

PREVENTING AND ADDRESSING HARASSMENT

This Preventing and Addressing Harassment textbook is partly extracted from RI online Learning Center course. Please visit the Rotary Learning Center for further information needed on the Rotary website: [Rotary.org](https://www.rotary.org)

Translating Committee
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Course Description

This course reviews Rotary’s policy on a harassment-free environment. It defines harassment, provides steps for those being harassed, and for those receiving allegations. Take this course to learn how you can create a harassment-free environment in your club.

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Overview

Rotary is committed to maintaining an environment that is free from any kind of harassment, which includes unwelcome physical contact, advances, or comments. Anyone who attends or participates in Rotary meetings, events, or activities must help establish conditions that promote safety, courtesy, dignity, and respect for all.



Even as they recognize that club members hold a variety of beliefs and values, all club, district, and zone leaders should use good judgment in conducting meetings, events, and other activities in a way that reflects Rotary's principles of tolerance.

The leaders of Rotary Action Groups and Rotary Fellowships should use the same good judgment to make sure their meetings and events are safe and inclusive environments that reflect our principles.

Members must follow the **Rotarian Code of Conduct**:

As a Rotarian, I will:

- ① Act with integrity and high ethical standards in my personal and professional life
- ② Deal fairly with others and treat them and their occupations with respect
- ③ Use my professional skills through Rotary to mentor young people, help those with special needs, and improve people's quality of life in my community and in the world
- ④ Avoid behavior that reflects adversely on Rotary or other Rotarians

- 5 Help maintain a harassment-free environment in Rotary meetings, events, and activities, report any suspected harassment, and help ensure non-retaliation to those individuals who report harassment

The Rotarian Code of Conduct applies to members from all cultures. Although the customs and norms of cultures vary, it's always important to be aware of what's appropriate. Take your cues from the person who is receiving your comments and actions.



In this course, we'll discuss Rotary's definition of harassment, talk about how to speak up against harassing behavior, and offer advice on how allegations should be handled. It's important both to work to prevent harassment and also to address any issues quickly and appropriately. Our clubs and programs should be inclusive and should make everyone feel safe and respected.

Note that there may be local laws you need to follow when you address harassment. This course focuses on Rotary's policies and the basics of what you must do to resolve incidents. It is your responsibility to contact local law enforcement and to determine whether other action is needed. Any allegations that involve young people or adults who work with them should be handled according to the Rotary Youth Protection Guide.

What is harassment?

Rotary has a harassment policy to ensure that we provide a safe, fun, and inclusive environment for all. It defines harassment as any conduct — verbal or physical — that denigrates, insults, or offends a person or group based on characteristics that include age, ethnicity, race, color, abilities, religion, socioeconomic status, culture, sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Harassment can take many forms. When a behavior becomes pervasive or extreme, it is harassment. Here are some examples:



Using insulting words, whether spoken or written, including in email or on social media



Bullying, including verbal or physical threats or intimidation, based on the characteristics listed above



Making derogatory remarks on social media or in email



Engaging in gossip, including insulting statements about people's private lives that could damage their reputations



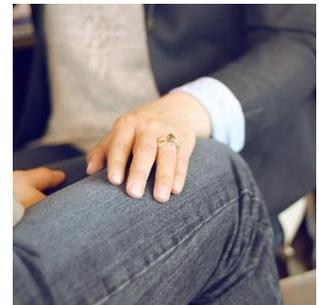
Deliberately impeding a person's movements



Asking questions or making comments about a person's sexual activity or experiences



Making jokes or using derogatory language about the characteristics listed above



Making or threatening unwelcome physical contact, such as brushing against, embracing, or pinching



Making unsolicited comments about a person's attractiveness or appearance



Leering or whistling



Using, displaying, or sharing sexually suggestive or offensive words, objects, pictures, articles, letters, emails, texts, or websites



Making references to age, ethnicity, race, color, abilities, religion, socioeconomic status, culture, sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity

It's important for all leaders to take any allegation of harassment seriously and address the situation.

