Sexual 'Banter' at Work... It's not OK

An Advice Guide for Usdaw Reps

USDAW EQUALITIES

Sexual 'Banter' at Work... It's not OK

Usdaw members who have faced sexual harassment say it's often difficult to deal with, especially when other colleagues laugh at so-called jokes and join in with the banter.

In the heat of the moment, fear, anger, shame, embarrassment or panic can make it very difficult to respond – knowing that other people are on your side really helps.

Seven out of 10 women members have experienced sexual harassment at some point in their working lives.

Sexist jokes and remarks matter because they can create an environment where workers feel unable to speak up about what's happening to them.

If it's left up to one person to challenge the jokes and banter, they just end up feeling more isolated and alone.

You could use the statements below to point out to people that what they are saying and doing may be upsetting and embarrassing to others.

- I'm not happy with what you said.
- I don't agree.
- I don't think that's funny.
- A lot of people would find that offensive.
- How do you think that comment makes the women here feel?

Supporting a Member Experiencing Sexual Harassment

Given the nature of the issue, it is important that union reps should:

- Treat all cases of sexual harassment seriously and support the members involved.
- Take up cases as quickly as possible.
- Establish whether other workers have experienced similar problems.
- Advise the worker complaining of sexual harassment about what to do and about the grievance procedure.
- Before invoking a formal procedure, you may want to advise the complainant to ask the harasser to stop. If they wish you, as their rep, to do so on their behalf, you can do this. However, the Equality Act's Code of Practice makes it clear that an objection does not have to be expressly made to the conduct for it to be deemed unwanted. A serious 'one-off' incident can amount to harassment.
- Report the incident(s) to management.
- Keep:
  - A record of each occurrence of the offending conduct.
  - Copies of any letters sent to the alleged harasser about their conduct.
  - Notes of any meetings about the incident(s).
- Advise the member that if the matter is not resolved through the procedures, it may be possible to take the matter to an Employment Tribunal. Tribunal claims must be lodged within strict time limits – normally three months less one day from the date of dismissal or cause of complaint, (ie the date the harassment occurred). Remember to always follow company grievance and appeal procedures.
- Seek the support, with the member's agreement, of other workers in order to reduce the risks of isolation and victimisation.
- Make provision for the harassed member to discuss the matter with a woman union rep. Arrangements can be made in each region of the Union for sexual harassment matters to be discussed in strict confidence with a woman union official if the member wishes this.

Usdaw Nationwide

Wherever you work, an Usdaw rep or official (Area Organiser) is not far away. For further information or assistance, contact your Usdaw rep or local Usdaw office. Alternatively, you can phone our Freephone Helpline 0800 030 80 30 to connect you to your regional office or visit our website: www.usdaw.org.uk
You can also write to the Union's Head Office. Just write FREEPOST USDAW on the envelope and put it in the post.

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You can join online at:
www.usdaw.org.uk/JoinUs

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What Happens Next

Once we process your application, you will receive a membership card with our Helpline telephone number and a New Member's Pack giving details of all the benefits and professional services available to you.

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