

# Empowering bystanders to act on sexist and sexually harassing behaviours while working remotely

Guide to implementing a social norms email campaign encouraging bystander action



# The purpose of this email toolkit

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Workplace sexism and sexual harassment is a persistent problem in Australian workplaces. The Australian Human Rights Commission reported in 2018 that 20% of Australians had been sexually harassed in the workplace in the past 12 months.<sup>1</sup> Almost half of Australian women also report that gender inequality exists in most Australian workplaces.<sup>2</sup>

With workplaces moving increasingly online, experiences of sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace, and taking action in response, are also changing.<sup>3</sup> Encouraging and empowering staff to be active bystanders (see box 1) against sexism and sexual harassment in workplaces has a positive and enduring impact. It protects and supports those targeted by the behaviour, discourages perpetrators from repeating the behaviour, and helps shape social norms around the acceptability of sexism and sexual harassment into the future.

Our previous work at the University of Melbourne found that highlighting social norms (see box 2) stating that the majority of individuals approve of taking action in response to inappropriate behaviours led to increased bystander action.<sup>4</sup>

To assist workplaces to encourage staff to be active bystanders, we have created this toolkit for a workplace-wide bystander email campaign. Included are 5 template emails that can be adapted and used in your workplace. If you are running your own campaign, we'd love to hear about it. Get in touch with us at: [VicHealth](#) or [The Behavioural Insights Team \(BIT\)](#).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2018). Everybody's business: Fourth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces.

<sup>2</sup> Lumby, C., & Aftab, A. (2018). 'Is Australia Sexist?' Survey Report.

<sup>3</sup> The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation and The Behavioural Insights Team. (2021). Victorians' experiences of sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely due to the coronavirus – Report findings

<sup>4</sup> The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation and The Behavioural Insights Team. (2019). Take action: Empowering bystanders to act on sexist and sexually harassing behaviours in universities. [https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/Take-Action-Bystander\\_Oct2019.pdf](https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/Take-Action-Bystander_Oct2019.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> In 2017, the Behavioural Insights Team, VicHealth and the Office for Women, Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet, formed an innovative partnership to understand how behavioural insights can encourage bystander action against sexism and sexual harassment. This tool was developed as part of Phase 3 of the project, aimed at reducing sexism and sexual harassment experienced during digital working.

### Box 1: What is an active bystander?

A bystander is a person who is present and witnesses something but is not directly involved in it. In this context, a bystander is someone who is told about an incident or who witnesses sexist or sexually harassing behaviours in a workplace setting.

An *active* bystander is someone who takes action after witnessing or hearing about an incident of sexist or sexually harassing behaviour. There are a range of actions which an active bystander can take in response to these behaviours, including giving a disapproving look, speaking out or reporting the behaviour. Active bystanding does not involve physically restraining someone and does not include hostile or aggressive responses.<sup>6</sup>

### Box 2: What are social norms?

Humans are innately social creatures. This means that we are heavily influenced by what other people do, or by what we think they do, and we will take cues about how to act from our social environment.<sup>7</sup> We are particularly influenced by those we perceive to be similar to ourselves.<sup>8</sup>

'Social norms' are an expression of what is widely understood to be the appropriate attitude or behaviour in a given situation. Social norms can represent the proportion of individuals that behave in a particular way, or the proportion of individuals that hold a particular belief or value.

When we communicate social norms about a 'target behaviour', it's important to advertise the behaviour we want to see (e.g. 'most people do this') and to *not* inadvertently advertise the behaviour we want to avoid (e.g. by saying 'this is a huge problem'). Advertising social norms encourages people who are not currently performing the 'target behaviour' to shift towards the behaviour most other people are doing.

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<sup>6</sup> The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation and The Behavioural Insights Team. (2019). Take action: Empowering bystanders to act on sexist and sexually harassing behaviours in universities

<sup>7</sup> Rhodes, N., Shulman, H. C., & McClaran, N. (2020). Changing Norms: A Meta-Analytic Integration of Research on Social Norms Appeals. *Human Communication Research*, 46(2-3), 161-191.

