



Webinar 6 – June 2026

# Workplace Violence, Harassment & Bullying

## WEBINAR OUTLINE

INTRO/SETTING THE STAGE

WHAT CONSTITUTES WORKPLACE VIOLENCE?

WHAT IS HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE?

THE BASICS OF BULLYING

HYPOTHETICAL SCENARIO

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## INTRO/SETTING THE STAGE

### Legal Compliance and Why it Matters

- Creating a workplace that is safe, respectful, and free from harassment is a fundamental responsibility for employers, even in states where there are no mandated sexual harassment training laws.
- A proactive approach to harassment prevention not only protects employees, it fosters a positive organizational culture – and minimizes legal risks.

## WHAT CONSTITUTES WORKPLACE VIOLENCE?

- **Workplace Violence:** Any act or threat of physical violence, physical assault, property damage, or severe verbal abuse occurring at the work site.
- Physical assaults including hitting, pushing, or kicking.
- Use of weapons or brandishing dangerous objects.
- Direct or veiled verbal and written threats of physical harm.

## WHAT IS HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE?

### Types of workplace harassment

There's not just one type of harassment or one surefire way to fight it. Here are some of the most common and impactful forms of workplace harassment.

- **Sexual Harassment:** Explicit or implicit requests for sexual favors in exchange for employment benefits. Or unwelcome sexual advances, comments, or behavior that creates an uncomfortable, hostile, or offensive work environment.

Sexual harassment can be verbal or physical, both of which are discriminatory.

Examples of sexual harassment include:

- Unwanted touching
- Unwanted sexual gestures
- Sexual jokes, comments or questions
- Requests for sexual favors

The only effective way to address this pervasive type of harassment is to bring it to the surface. Unwelcome sexual advances and inappropriate sexual remarks between employees happen, and although sexual harassment towards women is most common, people of all genders can be both victims and perpetrators.

### Quid Pro Quo Sexual Harassment

The Latin phrase “quid pro quo” translates to “something for something” or “this for that”. It is used to describe an exchange of services (or goods) in return for a favor.

In the event of quid pro quo harassment, an employee in a superior position may demand sexual favors from a subordinate employee in exchange for a benefit, such as a pay increase or promotion. They also may threaten consequences, such as termination, demotion or withholding a promotion, if the subordinate does not comply.

### Hostile Work Environment

A hostile work environment consists of discriminatory harassment, victimization, violence or offensive conduct as defined by the EEOC. This unwanted behavior is usually severe, persistent and disruptive to the complainant’s work. It is typically based on race, color, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, national origin, disability and more.

- **Discriminatory harassment:** Treating people unfairly or unfavorably due to their race, gender, age, religion, or other protected characteristics. Or based on disability (disability harassment), where people make derogatory comments, mock, or exclude others from opportunities. This type of harassment at work may be verbal, written or physical.
- **Bullying:** Persistent, aggressive behavior intended to intimidate, degrade, or humiliate a person. It often involves a power imbalance between the bully and the victim. Harassment might also be carried out through electronic communication (emails, social media, chats), and it’s known as cyberbullying.
- **Verbal harassment:** Inappropriate comments, slurs, or offensive language that creates a hostile workplace.
- **Psychological/emotional harassment:** Actions that cause distress, anxiety, or fear. For example, constant criticism, humiliation, or giving someone the silent treatment.

Note: Harassment is typically not illegal, unless the behavior is based on a protected characteristic.

### ***A claim of harassment generally requires several elements, including:***

- The complaining party must be a member of a statutorily protected class;
- The individual was subjected to unwelcome verbal or physical conduct related to their membership in that protected class;
- The unwelcome conduct affected a term or condition of employment and/or had the

purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with their work performance and/or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

## ONLINE HARASSMENT

Online harassment in the workplace is any unwelcome, offensive, or discriminatory conduct that occurs via digital channels. It can create a hostile work environment and manifests in several common ways:

