it occurred.
 - Who was involved.
 - The names of anyone else who might have seen it.
- **Describe what happened, what was said and done, why it felt sexually harassing to you, or why you think it was harassing to a coworker.**
- **If you are not satisfied that the person's behavior was really "innocent", or if another incident occurs, your next step should be to report what happened to management or your company's Human Resource Department.**
 - A written record will provide a good factual foundation for your report.

- **Reporting a sexual harassment incident can often be difficult, because it brings up a lot of feelings.**
 - Embarrassment about the harassment itself.
 - Anxiety about what will happen if you come forward.
 - Concern that people might not believe you.
 - Fear of how the harasser will react.
- **Just remember, coming forward is not only the right thing to do... it's also your responsibility.**
 - Whether you are a victim or a witness to an incident of sexual harassment, your company needs you to report it, so they can put a stop to this type of behavior.
- **Bring along a copy of your written incident description when you meet with your supervisor or someone in Human Resources.**
 - As they talk with you about what happened, be sure to answer their questions honestly and accurately.
- **You may be asked to sign a written summary of your conversation.**
 - Read it carefully to confirm that everything is correct.
 - Point out anything that you feel isn't accurate, so it can be corrected before you sign.
- **Your supervisor or HR representative will then talk to the person whose behavior you feel was sexually harassing. They will be:**
 - Informed of the allegations.
 - Questioned about their role in the incident.
 - Advised that the offensive conduct must stop.
- **The company will always try to keep the process confidential, but sometimes it will be necessary for them to interview some other people who may have witnessed the events.**
- **How the situation is resolved will depend on the type of harassment, how often it occurred and other factors.**
 - At the very least the harasser will be warned to "cease and desist" or face disciplinary action.

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- **Know your employer's sexual harassment policies and follow them.**
- **To help keep your workplace harassment-free, think about what you say and do, and take care not to behave in ways that could offend your coworkers.**
- **Let others know when their behavior has "crossed your line".**
- **Document any event that you feel may be sexual harassment, whether it happened to you or to a coworker.**
- **Submit a copy of your documentation when reporting the incident to management.**
- **When you avoid behaving offensively, speak up when someone offends you and report any incidents of sexual harassment to management... you can help to create a healthier, more professional and more respectful workplace for everyone!**