Creating a harassment-free environment



Making sure that your meetings and social events are free from harassment is something everyone should be a part of. The introduction to this course and the section that defines harassment discussed Rotary's commitment to preventing harassing behavior. District leaders, including governors, assistant governors, and committee chairs, must work with their clubs to maintain an environment that promotes safety, courtesy, dignity, and respect for all. The leaders of Rotary Action Groups and Rotary Fellowships are held to that same standard.

Here are some steps that club and district leaders can take to create a harassment-free atmosphere. Rotary Action Group and Rotary Fellowship leaders should adapt these steps to the structure and activities of their groups.

- 1 Club leaders should discuss Rotary's policy on creating an environment free of harassment (included in its entirety at the end of this course) at a club board meeting, and determine how you want to talk about it with members.
- 2 Talk about the policy at your club assembly. Before starting the discussion, set a list of rules that everyone agrees on to guide what could be an uncomfortable discussion. Some possible rules: talk about your own experiences and feelings, ask questions in a way to help you understand, and have only one person speak at a time.
- 3 Club leaders should acknowledge any instances in the past that would have qualified as harassment and make it clear that such behavior will not be accepted.

- ④ Club and district leaders should emphasize the message that Rotary will not tolerate harassment.
- ⑤ Members should feel empowered to stand up to harassment when it's occurring and report it to law enforcement officials or to club or district leaders if necessary.
- ⑥ Club leaders should tell members how club or district leaders will respond to reports of harassment.
- ⑦ Reiterate that it is everyone's responsibility to create a harassment-free environment.

Rotary's founding ideal of bringing together leaders of different backgrounds in order to improve their communities can be accomplished only in a safe, harassment-free environment.

What to do if you're harassed

If you feel you have been harassed, follow the steps below. Click the black circle with the white arrow to see all the steps.

Step 1

If your safety is in doubt, contact local law enforcement

Your safety is the most important consideration. Contact local police to report the incident. All allegations of criminal behavior should be reported to law enforcement officials.



Step 2

Tell someone on the club's board, a district leader, or a zone leader.

If you were harassed by someone in the club or district, or if the behavior took place at a Rotary event, notify the appropriate person based on where it occurred. That might be a club board member, a district leader who ran the event, or the zone leader in charge. Report any incident at an event organized by a Rotary Action Group or Rotary Fellowship to the group's chair or someone else on the leadership team.



Step 3

Report the incident to Rotary International

Allegations that harassment took place at a Rotary International-sponsored event like the International Assembly or the Rotary International Convention should be reported to Rotary International World Headquarters.

Any allegations of harassment by district governors, governors-elect, governors-nominee, directors, or trustees must also be reported to Rotary headquarters. Contact your **Club and District**

Support (<https://my.rotary.org/en/contact/representatives>) representative.



Other incidents should be reported to your club, district, or zone leaders. If they do not respond, notify your Club and District Support representative. They can contact the district and zone leaders for further investigation and encourage them to help resolve the issue.

- ① A Rotarian or non-Rotary volunteer who admits to, is convicted of, or is otherwise known to have engaged in sexual abuse or sexual harassment or other act of moral turpitude must be prohibited from working with youths in a Rotary context.

As a reminder, any allegation of harassment involving youths must be reported to Rotary International at youthprotection@rotary.org within 72 hours.

Addressing an allegation

Leaders of a club, district, zone, action group, or fellowship must promptly address any allegation of harassment and must not retaliate against the person who made it.

Rotary strongly encourages leaders in all these areas to form committees to address these kinds of allegations. Districts should work with their clubs to establish a code of conduct and policies for preventing and addressing harassment within clubs, among members, and with other Rotary participants. These policies should list the consequences if harassment is found but does not constitute criminal activity, and they should specify when contact with young people should be restricted. If sexual harassment is found, contact with youths is prohibited. Having a transparent process will help clubs and districts prevent harassment.

