

Preventing sexual harassment

As an employer, you must take steps to prevent sexual harassment happening in your organisation.

What the law says

By law, all employers must take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of their workers.

The law is the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023. The law came into effect on 26 October 2024.

The law covers sexual harassment from:

- other people at work
- third parties – for example customers and clients

You must take action to assess risks and put measures in place. You cannot wait until sexual harassment happens. If it's already happened, you must take action to stop it happening again.

Important: If you do not take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) could take action against you. You might also have to pay a higher rate of compensation if an employee makes a successful claim at an employment tribunal.

What you should do

To help you take appropriate action, you should:

- consider the risks of sexual harassment happening in your organisation
- consider steps you could take to reduce the risks of sexual harassment happening
- consider which of those steps are reasonable for you to take
- take those steps

What is reasonable depends on the situation. There's no set list of steps that all employers must take.

Considering risks

Sexual harassment can happen in any organisation. You must not assume that it will not happen.

You should assess any possible risks in your organisation.

In your risk assessment, consider any factors specific to:

- your sector
- the type of work
- ways of working

- different roles in your organisation

Higher risk factors might include things like:

- meeting clients or service users alone
- an environment where people are drinking alcohol
- work-related social events
- power imbalances between workers
- travelling for work, including overnight stays

You should also be aware that some people might be at higher risk. For example:

- younger workers, including apprentices and interns
- people with learning difficulties

Considering steps to take

To decide what steps are reasonable for your organisation, you should consider things like:

- the size of your organisation
- the kind of work your workers do
- what risks of sexual harassment there might be in your working environment
- who your workers might have contact with as part of their work
- how often your workers are in contact with third parties
- whether sexual harassment has happened before
- your organisation's resources

When you're considering third parties your workers are in contact with, consider people like:

- customers
- clients
- service users
- members of the public
- self-employed consultants
- people at conferences or events

Examples of steps to prevent sexual harassment

The steps you could take include:

- making it clear to everyone who works for you, or uses your services, that you will not tolerate sexual harassment
- encouraging workers to report any incidents of sexual harassment
- encouraging workers to report situations where they felt at risk, even if nothing happened
- introducing ways for workers to get help quickly, for example panic buttons or alarms
- setting standards of behaviour for work social events
- having someone at senior level to make sure the organisation is taking steps to prevent sexual harassment

You should check you have the right policies and procedures in place.

You should also consider:

- having a specific policy on sexual harassment
- training everyone who works for you on recognising sexual harassment
- training managers on their responsibilities
- having a process for reviewing your policies and training
- taking steps to create the right culture

Having the right policies and procedures

You must follow a full and fair procedure for handling complaints, in line with the [Acas Code of Practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures](#).

This could be through:

- a grievance procedure
- a specific procedure for handling sexual harassment complaints – this could be part of a sexual harassment policy

[Find out more about creating a sexual harassment policy](#)

Make sure other policies are in line

It's important that all your policies match up. You should check all relevant policies, for example:

- discipline
- social media
- dress code

For example, your social media policy should also make it clear that online sexual harassment will not be tolerated. This includes on personal devices.

Inform and train workers

This includes:

- telling everyone that sexual harassment is not acceptable – for example as part of their induction
- training everyone who works for you on recognising and understanding sexual harassment
- training managers on how to assess and manage risks of sexual harassment
- training someone to advise people who are considering making a sexual harassment complaint – you could train someone in HR, a manager or another worker

Acas training for employers and managers includes:

- [training on dealing with unacceptable behaviours at work](#)
- [equality, diversity and inclusion training](#)

Review your policies and training

You should regularly check:

- if your policies and procedures for preventing sexual harassment and handling complaints are working
- how effective your training around sexual harassment is

For example, you could do a survey.

If sexual harassment happens, you should review your policies. You may need to make changes and take other steps to prevent it happening again.

Create the right culture

You should make these things clear to everyone who works for you:

- sexual harassment is against the law
- what sexual harassment is and what behaviours are unacceptable at work
- you will never cover up or ignore a sexual harassment complaint
- you will not tolerate misuse of power in workplace relationships, for example through seniority or influence
- how you will handle a sexual harassment complaint
- that workers are encouraged to report sexual harassment
- if someone who works for you carries out sexual harassment, it may lead to them losing their job
- if someone makes a complaint that's not upheld, they will not face any disciplinary action, as long as their complaint was not malicious

There are other steps you can take to help create the right culture. For example:

- having a clear way for workers to report sexual harassment, including anonymously
- carrying out anonymous surveys to understand people's experiences of sexual harassment at work
- including in managers' performance objectives that they should report sexual harassment if they see it, or deal with it if they're trained to
- keeping a record of sexual harassment complaints to watch for any patterns of unwanted behaviour
- [improving equality, diversity and inclusion](#) – sexual harassment is less likely to happen in an inclusive organisation where everyone is treated with respect

Get more advice and support

[Find out more about preventing sexual harassment from the Equality and Human Rights Commission](#)

If you need help with taking steps to prevent sexual harassment, you can:

- [contact the Acas helpline](#)
- [get tailored support for your organisation](#)