

When you own and run a business, one thing that you would like to think would never happen is [workplace harassment](#). However, no matter the type of business you own and how hard you ensure that you have the best quality staff, there is always a chance that you can end up dealing with [workplace harassment](#).

Equally, you may find that you are incredibly happy with where you work, only to find that you are a victim of [workplace harassment](#). Whether you are an employer or an employee, knowing as much as possible about workplace harassment is what can help you to deal with it in the best way possible.

Workplace Harassment laws

Bullying and [harassment](#) in the workplace are unlawful in the [Equality Act 2010](#). This Act covers the protected characteristics of people such as:

- Age
- Gender
- Race
- Religion
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation
- Disability

What constitutes workplace harassment?

If you look at the Equality and Human Rights Commission's definition of harassment, it can include a variety of things. This includes:

- Offensive jokes
- Slurs
- Epithets
- Name-calling
- Physical assault
- Threats
- Intimidation
- Mockery
- Ridicule
- Insults

Put-downs
Offensive objects or pictures being used
Interference with workplace performance
Spreading rumours
Denying training or promotions without good cause

The person who is accused of harassment could be a supervisor, either direct or in another team; they could be an agent, a co-worker or even someone who is not a direct employee of the business.

The victim doesn't always be the person who is harassed; they could be anyone who is affected by the offensive conduct in a [workplace](#).

Any form of harassment comes under the law, and therefore it needs to be dealt with as soon as possible and always in the right way possible.

What are the different types of workplace harassment?

There are a number of different workplace harassment types. Some of them happen alone, but sometimes they can occur together.

The first is [verbal harassment](#). Verbal harassment may not seem as bad as physical harassment, but it can be just as harmful and powerful. Often, verbal harassment can be ongoing over an extended period of time which can really impact your health and how you feel about your career.

Verbal harassment can be demeaning remarks, offensive gestures and criticism that appears to be unreasonable. You may also be a victim of slurs, insults, hurtful comments and unwanted jokes.

The only issue with verbal harassment is that it can be the hardest one to recognise, and therefore it is often seen as a grey area.

Another form of harassment that is often linked to verbal harassment is psychological harassment. Whilst it is similar, it is usually much more covert. [Psychological harassment](#) will include things such as withholding information from the victim and something that is known as gaslighting.

Those who psychologically harass someone else are trying to mentally break down the victim; they want to chip away at their self-esteem and do their best to undermine them. This could manifest in the form of taking

credit for their work, giving them demeaning tasks to complete or imposing a deadline on someone, which is unreasonable.

A more modern variety of harassment is [digital harassment or cyberbullying](#), as it is usually known. Social media is the main platform that is used for this form of harassment. You may find that you are a victim of someone posting threats or comments that are demeaning on social media. They may also create a fake persona in order to bully someone online.

This can go even further, and the harasser could create websites or pages that are there solely to mock and belittle the victim and even use it to make false allegations about them.

Physical harassment does happen in the workplace, and it can occur in a number of different ways. It could be something like unwanted gestures towards someone, such as touching them or their clothes. Or it could be much more severe such as physical assault on someone or damage to their personal property.

There doesn't have to be severe physical harm in order for something to be seen as physical harassment.

You might not think that sexual harassment is common, but you may be surprised to learn that it can and does happen. Anyone can be a victim of sexual harassment, although it is most commonly reported against women.

It is an incredibly serious offence, and sexual harassment could include unwanted sexual advances, inappropriate touching and sexual jokes. You may have pornography shared with you or be receiving sexual messages from someone. You may even find that you are offered a promotion, job or a new role in exchange for sexual favours.

How to recognise [Workplace Harassment?](#)

As workplace harassment can take a variety of forms, this means that it can be hard to spot. It also can feel that you are perhaps the one to blame and that you are simply not dealing with the comments and behaviour of someone else in your workplace in the right way.

The best way to tell whether or not something could be seen as [harassment](#) is to ask yourself if the behaviour has made you feel

intimidated or threatened in any way at work. Do you regularly feel humiliated or ridiculed, especially in front of other colleagues?

Other questions that you could ask have you been called names, or are your efforts consistently undervalued or disregarded?

Another sign that you could be a victim of workplace harassment is if you feel sick or nauseous when you are working with someone in particular in the workplace.

If you answer yes to any of these questions, then you may find that you are the victim of harassment, and you may want to take this further and proceed through the reporting and complaints procedure.

What should you do if you are being harassed?

If you are being harassed, then you need to ensure that you do not blame yourself for what is happening and instead recognise that you are a victim of harassment. You should not feel intimidated to be quiet; rather, you should feel brave enough to take the complaint further.

You should always start by talking to a member of your senior leadership team, should you feel comfortable doing this. Whilst you may want to speak to your colleagues, unless they are someone who you can truly trust, then it may not be wise to do this.

If you don't feel able to speak to someone in your workplace, then you want to make sure that you speak to an outside body such as ACAS to raise your concerns.

It is also a good idea to try and look at the policy of your workplace to see how your harassment claim is likely to be handled and what is expected of you as the victim. That way, you can be best prepared to deal with the process and what it could mean for you.

How to [report workplace harassment](#)

If you believe that you are a victim of workplace harassment or you see someone who is a victim of workplace harassment, then you need to ensure that you report it. You may have a policy in your workplace that needs to be followed; however, if you don't, then these are the most common steps that are recommended.

If the situation is not violent, then you should try your best to resolve the situation with the perpetrator. Approach them privately and let them know why you feel that their behaviour is not appropriate. They may not know that this is an issue and want to fix their behaviour.

If this is not the case, or you feel it is too serious or dangerous for you to try and deal with, then you should speak to your immediate manager (unless they are the person in question). You may also want to speak to HR at this point to see if they can support you.

They may ask you to provide them with any evidence that you may have, such as screenshots, emails and the accounts of other eyewitnesses. It is always recommended that you send over your evidence and your complaint in writing rather than in person, that way, you will have a way to manage and keep all of your comments and what you have already done.

If all of these things do not help, then you can always speak to the Equal Opportunities Commission to help you with your case. Or your trade union representative.

Why is it important to report workplace harassment?

You may think that it is not worth [reporting workplace harassment](#), but it is vitally important that you do this. You may not realise it, but even the smallest sign of harassment could paint a much bigger picture of the person who is harassing. They could already be doing it, but nobody else has reported it, or it has been reported, but more evidence is needed.

Not only this, but you may not be the only person who has been impacted by that person, which means that you could help someone else feel better simply by being brave enough to stand up to the harassment and take steps to stop it.

What are the responsibilities of the employer?

Employers are responsible for doing everything that they can to prevent harassment and bullying in their workplace. This means that they are liable should their employees be suffered in the workplace.

It is important for employers to follow the guidance set out by the Government and to create their own policies that cover how they will deal with harassment should it occur within their business.