

CHAMPION  
HEALTH

*Thrive*

# How to stop sexual harassment in the workplace

A Champion Health Guide

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# How to stop sexual harassment in the workplace

## Safety is a right, not a privilege.

Everyone has the right to feel safe at work and to be treated with dignity and respect.

Sadly, for 50% of women, this is not happening.

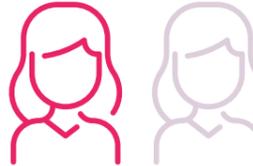
Sexual harassment is still incredibly prevalent in many workplaces, and while it can happen to anyone, the majority of the affected individuals are women.

Despite often being hidden behind phrases like “it’s just a bit of banter”, or “I didn’t mean it like that”, sexual harassment is a serious issue that deserves serious attention.

It is also not just confined to the office. Sexual harassment incidences have persisted, and in some cases increased, despite the increase in remote working.

Ensuring that it is dealt with appropriately is vital for fostering an inclusive and fair working environment, and retaining a talented, equal and happy workforce.

Champion Health have worked with Thrive Law to create this guide, which aims to help employers work towards a workplace environment in which women can feel safe and comfortable.

**1 in 2** 

**women** have been sexually harassed at work

**3 in 5** 

**women** between the ages of 16-24 have been sexually harassed at work

**4 in 5** 

**women** who are sexually harassed at work don’t report it

(TUC & Everyday Sexism Project, 2016)

Sexual harassment is even more prevalent for women with disabilities, from black and ethnic minority backgrounds or who are part of the LGBT community (TUC, 2019)

# What is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment is defined as any sexual behaviour or conduct that is unwanted, offensive, and that makes someone feel uncomfortable, intimidated, humiliated or scared.

## Examples include:

- Flirting, gesturing or making sexual remarks about someone's body, clothing or appearance
- Unwanted physical contact, for example hugging or stroking someone
- Asking questions about someone's sex life
- Making sexual comments or jokes about someone's sexual orientation or gender
- Displaying or sharing pornographic or sexual images, or other sexual content
- Making conditions of employment or advancement dependent on sexual favours, either explicitly or implicitly
- Constantly asking someone or pressuring someone to go on a date with you
- Sexually explicit "banter" on a group WhatsApp message, even if it's not targeted at any particular person



Sexual harassment does not have to take place face to face within an office setting. It is still harassment if an incident happens virtually, after-hours or out of the office.



CASE STUDY 1  
**Lisa**



Lisa is walking down the stairs at work, when she is stopped by a male member of staff who she has never met. The male member of staff tells her she looks beautiful.

Lisa feels quite uncomfortable and is unsure what to say. From then on, whenever she sees that member of staff, she feels awkward and embarrassed.

She doesn't report the incident, as she's worried she will look "silly" reporting a comment that could have been meant as a compliment. She is also convinced that nothing would be done if she did report the incident.

## Points of focus



It does not matter how the comment was meant. It's unwanted content of a sexual nature, which has made Lisa feel uncomfortable and embarrassed, and is therefore considered sexual harassment.



Ignorance is not an excuse; even if the comment was not meant to be harassing, it is. It's the responsibility of the company to make sure employees are aware on what constitutes sexual harassment.



A significant barrier to women reporting sexual harassment is the belief that nothing will change if they report it. The company need to make it clear that all reports of sexual harassment will be taken seriously.

This is a true story, but the identity of the person has been protected by a pseudonym

# The effects on victims

Increased risk of anxiety, depression and PTSD

Diminished self-esteem, self-confidence and psychological wellbeing

Long-term effects on wellbeing, due to chronic stress

Significantly increased risk of high blood pressure and poor sleep

“Sexual harassment can have a devastating impact on those who are subjected to it. Mental and physical health often suffer, leading to anxiety, poor sleep, depression, loss of appetite, headaches, exhaustion or nausea. Victims feel humiliation, mistrust, anger, fear and sadness.”