All allegations of criminal behavior must be referred to local law enforcement officials. Members should always cooperate fully with any investigation and should not interfere. Nobody who was directly involved in an incident or behavior that is reported should participate in investigating it or making decisions about it. Nor should their friends.

Review the responsibilities of various Rotary roles below. Select the plus sign to read more.

A member's responsibility

Creating a harassment-free environment is everyone's responsibility. If you see something that appears to be harassment, let the person know that those actions are not in line with Rotary's policies. Talk about your concerns with club or district leaders. Silently watching without taking action suggests that the behavior is acceptable.

A club board's responsibility

An allegation of harassment at a Rotary event or activity must be reviewed by the club board or the committee appointed for this purpose. The board or committee must respond within a reasonable time, typically one month.

If a member of the club board is the subject of the complaint, they should not participate in the discussion.

If you have reported harassment to your club leaders and feel that the club board or committee has not addressed it adequately, report the behavior to your district governor or the district committee that handles harassment allegations.

A district's responsibility

An allegation of harassment at a Rotary event or activity must be reviewed by the governor or the committee appointed by the governor for this purpose. The governor or committee must respond within a reasonable time, typically one month.

If the district governor is the subject of the complaint, the immediate past district governor or the committee will review and respond to the complaint. If an allegation is made against a

governor, governor-elect, or governor-nominee, you must also contact your Club and District Support representative.

If any district leaders are the subject of the complaint, they should not participate in the discussion.

If you have reported harassment to your district governor, past district governor, or the committee and feel that they have not addressed it adequately, report the behavior to the RI director.

A zone's responsibility

An allegation of harassment at a Rotary event or activity must be reviewed by the RI director or a committee appointed by the RI director for this purpose. The director or committee must respond within a reasonable time, typically one month.

If the director is the subject of the complaint, the RI president will appoint another current director or a past director to review and respond to the complaint. If an allegation of harassment is made against an RI director, director-elect, or director-nominee, you must also inform the RI president.

If any RI directors are the subject of the complaint, they should not participate in the discussion.

If you have reported harassment to a zone official and you feel that they have not addressed it adequately, report the behavior to the RI president.

An action group or fellowship's responsibility

An allegation of harassment at a Rotary Action Group or Rotary Fellowship event or activity must be reviewed by the group or a committee appointed for this purpose. The committee must respond within a reasonable time, typically one month.

If a member of the group's board or committee is the subject of the complaint, they should not participate in the discussion.

Action groups and fellowships must notify the relevant club president and district governor about any harassment complaint made against a member.

If you have reported harassment to the leaders of an action group or fellowship and feel that they have not addressed it adequately, you may direct your concern, with appropriate documentation, to the RI president. If an action group or fellowship does not adequately address findings of harassment, the RI president will ask the RI Board for appropriate action.

How to handle reports of harassment

Allegations of harassment should be taken seriously every time.

Step 1

Acknowledge every report with respect

Tell the person who reports an incident that Rotary does not tolerate harassment. Discuss what action could be taken next and let them decide if they want to pursue an investigation.

Step 2

Report the allegation to the appropriate person or committee

If the situation warrants it, tell the person who made the complaint that you will support them if they want to report it to the local authorities.

Clubs, districts, zones, action groups, and fellowships should also create committees to handle these types of allegations. This helps ensure that complaints will be handled fairly and quickly. If your club doesn't have a committee, contact the club president or district governor.

Step 3

Remove the accused person from youth activities

To protect everyone, and in accordance with Rotary's youth protection policies, anyone accused of sexual abuse or harassment must be removed from contact with youths until the matter is resolved. This step may help protect young people and protect the person from future allegations.

Step 4

Review the complaint and determine who to interview

Review the complaint and decide who you want to speak with. Arrange interviews with everyone involved in the situation. The best thing to do is to talk to the person making the complaint, the subject of that complaint, and other people who may have witnessed the event and might be able to provide perspective. If someone refuses to be interviewed or will not return your calls or emails, note that in your report. Try to contact the person at least three times using two different methods. The interviews can be conducted in person, by phone, or in an online meeting. Be sure to take careful notes regardless of how you conduct the interviews.

