

## PREVENTION OF HARASSMENT

### What is Harassment?

Harassment is inappropriate unwanted behavior which disturbs someone. To harass is to insult, grab, aggravate, frighten, tease, taunt, threaten, bully, and/or stalk. Harassment can make us feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, isolated, and angry. Harassment can also make us feel sick, weepy or like sleeping all the time. Harassment is an act of discrimination based on prejudice. Harassment is mean, harmful, illegal, and doesn't belong on or off campus.

If someone is doing something to you, or saying something about you, that you are disturbed by or feel uncomfortable about, it's probably harassment. We have the right to be safe. No one has the right to touch us unless we say it's OK. Even if someone is "just joking," if it disturbs the target or spectators of the action, it is still harassment, because mean jokes can be harassing too.

### Types of Harassment or Discrimination

In Canada it is illegal to discriminate against anyone based on grounds outlined in the Canadian Human Rights Act such as race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability and conviction for which a pardon has been granted.

- **Sexual:** unwanted, unwelcome sexual comments or actions, including unwanted touching, sexual insults, staring, unwanted "compliments" that make the target uncomfortable, and sexual rumor spreading.
- **Racial:** racist comments and attacks on someone's skin color, language, or national origin.
- **Sexual Orientation:** anti-gay, anti-bisexual, anti-lesbian, anti-trans gender harassment and homophobia: calling someone a "faggot" or calling something you don't like, "gay" or "queer." Homophobia also includes excluding someone based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation, graffiti using terms associated with the gay/lesbian community, name calling, or "outing" someone without their consent.
- **Religious:** attacks on someone's religious beliefs or religious group.

- **Disability:** insulting someone based on a real or assumed physical or mental disability. Examples include calling someone, "retard," or insulting them because they use crutches, a hearing aid, or a seeing-eye dog.
- **Social or Economic class, Family status:** prejudices such as "making fun" of someone based on how much money they or their family might have, calling someone names such as "trailer trash," "welfare mother" or describing someone you don't like as "dirt".
- **Personal Appearance:** verbal attacks based on looks, calling someone "ugly," "greaseball," "4 eyes" or "dog" or taunting someone because of their height or weight.

Personal Harassment or Bullying: pressuring someone to do something they don't want to do, or excluding them from a social circle through threats, intimidation, and/or insults. Bullying is particularly harmful when the person(s) bullying have more status than the person being bullied and when the bullying is repeated.

### **Personal Harassment (Bullying)**

Personal Harassment is any improper conduct by an individual, that is directed at and offensive to another person or persons in the workplace or school place, and that the individual knew or ought reasonably to have known would cause offence or harm. It comprises any objectionable act, comment or display that demeans, belittles, or causes personal humiliation or embarrassment, and any act of intimidation or threat.

### **Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment is any unwelcome behaviour, sexual in nature, that adversely affects, or threatens to affect, directly or indirectly, a person's ability to study and learn, job security, working conditions, grades, evaluation, prospects for promotion or earnings; or prevents a person from taking a course, getting a job, living accommodations or any kind of public or educational service.

Examples of sexual harassment:

- suggestive remarks, sexual jokes or compromising invitations;
- verbal abuse;
- visual display of suggestive images;
- leering or whistling;
- patting, rubbing or other unwanted physical contact;
- outright demands for sexual favours

If both parties agree or consent to a particular behaviour then there is no harassment. But if someone feels that he or she has to put up with someone's attitude or behaviour or learns to tolerate it because she or he has no control over the situation - she or he is being harassed.

Both men and women can be sexually harassed, but women are sexually harassed much more often than men. This is a reflection of the imbalance of power in our society.

When someone sexually harasses another person, they are interfering with that person's right to learn, live, work and play without fear as well as the right to be treated equally.

### **Stalking or Criminal Harassment**

Criminal harassment, which includes "stalking," is a crime. While many crimes are defined by conduct that results in a very clear outcome (for example, murder), criminal harassment generally consists of repeated conduct that is carried out over a period of time and that causes victims to reasonably fear for their safety but does not necessarily result in physical injury. It may be a precursor to subsequent violent acts.

Examples of criminal harassment:

- calling you over and over again, and perhaps hanging up whenever you answer the phone
- contacting you on the Internet or through constant e-mail messages
- following you or your friends
- leaving threatening voice messages
- sending you gifts you do not want
- watching you or tracking where you go
- threatening you, your children, family, pets or friends

Such unwanted behaviour can be frightening and cause emotional distress. You can take action if this is happening to you. Contact the police to discuss your options.

**Impact of Criminal Harassment on the Victim:** The cumulative effect of harassing behaviour and actions causes victims to experience intimidation, as well as psychological and emotional distress. The psychological effect of stalking on victims can produce an intense and prolonged fear. This fear usually includes an increasing fear of the escalation of the frequency and nature of the conduct (for example, from non-violent to life-threatening) and is accompanied by a feeling of loss of control over the victim's life.

Some common responses by victims to the trauma of being stalked include the following:

- self-reproach
- a tendency to downplay the impact of the stalking
- interpretation of the stalking as a "private matter"
- a sense of betrayal and stigma
- anxiety and fear, due to the unpredictability of the stalker's conduct
- feelings of being helpless and unable to control their lives
- lack of confidence in authorities such as Campus Security or police, resulting in a failure to report
- inaction, due to a lack of awareness that the conduct is criminal; and
- denial or embarrassment

### **Homophobia and Heterosexism**

"Homophobia" and "heterosexism" are terms used to describe prejudice relating to sexual orientation. They refer to the assumption that heterosexuality is superior and preferable, and is the only right, normal or moral expression of sexuality. Both may also be the basis for negative treatment of gay, lesbian, or bisexual people based on sexual orientation. Although these terms are closely related and overlapping, they also can emphasize different aspects and expressions of prejudice, and can therefore be helpful in identifying and addressing different aspects of the discrimination and harassment experienced by lesbian, bisexual or gay people.

"Homophobia" is often defined as the irrational aversion to, or fear or hatred of gay, lesbian, or bisexual people and communities, or to behaviours stereotyped as "homosexual". It is commonly used to signify a hostile psychological state in the context of overt discrimination, harassment, or violence against gay, lesbian, or bisexual people.

"Heterosexism" is used to refer to the assumption that everyone is heterosexual. This definition is often used in the context of discrimination against bisexual, lesbian and gay people that is less overt, and which may be unintentional and unrecognized by the person or organization responsible for the discrimination. It can also be useful in understanding and identifying some kinds of institutional or societal bias, although homophobia may also be at play.