



# TIPS TO ADDRESS SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

No one should feel uncomfortable or fearful of unwanted sexual comments, advances or touching in the workplace. Sexual harassment is prohibited in all jurisdictions across Canada and is a form of discrimination. Unfortunately, there is still work to be done. In the 2018 [Healthy and Respectful Workplace Survey](https://cdha.ca/healthyworkplacesurvey) ([cdha.ca/healthyworkplacesurvey](https://cdha.ca/healthyworkplacesurvey)) commissioned by the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA), 19% of respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment from clients; 9% reported sexual harassment from dentists.

## What is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment<sup>1</sup> is a type of discrimination based on sex involving unwanted comments or behaviour that intimidate, offend or humiliate another person. Sexual harassment can happen in person, by text messages or online.



## Examples include:



Calling people sex-specific derogatory names



Touching non-sexual body parts inappropriately (e.g., massages, hand holding)



Abusing a position of authority to ask for dates or sexual favours, or asking for sex in exchange for a benefit, such as a promotion or a passing grade



Sending sexually explicit messages or making online posts of an offensive and sexual nature

## Workplace sexual harassment may include:

- Unwanted questions or discussion of sexual topics or sexual activity
- Rough or vulgar humour or remarks related to sexuality, sexual orientation or gender identity
- Display or circulation of pornography, sexual images or offensive sexual jokes
- Sexual gestures, leering or inappropriate staring
- Cornering, standing too close or invading personal space
- Making gender-related comments about someone's physical characteristics, mannerisms or conformity to gender-role stereotypes
- Verbally abusing, threatening or taunting someone based on gender or sexual orientation
- Threatening to penalize or otherwise punish someone if they refuse a sexual advance

<sup>1</sup>Sexual violence as a workplace hazard refers to any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a worker's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in a workplace or work-related setting. Sexual violence exists on a continuum from obscene name-calling to sexual assault and/or homicide. It includes online forms of sexual violence, such as internet threats and harassment, and sexual exploitation.

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THE CANADIAN DENTAL  
HYGIENISTS ASSOCIATION  
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE  
DES HYGIÉNISTES DENTAIRES



## What is the difference between sexual harassment and sexual assault?

If someone touches you, the situation has escalated from sexual harassment to either assault or sexual assault. If this happens, contact the police, and consult our *Tips to Address Abuse and Violence in the Workplace* ([cdha.ca/abuseandviolence](http://cdha.ca/abuseandviolence)) for more advice.

### What should you do if you're being sexually harassed by a client?

- Address the situation if you feel safe in doing so
- Report the incident to your office manager and your employer
- Document the incident in detail
- Discontinue the dental hygienist–client relationship

### What should your employer do if you're being sexually harassed by a client?

Your employer has an obligation to maintain a safe work environment. They can support you by:

- Communicating to the client that sexual harassment of staff will not be tolerated
- Documenting the incident in detail
- Consulting their regulatory body or human resources department to determine if dismissing the client is appropriate

### What should you do if you're being sexually harassed by your co-worker or employer?

- Document the incident in detail, including date and time
- Consult your office's protocols for dealing with sexual harassment, which are required to be available to you
- Report the incident to your office manager, human resources department or employer
  - If the offender is a regulated health professional, report the incident to their regulatory body
- Address the incident immediately if you feel safe in doing so
- Report the incident to the police
- Consult CDHA's [Employment Legal Line](http://cdha.ca/employmentlaw) ([cdha.ca/employmentlaw](http://cdha.ca/employmentlaw)) for legal advice

### What should you do if you witness a co-worker being sexually harassed?

- Assess if the situation is safe for you to intervene. If so, interrupt the incident to give your co-worker a chance to exit the situation. Inform the offender that their conduct is inappropriate.
- Document the incident in detail
- Offer to serve as a witness for the person who was sexually harassed
- Acknowledge the incident with your co-worker, offer empathy, and help connect them with resources they need (e.g., Homewood Health)

If you're experiencing sexual harassment, visit Western University's Workplace Harassment and Violence web pages for [support resources](http://learningtoendabuse.ca/docs/List-of-Support-Resources--BILINGUAL-.pdf) ([learningtoendabuse.ca/docs/List-of-Support-Resources--BILINGUAL-.pdf](http://learningtoendabuse.ca/docs/List-of-Support-Resources--BILINGUAL-.pdf)) in your province.

If you are in distress or if your psychological well-being is affected, contact [Homewood Health](http://cdha.ca/Homewood) ([cdha.ca/Homewood](http://cdha.ca/Homewood)), CDHA's member and family assistance program, for support.