- **Hostile or Derogatory Messages:** Sending aggressive, demeaning, or belittling emails, direct messages (like on Slack or Microsoft Teams), or texts. This includes sending offensive jokes, slurs, or persistent personal attacks based on physical appearance, race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.
- **Exclusion and Ostracization:** Intentionally leaving a colleague off important work emails, chat threads, or video calls to maliciously undermine their ability to do their job.
- **Online Sexual Harassment:** Sending unwanted sexual advances, lewd images, or inappropriate messages. It also includes "cyberflashing" (sending unsolicited graphic images) or requesting sexual favors over work or personal messaging apps.
- **Doxxing:** Maliciously sharing a coworker's private, sensitive information – such as their personal home address, private phone number, or banking details – in public online spaces.
- **Impersonation:** Creating fake profiles or hacking an employee's existing social media or professional accounts to post inflammatory or embarrassing content and damage their reputation.
- **Cyberstalking and Monitoring:** Obsessively following an individual's personal social media blogs, or aggressively tracking someone's online status and movements through shared workplace calendars or location-sharing software.

## DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE ANTI-HARASSMENT POLICY

Develop and disseminate a comprehensive anti-harassment policy. This policy should:

- Define what constitutes harassment, including examples of sexual harassment, bullying, and other forms of inappropriate conduct.
- Clearly state that harassment will not be tolerated under any circumstances.
- Explain the procedures for reporting harassment and ensure confidentiality to the extent possible.
- Outline the steps the company will take to investigate and address complaints.

### New York State Requirements for Sexual Harassment Prevention

Every employer in the New York State is required to adopt a sexual harassment prevention policy. An employer that does not adopt the model policy must ensure that the policy that they adopt meets or exceeds the following minimum standards.

The policy must:

- prohibit sexual harassment consistent with guidance issued by the Department of Labor in consultation with the Division of Human Rights
- provide examples of prohibited conduct that would constitute unlawful sexual harassment
- include information concerning the federal and state statutory provisions concerning sexual harassment, remedies available to victims of sexual harassment, and a statement that there may be applicable local laws
- include a complaint form
- include a procedure for the timely and confidential investigation of complaints that ensures due process for all parties
- inform employees of their rights of redress and all available forums for adjudicating sexual harassment complaints administratively and judicially
- clearly state that sexual harassment is considered a form of employee misconduct and that sanctions will be enforced against individuals engaging in sexual harassment and against supervisory and managerial personnel who knowingly allow such behavior to continue
- clearly state that retaliation against individuals who complain of sexual harassment or who testify or assist in any investigation or proceeding involving sexual harassment is unlawful

## THE BASICS OF BULLYING

What could bullying in the workplace look like?

Knowing what bullying looks like can help you prevent it from occurring. Here are some common examples of workplace bullying behaviour:

- Gossiping or spreading rumours about an employee
- Purposely ignoring or excluding an employee
- Using an intimidating attitude
- Undermining an employee's work
- Keeping essential information from people who need it
- Giving people overwhelming or impossible deadlines
- Assigning too little work
- Making offensive or inappropriate jokes or statements
- Stalking or invading people's privacy

## TRAIN EMPLOYEES AND SUPERVISORS

Provide regular harassment prevention training to all employees. Training should cover:

- Understanding what constitutes harassment and bullying.
- The importance of bystander intervention and supporting colleagues.
- How to report incidents and the company's commitment to handling complaints seriously.
- The consequences of engaging in or condoning harassment.

Tailor training programs to address the specific needs and challenges of your organization. Generic training may not be as effective as content tailored to your company's culture and industry.

Provide regular, ongoing training to reinforce positive behaviors and update employees on any policy changes. To achieve that, use interactive workshops and group activities to encourage open discussions.

Equip managers and supervisors with the tools to recognize, prevent, and respond to harassment:

- Teach them how to handle complaints sensitively and confidentially.
- Ensure they understand their responsibility to model respectful behavior and enforce anti-harassment policies.
- Provide guidance on how to create a positive and inclusive team environment.

Include real-life case studies in management training to boost understanding of complex situations. Discussing these scenarios allows managers to develop the skills needed to handle similar situations in the workplace.

