

STUDY GUIDE FOR

ASK BEFORE YOU HUG
Sexual Harassment in the Church

VHS #6077

Ask Before You Hug Study Guide

Introduction

This training video is intended for use in your local church or congregation. The video presents six situations portraying a range of inappropriate behavior in church settings. Participants are offered tools to help them identify sexual harassment and take steps to stop unwanted behavior. Suggestions in the video and this study guide may assist church members to take additional steps to prevent sexual harassment in their congregations and ensure safety and hospitality in their churches.

Using the Training Video

The actual length of the video is 31 minutes, however, please allow 60-90 minutes for viewing the video and participating in suggested discussion. After the first viewing of each of the six situations participants are invited to “stop the tape for discussion” of suggested questions. The second viewing of each situation provides a possible response of inappropriate behavior. Large groups may want to discuss in groups of two or three persons.

In preparation for using this video, you may want to make resources available to participants, including specific names and addresses of your church officials, your denomination’s resources, as well as local/state human rights organizations (see resource list on pages 8 and 9).

Also, consider establishing a “safe environment” for conversation by inviting participants into covenant:

- to listen to and respect one another
- to honor differences in experience
- to avoid condemnation or judgment

The discussion time may include disclosure of experiences of sexual harassment. Please be prepared to respond to individuals by providing resources or providing names of persons and /or organizations to contact for assistance.

Sexual Harassment in The Church

According to Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, as amended in 1972, the Civil Rights Act of 1991, and Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972, sexual harassment is a violation of federal law in the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Not every incident of sexual harassment in the church may be within the purview of federal law; nevertheless, church members are called by God to create a just environment of welcome and respect in their ministry settings. This video seeks to offer tools for the prevention of sexual harassment among employees or volunteers in church ministry settings.

The Video

Remember the following defining elements when looking at the behavior in each of the six situations presented. Sexual harassment includes:

- behavior which is unwelcome or unwanted
- behavior which is sexual in nature or gender
- behavior which is severe or pervasive enough to interfere with one's ability to do a job, get an education or do ministry

Situation #1: POWER PLAY

This situation involves a male senior pastor and a female student pastor.

Questions for discussion:

- What is the impact of the behavior on the female pastor?
- Is this sexual harassment?
- What might she do in this situation?

In addition to unwelcome and intimidating sexual advances, the senior pastor bargains for sexual favors in exchange for career advancement (“Remember who chairs the Ministry Committee....suggest you keep the chair happy.”)

According to federal law in the U.S.A., sexual harassment in the workplace includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal and physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

- a) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment;
- b) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting an individual; or
- c) such conduct has the effect of unreasonable interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

When the conditions of “a” or “b” are met, this constitutes “quid pro quo” sexual harassment and may involve one or more incidents. When condition “c” is met, this constitutes “hostile environment” sexual harassment and often involves more than one incident, or a pattern of behavior.

The POWER PLAY situation is an example of quid pro quo harassment. It is also important to recognize that some situations may involve sexual assault, rape or other crimes.

What about “clergy misconduct”?

Some participants may identify the POWER PLAY situation as clergy misconduct: sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship. The senior pastor violates the ministerial relationship by sexually harassing the student pastor. This is also clergy misconduct.

Situation #2: OFFICE TALK

This situation involves a church business administrator and a church secretary.

Questions for discussion:

- What is the impact of the behavior on the secretary?
- Is this sexual harassment?
- What might she do in this situation?

OFFICE TALK is an example of “hostile environment” sexual harassment. If the behavior of the business administrator persists, it creates an intimidating and hostile work environment and interferes with the secretary’s ability to do her job.

Situation #3: TO HUG OR NOT TO HUG

This is a situation which involves a choir member offering hugs to other members of the choir.

Questions for discussion:

- What is the impact of the hugging on these choir members?
- Is this sexual harassment?
- What might the choir members do in this situation?

Although the hugs do not constitute sexual harassment in this situation, the behavior is unwelcome and unwanted. Attitudes about hugging and other kinds of touch may vary according to one’s individual experience with touch. Cultural, ethnic, or geographical differences related to our “comfort zones” are not excuses for behavior that is hurtful; however, these differences may help us understand the complexities of relating to one another.

Situation #4: JUST FLIRTING

This is a situation involving two girls and a boy gathering for a youth meeting.

Questions for discussion:

- What is the impact of the behavior on the boy?
- Is this sexual harassment?
- What might he do in this situation?

The JUST FLIRTING situation involves unwanted and unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature. The girls’ comments and gestures are offensive, humiliating, and include sexual innuendo.

This situation provides an opportunity to explore how one’s own language and behavior, particularly one’s use of humor, teasing, or one’s flirting may be discriminatory and/or hurtful.