<sup>8</sup> Turner, J. C. (1985). Social categorization and the self-concept: A social cognitive theory of group behavior. *Advances in group processes: Theory and research*, 2, 77-122; Turner, J. C. (1991). *Social Influence*. Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press

### Box 3: The ladder of active bystanding

BIT and VicHealth developed the ladder of active bystanding in order to assist workplaces looking to implement workplace active bystander initiatives.<sup>9</sup> The ladder represents the range of responses that staff can take in response to sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace.

Actions higher up the ladder include reporting an incident or calling out a perpetrator in the moment. These are in general more impactful ways of discouraging sexism and sexual harassment, but are more confrontational and require more skill and confidence on the part of the bystander. It should also be noted that actions higher up the ladder are more likely to yield positive results in workplaces where there is strong, visible leadership and modelling of bystander action and gender equality.

Actions lower on the ladder include checking in with the target after an incident, or diffusing a situation with a light hearted comment or disapproving look. They are easier to perform, involve less risk for the bystander, and are more suitable when the intent of the perpetrator is unclear.

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<sup>9</sup> The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation and The Behavioural Insights Team. (2019). Take action: Empowering bystanders to act on sexist and sexually harassing behaviours.

# Steps to implement an active bystander email campaign

This section of the toolkit sets out the practical considerations leading up to, during, and after implementation of a social norms email campaign to encourage people to act against sexism and sexual harassment, as active bystanders, while working remotely.

## 1. Build the foundations for the campaign

Prior to implementing an email campaign to promote bystander action, it is crucial that your workplace ensures it has good policies and systems in place to respond to reports of sexism and sexual harassment, to deal with perpetrators, and to support both targets of sexism and sexual harassment and bystanders. This organisational readiness is key to creating an inclusive, supportive environment for your staff.

We recommend that you do this prior to implementing the email campaign, as it is possible that the email campaign will result in increased conversations about sexism and sexual harassment amongst staff, questions about policies associated with sexism and sexual harassment, bystander action, and reporting of incidents. Specifically, we recommend that you have in place:

- **A clear, visible sexism and sexual harassment policy:** It is important that workplace policies on sexism and sexual harassment are specific about which behaviours are and are not acceptable and are consistently reinforced. For example, you could disseminate a one-page, plain-English summary of the policy prior to the email campaign being launched. The policies should also be clear about the actions which bystanders can take (see box 3) when they witness sexism and sexual harassment. It is also important that the organisation is prepared to respond effectively to disclosures with relevant referral information. Further information can be found here <https://www.1800respect.org.au/contact-us>
- **An effective and confidential reporting process:** Concerns about confidentiality are a major barrier to reporting sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace.<sup>10</sup> Workplaces should have both internal and external avenues for reporting an incident of sexual harassment confidentially, and they should communicate these reporting options and outcomes clearly and transparently to all staff.<sup>11</sup> We also recommend building a dedicated webpage where policies, procedures and reporting avenues are readily accessible to staff.

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<sup>10</sup> Pornpitakpan, C. (2004). The persuasiveness of source credibility: A critical review of five decades' evidence. *Journal of applied social psychology*, 34(2), 243-281

<sup>11</sup> External avenues could include independent reporting services, such as [Integrity Line](#) or by contacting the Australian Human Rights Commission [complaints under the Sex Discrimination Act](#).

- **Metrics to track sexist and sexually harassing behaviours, and bystander action:** You should securely and confidentially collect data relating to experiences of sexism and sexual harassment, including official and unofficial reports. This could also include data on other gender equality metrics, including access to flexible work and parental leave and differences in rates of pay. This will assist you to understand whether the email campaign had any impact on these metrics both during and after the campaign.

## 2. Collect data in order to adapt the emails to your workplace

We recommend that you include norms that are specific and relevant to your workplace in this email campaign. This is because people are more influenced by social norms messaging when they identify strongly with the described social group.<sup>12</sup>

In the templates below, we have provided [spaces] indicated by square brackets to insert social norm statistics that are relevant to your workplace. We recommend that you survey staff in your workplace using the associated 'behavioural survey tool to understand experiences of sexism and sexual harassment in your workplace'.<sup>13</sup> This will provide you with information about existing attitudes and behaviours in your specific workplace so you can make the content of your emails as relevant and relatable as possible. This will also generate social norms data that can be used to demonstrate the group's commonly held beliefs and standards about bystander action.

