



Sexual Harassment vs Sexual Abuse: Understanding the Difference

Sexual harassment is a form of abuse where someone makes **unwanted sexual advances, comments, or gestures** toward another person, causing them to feel **uncomfortable, unsafe, or disrespected**. This can happen:

- **At work** (common in adult environments)
- **In schools** (common among kids and teens)
- **In public spaces or online**

Why It's Serious

- **Harassment is a boundary violation** — it shows the offender does not respect personal or sexual boundaries.
- These behaviors can be **early warning signs** of someone who may escalate to sexual assault if given the opportunity.
- Harassment is about **power and disrespect**, not attraction.

Examples of Sexual Harassment

- **Verbal:** Sexual jokes, comments about someone's body, sexual rumors, asking sexual questions
- **Non-Verbal:** Staring, leering, winking, making sexual gestures, displaying sexual images
- **Physical:** Unwanted touching, brushing against someone, blocking someone's path in a sexual way
- **Digital/Online:** Sending sexual messages, images, or videos without consent

Sexual Harassment vs. Sexual Assault

- **Sexual Harassment** – Unwanted sexual behavior (words, gestures, or minor physical contact) that does **not** involve forced sexual activity
- **Sexual Assault/Rape/Molestation** – Physical sexual acts or contact **without consent**, often involving force, coercion, or manipulation

Both are serious, and both should be reported.

Who to Contact

- **School officials** (for harassment in schools)
- **Workplace HR** (for workplace harassment)
- **Local Police** if the harassment is threatening, physical, or part of a pattern
- **National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-4673 (RAINN)**
- **National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)**