

# Building Inclusion:

## Recognizing and Preventing Harassment

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### 1. What is Harassment?

Harassment is typically defined as a course of conduct or comment that is unwelcome, demeaning and offensive. Harassment can include:

- Unwelcome physical contact
- Inappropriate looks or gestures
- Circulating offensive materials
- Persistent criticism and unreasonable demands
- Harassing emails or posts to social media sites
- Offensive jokes
- Malicious gossip
- Insulting and demeaning verbal comments

Although harassment usually involves repeated harassing behaviour, one incident that is serious enough to significantly impact your ability to cope might also constitute harassment.

#### Did you know ...

- In addition to violating McMaster University's policies, harassment is contrary to legislation.
- Harassment contravenes the Occupational Health and Safety Act (Bill 168).
- Harassment that targets an individual or a group of individuals on the basis of one or more of the protected human rights grounds such as sex, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation or religion breaches both the University's human rights-related policies and the Ontario Human Rights Code.

### 2. If you are being harassed,

- ✓ **Seek help and support:**
  - Discuss the situation confidentially with a Human Rights Officer in the Office of Human Rights & Equity Services (HRES). They will listen to your concerns and review your options with you.
  - Consider talking with a supportive friend or colleague or to your union steward or supervisor.
  - If you are experiencing health-related problems, see your doctor or contact the University's employee assistance program: <http://www.workingatmcmaster.ca/humansolutions/index.php>.
- ✓ **Tell the harasser to stop if you can do so safely:** Communicate with the harasser in-person or by email, depending on the circumstances. Identify the incident(s) and what you found objectionable. State clearly that you want the harassment to stop immediately.
- ✓ **Document:** Record dates, times, the specific nature of the incident(s), names of witnesses and your response at the time of the harassing behaviour. If you know of others who are being harassed, consider asking them to document their experiences as well.

- ✓ **Protect Yourself:** If possible, avoid being alone with the harasser. If you must have contact, remain calm and avoid any behaviour that could lead to claims of harassment against you.

### 3. If you witness harassment:

- ✓ **Offer support:** Let the target of harassment know what you witnessed and that you object to what happened. Offer support should they wish to take action to stop the harassment.
- ✓ **Put the harasser on notice if you can do so safely:** Tell the harasser what you witnessed and that you disapprove of the behaviour.
- ✓ **Document:** Record dates, times and the nature of the harassment you witnessed.
- ✓ **Take action on your own behalf:** Witnessing bullying and harassment is upsetting. Contact HRES to explore your options under the University's harassment and violence prevention policies.

### 4. If you are a supervisor:

- ✓ **Be a role model.** Refrain from disrespectful, harassing, violent or discriminatory behaviour.
- ✓ **Establish and communicate clear expectations.** Harassment is a serious performance issues that creates a stressful and disrespectful environment. Communicate your intention to take disciplinary action should harassment be found to occur.
- ✓ **Provide ongoing education on harassment, discrimination and violence.** Contact HRES for educational resources.
- ✓ **Monitor** the work environment and check in with your team members regularly.
- ✓ **Intervene** immediately and appropriately when you witness disrespectful behaviour of any kind.
- ✓ **Document** any actions that you may have taken in response to harassment.
- ✓ **Seek support.** You are not in this alone. The Office of Human Rights & Equity Services is available to you should you require advice, strategies and guidance.

### 5. Additional Resources:

**The Office of Human Rights and Equity Services (HRES):** HRES offers confidential information and support to all members of the McMaster Community who are dealing with issues related to harassment, discrimination or barriers to accessibility

Contact: 905-525-9140, Extension 27581 or [hres@mcmaster.ca](mailto:hres@mcmaster.ca) or [www.mcmaster.hres.ca](http://www.mcmaster.hres.ca)

**Employee Assistance Program:** [www.workingatmcmaster.ca/humansolutions/index.php](http://www.workingatmcmaster.ca/humansolutions/index.php)

**Human Resources – Violence and Harassment Prevention in the Workplace**

<http://www.workingatmcmaster.ca/eohss/prevention/workplace-violence/>

**Ontario Human Rights Code:** [www.ohrc.on.ca](http://www.ohrc.on.ca)

**Ontario Ministry of Labour information on Bill 168 and Preventing Workplace Violence and Harassment:** [www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/sawo/pubs/fs\\_workplaceviolence.php](http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/sawo/pubs/fs_workplaceviolence.php)

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