The associated behavioural survey tool has been specifically developed to provide you with the information and insights you need to run your email campaign. The relevant questions to generate social norms data for this email campaign are indicated in the survey tool by a footnote and a hash sign (#) on the relevant question. Using this behavioural survey tool will also give you a baseline from which to measure the impact of your email campaign after it has been completed.

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<sup>12</sup> Hogg, M. A., and Reid, S. A. (2006). Social identity, self-categorization, and the communication of group norms. *Commun. Theory* 16, 7–A

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/sexism-remote-working-survey-tool.pdf>

### 3. Apply behavioural insights to the email templates

#### Decide the best time to send the emails

People respond differently to information depending on when it is presented to them. People are more likely to pay attention to information and act on it if it appears when their motivation, ability and opportunity to act is highest. As a result, it is important that the timing of the email campaign is best suited to promote behaviour change. Where possible, we recommend that you:

- **Make the campaign timely by linking the start to an internal event, or relevant day:** Where possible, we recommend that you link the beginning of the campaign to an international day (for example, International Women’s Day, or International Day of Women and Girls in Science), or an internal event promoting gender equality at work. Doing this also has the potential to spotlight gender equality issues more broadly, and to leverage the attention that the particular event or day is receiving.
- **Schedule the emails approximately one week apart:** Allow time between the emails to ensure that the emails are read, and the knowledge gained as a result of the emails can sink in. Having some time between the emails also allows time for staff to pause and reflect on the email content, and reduces the potential that staff feel they are being overwhelmed with emails about a sensitive topic.

#### Select a credible email ‘messenger’

The behavioural sciences tell us that the person who delivers a message (i.e., the “messenger” or the signatory) is just as important as the content of the message itself, and has a large influence on how that message is received and responded to.<sup>14</sup>

We recommend that you choose a visible workplace messenger for these emails — this should be someone who staff know, who is influential and has authority in the workplace, who is relevant to staff, and who can be seen as a role model for change.

#### Personalise the emails

We are more likely to do something if our attention is drawn towards it. Personalisation is a powerful tool to attract the attention of a reader/recipient of a behavioural science intervention. We recommend that the social norms emails themselves are personalised to the staff receiving them. For example, most email platforms allow you to address recipients by name. This will increase the likelihood that the email will capture attention, which will make the emails themselves more salient to the reader.

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<sup>14</sup> Wilson, E.J., Sherrell, D.L. (1993). Source effects in communication and persuasion research: A meta-analysis of effect size. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 21, 101.  
Pornpitakpan, C. (2004). The persuasiveness of source credibility: A critical review of five decades' evidence. *Journal of applied social psychology*, 34(2), 243-281.

#### 4. Monitor staff reactions to the emails, once sent

Once the foundations for the email campaign are in place, the templates have been adapted to your context, and you have ensured the messenger is on board with the campaign, you can launch it. We recommend that once the campaign is launched, you continue to monitor reactions to the campaign. While monitoring the campaign looks different across all workplaces, here are some suggestions for what you can do:

- **Look for negative reactions to the email campaign.** We recommend developing an action plan for management and HR to gauge and be prepared for staff reactions feedback or backlash that may occur as a result of the email campaign. VicHealth have created a guide with effective strategies and tools to prepare for and respond to backlash and resistance to gender equality initiatives should they arise.<sup>15</sup>
- **Check on levels of reporting via HR:** While the email campaign is live, we recommend that you check reporting levels to ascertain whether there are any changes in the number or type of incidents reported. This should be communicated in the aggregate, to maintain confidentiality, where possible.
- **Ask senior management for feedback:** Senior management often hear conversations or receive feedback “up the chain”. Asking for their feedback and thoughts regarding an email campaign can help to ascertain what the broader consensus and mood regarding the communications is.
- **Be open to receiving feedback:** Many staff communicate with one another formally and informally. While an email campaign is live, we would recommend being open to discussions with staff during and following the campaign. Given sexism and sexual harassment is a sensitive topic, you should have a safe space that staff can talk to you regarding their thoughts on the email campaign.

