



This could be workplace sexual harassment

In simple terms, sexual harassment means any unwelcome sexual behaviour that a reasonable person could anticipate may make another person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated in that situation

Sexual harassment is not always obvious. It includes a wide range of behaviours.

Here are some examples of behaviour that could be workplace sexual harassment:

Lea's story

Lea recently started her first ever job, at a supermarket. The owner of the store, Jonno, seems to spend a lot more time watching her, and asking her questions, compared to the other workers.

After work one day, Lea checks her phone and sees a message from Jonno on her social media, 'I've been wanting to ask you ever since you started working for me, do you have a boyfriend?' Lea does not reply to the message. When she wakes up the next morning, Lea has 37 more messages from Jonno, asking questions about her personal life.

Even though this happened on their private social media accounts, because Jonno is Lea's employer, this could still be workplace sexual harassment.

Flic's story

Flic runs into their manager, Jo, at a bar while out with friends one weekend. Jo sits next to Flic, places her hand on Flic's thigh and says, 'you look so hot tonight, why don't you ditch your friends and come home with me?'

Even though this did not happen at work, because Jo is Flic's manager, this could be workplace sexual harassment.



Sami's story

Sami works as a junior agent at a real estate company. One of the senior agents, Dale, has always been very friendly. Recently, Dale has started complimenting Sami on his appearance several times a day, saying things like, 'Wow, have you been working out? Check out those guns' and whistling when he walks past.

Sami asks Dale to stop doing this as it makes him uncomfortable and he's noticed the other agents giving them strange looks. Dale says, 'Don't worry mate, it's ok. I'm married, everyone knows that. Plus, I'm not gay. It's just a bit of fun.'

Because Sami and Dale are co-workers, this could be workplace sexual harassment.

Sandra and Mark's story

Sandra and Mark are casual sales assistants at a liquor store. Their manager, Ellen, tells them that she's just started dating a new guy and he's 'hot'. Ellen pulls out her phone and shows Sandra and Mark photos of her new guy, including a photo where he is lying on a bed, completely naked.

As Sandra and Mark are co-workers of Ellen's, this could be workplace sexual harassment.

Bonnie's story

Bonnie works part time for a fast-food retailer. She is a passionate about fitness and regularly attends high intensity circuit classes outside of work. She has a huge Instagram following, with 20,000 followers, and posts daily fitness photos of herself at the classes, often in crop tops and shorts.

One day, she notices that Darren, who works with her at her job is sitting outside her fitness class, watching her as she returns to her car. Later than night, Darren sends a sexually explicit image to her by private Instagram message.

As Bonnie and Darren are co-workers, this could be workplace sexual harassment.



Boris's story

Sarah is a department manager at a large fashion retailer. Boris is a student visa holder, working casually, in line with his visa restrictions. Sarah is constantly touching Boris on the arm as they work together. On one occasion, she even slaps him on the bum as he walks past, commenting that 'you must work out.'

As Boris and Sarah are co-workers, this could be workplace sexual harassment.

Mario's story

Mario is a young male who openly identifies as gay. He works in an office in a large team and reports through to Judy, the team leader.

The team has an End of Financial Year Celebration, over a bottomless brunch on a Sunday. At the lunch, Judy tells Mario that she can't believe he is gay, and that she reckons she can 'turn him the other way.' Mario is extremely embarrassed by the comments.

As Mario and Judy are co-workers, this could be workplace sexual harassment.

Young female wait staffs' story

Albert is a kitchen hand working in a large restaurant. He is 70 years old and has been working at the restaurant for 30 years.

Albert regularly bakes cookies and slices and brings them to work as gifts. He only gives the gifts to the young female wait staff. He regularly tells these wait staff that they are beautiful and asks if they have boyfriends.

As Albert and the wait staff are co-workers, this could be workplace sexual harassment.

Jules's story

Joe is a sales assistant at a retail store. He has a mild intellectual disability and is on a supported wage arrangement. Jules usually works at a different location, but today she's working alongside Joe. Joe looks Jules up and down and asks 'do you have any small tattoos on your body.' Gary, their manager is there too. Jules feels humiliated and does not know how to respond.

As Jules and Joe are co-workers, this could be workplace sexual harassment.



Mikaela's story

Mikaela is a bar tender at a night club employed by the night club. Carlos is a security guard, employed by a third-party contractor.

Mikaela and Carlos sometimes engage in behaviour that may be considered flirting. At the end of one night, Carlos walks Mikaela to her car. He then presses up against her, kissing her on the lips and touching her on the breast.

As Mikaela and Carlos are co-workers, this could be workplace sexual harassment.

Saffy's story

Saffy and Cooper both get drunk at the office Christmas party. They go back to Cooper's house with a group of their work mates. Saffy passes out on the couch. When she wakes up, she is in Cooper's bed, naked. Beside her, Cooper is asleep.

As Saffy and Coopers are co-workers, this could be workplace sexual harassment (and may also be sexual assault).

Rachel's story

Rachel works in a large fruit shop. Her department manager constantly makes inappropriate comments about her body, and asks her to send him photos of herself in a bikini.

She reports the comments and request to the store manager. The store manager laughs and says 'don't worry, he's got a girlfriend, and he's a nice guy. He's just having a laugh with you.'

The owner of the store visits one day and Rachel reports the behaviour of the department manager, and the store manager to her. She apologises to Rachel and says that the store manager should have dealt with the conduct properly when she initially reported it.

As Rachel and her department manager are co-workers, this could be workplace sexual harassment.



Georgie's story

James and Georgie are work colleagues who went out on a couple of dates. However, Georgie is of the view that there is no connection between them and they have nothing in common.

When she called it off, James got upset. At each shift they work together, he begs Georgie to reconsider, and he follows this up with text messages. Georgie tells him that she is certain, and she asks him to stop. The behaviour continues.

As Georgie and James are co-workers, this could be workplace sexual harassment.

If sexual harassment occurs at, or in connection with, work then it is against the law.

For more information:

The Respect@Work website provides free information about workplace sexual harassment. To find out more, visit www.respectatwork.gov.au/younger-workers