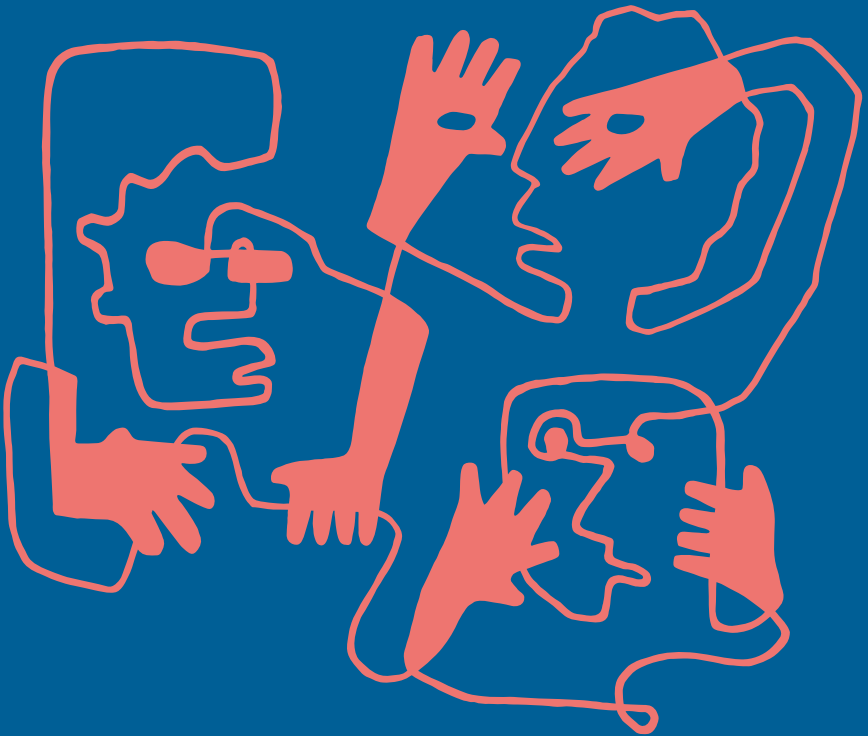


Violence and harassment in the workplace

**HAVE YOU  
WITNESSED IT?  
EXPERIENCED IT?  
ENGAGED IN IT?**



Make it **stop.**

Behaviour associated with harassment and violence at work has many consequences, particularly on the physical and psychological health of victims, as well as having negative repercussions on workplaces.



This is why, to ensure its affiliated unions are equipped on this issue, the CSN created a model “Policy for the Prevention of Violence and Harassment at Work” in 2003—one year before the right of every person to work in an environment free of psychological harassment was incorporated into the *Act respecting labour standards*. These matters continue to be a concern, which is why the CSN published a prevention kit in 2019 and is launching an extensive awareness-raising campaign this year.

Creating a safe and healthy workplace is the employer’s responsibility, and the CSN labours to ensure that they maintain one. As such, preventing and combatting all forms of violence and harassment at work is also a collective responsibility. We believe that every individual has a duty to be civil and behave in a way that is respectful of others.



## **What is workplace violence and harassment?**

Violence and harassment at work can occur as violent actions or words that are easily identifiable, or as more subtle, insidious behaviour that repeats and accumulates over time. Anyone can be involved, whether as a victim, witness, accomplice or perpetrator.

## VIOLENCE AT WORK

There is violence at work when the behaviour (attitudes, actions, or words) of an individual or group of individuals intentionally or unintentionally has an adverse effect on the physical or psychological safety or well-being of another individual or group of individuals.

### EXAMPLES

Throwing any kind of object, using hurtful words or insults, making threats, destroying work equipment by kicking it, etc.

