

Discrimination and harassment at work

Moderate · 15 min to read · Free

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ A notebook or notes app to write down what happened, when, and who saw it
- ☐ Copies of messages, schedules or pay stubs that show what happened
- ☐ Your company's harassment policy and handbook, if it has them

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Know who's covered.** The laws apply to applicants, employees and former employees, whatever their citizenship or work authorization status. Full-time, part-time, seasonal and temporary workers are covered at federal agencies and most employers with at least 15 employees.
- 2 **Know your five basic rights: to work free of discrimination, to work free of harassment, to complain without punishment, to ask for reasonable workplace changes for religion, disability or pregnancy, and to keep your medical and genetic information private.** Discrimination covers every kind of job decision, including hiring, firing, promotions, training, pay and benefits.
- 3 **If you're being harassed, act early.** Tell the person their behavior is unwelcome if you feel safe doing that. If you don't, or it doesn't stop, tell your employer.
- 4 **Find your company's harassment policy.** It should say who handles complaints. If you're uncomfortable going to that person, talk to your manager or another manager. Once your employer knows, it's responsible for fixing the situation, and not reporting promptly may affect your rights.
- 5 **Write it down as it happens.** A charge to the EEOC asks what was done to you (fired, demoted, harassed), when it happened, and why you believe it was discrimination. Keep a dated log with what was said, where, and who saw it, and save copies of messages somewhere that isn't a work account.
- 6 **To file with the EEOC, start with an inquiry on the EEOC Public Portal.** You'll schedule an interview by phone, by video, or in person at one of 53 EEOC offices. You can also call 1-800-669-4000 to get started, though charges aren't taken over the phone.

Watch out Deadlines are strict, and the clock keeps running. In general, you have 180 calendar days from the discrimination to file a charge, or 300 days if a state or local agency enforces a similar law. Using an internal grievance, a union grievance or mediation first generally doesn't extend the deadline, though you can pursue them at the same time.

DAD NOTE Write it down the day it happens. Dates and names beat memory every time.

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/legal/know-your-rights/discrimination-and-harassment-at-work/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.