



THE INC. LIFE

# 6 Phrases to Stop Harassment in Its Tracks at Work and in Life

Are you being bullied, sexually harassed or otherwise put upon? What you can say to make it stop



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WRITE A COMMENT

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I returned home last night from seeing a play to a slew of texts from friends commenting on the viral "me too" campaign that has hit [Facebook](#) in the past 24 hours. Honestly, I had not been paying it much attention, so I went on my site and began to scroll.

Page after page, I saw friends I had known for years who had posted two simple words: "me too." Then it hit me like a ton of bricks. With more than 25 years in the [workforce](#), of course I have encountered [inappropriate sexual advances](#) at work, and so have most of the women I know, and more than a few of the men as well. In short, "me too."

And the harassment is not always sexual. As has been written in numerous articles about Harvey Weinstein recently, he was known for using abusive language and having screaming tirades.

I also thought about how, with all my training, even I am sometimes at a loss for what to say when I feel impinged upon so I asked some experts to give their best bets for phrases to halt harassment in its tracks. Here's what they had to say:

## X is harassment.

Stephany Zoo is the executive director of Phoenix Risen, a World Economic Forum-supported nonprofit that brings men and women together to talk about sexual harassment. She says that it's all about setting clear boundaries at the start of the situation. "Make sure that you are explicit that what the perpetrator is doing is harassment," says Zoo.

Alternative phrase: "Do not X; that's harassment."

## Those types of comments or jokes that you're making don't belong in the workplace. Let's keep things professional.

Barbara Mitchell and Cornelia Gamlem, authors of [The Conflict Resolution Phrase Book](#), say that when disruptive behavior evolves into bullying and harassment, it can be disastrous. The key is to have a respectful confrontation by pointing out inequity, setting boundaries and responding to disruptive behaviors.

Alternative phrase: "You may intend the jokes and comments to be funny, but they aren't. They're insulting."

## Thank you very much, but could you go back to the point you were making about X?

Attorney M. Reese Everson, author of [The B.A.B.E.'s Guide to Winning in the Workplace](#), says that comments about your appearance (you have nice hair; your dress matches your eyes) can be meant as genuine compliments. However, if they make you feel uncomfortable or begin to cross the line, Everson says the key is to redirect the conversation back to the matter at hand.

Alternative phrase: "That was a very interesting point, and I want to be sure to put that in the report."

## Don't touch my hair, arm, shoulder, etc.

Susan Harrow who teaches the True Shield™ verbal self-defense for girls says in addition to stopping the behavior on the spot, it's important to tell the other person what you expect their future behavior to be.

Alternative phrase: "In the future, please ask my permission to touch me for anything other than a handshake."

## I feel threatened by this.

And leave it at that. Dr. Judi Cineas, a psychotherapist, says that when it comes to defending yourself or your space, it's important to be definitive and not leave room for alternate interpretations of what you mean.

"Perpetrators of all kinds are good at using interpretation to cover their tracks. They will claim to not have understood what you meant or that their actions were not intended as you received," says Cineas.

Alternative phrase: "I am not interested in..." or "I do not want..."

## This is making me feel uncomfortable.

While some experts believe that telling the harasser your feelings is not the way to go, this phrase has gotten me out of many a sticky situation. In my experience, many people are not even aware that what they are doing is having an impact on others. Letting them know in a straightforward way is often enough to stop the behavior.

Alternative phrase: "I feel uncomfortable with this conversation, what you're doing, how you're talking to me."

While curbing harassment is a problem that needs to be addressed at a larger societal level, in company policy, and more, as individuals, we all (men and women) need to learn how to stand up for ourselves when faced with situations that make us feel uncomfortable.

In short, we need to learn to just say no.