

# VinciWorks

Frequently Asked Questions  
for Supervisors –

Behavior at Work

# Introduction

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VinciWorks continuously receives questions on the topic of sexual harassment. We have separated our answers to the questions into three categories: general questions about sexual harassment, questions about behavior at work and questions frequently asked by supervisors. This document covers questions facing supervisors. You can access the other categories by visiting our [sexual harassment prevent resource page](#). The full list of questions and answers is included in VinciWorks' harassment training, [MyStory: Harassment and Bullying at Work](#).

## I'm a supervisor. Can I have a relationship with my subordinates?

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There is not a straightforward answer. Some companies have specific policies in place that forbids relationships between supervisors and subordinates, and these should be followed. Even if such relationships are not prohibited, it will have consequences that should be considered. All managers and supervisors must maintain the highest standards of integrity, fairness and impartiality in their work and relationships complicate this. Conduct that is unwelcome is unlawful regardless of any pre-existing relationship. If such relationships are unavoidable, consider options for transfer or working in a different department.

## Someone has come to me with a complaint of sexual harassment. What should I do?

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First of all ensure the employee is not in any immediate danger. For serious situations you should consider reporting the matter to the police. Do not promise complete confidentiality, but explain that their privacy will be respected. Explain the options available, such as formal investigation, informal handling of the complaint or mediation. Inform the employee of any resources such as counselling that may be available. Ensure the employee knows that retaliation against them will not be tolerated. Check in with the employee regularly during and after the conclusion of the complaint to ensure they are being treated fairly and have not been retaliated against.

## Do I need to keep records?

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Document every interaction and all the details. Document all conversations with all parties involved in the complaint. Keep any evidence of harassment and make all evidence available to investigators. Document any actions you took, including speaking with witnesses or any attempts to resolve the situation. It is vital you keep records to ensure you can show that you took reasonable action and followed procedures.

## **What disciplinary action should I take against the harasser?**

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Make sure you consult and follow your company's policies and procedures. Disciplining someone is always a difficult situation. Document all actions that you took and ensure anyone being disciplined is aware of any right they have to appeal or redress. Action you may be empowered to take could range from a warning to immediate dismissal. Make sure your actions are appropriate and in accordance with company policy.

## **What action should I take if an employee is being sexually harassed by a customer or vendor? Am I liable?**

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The employer would be liable if they saw the action taking place and did nothing to prevent it. Managers and supervisors have an obligation to ensure their employees are not sexually harassed by the public, by clients, customers or other vendors. The safety and wellbeing of employees should always be your priority. If such behavior occurs, you should:

- Demand the harasser leave the premises immediately
- Report their behavior, either to their company or to the police
- Inform security of your building and consider alerting security of places nearby or around
- Give the harassed employee support and care, and follow up with them regularly
- Follow company procedure for reporting an incident

## **Do I need to be concerned about unprofessional behavior that is not harassment?**

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Yes. Off the cuff remarks, jokes, innuendo, comments or other behaviors that may not by themselves be sexual harassment, can often qualify as sexual harassment or develop into behaviors that create a hostile working environment. Even if not illegal, unprofessional conduct should not be tolerated. One remark can lead to another and a culture of abusive remarks can be hard to remove once established. Most people understand what is acceptable workplace behavior and what is not. Don't wait for things to get out of hand before taking action. Telling someone to knock it off in that moment can save much time and effort later on.



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