

# The Top 10 Things Co-Workers Can Do Right Now to Address Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

*Co-workers can be critical support systems in the workplace for employees experiencing sexual harassment. Because co-workers are often outside of the sexual harassment reporting hierarchy and work closely with their peers, victims of harassment may feel more comfortable sharing their experiences and concerns without fear of judgement. As a caring co-worker, here are the top 10 ways you can support others in the workplace.*

## **I. Acknowledge to the victim that the harassment is not their fault.**

As a co-worker, you should acknowledge that the victim of harassment has confided in you about a difficult experience that has negatively impacted their work environment. Experiencing harassment in the workplace can be highly personal and painful, and coming forward to share a story takes courage and risk-taking. Believe them instead of blaming or doubting their actions or experience.

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## **II. Maintain confidentiality as best as possible.**

As a co-worker, you are likely to be out of the formal reporting hierarchy for harassment in the workplace. Moreover, the victim has probably approached you with the intent of maintaining confidentiality because of potential discomfort or triggering an investigation by disclosing to a supervisor or human resources (HR) office. Be sure to maintain this confidentiality by not discussing the incident(s) in public settings or with supervisors without the explicit consent of the victim.

## **III. Offer to help document the harassment or serve as a witness, if appropriate.**

If the victim decides to move forward with a formal complaint in the future, they will need clear documentation on the details of what happened, the date, time, place, and any witnesses present. If the victim has approached you in confidence, encourage them to document the incident and offer to serve as a witness. Moreover, encourage them to keep this evidence [somewhere safe](#) outside of the workplace in work computers are confiscated or work areas are searched. Ultimately, the decision to document the harassment and file a formal complaint belongs solely to the victim—as a co-worker, you can offer personal support and information on how to do it safely so they have the full range of response options in the future.

## **IV. If the victim decides to confront the harasser, offer to go with them.**

The victim may decide that it is safe to confront their harasser about the inappropriate behavior and ask them to stop. As a co-worker, you can offer to accompany them as added support and a witness if they are nervous about the confrontation. Remember to let the victim lead in this decision-making; they know what will make them feel the safest in the workplace, and you are there to support the victim's choices.

### **V. Educate yourself on the prevalence and dynamics of workplace harassment.**

If this is your first time hearing about or critically thinking about an incident of sexual harassment, it is important to educate yourself on the nuanced power and control dynamics at play. You can use resources like the [Facts on Gender-Based Workplace Violence](#) and [The Impact of Violence on Workplace Communities](#) to better understand the nature of harassment and its impacts to become a stronger ally in the workplace.

### **VI. Identify and provide a referral to local advocacy and support groups.**

Most communities have advocates, counselors, attorneys and faith leaders that can support the victim more directly as they navigate the lasting impacts of workplace harassment. These can include national hotlines, like the [National Sexual Assault Hotline](#) as well as other local legal and advocacy groups. Have a list of those resources handy to refer to the victim upon request, and be sure to take steps that maintain their confidentiality and wishes throughout.

### **VII. Review your workplace's internal policies and protocols.**

Consult your employer's sexual harassment policy to see what the procedures are for reporting misconduct. If your employer doesn't have a policy in place, talk to management or Human Resources about creating one. You can use this [model policy](#) to build one that addresses sexual harassment in your own workplace. In general, a workplace policy should define sexual harassment and misconduct, have steps for reporting harassment, details about the investigation processes, and protections for retaliation against those who report harassment.

### **VIII. Be an upstander.**

If harassment happens in front of you, choose to be an upstander rather than a passive bystander. Use the five D's (Distract, Delegate, Document, Delay, and Direct) outlined by the [Hollaback! Bystander Intervention Training](#) to stop sexual harassment and support the victim as long as it is safe to do so. Advocate for this type of upstander training across your workplace, to better equip other peers to respond to incidents of sexual harassment.

### **IX. Check in on the victim, without judgement.**

You can continue to be a resource for the victim by checking in on them in a safe way, and without personal judgement about their actions or decisions. As their peer, your goal is to listen to them, provide resources and support as they ask, and help create a respectful work environment to the best of your ability.

### **X. Be kind to yourself.**

Supporting a victim through their experience with harassment can be emotionally and physically difficult for you as a co-worker, especially if you yourself have experienced harassment in the past. Reach out to hotlines and local advocates to find support for yourself, and check out these [helpful tips for self-care](#).