

Online Sexual Harassment

Online Sexual Harassment: Recognize, Respond, and Rise

In our digital age, the internet offers endless opportunities for connection and creativity. However, it also opens the door to harmful behaviours including online sexual harassment. This article will help you understand what online sexual harassment is, how it can affect people and what measures are available to protect yourself and others.

What Is Online Sexual Harassment?

Online sexual harassment refers to unwelcome and sexually explicit behaviour conducted through digital platforms. This harassment can include, but is not limited to:

- Making sexual remarks, jokes or sending unwanted sexual messages
- Making comments about someone's body, the way they dress, or look
- Taking or sharing explicit content without consent
- Sharing personal or explicit content without permission to publicly embarrass or control
- Using sexually charged language or behaviour to intimidate

By understanding these actions, you can better identify and respond to uninvited behaviour online.

How It Can Affect You

The impact of online sexual harassment goes far beyond an uncomfortable message. Its effects can be both emotional and psychological:

- **Psychological:** Stress, anxiety, panic attacks, loss of self-esteem, feelings of powerlessness
- **Emotional:** Fear for personal safety, changes in sleep and eating patterns, hypervigilance
- **Academic/Professional:** Reduced performance due to stress and anxiety

Recognizing these signs is essential to seeking help and putting strategies in place to regain your sense of safety online.

Managing Online Sexual Harassment

Standing up against online harassment starts by taking proactive steps to protect your digital space, as well as supporting your emotional well-being.

- **Review Privacy Settings:** Enhance security by regularly updating privacy settings on social media and other accounts
- **Keep a record:** Save evidence of the harassment, including messages, photos, or videos, and date/time of when it happened
- **Tell the harasser to stop:** Inform them that their behaviour is unwanted and makes you uncomfortable
- **Stop communication:** Block the harasser on all online platforms and stop responding

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- **Report it:** To the platform where the harassment occurred, your place of work/college or the police
- **Seek support:** Talk to a trusted friend, colleague, manager, or a mental health professional
- **Understand your rights:** Sexual harassment is a form of abuse and is against the law

Further Help and Resources

Know online sexual harassment is taken seriously and reach out if you need further support:

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

www.reportharmfulcontent.com

www.nsvrc.org/whatisonlinesexualabuse

Conclusion

Online sexual harassment is a serious issue, but you are not powerless. By understanding what it is, recognizing its effects, and taking proactive steps to protect yourself, you can reclaim your digital space.

Step up, speak out and put a stop to online harassment. Remember, you deserve respect in every part of your life.