(Women and Equalities Select Committee Report, 2018)

**The mental health effects from sexual harassment can even be fatal. The British Medical Journal reported that employees who suffer sexual harassment at work have a higher risk of death by suicide.**

**80%**

of women who experienced harassment didn't report it

**30%**

felt that reporting the harassment would negatively impact their career and working relationships

**70%**

of those who did report the harassment experienced no change afterwards

**20%**

have been harassed by someone who had direct authority over them

[TUC & Everyday Sexism Project, 2016]

## Why do 4 in 5 women not report sexual harassment?

- > Fear of retaliation from the harasser
- > Fear of not being believed or taken seriously
- > Fear of a negative impact on their career or their working relationships
- > Fear of being seen as "unable to take a joke"
- > A belief that nothing will change
- > Not knowing who to report it to
- > Feelings of shame, embarrassment or that it was their fault because they 'led them on'

**Keep in mind** Sexual harassment can happen to men too and due to the association of sexual harassment as a "women's problem", men may be more likely to feel shame or embarrassment if they are sexually harassed in the workplace.



CASE STUDY 2  
**Kathryn**



Kathryn's co-worker asks her to go on a date, to which she politely declines. A week later, the same co-worker asks again. Again, Kathryn declines.

When the co-worker asks for a third time, this time in front of his friends, Kathryn tells him that the continued pressure is making her feel uncomfortable. He tells her to "chill out" and "stop being boring", which makes his friends laugh. Kathryn feels too embarrassed to report the incident.

From now on, Kathryn feels uncomfortable sharing an office with her colleague and starts to dread coming into work every day. As a result, her work performance suffers.

## Points of focus



Initially asking Kathryn for a date would not be considered sexual harassment. However, once she has said no, the repeated asking and pressuring would be, as it is conduct of a sexual nature.



Lots of women don't report sexual harassment, as they don't want to be labelled as "boring" and "unable to take a joke".



Feelings of embarrassment and shame are common for those who are subjected to sexual harassment.

This is a true story, but the identity of the person has been protected by a pseudonym

# What if it happens to you?

Sexual harassment can happen to anyone, but that doesn't make it any easier to deal with if it happens to you.

Difficult as it may be, if you are sexually harassed, then you should report the incident if you feel able to.

Reporting keeps people accountable for their actions, and stops the harasser repeating their actions against you, or someone else.

It also gives the employer the opportunity to appropriately protect and support you; ultimately the company can only help with issues they know about.

The next page outlines steps to make reporting sexual harassment easier and clearer.



# Who can help?

There are numerous helplines and services which support women who are the victims of sexual harassment. These include:



## Thrive Law

This employment law firm offers free initial assessments of any sexual harassment claim.

[enquiries@thrivelaw.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@thrivelaw.co.uk)  
[www.thrivelaw.co.uk](http://www.thrivelaw.co.uk)

## Rights of Women

Rights of Women provides free advice for women who have experienced sexual harassment.

020 7251 6575  
[www.rightsofwomen.org.uk](http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk)



## Victim Support

Victim Support have a live chat support online, as well as an information service. All of their support is free.

08 08 16 89 111  
[www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)



## Remember that it isn't your fault

This is so important. Anyone can be sexually harassed, and the fault lies with the harasser not you!

1

## Keep a log of any harassment you experience

This ensures that you can provide a conclusive report of the incident if you need to. The most important things to note would be the dates and times, and what exactly was said or done. If it's in messages only, keep screenshots so they can't be deleted.

2

## Speak to someone you trust

Whether it's to seek advice or just talk about what you've been through, speaking to someone you trust about your experience may help you to clear your mind and decide what to do next.

3

## Consult your workplace policy

Your workplace should have clear policies and procedures in place for dealing with sexual harassment, usually in the anti-bullying and harassment policy. Consult these policies to check what you should do.

4

## Raise the issue with the harasser

Addressing the harasser is a potential first step to stopping the harassment, but should only be done if you feel comfortable doing so.

5

## Report the incident

Whilst it can feel daunting to report sexual harassment, your company should have processes in place that keep you safe. They should also listen to you and take your complaint seriously. You shouldn't be victimised for raising a sexual harassment complaint.

6

## Access the right support

If needed, there is support available outside the workplace. Contact details of helpful services have been provided within this guide.

7

## Seek advice on legal rights

If your complaint isn't taken seriously by your workplace or you are treated unfairly after your complaint, seek advice on your legal rights. In some circumstances, you may want to seek legal assistance early on, as solicitors will often be willing to support you throughout the grievance and investigation process.

