



Street Harassment

What is street harassment?

Street harassment is the unwelcome or unwanted verbal, non-verbal, physical or visual conduct based on sex or of a sexual nature which occurs with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person.

Examples include:

- Unwelcome comments about your body, clothing, appearance, accent, sexuality, etc.
- Sexist, racist, ableist, transphobic, or any other comments insulting an aspect of your identity
- Persistent requests for someone's name, number, or other information
- Staring or 'checking you out'
- Making vulgar gestures or telling you to smile
- Taking a photo of you without your consent
- Using a mirror or taking a photo to look up your skirt or dress without your permission
- Flashing you, or exposing oneself
- Showing pornographic images without someone's consent
- Threatening to remove an item of clothing, for example your hijab
- Claiming that you don't have the right to be in a public space
- Whistling, barking, or kissing noises
- Following, stalking or blocking your path
- Intentionally invading personal space or blocking the way
- Sexual touching or grabbing
- Public masturbation or touching

Why is it harmful?

Street harassment is not acceptable and it is never a compliment. You deserve to be treated with dignity and respect and to feel safe in public spaces. Being harassed in a public space can make you worried about your physical safety and creates an environment of fear and intimidation. You may feel unsafe being alone in public, even walking alone in a mall, going out after dark, or using transportation alone.

Further, street harassment is rarely a single, isolated incident, it may happen over and over again. Being continuously subject to these types of comments and behaviors can cause you to feel a heightened sense of anxiety, or to be "on edge" at all times.

How do I respond to street harassment?

You are not responsible for the harasser's behavior. It is your choice to respond to the harassment or not. Make your decision based on what is right for you. It is OK to do nothing, however, if you decide to respond, do it for yourself. Having some kind of response (either in the moment or later) can reduce the element of fear or trauma. There is no correct or perfect way response to harassment, but there are a few strategies that can help you feel safer.

○ Go somewhere safe

If you are being followed on the street or feel that your physical safety is in danger, go into a local business, store, coffee shop, or apartment building lobby where the person harassing you may be discouraged from following you, or where you can get help from a security guard

○ Set a boundary

Address the person harassing you exactly what you want them to do and why. Name their wrongful behavior with a strong, clear voice.

For example, you can say "Do not [what they're doing], that's harassment."

You can also say "that is not okay" or "don't speak to me like that." Say what feels natural to you. The important thing is that you aren't apologetic in your response, and that you don't engage with them after you set the boundary. The person who is harassing you is likely to argue with you or dismiss their fault through further conversation or by making fun of you. At this point, it isn't recommended to engage or respond to them any further for two reasons. First, the attention may feed their abusive behavior and second, this causes the situation to escalate. Once you've pointed out the harassing behavior, move on.

○ Report

Some forms of street harassment are legally recognized and you can report them to law enforcement. If you can guess the employer of the person harassing you, for instance if they are wearing a uniform or working on a construction site, you can report the harassment to the company.

○ Engage bystanders

If someone is around witnessing you, tell them what's going on and what they can do to help. Not all bystanders will know how to respond but typically people do understand that street harassment is not okay and they want to help you, so what can you do to ask for that help? You need to loudly announce to people around you what the harasser just said or did and identify them, like: "That man in the red shirt is following me. I need help!" Then tell people what you want them to do, like, "Can you wait here with me? Can you call the police?"

- Document the situation

If you feel it is appropriate and safe, consider taking a picture or video of your experience - or asking a bystander to do this. This could include the person harassing you, their license plate, or the scene. Some people use photos or videos to report an incident. Others find it empowering to turn the focus onto the person harassing them.

- Trust your instincts

You are in no way obligated to respond to a harasser or to report them. Though responding to or reporting a harasser can be empowering, it can also be exhausting and potentially unsafe. Trust your judgement to do what feels right for you.