

Cafe and restaurant industry

Workplace harassment

Workers in the cafe and restaurant industry can be exposed to workplace harassment. This can have a significant impact on both people and businesses. Workers exposed to harassment can become physically or mentally ill.

Work factors such as highly demanding work, workers having little or no influence over their work characteristics and poor support or workplace cultures can increase the risk of workplace harassment.

How do I know if it is really workplace harassment?

A worker may be exposed to workplace harassment if they are exposed repeatedly to behaviour that:

- is unwelcome and unsolicited
- the worker considers to be offensive, intimidating, humiliating or threatening
- a reasonable person would consider to be offensive, humiliating, intimidating or threatening.

The source of workplace harassment may be an employer, employee, a co-worker or a group of co-workers. 'Workplace harassment' does not include reasonable management action taken in a reasonable way by the employer in connection with the employee's employment.

Harassment can range from subtle intimidation to aggressive tactics. Some examples of situations that may be workplace harassment include:

- abusing a person loudly, usually when others are present
- repeated threats of dismissal or other severe punishment for no reason
- constant ridicule and being put down
- leaving offensive messages on email or the telephone
- sabotaging a person's work, for example, by deliberately withholding or supplying incorrect information, hiding documents or equipment, not passing on messages
- deliberately getting a person into trouble
- humiliating a person through gestures, sarcasm, criticism and insults, often in front of customers, management or other workers
- spreading gossip or false malicious rumours about a person with an intent to cause the person harm.

Possible solutions

- Be prepared for workplace harassment if it occurs. This should include:
 - being able to identify if the behaviour is workplace harassment
 - deciding on what course of action you will take to do to stop workplace harassment
 - letting your employees know:
 1. what workplace harassment is
 2. that you will not permit workplace harassment
 3. what action you will take if it occurs
 4. how they should let you know if they feel they are being harassed.
- Take prompt impartial action to resolve any situations which may be perceived as harassment and any reports of workplace harassment.
- Provide access to external mediation when management may be perceived not to be impartial.
- Provide training particularly for supervisors and managers.
- Provide responsible, mature supervision of employees to ensure that inappropriate behaviour is not tolerated.
- Look for other work characteristics that may increase the risk of workplace harassment for example:
 - highly demanding work
 - a culture that may encourage workplace harassment
 - a lack of support
 - workers not being clear about what their role is
 - poor workplace communication.

For more information on workplace harassment and workplace health and safety issues visit www.dir.qld.gov.au

Disclaimer: Any advice given to you as an obligation holder by Workplace Health and Safety Queensland Small Business Advisors is given only to assist you to discharge your obligations under the Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995 (Qld). Compliance with this advice does not relieve you of your obligations under that Act. Any advice is given on the basis that you will make your own independent assessment of what action is necessary to ensure your compliance with the Act.

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