

HAS THE WORLD GONE CRAZY?

I listen to the radio news in the morning. It seems to me we have reached the "tipping point", that moment of critical mass, the boiling point, where what was unexpected has now become expected (Gladwell 2000). I used to hear the weather, some politics, a local news story. If there was a news flash about a well-known person sexually harassing, abusing, or assaulting it was unusual and startling. Today, when I turn on the radio I am surprised if I don't hear story about a politician, actor, or familiar and powerful person being accused of a sexual offense. I am beginning to think the world has gone mad. Terrible times.

However, there is a positive aspect to all of these harmful behaviors. People are speaking out-in droves. Both in the US and UK people who have been sexually taken advantage of are coming forward and being taken seriously. The accused are resigning, being fired, apologizing, getting treatment and many are facing legal repercussions.

Therapists will tell you this has been a common problem in the workplace forever. One reason people see psychological help is to learn coping skills to deal with workplace harassment and the legal process if they report it. Women and some men, have suffered silently; terrified to speak out. They fear not being believed, losing their jobs, or worse. Often, the person acting inappropriately is in a position of power over the person being harassed. Sometimes, there were no harassment laws or workplace guidelines and even where they did exist legal battles to deal with harassment complaints often took many stressful years. Perhaps we have reached a tipping point and peo-

ple will begin to feel empowered by the recent willingness to report. "The success of any kind of social epidemic is heavily dependent on the involvement of people with a particular and rare set of social gifts" (Gladwell). We are beginning to see this take place right now. One problem that concerns me is when a person badly needs an income to support a family. Need undermines the ability to take a stand. But, this recent change is a step in the right direction. What is sexual harassment in the workplace and what can be done about it? It is unwanted behavior of a sexual nature which:

- violates your dignity
- makes you feel intimidated, degraded or humiliated
- creates a hostile or offensive environment

Sexual harassment includes:

- sexual comments or jokes, facial expressions, questions or comments about your sex life, requests for sexual favors
- physical behavior, including unwelcome sexual advances, touching and various forms of sexual assault
- displaying pictures, photos or drawings of a sexual nature
- sending email with a sexual content
- spoken or written words of abuse
- threats/promises to employment in return for sexual favors.

Sexual Harassment is against the law! Federal Law prohibiting sexual harassment is Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. These laws apply to both men and women, and prohibit sexual harassment

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whether it is directed at someone of the same or opposite sex.

Steps to take if a person is being sexually harassed at work. If possible confront the harasser the first time they act. They may not understand their behavior is offensive.

- Speak clearly, slowly, maintain direct eye contact
- Describe the behavior, its effects on you and that you want it to stop
- Ignore attempts to trivialise or dismiss
- Don't smile or apologise. This undermines your complaint
- When you have finished, walk away-the less you say, the more powerful you will be
- If speaking is too difficult write them-keep a copy of all correspondence
- Keep a diary of all offending behavior including dates, times, locations, others present and their names. Important if you make a formal complaint.
- If the behavior continues tell your employer, HR person, or supervisor. There are procedures they need to follow. Again, keep a record.
- If it continues file a complaint with a government agency.

Here is an article that provides guidelines: <https://www.equalrights.org/legal-help/known-your-rights/sexual-harassment-at-work/>

If you are in this situation this is a good time to come forward. The excellent therapists at Affiliated Clinical Services are there to support you in the process. You deserve better.