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<sup>15</sup> The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. (n.d) *13 steps to tackle gender discrimination*. <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/13-steps-to-tackle-gender-discrimination>

## 5. Evaluate the impact of the active bystander email campaign

There are a number of ways that the impact of this email campaign, on sexist and sexually harassing behaviours and active bystanding, can be evaluated. One method to evaluate the impact of this campaign is via a randomised controlled trial (RCT). An RCT is the gold standard for evaluating the effectiveness of an intervention. To conduct an RCT, individuals are randomly assigned to receive the intervention emails, or be a part of a control group which does not receive the emails.

The control group allows you to compare the performance of an intervention against what would have happened if there had been no intervention at all. For example, it's possible that over the period of your email campaign, attitudes and behaviours in the workplace shift as a result of external factors (other than the email), such as media coverage, or a new piece of legislation may be proposed in state or federal government. Outcomes for the intervention group should then be compared statistically to outcomes in the control group. We recommend you use the associated Behavioural Survey Tool to collect data about the effectiveness of the email campaign.<sup>16</sup>

**If you intend to carry out any research that collects data on workplace experiences, please ensure that you obtain approval from your workplace's Human Resources department, or an outside Human Research Ethics Committee.**

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<sup>16</sup> For more detail on how we implemented an RCT to evaluate a social norms email campaign see: VicHealth (2019) [Take action: Empowering bystanders to act on sexist and sexually harassing behaviours in universities - The final report from the Phase Two bystander trials 2018-2019.](#)

# The email templates

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We have designed an active bystander email campaign consisting of 5 template emails (below), which communicate social norms to encourage bystander action among staff.

Sample content for each email:

- Email 1 is an introductory email (about sexism and sexual harassment)
- Email 2 is about sexual comments or jokes (sexual harassment)
- Email 3 is about making assumptions about career interests based on gender (sexism)
- Email 4 is about treating colleagues differently because of gender (sexism)
- Email 5 is about asking intrusive or offensive questions about colleagues' private life or physical appearance (sexual harassment)

The data we recommend referencing in these emails (both in relation to prevalence and social norms) should be taken from a survey conducted in your workplace.<sup>17</sup> Some important features of these emails are:

- The specific behaviours referenced in each of the emails should be those which are commonly experienced and witnessed at **your workplace** in the past 6-12 months. The templates included here reference 3 behaviours which were classified as sexism in the staff survey, and 2 which are classified as sexual harassment.
- The social norms used in these emails are **majority norms**; this means that we are encouraging bystander action amongst staff by telling them what **the majority of them** think should be done when witnessing sexism and sexual harassment at work.
- The social norms are highlighted in a **call out box** so they are a key feature of each email. This helps ensure that the reader's attention is drawn to these powerful messages.
- We also provide staff with information about **how** to take bystander action. Often people want to act but aren't sure how to. Giving people specific examples reassures them that there are ways to take action against sexism and sexual harassment, both in the moment and after the moment. This information about how to act is based on the range of available bystander actions set out in the active bystander ladder (see Box 3).

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<sup>17</sup> Further information about this survey and how to conduct it is available in the [Behavioural Survey Tool](#)

## Important actions when using the email templates

When using the below email templates remember to substitute the relevant information for your workplace. To make this easy we have used [square brackets] to signpost the most important changes, however other changes to language and style are also recommended to ensure the tone of the emails is appropriate for your workplace. Below are the most important substitutions to make:

- [your workplace] = replace with the name of your workplace, i.e. the workplace whose staff you have surveyed and are whose staff you are sending the emails to
- [X%] = replace with norms data from your workplace based on the behavioural survey. **Ensure the norm % is sufficiently high to promote action. Do not include norms where you cannot truthfully say that 'most' people agree or do the behaviour**
- [Name of recipient] = mail merge in the name of the employee receiving the email in order to personalise and draw their attention to the email
- [Messenger] = replace with the credible messenger in your workplace who will be the signatory on the email

To demonstrate how to create and tailor the emails using the toolkit we have included a mockup of **Email 2: Sexual comments or jokes (sexual harassment)** using a fictional company name and illustrative norms data.

Insert majority norm for your workplace

Replace with your workplace

Email 2: Sexual comment or joke (sexual harassment)

Subject line: 95% of "ACME Inc." staff think you should take action in the moment if you hear a sexual comment or joke at work

Personalisation

Hi Stephan

Select specific behaviours commonly experienced and witnessed at your workplace

While sexual comments or jokes are sometimes made as an attempt at 'humour', they are still offensive and cause harm.



