

You're not alone

We heard from over 300 people who have been sexually harassed at work. They shared their advice and experiences to help others in a similar situation. They said:

Workplace sexual harassment can be difficult to talk about and can make you feel alone. It is important to know that you are not alone.

*"While I had support from a couple of the upper managers who knew of what happened, **I still felt really alone.**"*

- Hospitality worker, Sydney

*"I genuinely thought I was the first person to ever, in the whole company, in the whole world, to go through something like this. And **I had to keep it to myself and so I was alone.** And it turns out, it happens all the bloody time."*

- Young neurodivergent worker, Perth

People respond to sexual harassment in different ways. Sometimes, you might not understand what's going on:

*"As a queer migrant, also being a young person, **I found myself pretty much [lacking] understanding about sexual harassment.** It's very, very uncomfortable, but I didn't know that was a form of sexual harassment."*

- LGBTQ+ migrant worker



*"I was naïve, something that is massively [exacerbated] by my **neurodiversity.** Even when you know what sexual harassment is, you can still fall prey to it and **not understand what's happening.**"*

- Neurodivergent worker

*"I've seen that with other colleagues... where **they don't even realise** that it is sexual harassment because... **it's so normalised.**"*

- First Nations worker, Darwin

It's normal to wish you had responded differently:

*"The first time [it happened] I was very young. I didn't know how to deal with it. [I wish] I'd done more and **I struggled for a long time afterwards with not having done anything about it.**"*

- Young worker, Hobart

You might try to act like nothing's wrong:

*"At the time years ago I was very new, very quiet at the time. And **I was just laughing**, but in order to deescalate, I can only just say, 'I'm not sure.' I didn't say I wasn't happy or I wasn't feeling comfortable."*

- International student, Melbourne

You might feel angry and call out the behaviour:

*"When I realised that they had used my honesty and vulnerability to weaponise against me, **I just snapped.**"*

- LGBTQ+ young worker, Melbourne



You might prefer to take other action:

*"He went to the bathroom and **I just walked out** and just went home because I didn't feel safe there."*

- Neurodivergent international student

*"**I had my friends come and pick me up** and drop me for a little bit because... I got followed outside of work. So...I don't want to walk alone there."*

- Young worker, Melbourne

*"**I told the head of security** what had been going on and showed her the messages he had been sending."*

- Young worker, Melbourne

*"**I wrote to the minister** and said, 'Please, can you review [my department]?'"*

- Worker, Brisbane

Speaking up about workplace sexual harassment can be hard:

*"Yes, it's uncomfortable and I feel unsafe at times... but I need work and don't say anything to [the] manager as **I might lose my job.**"*

- Written submission

*"There needs to be an understanding of the **power dynamics** and how difficult it can be making a complaint for sexual harassment where you can **risk not getting promoted, risk losing your job, risk social exclusion.**"*

- Neurodivergent international student

You may need time to process or get to safety before you're ready to tell someone:

"After enduring years of harassment, I disclosed to a close co-worker who explained to me the reporting steps."

- Written submission

You might find it hard or not want to go to the police or your boss to report what happened:

"I [did not] reach out because if I do my student placement [could] be cut down, if I got cut down my visa [could] get cancelled. [If] my visa gets cancelled, I go back to my country. That's it. I don't want police to be involved in this."

- LGBTQ+ migrant worker, Melbourne

"I have so many other female peers, colleagues, friends in [the] industry... that haven't gone through any formal investigation because of their perception and risk of the impact and tarnish to their career."

- Young neurodivergent worker, Perth

"As immigrants to this country, there is a certain mindset. You don't get these facilities back home, so you don't look for them here. When you go through any form of harassment or trauma, you don't go looking out for help."

- Culturally and racially marginalised worker, Perth

Sometimes when you do speak up, the workplace will respond in a harmful way:

"[They] diminish [your] feelings and try to belittle your experiences."

'It's just all your imagination or your own different interpretation of things... because you're Asian... you may be more sensitive!'"

- Culturally and racially marginalised worker, Melbourne

"When I tried to come forward, there was sort of responses like, 'Oh, that person's a good guy, can't you talk to him about it?'"

- Worker with a disability

"I was sexually harassed by a cis woman and my previous workplace, when I reported it to a cis man, I was laughed at...and completely invalidated because 'that doesn't happen between two women.'"

- LGBTQ+ worker, Perth





Remember: It is against the law for your workplace to respond in a harmful way.

Harmful responses can make you doubt yourself and your experience:

"Your colleagues, your managers, or sometimes even your family or friends, they might say, 'you're over sensitive. You think too much about it. Maybe they didn't mean that way.'"

- Culturally and racially marginalised worker, Adelaide

"Because often you're not believed if you're black or brown. [They say] 'Are you sure?..' Really gaslighting you until you end up leaving there doubting yourself."

- Culturally and racially marginalised worker, Sydney

"I think the longer these processes go on for, and all the institutional obstacles that you encounter along the way, they do exacerbate your own doubt."

- LGBTQ+ worker, Melbourne

Harmful responses take away your voice and your choices:

"I had a meeting with HR and they're basically saying, you better be quiet because [the harasser] could be taking you for slander and defamation."

- LGBTQ+ First Nations worker, Perth

"When I was a student, at my first job... my boss always said, 'You should be so lucky that I'm hiring you, because you don't have any experience,' and I stuck with that job for two years."

- LGBTQ+ refugee, Melbourne

It's normal to feel guilty or ashamed, but you have so much to be proud of:

"I'm proud that I came to the other side with integrity."

- Culturally and racially marginalised worker, Brisbane

"I'm proud of the fact that I've been developing my ability to communicate, and that that has allowed me to better convey my experiences."

- Worker with a disability, regional

*"I'm proud of being able to have **put myself first** and do what was best for me even though it was hard."*

- Young worker, Hobart

*"I am most proud of my **resilience...** being able to stick up to my **values** and **stand up for what I believe** despite having received so many rejections and backlashes throughout the process."*

- International student, Melbourne

*"My experience of sexual harassment has galvanised my **empathy** for others. I'm just proud that **I'm thinking about the people behind me.**"*

- LGBTQ+ worker, Melbourne

*"I am proud of **finding community**, and in that community finding a source of resilience and support."*

- Hospitality worker, Sydney

*"I'm proud to **still be alive** because the gap is not closed yet and I'm heading into the years where a lot of our people don't get to this age."*

- First Nations worker, Darwin

If you're ever feeling guilty or ashamed, just remember:

*"I don't really have to be ashamed and guilty because I'm not the problem, even though I feel like the problem. **It just takes having people to relate to, to make it less your fault.**"*

- Neurodiverse worker, Hobart

Workplace sexual harassment is never your fault. It is the fault of the person who harassed you. Workplace sexual harassment is against the law.

You have a right to feel safe at work. Your boss is responsible for stopping workplace sexual harassment and keeping you safe.

Contact the **National Information Service** on 1800 620 241 or email respect@humanrights.gov.au for free and private information and help.