8

## Consider criminal actions

Some incidents of sexual harassment will be illegal. If you're in danger, you should call 999 or report any incidents to the police.

9

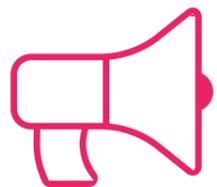
# How individuals can stop sexual harassment

We can all play our part in preventing sexual harassment.



## Trust yourself

Don't let sexual harassment or harassers hide behind phrases like "it's just a bit of banter". Trust your instincts. If you think that any comment, behaviour or communication is harassment, it probably is!



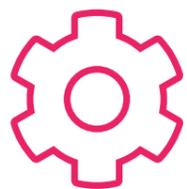
## Speak up

We know how difficult this can be, but it's so important. Positive change can only happen when all employees recognise and interrupt harassing behaviours. If you see someone being harassed, or experience it yourself, speak up.



## Report

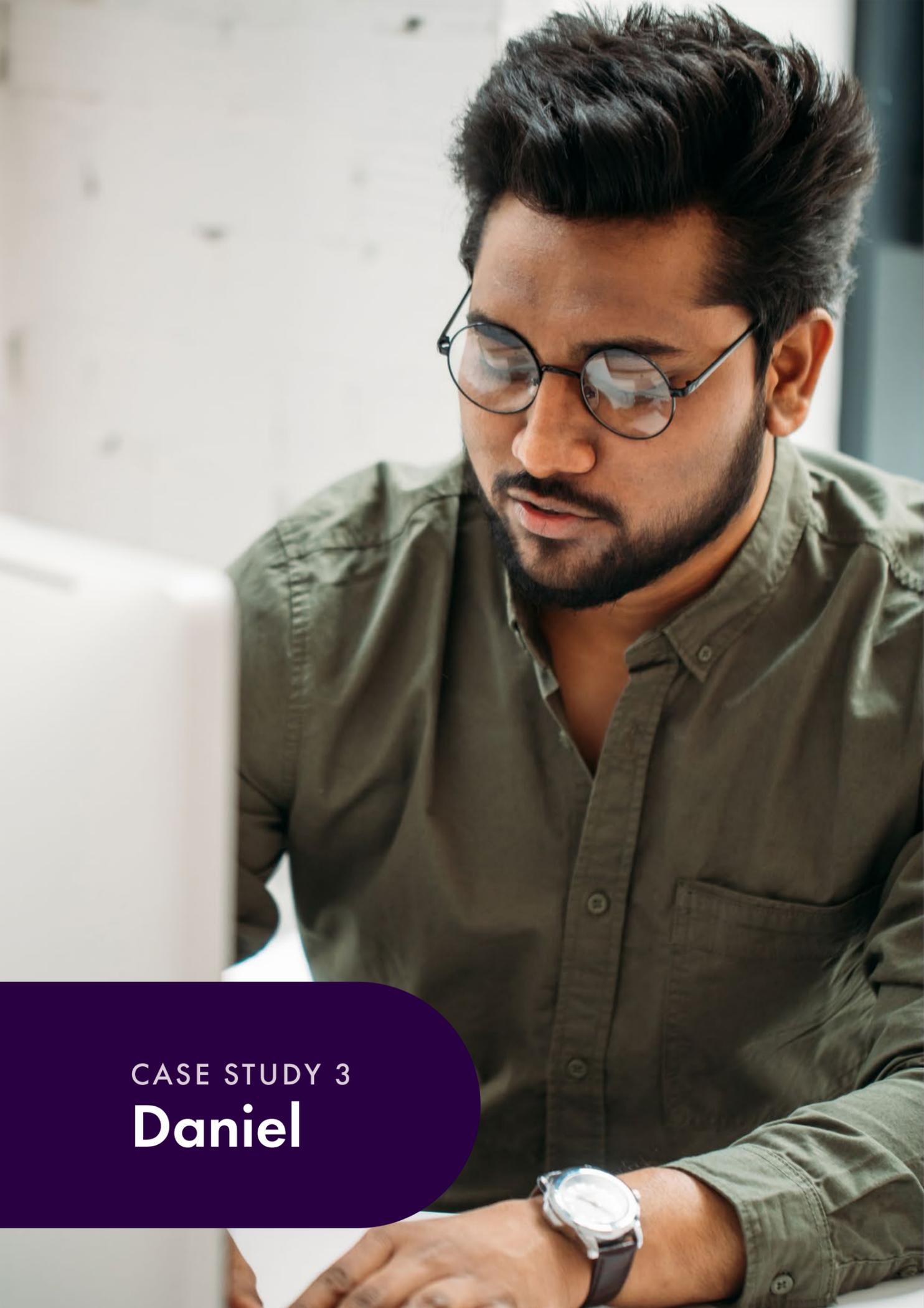
Look at your company's anti-bullying and harassment policy, and carry out the relevant steps to escalate the issues if you see harassment inside or outside the workplace.



