

Preventing Sexual Violence and Harassment on Campus: The Role of the Local Union



Prevention is an important part of any sexual violence and harassment strategy.

We not only want to address incidents of sexual violence and harassment as they arise; we want to stop them from occurring in the first place, making our campus communities a safe and healthy place for all students, workers, and visitors.

While the employer bears the primary responsibility for providing a safe place to work, learn, and live, our local unions can and should be partners in prevention. This means doing what we can to prevent and address sexual violence and harassment in our union spaces, in our workplaces, and wherever we encounter it.

Cultivating a Culture of Respect and Consent

Preventing sexual violence and harassment begins with cultivating a culture of respect and consent. Establish internal expectations within your local union by adopting a code of conduct, an anti-harassment statement, and an equality statement. Have your local executives lead by example in treating members respectfully. Ask for consent before touching someone, including giving a hug. Take swift action when there is inappropriate behaviour. Don't diminish any behaviour as too insignificant to address, or excuse it as a joke not intended to be hurtful, or just the old boys' club.

Show your members that you are serious about promoting equality and fighting discrimination and violence in all its forms. Host events, invite speakers to a union meeting, or write articles for your local website or newsletter on harassment and creating a safe workplace.

Collective Bargaining and Campaigning

While your employer has an obligation to provide a safe workplace regardless of what your collective agreement says, your collective agreement can also state a mutual commitment to anti-harassment and preventing violence. Check out CUPE's [Stop Workplace Sexual Violence](#) and [Stop Harassment](#) guides for ideas on language that should be included in your collective agreement.



You should also consider what elements of your workplace might contribute to situations where sexual violence and harassment could occur. Precarious staff in temporary or casual positions might find it harder to refuse or report harmful behaviours because they are scared of being dismissed. Funding cuts and privatization can increase stress levels while making workers more vulnerable to discriminatory or violent behaviours because they fear losing their job. Valuing some kinds of work more than others creates power imbalances that can also contribute to harassing behaviours. Workers who are already more likely to be vulnerable to sexual violence and harassment (including women, racialized and Indigenous workers, newcomers and migrant workers, young workers, and workers with disabilities) are also more likely to be concentrated in undervalued, precarious jobs.

Bargaining language on minimum staffing complements, restrictions on contracting out, and converting temporary positions to full-time positions can help create a safer workplace and prevent violence. Campaigns opposing privatization, cuts, contracting out, and precarious work also have a role to play.

Education and Training

An important part of prevention is changing attitudes, ideas, and behaviours. This includes ideas about consent, gender roles, the structural and pervasive nature of gender-based violence and rape culture, the connection between gender-based violence and other systemic forms of discrimination, and how to safely and effectively intervene in instances of sexual violence or harassment.

Research has shown that brief, single session educational programs are not effective in changing deeply entrenched ideas and behaviours. Education should be both engaging and ongoing.

Your local union should lobby for and support institutional efforts to train students, faculty, and staff, using proven curriculum or training programs that go beyond a single orientation session.

Your local union executive might also wish to consider booking Union Education courses through your national servicing representative.

A Safe Environment

Identifying problem areas, problem practices, or hot spots can be a useful tool in preventing sexual violence and prevention. Are there areas of campus that are poorly lit? Are there buildings where people work alone at night and if so, what is the access policy?





Are there windows in the doors of offices where one-on-one meetings take place? Are there safe, well-lit places for students to hang out at night, and if not, what spaces might be opened to them? Are there places on campus where incidents of sexual violence and harassment are repeatedly taking place?

Staff and faculty often know the physical landscape of campus and what takes place better than senior administrators. Take the time to report problem areas or patterns to the person or office in charge of your campus' sexual violence prevention strategy or to your Joint Health and Safety Committee. Your steward can help you make the report if you're not sure how to do it.

Your Joint Health and Safety Committee should also ensure that they are considering the risk of sexual violence and harassment when conducting their workplace inspections.

Regular Evaluation

Prevention requires knowing what is working well and what is not working at all. This can happen only with regular collection and disclosure of data and regular evaluations of what is happening.

A campus safety audit, such as the one offered by Metrac, a Toronto based-organization that works to end violence against women and youth, can be a helpful tool in identifying what is working well and what needs work.

Your local union can lobby the employer for regular safety audits and participate by sharing the information your members have on what the problematic behaviours, policies, and areas on campus are.



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