95% of your colleagues think you should take action in the moment if you hear a sexual comment or joke at work, and 9 out of 10 said they themselves would intervene in the moment if they witnessed sexism or sexual harassment.

If you see or hear about someone making a sexual comment or joke, it's important to show them that it's not okay. This can make them less likely to do it again, and sends an important message to others.

Provide information on how to take action

If you see a sexual comment or joke here's what you can do:	
<b>In the moment</b>	Try <b>asking a question</b> : "Sorry, I don't get it — can you explain the joke?"; or tell them how the joke made you feel: "Hey, what you said wasn't funny, it was demeaning to women/men and that really bothered me".
<b>After the moment</b>	If you didn't say anything in the moment, it's not too late to act. You can <b>reach out to the person who made the joke or comment</b> to let them know it was unacceptable. Say something like "Hey, that joke you made earlier really bothered me."

Click [here](#) for further suggestions on how you can take action.

Select a credible messenger

Julia  
CEO of "ACME Inc."

If you have experienced sexism or sexual harassment, or know someone else who has, please come and talk to the "ACME Inc." Gender Equality team or call 1800RESPECT

While intervening in sexism and sexual harassment is important, your safety is more important. If it is unsafe to intervene, or the perpetrator responds aggressively when you intervene, remove yourself from the situation.

See [here](#) for more information about this email.

Want to opt-out of receiving these emails? You can unsubscribe below.

## Email 1: Introductory email (sexism and sexual harassment)

**Subject line: [X%] of [your workplace] staff agree we all have a role to play in reducing sexism and sexual harassment at work**

Hi [Name of recipient]

Sexism and sexual harassment have no place at [your workplace]. That's why we recently asked you to complete a survey to find out what sexism and sexual harassment look like in our workplace. This information is being used to help us design effective prevention strategies for sexism and sexual harassment.



**[X%] of your colleagues think it's important that every person at [your workplace] take action against sexism and sexual harassment, and [X] out of 10 said they themselves would intervene if they witnessed sexism or harassment.**

If you witness or hear about an incident there are lots of actions you can take. For example, you can call out a poor "joke", you can check-in to see if someone is ok, or you can make a formal report. You can also click [here](#) for further suggestions on how to take action.

Choosing how to respond will be different for different people. The most important thing is that you take actions you feel comfortable with.

To help you know what to do when you witness or hear about an incident, over the next 4 weeks we will be sending you different bystander actions you can take.

Take action to help your colleagues and stop sexism and sexual harassment at [your workplace].

*[Messenger]*

*If you have experienced sexism or sexual harassment, or know someone else who has, please come and talk to [your workplace] team or call 1800RESPECT*

*While intervening in sexism and sexual harassment is important, your safety is more important. If it is unsafe to intervene, or the perpetrator responds aggressively when you intervene, remove yourself from the situation.*

*See [here] for more information about this email.*

*Want to opt-out of receiving these emails? You can unsubscribe below.*

## Email 2: Sexual comments or jokes (sexual harassment)

**Subject line: [X]% of [your workplace] staff think you should take action in the moment if you hear a sexual comment or joke at work**

Hi [Name of recipient]

While sexual comments or jokes are sometimes made as an attempt at 'humour', they are still offensive and cause harm.



**[X]% of your colleagues think you should take action in the moment if you hear a sexual comment or joke at work, and [X] out of 10 said they themselves would intervene in the moment if they witnessed sexism or sexual harassment.**

If you see or hear about someone making a sexual comment or joke, it's important to show them that it's not okay. This can make them less likely to do it again, and sends an important message to others.

If you see a sexual comment or joke here's what you can do:

<b>In the moment</b>	Try <b>asking a question</b> : "Sorry, I don't get it — can you explain the joke?"; or tell them how the joke made you feel: "Hey, what you said wasn't funny, it was demeaning to women/men and that really bothered me".
<b>After the moment</b>	If you didn't say anything in the moment, it's not too late to act. You can <b>reach out to the person who made the joke or comment</b> to let them know it was unacceptable. Say something like "Hey, that joke you made earlier really bothered me."

Click [here](#) for further suggestions on how you can take action.

