

Human Resources Administrators

Best practices for receiving & responding to disclosures of workplace sexual harassment

Disclosing is not Reporting

Disclosing workplace sexual harassment is not the same as reporting workplace sexual harassment. Some complainants may choose to disclose for several reasons including to ask questions, to request an accommodation or to seek personal support. These complainants may not wish to proceed with a formal report, at any time. Accordingly, you should have procedures in place to respond to disclosures in a survivor-centered manner understanding that some disclosures may never proceed to a report.

Retaliation and Power Imbalances

Prepare for the possibility that a complainant may choose not to report workplace sexual harassment due to a fear of retribution or retaliation. This fear is often exacerbated where there is a power imbalance between the complainant and their harasser. For this reason, you should have procedures in place to respond to either likelihood.

Recognize Discrimination and its Connection to Sexual Harassment

Persons belonging to certain communities or groups are vulnerable to sexual harassment because historically their reports of sexual violence to police or other authority figures have been ignored or dismissed altogether. Ensure that you become educated in the connection between the sexual victimization of Indigenous women, Black women, queer and trans people, racialized persons, migrants or refugees, and those who live with disabilities. Know when to offer support specific to the needs of complainants from one or more of these communities.

Sexual Harassment is Never Insignificant

Some complainants who disclose workplace sexual harassment may reveal interactions with their harasser which are immediately shocking, egregious and invasive while some may disclose interactions which may at first seem trivial and small. Sexual harassment is never insignificant

regardless of the conduct. The psychological impacts may be significant, traumatizing and potentially triggering previous experiences of sexual harassment. Accordingly, when you receive a disclosure of a “minor” incident, respond and accommodate as you would if it were a “serious” incident.

Be Clear on the Limits of Confidentiality

Every employee who discloses workplace sexual harassment should be informed as to the limits of confidentiality, as per applicable federal and provincial laws. Know the limits and communicate them either in advance of receiving the disclosure or immediately following.