

Points to Remember about Sexual Harassment

- ◆ If you are offended by an obscene joke, talk, or behavior that is sexually charged, inform the offender in clear language that you are displeased.
- ◆ If a client is making suggestive remarks or making you uncomfortable with his or her behavior, immediately inform your field instructor. It may be necessary to transfer the case.
- ◆ If an employee of the agency is sexually harassing you, these are avenues of action available to you:
 1. Speaking with the offender
 2. Sending a letter to the offender
 3. Recording the event in your journal or personal file (In case there are subsequent incidents, it will be important to document what happened and when.)
 4. Reporting the incident to your supervisor or the offender's supervisor

When does a hug or a touch become sexual harassment? Sexual harassment is one-sided. There is no reciprocity involved; the offender's behavior is unwelcome and almost always repetitive. A single incident usually is not sexual harassment unless a serious threat or assault is involved.

Another aspect of sexual harassment is that the offender may use clout or power of position to insinuate that the victim has much to lose by not going along with the offender's requests. Sexual harassment exists when you fear a loss of position or status, or negative evaluation, because you rejected sexual advances. Both men and women can be victims of sexual harassment.

If you feel that you are being subjected to sexual harassment, you should immediately inform your primary supervisor. If the person harassing you is the supervisor, or if you do not feel comfortable discussing the matter with this person, by all means contact your faculty field liaison. Often, the situation will not improve until someone—

the victim—decides to take a stand. One of our graduate students, placed in a psychiatric setting, was repeatedly subjected to derogatory comments from a male physician about the nature of her work. These comments were completely unfounded and sexist in nature. When the student discussed this situation with her field instructor, a great deal of support was generated for her, and the result was that a letter of disciplinary action was placed in the physician's personnel folder.

Do not be silent just because you are a student or because you don't have much longer in the placement. If you are feeling sexually harassed, it is likely that the same offender is harassing others. There are laws to protect you against sexual harassment. One way to avoid becoming a victim is to familiarize yourself with your agency's policies for complying with sexual harassment laws. Dhooper, Huff, and Schultz (1989) found that 54 percent of social workers surveyed were ignorant of the applicable laws.

SUMMARY

This chapter has aimed to provide some beginning information about the legal system and to prepare you for handling such thorny problems as resolving ethical dilemmas, handling mistakes, and gives guidance for some common problems that might be encountered.



Human Rights & Justice

Critical Thinking Question: What argument could you make to advocate for a sexual harassment policy if an agency didn't have one?

Understanding the Interaction of Personal and Professional Values

1. Just as everyone else, you have a set of values that guide your personal and social life. As a social worker, your professional behavior should be guided by the NASW Code of Ethics. But what are the values that constitute your personal ethical "code"?

- a. _____
- _____
- _____
- b. _____
- _____
- _____
- c. _____
- _____
- _____
- d. _____
- _____
- _____

2. Have any of your personal values changed because of your exposure to a world of diverse people, ideas, and experiences, or your education for a professional career? Which values and how?

- _____
- _____
- _____

3. Is there any conflict between your personal values and social work professional values? Where do they clash?

- _____
- _____
- _____

4. How do you plan to resolve the conflict between your personal and professional values?

- _____
- _____
- _____