

Berkeley

PATH to Care Center

PREVENTION | ADVOCACY | TRAINING | HEALING

How to Give Support: Sexual Harassment

If someone close to you has been impacted by sexual harassment...

You don't have to be a professional to support a friend or member of your community who has been impacted by sexual harassment. We know that a survivor's community is an important part of getting support if they're in an uncomfortable situation. Below, you'll find some tools to help support someone who has experienced or is experiencing sexual harassment.

What to Expect

Sexual Harassment is characterized as unwanted and unwelcome sexual remarks, physical contact, or sexual solicitation. Sexual harassment often occurs when unequal power dynamics are present and the aggressor has some degree of power or privilege over the person being impacted. Sometimes, these power dynamics can intersect with identities a person may hold, and can take place in the workplace, at school or in other private and public spaces. Is it common for people to minimize the impact of sexual harassment or assume that it is common place and a typical experience. The truth is, a person experiencing sexual harassment can be significantly affected by it, especially if they have experienced sexual violence in the past. Some feelings might include:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Self-blame, guilt, shame● Easily becoming triggered or upset, especially if there is trauma in the past● Hypervigilance - feelings of fear and paranoia● Embarrassment, avoidance● Minimizing feelings and the experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Hyperarousal - extreme anxiety● Hypoarousal - disassociated, emotionally numb● Concerns about support system taking the incident seriously● Fear for safety |
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How to Support

Sexual harassment is an uncomfortable and violating experience. Similarly, interpersonal violence is always very disempowering to the person experiencing it, so it's important to let the survivor know that they control what happens next. Harassment feels different for everyone depending on a variety of factors, including past experience and situational dynamics so it is important not to minimize or liken the event to personal experiences. Often a support person can be impacted by the feelings of a person close to them. Remember not to neglect your own self care or take on more than you can handle while acting as a support person. It is healthy to set your own boundaries with time and emotional limits while providing care. Always reach out to the PATH to Care advocate team to access your own support as needed, and remember you don't have to be a superhero to support someone, being there for them is enough! If you know a person impacted by sexual harassment consider the following suggestions:

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| DOS | DON'TS |
|---|---|
| Provide resources for reporting (OPHD, etc) | Tell the person to be more assertive or engage in confrontation |
| Check your biases and validate the experience | Minimize or state that harassment is a normal occurrence |
| Recognize that harassment looks and feels different for different folks | Make assumptions about a situation or someone's experience |
| Be aware that the person may have experienced sexual violence in the past | Assume that this is a single incident experience |

Resources

RAINN Sexual Harassment Resources: <https://www.rainn.org/ThatsHarassment>

AAUW Know Your Rights

<https://www.aauw.org/what-we-do/legal-resources/know-your-rights-at-work/workplace-sexual-harassment/>