Questions to consider:

- Does my language, flirting, humor, teasing or other behavior have a hurtful impact on others?
- What do my friends and colleagues think?
- What change in my language and behavior may help to affirm and respect others?

Situation #5: “WOMAN’S” WORK?

This situation involves one woman and four men at a church building committee meeting or board of trustees meeting.

Questions for discussion:

- What is the impact of the behavior on the woman?
- Is this sexual harassment?
- What might she do in this situation?

Although not sexual in nature, the behavior in the WOMAN’S WORK includes unwanted, gender directed comments which if continued could constitute gender harassment. It is important to clarify and correct sexist assumptions so that the pattern does not escalate and interfere with ministry.

Situation #6: FEELING TENSE

This situation involves a woman and man waiting for the beginning of a church meeting.

Questions for discussion:

- What is the impact of the behavior on the man?
- Is this sexual harassment?
- What might he do in this situation?

Though not sexual harassment, the neck rubbing is unwelcome and unwanted touch. Maintaining personal boundaries, as well as respecting another’s comfort zone with touch is very important. It is the impact of the behavior which matters, not the intent.

If you are sexually harassed:

Tell the harasser clearly and firmly what behavior is unwelcome and tell him or her to STOP.

Tell others whom you trust about the behavior (friend, colleague).

Keep a journal of incidents including dates, times, places, and witnesses.

Write a letter to the harasser, naming the behavior, its impact and telling him or her to STOP. (Keep a copy)

Obtain a copy of the sexual harassment policy and grievance procedures in your setting. Follow the procedures.

When the harasser is a ministerial leader, you may contact a judicatory head or regional official in your denomination in order to obtain a copy of your denomination's policy and grievance procedures.

You may contact an advocacy organization or human rights commission within or outside of the church.

You may contact an attorney.

You may have a right to file a civil right complaint or to file a lawsuit. Some forms of sexual harassment are also crimes and perpetrators can be prosecuted.

What your church can do:

- Find out about the position of your denomination or faith group regarding sexual harassment.
- Invite persons from your community with knowledge and expertise about prevention of sexual harassment to share information with church leaders and members.
- Consider power, harassment and similar concepts in worship, sermons, Bible studies, church school curriculum, youth gatherings and church meetings.
- Establish a clear, concise sexual harassment policy for your church and train persons responsible to implement the policy and conduct grievance procedures.

About sexual harassment policies and procedures:

- Set the context of the policy: name your church and the persons included in the policy or affected by the policy. (e.g. clergy, employees, volunteers, etc.)
- Offer a theological context and clear statement about what behavior is prohibited. Define the behavior.
- Name informal and formal grievance procedures. Procedures may vary for employees or volunteers. Persons should be able to bring grievances to someone other than a supervisor or pastor, in the event that person is the harasser.
- Name consequences for the offending person(s) if behavior is verified.
- Clearly state assurance of fair process and intolerance of retaliation.
- Name your church's commitment to education and ongoing assessment of your environment and policy and procedures.

Note: To prevent sexual harassment by volunteers, some congregations have chosen to enter into a covenant with volunteers regarding sexual harassment. Church leaders take responsibility to hold one another accountable for their behavior.

Additional Resources- Church Related

IN YOUR DENOMINATION:

Regional church administrator or judicatory head (ask a church leader or pastor in your denomination) or Commission on Women, Commission on Sexism or Racism or Human Rights Commission (ask a church leader or pastor in your denomination).

INTERFAITH:

Project Equality, Inc.

6301 Rockhill Road, Suite 315

Kansas City, MO 64131

(A National Interfaith Program for Equal Employment Opportunity)

State Council of Churches

(Many state councils have lists of contact persons and resource information on sexual harassment. Ecumenical Networks may be able to assist you in locating your state office.)

Ecumenical Networks

National Council of Churches

475 Riverside Drive, Room 868

New York, NY 10115-0050

Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence

936 N. 34th Street

Suite 200

Seattle, WA 98103

(An interreligious, educational ministry providing resources and curriculum on prevention of clergy misconduct, child abuse, domestic violence.)

Additional Resources- in the U.S.A.

WORKPLACE HARASSMENT:

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Washington, D.C. 20507

800-669-EEOC

(Check telephone listings for field office near you)

State Human Rights Department or Commission and State Department of Labor

(Check telephone listings of a public library in your region. Your town, city or county may also have a human rights commission.)

EDUCATION HARASSMENT AND YOUTH:
State Department of Education, Equity Programs Office
(Check telephone listings or a public library in your region.)

National Coalition for Sex Equity in Education
1 Redwood Drive
Clinton, NJ 08809