

# Informal Strategies for Responding to Sexual Harassment and/or “Boundary Violations”

by Tom Sebok

NOTE: The following responses are things an individual can say or do in response to the unwelcome sexually oriented behaviors of another. They do not require making a formal complaint or telling anyone with institutional authority. They are probably most applicable to “boundary violations” and to “hostile environment” types of sexual harassment.

## Level 1 (least threatening)

1. “Joe, I know you probably don’t mean any harm by it, but I feel uncomfortable when you \_\_\_\_\_, and I’d really appreciate it if you would stop.”
2. “Joe, I’m sure we both agree that it’s important for everyone to feel comfortable here in our work/school/residence hall environment. It would help me to feel more comfortable if you would refrain from \_\_\_\_\_.”

(possible examples to fill in the blanks above)

“...make comments about my appearance...”

“...tell dirty jokes in my presence...”

“...ask me out...”

“...make suggestive comments...”

“...ask me about my love life...”

“...talk about sex in my presence...”

“...hug me...”

“...rub my shoulder...”

## Level 2

1. “Joe, we’ve discussed this before. I don’t like it when you \_\_\_\_\_. I’d like for us to work this out between us, but I need your cooperation. Would you please stop?”

2. “Joe, this is not negotiable with me. I really don’t like it when you \_\_\_\_\_. Please stop.”
3. Write a letter to Joe outlining:
  - a) what behavior occurred,
  - b) how you felt about it, and
  - c) that you want it to stop.
4. Give Joe a copy of the university sexual harassment policy with the relevant passages highlighted. You might include a note indicating that, regardless of his intentions, his behavior is unwelcome by you.
5. Tell a friend or colleague every time Joe does something that offends you. Be specific about what occurred. Choose a friend/colleague who would be willing to verify that you told him/her about the incidents.
6. Ask a colleague or friend to accompany you to talk with Joe about how his behavior bothers you and to request that he stop. The friend/colleague would be present to provide support for you, and, if necessary later, to serve as witness on your behalf.
7. Keep a journal of dates, times, places, and occurrences.
8. Ask someone from the Ombuds Office to contact Joe to talk with him about your complaint and to convey that you’d like the behavior to stop.

**Level 3** (most threatening)

1. “Joe, we’ve discussed this before. Your behavior is not acceptable to me. If you do it again, I will be forced to make a formal complaint to the (choose one) Office of Discrimination and Harassment or the Office of Judicial Affairs. Please stop!

(variation)

2. Say this in a letter to the harasser. (The threat of making a formal complaint is the primary difference between this letter and the one mentioned in Level 2, number 3.)