



10 Ways to Prevent Harassment in the Workplace

1. **Workplace culture starts at the top:** The messages sent by leadership set the tone for how your company will handle sexual harassment. With thorough and clear policies, everyone will understand the process, the expectations and the consequences. AND, leaders must make sure that line supervisors and managers are properly informed and can effectively repeat the message. Be specific to your leadership team of the steps that they must take and ask them to report annually on what they specifically are doing to spread the organization's message for preventing and addressing harassment in the workplace.
2. **Training helps cement the message:** To assure that your organization understands your policies and how to prevent and manage sexual harassment, regular training for all employees must be conducted. It should be instructor-lead, interactive and use recognized adult-learning techniques. The training should be comprehensive and workplace specific to help employees and supervisors recognize sexual harassment in the context of your company. Include explanations of your policies as well as the company's reporting and investigation process. Specifically address how to report harassment as a victim or a witness and provide tips on how bystanders can speak out and intervene. Very importantly, employees must understand their rights and responsibilities and the consequences for harassing others.
3. **Build trust in the process:** Ensure that your policy is supported by a procedure. Employees must understand the process triggered by a report or complaint such as what an investigation entails, and they should have clear expectation about how long it might take and when they might expect a final resolution. Be a stickler for following the process and keeping to timelines. This will build trust in the process and ensure that your policies are real and are meant to protect your employees.
4. **Your message and supporting documentation needs to be easy to read and easy to find:** Use internal systems such as an intranet or website to post all relevant information about your anti-harassment and anti-retaliation policies and procedures. List how to report and who to contact and give access to all resources such as training materials and forms.
5. **Provide choices for reporting:** You can't manage sexual harassment if you are not made aware of its existence, so create multiple ways for your employees to report incidents. Provide options for anonymous reports, including by witnesses or bystanders. Be very clear how reporting can be escalated should an employee meet with a possible roadblock, such as non-responsive supervisor.
6. **Get Feedback:** Conduct a survey to find out if your policies and the communication about your policies are effective. Ask if employees feel comfortable intervening or reporting harassment,

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7. whether they understand the company's policies and complaint process and know where to find information, resources and training.
8. **Be earnest about protecting their rights:** Don't make employees sign employment agreements that require arbitration of harassment and other discrimination claims and prevent them from bringing these claims in court.
9. **Promote your policies to enhance your company's reputation:** Protect your company's reputation by preventing harassment in the first place. Don't depend on requiring your employees to sign nondisclosure and non-disparagement agreements as a condition of employment. Create a safe place to work, not a place with secrets. Employment terms and conditions that prevent employees from discussing or reporting harassment—or worse, assault—to enforcement authorities or others outside the workplace helps no one in the long run.
10. **Be accountable:** You are only as good as your weakest link, so make sure there aren't any. Create mechanisms that hold Human Resource and supervisory staff accountable for addressing harassment. Use performance reviews to assess if they have handled reports and complaints in a timely manner and in line with your policies and procedures.
11. **Support your policies by helping victims:** Consider implementing an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)—a work-based intervention program designed to identify and assist employees in resolving personal problems such as financial, emotional and family issues, substance/alcohol abuse and trauma. Such issues can adversely affect an employee's performance, but EAP providers are trained to aid. If you have a EAP, make sure providers are equipped to assist victims of sexual harassment and assault. If you don't have an EAP, reach out to experts in your community to help you develop a referral list of appropriate service providers.

This list was developed from information obtained by The National Women's Law Center which provides many excellent resource for both employers and employees on preventing and managing sexual harassment. For more information please visit their website at <https://nwlc.org/>.

JJ Miller is not licensed to practice law and this document is not intended to give legal advice.