

# Sexual Conduct at Work

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## *Offending Others*

### **I don't mean to offend anyone, so what's the big deal?**

*It's not the intention that matters; it's the impact on the other person. And the big deal is that your job is on the line.*

If you're thinking that it's difficult to know how to behave at work, you're right — sort of. It's easy to blow this out of proportion, though, and say that you're not allowed to be yourself or that the world has gone too PC. But political correctness at work is really just a matter of respecting the people around you.

The way you act and what you say when you are out with a group of friends on a Saturday night may be different from how you act and what you say while you're at work. You can be yourself in both environments, just a different part of yourself.

At work, cluelessness won't cut it. If you find yourself offending people without meaning to, get a clue. Think about what you say and do before you say or do it. Building a culture of respect begins with everyone doing their part.

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## What if a co-worker tells me I've offended him or her?

*Just say, "I'm sorry."*

If it wasn't your intention to offend your co-worker, a genuine "I'm sorry" will quickly put the incident in the past. Yes, it may be a little embarrassing for you, but consider the courage it took your co-worker to tell you.

Now, if you did intend to offend, an "I'm sorry" is a good place to start. But, most importantly, consider yourself warned and don't do it again. Negative or offensive comments among co-workers only make it more difficult to work, which is why you're together in the first place. And, keep in mind that a pattern of offensive comments could lead to serious consequences, including loss of employment and even legal action.

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## How can I have any fun at work if I have to be politically correct all the time?

*You don't get paid to have fun; you get paid to work.*

Actually, you can — and should — have fun while you work. We all spend too much time at work not to enjoy it. However, that fun shouldn't be at the expense of someone else.

If you're getting caught up with what's PC and what isn't, you're missing the point. Consider the feelings of your co-workers because it's the right thing to do. Making fun of people or sexually charging the workplace with your comments, suggestions, and behaviors is inappropriate. Try having fun by enjoying your job and the people you work with.

## What if a co-worker is always looking at my body?

*Talk about awkward!*

What do you say? “Hey, get your eyes off my body”? Maybe some of us could say that, but most of us couldn’t. However, you can say it in a different way — and, yes, you have every right to say it. Regardless of the words you choose, it’s going to be uncomfortable, but not as uncomfortable as their unwelcome gawking, right?

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Walk away and think about what you want to say. Then, take a deep breath and go back and say it.

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So, walk away, think about what you want to say, take a deep breath and then go back and say it. Try saying something like, “I’m really uncomfortable with the way you seem to be looking at my body when we’re talking.” If the offending co-worker plays innocent, follow up with something like, “Well, you may not be aware of it, but it really bothers me, so could you keep your eyes on my eyes when we talk?”

Some of you may be thinking, “Right. I would never be able to say something like that to one of my co-workers.” That’s OK. If the idea intimidates you or you can’t muster enough courage to talk face to face with her or him, talk to a manager. But do something about it. You may be dealing with a co-worker who doesn’t even know he’s doing it. Or you may be dealing with someone who knows exactly what he’s doing. Either way, it’s not going to stop on its own.

And, if you notice a co-worker behaving that way with another co-worker? Speak up. Be an upstander. The recipient of the gawking will thank you. And, who knows, the gawking co-worker may as well.

### **What if a co-worker tells me to take down my poster because it's offensive?**

*Take it down.*

Even if you'd like to tell your co-worker to get a sense of humor, the right thing to do is to take the poster down and put it up at home.

Your work area is your own space and should be comfortable. But it shouldn't be offensive to anyone else. There's more to you than any one poster can typify. So, if you want your work area to reflect who you are, find something that reflects one of the other many facets of you as a person.

### **Here are a couple of tips to help you assess what is appropriate to display in your work area:**

- Ask yourself whether the humor or message is at anyone's expense.
- Ask yourself if your freedom of expression infringes on someone else's.
- Ask yourself whether it's sexual in nature.
- If you like cars, for example, consider the difference between a poster of a sleek, red Ferrari and a poster of a scantily clad woman lying on the hood of a sleek, red Ferrari.
- If you want a calendar, consider the difference between photographs of people involved in extreme sports and photographs of firefighters in skimpy swimsuits.

On its own, hanging a poster, calendar, or a picture that is sexual in nature is not harassment. However, it is disrespectful and can become part of a pattern of offensive, unwanted behaviors that create a potentially hostile working environment. And, we know you don't want to be a part of that.

# Sexual Harassment Complaints and Reporting

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## Am I responsible if I just witness sexual misconduct, but I'm not part of it?

*To put it simply, "yes."*

As a fellow human being and a respectful co-worker, you are very responsible for trying to stop harassment of any kind in the workplace. Wouldn't you want someone to help you or a member of your family if they were being harassed?

You're not obligated to step into the middle of it yourself, unless you're comfortable doing so, but being an upstander instead of a bystander can be a powerful vehicle for change.

### **There are three ways you can be an upstander:**

1. Filter your words and actions so that your conduct is professional and respectful at work. In other words, be an example.
2. Speak up and address inappropriate conduct or sexual harassment when you witness it or hear it.
3. Support colleagues if they feel uncomfortable or harassed, by encouraging them to speak up to the person doing the harassing, their manager, or HR.

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