Step 5

Conduct a thorough investigation

Start by talking to the person who made the allegation. Ask:

1. What happened
2. Who might have witnessed what happened
3. What outcome they want (for example, action by the district)

Then talk to the subject of the complaint, telling them that an allegation has been made. Ask them to describe what happened. Request the names of possible witnesses to the event or behavior and any documentation or evidence they have to suggest the event did not take place as alleged.

Use a similar approach with witnesses. Ask questions that establish facts and avoid "why" questions that can lead to shaming or blaming the person who made the allegation.

It's best to talk to people who directly saw what occurred. This will lead you to a stronger conclusion. If you talk only to the person who made the complaint and the subject of it, they will likely offer different — if not opposite — descriptions.

If there are no witnesses, talk to both people involved and determine as well as you can whose testimony is more believable and what is most likely to have occurred. This is very difficult, and it's one reason why it's best to have a committee, not an individual, make this determination.

Step 6

Write a summary of the incident, including any action you recommend

When you've finished your interviews, write a report with conclusions. Based on those conclusions, determine if further action is necessary to keep anyone safe. This might include terminating someone from Rotary, asking them to resign from a role, or preventing them from taking part in youth-related activities.

Follow through with your recommendations and do what is needed to make sure the behavior does not happen again. This might include mediating a discussion between the parties or creating written club norms.

Keep the investigation's findings on file with the district. If the district determines that a person should be prohibited from working with youths, or if policy requires such a prohibition or termination of membership, notify Rotary International.

Step 7

Terminate the person's club membership

A club must terminate the membership of any Rotarian who admits to, is convicted of, or is otherwise found to have engaged in sexual abuse or harassment. Any member terminated due to harassment must be reported to Club and District Support staff.

A non-Rotarian who admits to, is convicted of, or is otherwise found to have engaged in sexual abuse or harassment must be prohibited from participating in Rotary activities with young people. A club may not grant membership to a person known to have engaged in sexual abuse or harassment.

If the RI Board learns that a club has knowingly failed to terminate the membership of such a Rotarian, it can act to terminate the Rotarian's membership as well as the club's charter.

Summary

It is imperative that club, district, zone, action group, and fellowship leaders take every allegation seriously. Rotary meetings and events should be places where everyone feels comfortable and safe.

Creating a review committee

We've discussed why it's best to have a committee, rather than an individual, review allegations of harassment and decide whether any action needs to be taken. Having a standing committee formed before any allegations need to be considered creates a transparent process. At the club level, a committee could be just three people, while a district committee might be three to five people.

When you select people for this committee, look for members and nonmembers who:

- Have experience dealing with allegations in their professions, such as police officers, social workers, or mental health counselors
- Are dedicated to creating a harassment-free environment
- Are committed to providing an objective review

If people are willing to serve on the committee but don't feel prepared to review allegations of harassment, consider inviting experts in the subject or local law enforcement officials to speak and offer their best practices.

After your committee is formed and trained, remember to tell all members and district leaders about it and how it works.

Practice scenarios

Emphasizing to members that harassment will not be tolerated and promptly investigating reports of harassing behavior are an important foundation for an inclusive environment where everyone feels safe. To practice in case you need to address harassing behavior, consider each scenario below and select the response you believe handles the situation the best.

- 1) A female member of a club tells you, her club president, that she was inappropriately touched by a man at a club event. She doesn't want to tell the board or local authorities about it. What is the best response?
- A) Thank her for confiding in you and ask what she hopes will be the result.
 - B) Respect her decision not to tell anyone else.
 - C) Tell her that Rotary has no tolerance for harassing behaviors. Strongly advise her to talk to the local authorities and let her know you would like to conduct an investigation so this doesn't happen again.

Answer: C

This is the best answer. While you can't force her to talk, and should respect her decision, make sure to provide her with clear options and support so she can make the most informed decision.