## HARASSMENT AT WORK

Harassment at work can take different forms, but generally involves remarks or behaviour with the following characteristics:

- **They are repeated**, although one serious act may also constitute harassment.
- **They are hostile or unwanted.** The victim does not have to clearly express refusal or disapproval for such acts to be unwanted.
- **They constitute vexatious behaviour.** Vexatious behaviour is abusive, degrading, offensive, or demeaning.
- **They affect the person's dignity or physical or psychological well-being.** The victim feels belittled and undervalued. Harassment can also cause physical or psychological health issues.
- **They create a harmful work environment.** Harassment leads to an unhealthy workplace and unpleasant working conditions for the victim.

## EXAMPLES OF HARASSMENT

### **Psychological harassment**

- Constant monitoring;
- Ridiculing or undermining a person in front of coworkers;
- Constantly denigrating a person through negative evaluations;
- Isolating and excluding individuals from team activities, refusing to communicate;
- To engage in mobbing behaviour. This describes when a group works together against an individual in order persecute them, prevent them from expressing themselves, isolate them, discredit them, etc.);
- Yelling or speaking in an aggressive and disrespectful manner; and
- Threatening or intimidating others.

### **Discriminatory harassment**

- Racist, sexist, homophobic, or intolerant remarks or jokes;
- Sexist and stereotypical behaviour; and
- Actions that are intolerant or that denigrate a person's ethnic or national origin, colour, sex, gender identity or expression, pregnancy, sexual orientation, civil status, age, religion, political convictions, language, social condition, or disability.

*Note that beyond certain form of harassment that one can observe within an organization, discrimination can also become part of an organization's standards, affecting hiring selection procedures and work assignment and creating invisible barriers that negatively affect career advancement.*



## **Sexual violence and harassment**

- Explicit gestures with sexual connotations: whistling or licking lips, leering or looks that make a person uncomfortable, etc.;
- Posting graffiti, drawings, caricatures, or other sexual or pornographic material;
- Sexual emails, texts, or letters;
- Sexist or sexual jokes, inappropriate remarks about an individual's body, appearance, or clothing;
- Pet names (sweetie, honey, etc.);
- Questions or comments about a person's private or intimate life;
- Unwanted and invasive familiar physical contact or discrete brushing that seems accidental, fondling of any kind, etc.;
- Exhibitionism;
- Propositions and solicitation of sexual favours; and
- Sexual coercion (blackmail for favours).

A single serious incident may constitute sexual harassment.





## Consequences of harassment and violence at work

There are many consequences for victims of workplace violence and harassment. This issue causes a lot of damage, and its impact can be significant. Victims may experience anxiety, low self-esteem, feelings of guilt, shame, doubt, and worthlessness, depression and psychological distress, suicidal ideation, etc.

Violence and sexual harassment can have lasting effects on the physical health of victims, who are also more likely to miss work, transfer departments, and consider quitting their jobs. They often experience relationship and family problems as well.

For victims, disclosing the violence they have experienced causes extreme anxiety. For example, in situations of harassment, having to relate events that could seem benign when considered separately is extremely painful for those subjected to this type of behaviour. Their fear of judgment or of not being believed or taken seriously is, in most cases, constant.



## Is it really harassment?

In work relationships, as in life in general, not all negative interactions constitute harassment or violence. It is critical to learn to differentiate between harassment and cases of incivility, conflict, standard management rights, stress or other professional constraints and difficult conditions.



## Incivility

Incivility is defined as follows: low-level negative interpersonal behaviour for which the intention to harm is ambiguous and which defies the standards of mutual respect in the workplace. Incidents of incivility must be taken seriously because they have a negative impact on the workplace environment. Incivility is often part of a worsening conflict and can lead to psychological harassment if nothing is done to manage the situation. Incivility refers to impolite, vulgar, disrespectful behaviour that shows a lack of respect for others.

### EXAMPLES OF INCIVILITY

- Not using normal greetings;
- Glaring;
- Using an impatient tone of voice or speaking loudly;
- Making sudden noises or movements;
- Using vulgar or impolite language;
- Adopting a negative or condescending attitude; and
- Gossiping, badmouthing, or making disparaging remarks.

