WC Ombuds Blog:  How to Respond to Sexual Harassment

Unfortunately, sexual harassment is a continuing problem. Despite the #MeToo movement and the decades of laws, regulations, college and workplace manuals, training sessions and social media spotlights, it has not stopped. Anita Hill, the 2019 commencement speaker here at Wellesley College, is a leader in the cause to end harassing behavior and raises our awareness of what we can do.

Sexual harassment occurs in many places – from merely walking down the street to being targeted in college or in the workplace. Many people are uncomfortable with hearing sexually suggestive statements and even more people are unsure of how to respond to them. Whether you are the victim of sexual harassment or a bystander, there are responses that can be made and hopefully they will help. When responding, do so in a clear and firm manner and do not joke about it. Being confrontational and yelling is not a good approach and neither is putting you head in the sand. Be assertive and direct, making clear that you do not appreciate the behavior and say that you expect it to stop.

Here are some suggested ways for you, the intended listener, to respond to a jerk.

1. This jerk repeatedly tells lurid stories at work about his sexual conquests:

   “Hey, apparently you think that telling these stories is ok. But it’s really not and it makes me uncomfortable. I want you to stop telling them here at work.”

   Hopefully the jerk will say, “Uh, ok. Sorry.” Possibly he will say “Oh get over your icy prude self” (or some other classy line). If he challenges you, you can say:

   “Look, it has nothing to do with that – it’s not allowed plus it’s creepy and disrespectful. Just stop.”

2. This jerk looks you up and down every day and sometimes adds “You look sexy today.”

   “Look, I don’t appreciate the way you look at me and prefer that we keep things professional here. Please just let me do my job and you should just do your job.”

   Again, hopefully he’ll change his behavior but if he continues it or tells you to “get over yourself,” you can repeat your request firmly and clearly and tell him to stop.

3. Here’s an example of a bystander who witnesses the continued unwelcome leering and barrage of sexually explosive statements from a group of young men towards a group of young women:

   “Hey guys – why don’t you cut it out? They clearly don’t want you to say such things – plus you’re acting like a-holes. Just leave them alone.”

   Bystanders play an important role and should say something when they witness something that’s sexually harassing. If bystanders don’t say anything, it may allow that awful behavior to continue and it even seems that it is condoned. Bystanders can also ask the victims if they are ok and if they want any kind of help. A bystander can walk someone out of a situation to a safe space, help them find out where they can get assistance and/or file a complaint, and speak up for them if they’re reluctant.
If you experience sexual harassment at Wellesley College and you want to do more than just respond, you have several options:

Talk with the campus or local police [https://www.wellesley.edu/administration/offices/titleix/resources](https://www.wellesley.edu/administration/offices/titleix/resources)

and/or the college’s Title IX office [https://www.wellesley.edu/administration/offices/nondiscrimination](https://www.wellesley.edu/administration/offices/nondiscrimination)

and/or the college’s Dean of Students resources (counseling is a confidential resource) [https://www.wellesley.edu/Counseling/](https://www.wellesley.edu/Counseling/)

and/or the college’s Ombuds office (a confidential resource) [https://www.wellesley.edu/administration/ombuds](https://www.wellesley.edu/administration/ombuds)

Know that you are not alone and that is important to speak up – whether directly to the harasser and/or to someone who is here ... ready willing and able... to help you.