- 2) A female regional leader sends you, an RI director, a message that says she was disrespected and defamed on social media by a governor-nominee during a Rotary institute. She wants the governor-nominee to be reprimanded, ordered to apologize, and investigated to determine whether he is fit for office. What do you do?
- A) Conduct an investigation in which you review the social media post and interview the regional leader, the governor-nominee, the governor-elect, the current governor, and anyone else who was involved.
 - B) Contact the governor-nominee and ask him to take the post down and apologize.
 - C) ask to mediate a conversation between the regional leader and the governor-nominee to resolve the issue.

Answer: A

Right. The best approach is to conduct a full investigation to be sure you have the complete story and can take fair action.

- 3) A male member reports to you, a club president, that he was disrespected and publicly defamed by another member at a local Rotary event that you did not attend. He asks that this person be disciplined. What is your next step?
- A) Tell him that because you weren't there, you can't resolve the situation.

- B) Say that you will investigate and ask him to document the details, including the names of anyone else who witnessed the incident.
- C) Assure him that you will talk to the other person and tell them that such behavior isn't appropriate.

Answer: B

Yes. As club president, you need to ensure that the situation is investigated promptly, which generally means in about a month.

- 4) Your club invites a female member from another club to talk about a project. While she is speaking, a male club member makes derogatory comments and dismisses the ideas she is presenting. The club president asks him to be quiet, but he continues to mumble at his seat and disturb other members. The guest feels uncomfortable and ends her presentation early. As one of three men at the table with the man making derogatory comments, what is your response?
- A) Tell the man that you want to hear the presentation and that all speakers deserve respect. Ask him to leave if he doesn't want to hear the presenter.
 - B) Do nothing. it's the club president's job to manage this type of behavior.
 - C) Approach the man after the presentation and say that his behavior was disruptive and unfair to the presenter. Ask what his complaint about the presentation was and how he could have handled it differently.

Answer: C

This is the best approach. A private conversation may be more productive and it doesn't disrupt the presentation again. If he is belligerent or aggressive, discuss with the club board whether further action is needed.

- 5) A club member who belongs to the dominant ethnic group votes against admitting the first member from an unrepresented ethnic group, saying the prospective member isn't welcome and threatening to leave the club if the man is admitted. At the next club meeting, which the new member attends, the longtime member won't shake the new member's hand, refuses to speak to him, and starts talking to a friend about how the club's image has suffered since it started to let "them" into the club. When the new member speaks, the longtime member makes negative comments. As a member of this club, what do you do?
- A) Talk to the club president and say you feel that the longtime member is creating a hostile environment.
 - B) Tell the longtime member that his comments are inappropriate and that you support having the new member as part of your club.
 - C) Do nothing. It is the responsibility of the club's leaders or the board to intervene.

Answer: B

Right. Addressing the situation directly is the best response. Talk to the person immediately after his inappropriate comments, then follow up afterward to ask why he said such things and reiterate that it is not acceptable.

- 6) You investigate an allegation of harassment and determine that the club president sexually harassed another member of your club. Criminal charges are filed with the local authorities. What should your club do now?
- A) Wait to see how the court case is resolved, then determine a course of action.
 - B) Terminate the person's membership and all participation in Rotary activities.
 - C) Suspend the person's participation in youth activities and ask that they don't attend club meetings or events.

Answer: B

Right. If your investigation shows that the incident occurred as it was reported to you, your club can terminate the president's membership without waiting for a court ruling. Remember to also notify Rotary International of the incident.

What you can do now

Now that you are familiar with Rotary's policy, you can work to make sure that your meetings and other events are harassment-free. You can:

- Tell all members about the policy
- Create a committee or institute a process to handle allegations
- Make it clear to members that you will listen to all concerns

Creating a harassment-free environment is a responsibility everyone shares. Think about what else you can do to create an atmosphere where all people are respected. See the full policy in the next section.

