

PREVENTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT WORK

Under Great Britain's *Equality Act 2010*, every employer must take all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of their staff.

Employers are also liable for harassment of staff by third parties, unless they took all reasonable steps to prevent it.

This factsheet outlines what sexual harassment is, your core duties to prevent it, and the implications of non-compliance.

WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

Unwanted conduct of a sexual nature that violates a person's dignity, or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. It can come from colleagues, managers or third parties. Examples include:

- sexual comments or jokes;
- unwanted touching, hugging or kissing;
- staring or sexual gestures;
- questions about someone's sex life; and
- displaying offensive material.

> Treating someone badly because they complained, or are suspected of complaining, is **victimisation** and is also unlawful.

YOUR CORE DUTY

- **Assess the risk:** conduct a sexual harassment risk assessment, especially before work events, and document the steps you take.
- **Have a clear policy:** explain what harassment is, your zero-tolerance stance, how to report it, how managers handle complaints, how you deal with third parties, and what support is available.
- **Train everyone:** cover all staff, and train managers on your policy and how to handle a complaint.
- **Act swiftly:** discipline employees who harass, and consider ending ties with third parties who do.
- **Review and evaluate:** use surveys and complaint data to check your steps are working.

KNOW YOUR THIRD PARTIES

Third parties include customers, clients, contractors and anyone employees interact with through work, in person or online. Employers must prevent sexual harassment and harassment linked to protected characteristics, excluding pregnancy and maternity, and marriage and civil partnership.

- **Map your contacts:** list the people outside your business your staff deal with.
- **Find the risks:** identify where contact could lead to abuse, including by email, social media or phone, and put controls in place.
- **Review your contracts:** check how agreements with venues, clients and contractors deal with harassment by their people.

REPORTING AND RECORDS

- **Make reporting simple:** give staff a clear point of contact and an easy way to raise problems, and consider an anonymous channel.
- **Keep a log:** record each incident, formal or informal, and how you responded.
- **Extend your policies:** update your grievance, whistleblowing, equality, and lone-working policies to cover harassment by outsiders.

Recognise whistleblowing: since April 2026, reporting sexual harassment is a protected disclosure. Ensure managers are trained to spot this and protect the person who raised it.

SET CLEAR STANDARDS

- **Train front-line staff:** cover personal safety and how to calm difficult situations.
- **Update your terms:** build behaviour expectations into customer, client and supplier terms.
- **Make your stance visible:** use notices or messages explaining that abuse of staff has consequences.
- **Assess higher-risk settings:** consider security personnel, personal alarms or cameras.
- **Enforce it:** a policy alone is not enough. Apply it consistently and act on every breach.

RISKS OF NON-COMPLIANCE

- **Uncapped awards:** there is no limit on tribunal compensation. Some high-profile awards have exceeded six figures; awards for injury to feelings can be substantial.
- **Defence costs:** defending a claim typically costs £10,000 to £50,000; even if you win, costs are rarely recovered.
- **Day-one risk:** there is no qualifying service period, and job applicants can claim too.
- **Wider costs:** management time, staff turnover and lost productivity. Tribunal decisions are published online, and complaints can go viral on social media.
- **Regulator enforcement:** the Equality and Human Rights Commission can investigate suspected breaches, even if no harassment has occurred. It can then require an action plan, enter into a binding agreement with the employer, or seek an injunction.



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