

# ***RESPONDING TO HARASSMENT***

Often people respond to sexual harassment by ignoring it. Unfortunately, to the harasser who is harassing, this silence can be taken as passive assent to the unwanted behavior.



## **First Action: Be Mindful of Warning Signs**

- What is the atmosphere in the environment?
- Is there graffiti or objectionable cartoons?
- What is the style of “humor”?
- Do you detect any inner warning signs?
- Do you feel uncomfortable with any individual?
- What does the local gossip have to tell?

## **Second Action: Confront Directly**

When an event of harassment actually occurs, challenge it directly.

1. Take a moment to calm down and organize your thoughts.
2. If safe, directly talk to the person. Look the individual in the eye. Do not smile to lessen the tension, it sends the wrong message.
3. Acknowledge what is happening and what you expect in the relationship.

Examples:

*“You just put your hand on my breast, and I resent that. I would like to resume a professional relationship and I will report it if it happens again.”*

*“I’m not amused by that joke, and consider it offensive. Please do not share jokes like that with me again.”*

*“You have asked me out before, and I have turned you down. I will do so in the future, and consider further requests for a date as harassment. If you insist on asking me again, I will discuss it with your supervisor.”*

## **Third Action: Write a Letter of Intent**

If you are too upset or humiliated to respond at the time, if the behavior occurs again, or if it feels unsafe to talk with the offender directly, a firmly worded letter is the next appropriate response. The letter should include:

- a review of the event(s) in clear, specific language
- your expectation of future relations
- your plan for subsequent action if the behavior should occur again.

Do not include an appeal for understanding or sharing of feelings, as these can be interpreted as an invitation to communication or may suggest vulnerability. Either send the letter “return receipt requested” or present it in person with a witness. Keep a copy for yourself.

## **Fourth Action: File a Formal Complaint**

In preparing a formal complaint, ask for the help of an informed individual away from the situation. Keep an accurate record of times, places and events. Find witnesses to these events and ask them to write down their observations. It is possible that others have been harassed in the same way and, if so, encourage them to contribute their accounts for the documentation.

Remember that your complaint may not be welcomed by the institution. Be sure that you are well supported. Do not expect understanding from the person about whom you are filing the complaint.