



Harassment: what it is and what to do about it

Harassment is any unwanted physical or verbal conduct that offends or humiliates you. Such conduct can interfere with your ability to do a job or obtain a service.

Harassment is a type of discrimination. It can take many forms, such as:

- threats, intimidation, or verbal abuse;
- unwelcome remarks or jokes about subjects like your race, religion, disability or age;
- displaying sexist, racist or other offensive pictures or posters;
- sexually suggestive remarks or gestures;
- unnecessary physical contact, such as touching, patting, pinching or punching;
- physical assault, including sexual assault.

Harassment can consist of a single incident or several incidents over a period of time.

Harassment can create a negative or hostile work environment which can interfere with your job performance and result in your being refused a job, a promotion or a training opportunity.

The harasser, who could be of the same or opposite sex as the person harassed, may be a supervisor, a co-worker, or someone providing you with a service, such as a bank officer or a clerk in a government department.

Harassment will be considered to have taken place if a reasonable person ought to have known that the behaviour was unwelcome.

Harassment and the Canadian Human Rights Act

The Canadian Human Rights Act gives each of us an equal opportunity to work and live without being hindered by discriminatory practices.

It covers federal government departments, agencies and Crown corporations, as well as businesses and industries under federal jurisdiction, such as banks, airlines and railways. All provinces and territories have some form of legislation which prohibits discrimination in their jurisdiction.



The Canadian Human Rights Commission accepts harassment complaints based on 11 grounds: race, colour, national or ethnic origin, age, religion, sex, marital status, family status, mental or physical disability, pardoned conviction, and sexual orientation.

Employer's responsibility

The employer is responsible for any harassment that occurs in the workplace. It is the employer's duty to:

- make it clear that harassment will not be tolerated;
- establish a harassment policy;
- make sure every employee understands the policy and procedures for dealing with harassment;
- inform supervisors and managers of their responsibility to provide a harassment-free work environment;
- investigate and correct harassment problems as soon as they come to light, even if a formal complaint has not been received.

The employer should be prepared to take appropriate disciplinary action against an employee found to have harassed someone.

If you are being harassed

Don't ignore harassment. Report it. If you are harassed, there are several steps you can follow:


- Make it clear to the harasser that his or her actions are not welcome.
- Document your case. Keep a written record of the incidents, including times, places and witnesses.
- If you are harassed at work, contact the appropriate person identified in your employer's harassment policy. If you are not satisfied, there might be a union or company grievance procedure you can follow.
- If you are harassed by the provider of a service, complain to the management.
- If these steps do not get appropriate results, and the harassment is based on one of the 11 grounds of discrimination prohibited under the Canadian Human Rights Act, you may wish to file a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission. Contact the nearest regional office listed in this brochure.

If a harassment complaint is made against you

- Discuss the matter with your supervisor, personnel officer, or union representative.
- Co-operate fully with the person(s) conducting the investigation, so that the facts may be determined.



Retaliation

You should not be afraid of someone getting back at you if you file a complaint or act as a witness in an investigation. The Commission can investigate and deal with complaints of retaliation against a person who files a complaint. It may also be a criminal offence to threaten, intimidate or discriminate against a complainant or witness. 



***For more information, contact the regional office of the
Canadian Human Rights Commission nearest you.***

Atlantic

Halifax: (902) 426-8380
Toll Free: 1-800-999-6899
TTY: 1-888-643-3304
Fax: (902) 426-2685

Quebec

Montreal: (514) 283-5218
Toll Free: 1-800-999-6899
TTY: 1-888-643-3304
Fax: (514) 283-5084

Ontario

Toronto: (416) 973-5527
Toll Free: 1-800-999-6899
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Fax: (416) 973-6184

Prairies

Winnipeg: (204) 983-2189
Toll Free: 1-800-999-6899
TTY: 1-888-643-3304
Fax: (204) 983-6132

Alberta and Northwest Territories

Edmonton: (780) 495-4040
Toll Free: 1-800-999-6899
TTY: 1-888-643-3304
Fax: (780) 495-4044

British Columbia and Yukon

Vancouver: (604) 666-2251
Toll Free: 1-800-999-6899
TTY: 1-888-643-3304
Fax: (604) 666-2386

National Capital

344 Slater Street, 8th Floor
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1E1
Phone: (613) 995-1151
Toll Free: 1-888-214-1090
TTY: 1-888-643-3304
Fax: (613) 996-9661

Internet: www.chrc-ccdp.ca
E-mail: info.com@chrc-ccdp.ca

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