Rotary's policy on harassment

Rotary's policy on harassment, approved by the Board of Directors in 2019, and updated in 2020. This can also be found in the [Rotary Code of Policies](https://my.rotary.org/document/rotary-code-policies).
(<https://my.rotary.org/document/rotary-code-policies>)

Article 26.120. Harassment-free Environment at Meetings, Events, or Activities

Rotary is committed to maintaining an environment that is free of harassment. Harassment is broadly defined as any conduct, verbal or physical, that denigrates, insults, or offends a person or group based on any characteristic (age, ethnicity, race, color, abilities, religion, socioeconomic status, culture, sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity).

All members and individuals attending or participating in Rotary meetings, events, or activities should expect an environment free of harassment and shall help maintain an environment that promotes safety, courtesy, dignity, and respect to all. Adults who work with youth are subject to policies outlined in the Rotary Code of Policies 2.120.

All allegations of criminal activity should be referred to appropriate local law enforcement authorities.

The club board, district, or zone leadership shall promptly address allegations of harassment and shall not retaliate against those making the allegation.

At the club level, allegations of harassment at Rotary meetings, events, or activities shall be reviewed by the club board and responded to within a reasonable time frame, typically one month. If the alleged offender is a member of the club board, he or she must recuse himself or herself from the discussion. The review and/or investigation shall be dependent on the circumstances including the severity and pervasiveness of the behavior. Concerns that allegations of harassment were not adequately addressed by the club may be referred with appropriate documentation to the district governor.

At the district level, allegations of harassment at Rotary events or activities shall be reviewed by the governor, or a committee appointed by the governor for this purpose, and responded to within a reasonable time frame, typically one month. If the district governor is the alleged offender, the immediate past district governor (or most recent past governor), directly or by appointment of a committee for this purpose, shall review and respond to the allegation. The general secretary shall be informed within two weeks of any allegations of harassment by district governors, governors-elect, and governors-nominee. The review and/or investigation shall be dependent on the circumstances including the severity and pervasiveness of the behavior. Concerns that allegations of harassment were not adequately addressed by the district may be referred with appropriate documentation to the RI director.

District leaders, including governors, assistant governors, and committee chairs, are encouraged to work with their clubs to create a harassment-free environment. District leaders should also work with their clubs to establish a code of conduct and policies for how to address

and prevent harassment within their clubs, among their members, and with other participants in Rotary.

At the zone level, allegations of harassment at Rotary meetings, events, or activities shall be reviewed by the RI director, or a committee appointed by the RI director for this purpose, and responded to within a reasonable time frame, typically one month. If the RI director is the alleged offender, either another current or past RI director as appointed by the RI president shall review and respond to the allegation.

The RI president shall be informed within two weeks of any allegations of harassment by RI directors, directors-elect, and directors-nominee. Concerns that allegations of harassment were not adequately addressed by the zone may be referred with appropriate documentation to the RI president.

As it pertains to Rotary Action Groups and Rotary Fellowships, the Rotary Action Group and Rotary Fellowship leadership shall promptly address allegations of harassment and shall not retaliate against those making the allegation. Allegations of harassment at an action group or fellowship event or activity shall be reviewed by the action group or fellowship, or a committee appointed by the chair of the action group or fellowship for this purpose, and responded to within a reasonable time frame, typically one month. If the chair or other leaders of the action group or fellowships is/are the alleged offender, the immediate past chair (or most recent chair), directly or by appointment of a committee for this purpose, shall review and respond to the allegation. If the alleged offender is a member of the action group or fellowship's board, he or she is expected to recuse himself or herself from the discussion. The review and/or investigation shall be dependent on the circumstances including the severity and pervasiveness of the behavior. Concerns that allegations of harassment were not adequately addressed by the action group or fellowship may be referred with appropriate documentation to the RI president.

Club, district, and zone leaders must report severe and pervasive harassment and any resulting membership terminations to the general secretary. If a club or district fails to adequately address findings of harassment, the RI director shall notify the RI Board for appropriate action. Such action may include club termination or other appropriate sanctions.

