



Responding to Sexual Harassment in the Library

Like many public-facing professionals, amid the overwhelming number of positive interactions, library staff also encounters patrons whose comments make them feel uncomfortable or even unsafe. Some staff might be surprised that this is happening in our library, while others have experienced or witnessed it first-hand.

Just because you work with the public doesn't mean you have to ignore harassing comments or behaviors. You can address these situations professionally while still establishing personal boundaries. If you experience such a situation it can be very difficult to respond in the moment and it can be helpful for a coworker to speak up on their colleagues' behalf. It's on all of us to work together to create and maintain a safe and supportive work environment.

Below is a list of example phrases that you could say in the moment address a patron's behavior. Read the examples carefully, think about what you would remember or feel comfortable saying in the moment. Finally, practice saying one or more of these phrases out loud. This exercise can help you feel more prepared to address a patron in the moment.

Suggested Language

Here are some phrases that might be helpful for you:

- "That comment/behavior is inappropriate."
 - "Your comment/behavior makes me uncomfortable."
 - "I am happy to answer questions about the library, but I will not answer questions about my personal life."
 - "I do not discuss my personal life at work."
 - "Calling me sweetheart/honey/baby is demeaning to me as a professional. Please do not call me that again."
 - "My marital status/appearance/personal life has no bearing on my ability to assist you in the library."
 - "If this behavior continues, I will have someone else finish assisting you."
- OR
- "If this behavior continues, I will report you to my supervisor."



Reporting Harassing Behaviors

Talking to a supervisor can be extremely helpful. Many times, supervisors are unaware of the severity or persistence of these types of behaviors, and can offer support or step in if a patron interaction becomes uncomfortable. Please also complete an incident report so administration can follow up on the event.

Talking to management can feel intimidating, especially about something as uncomfortable and stressful as sexual harassment. If other coworkers feel the same way, consider addressing your manager as a group. It can provide you with emotional support, and you can lend support to each other's experiences.

- If you are concerned about your safety or potential escalation from a patron, it is always permissible to call the police for assistance. Again, it is important to alert the building supervisor and complete an incident report.
- The City of Newton Human Resources Department is another great resource for reporting or discussing sexual harassment. Teri Struth (Acting Director of Human Resources), Kelly Brown (Worker's Compensation Manager) and/or Mary O'Neill (Recruitment Manager) can be reached in the Human Resources Department at x1260.
- The Employee Assistance Program (provided by CMG Associates) is a confidential service available to all employees to for support with any work/life problems. City of Newton employees may reach CMG Associates directly by contacting the City's Account Manager Nonnie Hamovitch M.Ed., at 617/969-7600 or 800/444-7262. Her email address is; nhamovitch@cmgassociates.com.

Remember: You are a professional and you have done nothing to encourage this type of behavior.