### FIVE RULES OF CIVILITY

Respect ◦ Courtesy ◦ Co-operation ◦ Politeness ◦ Manners



## Work conflicts

Workplaces are no different from other environments, and conflicts can come up. Conflict itself is not a form of psychological harassment. If effectively managed, work conflicts can lead to better defining responsibilities and developing staff relationships.



On the other hand, if they are poorly managed or unresolved, conflicts can be breeding grounds for psychological harassment.



## **Standard management rights**

An employer or manager exercising management rights is not a form of harassment. The day-to-day management of discipline, job performance, absenteeism, the assignment of work, the application of graduated disciplinary measures, and even termination fall under legitimate management rights. These actions do not constitute psychological harassment as long as the employer does not exercise these management rights in an abusive, unreasonable, discriminatory, or disrespectful manner and as long as the employer's interventions are made based on the work and not on the individual.



## **Work-related stress**

Work-related stress is not always caused by psychological harassment. An accumulation of stress factors, however, can mean a workplace is at higher risk for harassment.



## **Difficult professional constraints and working conditions**

Difficult professional constraints and working conditions and justifiable organizational changes that are economic or technological in nature do not constitute psychological harassment when they affect staff members in a non-arbitrary manner.

## Violence and harassment in the workplace

# HAVE YOU WITNESSED IT? EXPERIENCED IT? ENGAGED IN IT?

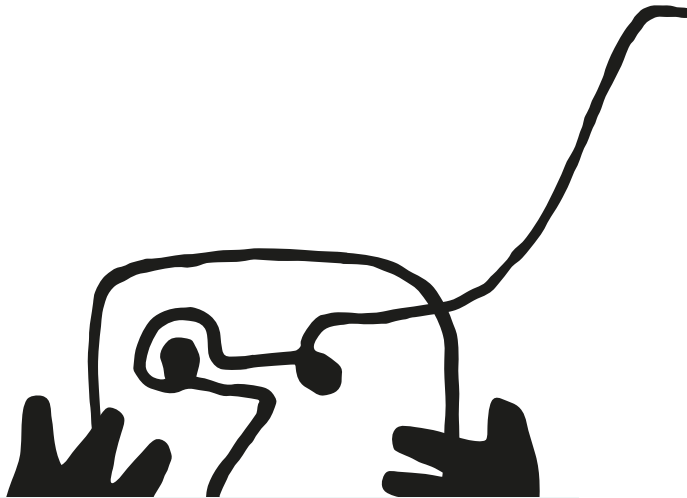
Make it **stop.**

### I have experienced it.

- Contact your union for assistance and information on the steps you can take to resolve the situation.
- Make a record of the allegations in as much detail as possible.
- If possible, tell the person or persons in question that their actions are unwanted and ask them to stop engaging in the behaviour. You can do this verbally or in writing.
- If the situation has led to health problems and you have had to take a leave of absence, take medication or see a health professional such as a psychologist, you have six months to present a claim for compensation to the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CNESST)<sup>1</sup>.
- We also advise that you quickly file a grievance in order to protect your rights. Contact your union without delay.

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1. If you're located outside Quebec, ask your union for the appropriate organization to contact.



### **I may have engaged in it.**

- Calling your own remarks and actions into question is the first step towards change.
- Speak to the person you think you may have hurt. Ask how your behaviour was perceived and whether the person felt offended.
- Listen to the person and discuss how you should have acted and what behaviour you will be adopting in the future. Sincere apologies are generally welcomed, particularly in situations in which the inappropriate behaviour was isolated and did not occur again.
- If necessary, contact your union for help handling the situation.

### **I have witnessed it.**

- Speak to the victim in order to provide assistance, offer support during the process, and encourage them to contact the union.
- You can also seek advice from your union on how to approach the situation.



Go to our website, [makeitstop.ca](https://makeitstop.ca), to access the tools available there and contribute to creating a healthy and respectful work environment for everyone.

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