## HOW TO HANDLE A COMPLAINT

Employers must act quickly and effectively when complaints arise. This includes conducting thorough investigations, maintaining confidentiality, and protecting complainants from retaliation. Employers who ignore or delay responses often face legal repercussions.

Take all complaints seriously, whether formal or informal, and document everything from the start.

Make it easy and safe for employees to report violence, harassment or bullying:

- Offer multiple channels for reporting, such as a dedicated HR contact, an anonymous hotline, or an online reporting system.
- Ensure that employees are aware of these reporting options and trust that their complaints will be taken seriously and handled promptly.

### Mandatory Reporting

- Supervisors must report any harassment that they observe or know of even if no one is objecting to it.
- Supervisors may be subject to discipline for failing to report suspected violence, harassment or bullying.
- Supervisors may also be subject to discipline for engaging in retaliation.

## **THE INVESTIGATION**

Make sure that all investigations are conducted promptly. In complex situations, consider involving external experts in the investigation process. This enhances objectivity and shows commitment to a fair resolution.

### Assign a Neutral Investigator

- Choose an unbiased, trained, and neutral investigator to ensure a fair process.

### Develop the Investigation Plan

- Create an investigation plan, including who to interview, what evidence to collect, and a timeline for the process.

### Gather Evidence

- Collect all relevant evidence, such as emails, documents, CCTV footage, and any other forms of physical or digital proof.

### Conduct Interviews

- Interview the complainant, the alleged harasser, and any witnesses to gather detailed information about the alleged incidents.
- Ask open-ended questions to understand the nature of the harassment, when it occurred, who was involved, and how it affected the complainant.

### Evaluate Findings

- Evaluate the credibility of the complainant, accused, and witnesses, looking for consistency and any discrepancies in their statements.

### Make a Determination

- Make a good-faith determination based on the evidence collected.

### Take Remedial Action

- Take immediate and necessary actions to stop the harassment and prevent it from recurring.

### Document and Follow Up

- Thoroughly document the entire investigation process in a confidential file.
- Communicate the results to the involved parties and follow up to ensure the situation has been resolved and that no retaliation occurs.

## HYPOTHETICAL SCENARIO

An employee reports to their supervisor that a coworker is harassing them on a coworker group chat. They are posting inappropriate memes about the employee, took pictures of the employee and is now posting them using AI to make fake images using their face. What should the employer do?

Employers must take online harassment seriously and act quickly because they have a legal duty to protect their workers. Recent court cases show that companies can be held legally responsible for online abuse, even if the harassment happens outside of the office or on personal social media accounts. When an employee is targeted by coworkers or the public online, employers should follow a clear plan to protect them.

### Investigate

- Listen carefully: Meet with the employee in private to hear their concerns and show empathy.
- Offer mental healthcare: Give them access to counseling services or employee help programs.
- Change duties: Lower their public exposure by changing their tasks or email setups if needed

### Gather Evidence

- Save screenshots: Copy all mean messages, bad posts, and user profiles before they get deleted.
- Keep logs: Write down the dates, times, and links for every single incident.
- Track blocks: Document all past attempts to stop the online bully. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]

### Take Action Against the Bully

- Report the content: Work with the employee to ask social web platforms to delete the posts.
- Send legal letters: Have the company lawyers send a cease-and-desist letter to the harasser.
- Involve the police: Help the employee file a police report if their physical safety is at risk.
- Fire internal bullies: Punish or fire the person if the harasser works for the same company.

### Update Company Policies

- Update tech policies: Make sure the company handbook clearly bans online and social media abuse.
- Hide personal data: Stop using full names on public customer service chats to protect identities.
- Run regular training: Teach workers how to spot



Prevention is the best tool to eliminate harassment in the workplace. Employers are encouraged to take appropriate steps to prevent and correct unlawful harassment.

- Clearly communicate to employees that unwelcome harassing conduct, violence and bullying will not be tolerated.
- Establish an effective complaint or grievance process, providing anti-harassment training to their managers and employees, and taking immediate and appropriate action when an employee complains.
- Employers should strive to create an environment in which employees feel free to raise concerns and are confident that those concerns will be addressed.