## Be thoughtful

What you do and say matters. It is your responsibility to do all you can to help to create a fair, safe and respectful work culture, free from sexual harassment.





CASE STUDY 3  
**Daniel**



Daniel has noticed that his manager has started acting inappropriately towards Joanne, a new starter on his team. He frequently references her looks and acts overly familiar, often resting both his hands on her shoulders.

Daniel wants to report his manager but is worried that his career will suffer if he does. He also feels that if the situation was bothering Joanne, then she would have said something.

A couple of weeks later, Joanne leaves her job.

## Points of focus



Reporting sexual harassment is not just the responsibility of the individual. Intolerance of sexual harassment should run throughout the company culture. Everyone needs to challenge harassing behaviour, and support their colleagues in doing so.



The organisation should have made it clear to Daniel that his career will not suffer if he reports sexual harassment.



Staff turnover due to sexual harassment is common. According to a report by Deloitte Australia (2019), it represents 32% of the total cost of sexual harassment.

This is a true story, but the identities of these people have been protected by pseudonyms

# ACT

## How organisations can stop sexual harassment

The ACT framework has been developed to provide a simple process for stopping sexual harassment within your workplace.

### ACT

#### Awareness

Ensure that all employees know exactly what sexual harassment is, what behaviours constitute it, and how incidents of sexual harassment will be dealt with. Leave no room for grey areas.

### ACT

#### Company Policy

Company policies must make the company's stance on sexual harassment clear, usually in the anti-harassment and bullying policy. They should also clearly outline the steps which employees should take if they want to raise a grievance. Procedures for dealing with sexual harassment investigations and grievances should be easy and efficient and senior managers or HR should be trained on dealing with these issues.

### ACT

#### Training

All staff, including board members and managers, should receive sexual harassment training of some kind. All staff should be trained on what sexual harassment in the workplace looks like, what to do if they experience it and how to handle any complaints of harassment.



# It's time to take action

An inquiry into sexual harassment in the workplace by the Women and Equalities Committee made it clear that rates of sexual harassment continue to be unacceptably high, and that employers are not taking sufficient steps to protect their staff.

## The time to take action is now.

Whether that's reviewing your company's sexual harassment policies, organising a sexual harassment training day, or distributing a sexual harassment resource (it could be this one) to your employees, any action you take is a step in the right direction.

Ideally, make it clear that your company has a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment and that the individuals subjected to it will be supported as needed. Perhaps set up an anonymous report line initially, to establish if sexual harassment is a day-to-day issue, which you aren't being informed of.

Any movement you make is a step towards making sure that every single one of your employees feels safe and secure at work.

# Resources used to develop this guide

-  [Rights of Women survey, 2020](#)
-  [The Economic Cost of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace](#)
-  [Still just a bit of banter?](#)
-  [Sexual harassment of LGBT people in the workplace](#)
-  [Turning the tables: ending sexual harassment at work](#)
-  [Women and Equalities Select Committee Report, 2018](#)

## With special thanks to

Jodie Hill, Alicia Collinson, Francesca Nugent-Kelly and Hannah Wright

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide. We hope you found it useful! If you would like to request a specific workplace guide, please do get in touch. You'll find us at:

[hello@championhealth.co.uk](mailto:hello@championhealth.co.uk) [www.championhealth.co.uk](http://www.championhealth.co.uk)

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