*[Messenger]*

*If you have experienced sexism or sexual harassment, or know someone else who has, please come and talk to [your workplace] team or call 1800RESPECT*

*While intervening in sexism and sexual harassment is important, your safety is more important. If it is unsafe to intervene, or the perpetrator responds aggressively when you intervene, remove yourself from the situation.*

*See [here] for more information about this email.*

*Want to opt-out of receiving these emails? You can unsubscribe below.*

### Email 3: Making assumptions about career interests based on gender (sexism)

**Subject line: Most [your workplace] staff think it's right to intervene if a colleague is making sexist assumptions about someone else's career interests**

Hi [Name of recipient]

Making assumptions about other people's career interests based on out-dated gender stereotypes can undermine their wellbeing and long-term job opportunities and satisfaction. This includes assuming that women have to care for their children, or assuming that men aren't interested in flexible work arrangements because they are 'career-focused'.



**Most of us at [your workplace] think we should take action if a colleague makes sexist assumptions about someone else's career, and [X] out of 10 said they themselves will follow-up after the moment when witnessing sexism or sexual harassment.**

Taking action when you see this is important both to support your colleague who was the target of the comment, and to educate the perpetrator, as they might not be aware of the consequences of their behaviour. Next time you witness this, here is what you can do:

<b>In the moment</b>	Try <b>asking a question to draw attention to an alternative way of doing things</b> . Say something like "Hey, Sam might be interested in this project, can we check with her before moving forward?".
<b>After the moment</b>	Even if you didn't 'call out' the perpetrator in the moment, you can 'call in' a colleague afterwards. <b>Reach out and explain how their actions might have had negative consequences</b> . Say something like "Hey, you might not have realised, but Emma is interested in developing her management skills and we have excluded her from management training next week".

Click [here](#) for further suggestions on how you can take action and support everyone's career goals at [your workplace].

[Messenger]

*If you have experienced sexism or sexual harassment, or know someone else who has, please come and talk to [your workplace] team or call 1800RESPECT*

*While intervening in sexism and sexual harassment is important, your safety is more important. If it is unsafe to intervene, or the perpetrator responds aggressively when you intervene, remove yourself from the situation.*

*See [here] for more information about this email.*

*Want to opt-out of receiving these emails? You can unsubscribe below.*

## Email 4: Treating colleagues differently because of gender (sexism)

**Subject line: [X]% of [your workplace] staff believe you should take action if you see someone treating a colleague differently because of their gender**

Hi [Name of recipient]

Treating colleagues differently because of their gender makes people feel excluded, limits career progression and contributes to negative workplace culture. For example, they might have been spoken over during a work call, or not invited to important project meetings.



**[X]% of your colleagues think you should take action if you see a colleague being treated differently because of their gender, and most said they themselves would intervene if they witnessed sexism or harassment at work.**

You can help put an end to this kind of behaviour at [your workplace]. If you see this happen, here is what you can do:

<b>In the moment</b>	If you notice a colleague is being excluded from certain opportunities, try <b>suggesting they be included</b> : “Why doesn’t Sarah come along to that meeting, she hasn’t been to one in a while”.
<b>After the moment</b>	Speak to <b>[your workplace team]</b> about <b>introducing a new office norm or practice that prevents this sort of behaviour from reoccurring</b> : “I was thinking that we should introduce a note-taking rota because I’ve noticed that Amy takes the meeting notes every week.”

Click [here](#) for further suggestions on how you can take action.

*[Messenger]*

*If you have experienced sexism or sexual harassment, or know someone else who has, please come and talk to [your workplace] team or call 1800RESPECT*

*While intervening in sexism and sexual harassment is important, your safety is more important. If it is unsafe to intervene, or the perpetrator responds aggressively when you intervene, remove yourself from the situation.*

*See [here] for more information about this email.*

*Want to opt-out of receiving these emails? You can unsubscribe below.*

## Email 5: Asking intrusive or offensive questions about colleagues' private life or physical appearance (sexual harassment)

**Subject line: [X]% of [your workplace] staff think you should intervene if you hear a colleague ask an intrusive or offensive question**

Hi [Name of recipient]

Asking offensive or intrusive questions when people are trying to do their job can make colleagues feel distressed and uncomfortable. This includes asking about or commenting on somebody's physical appearance, weight, clothing or romantic life.



**[X]% of your colleagues think you should take action in the moment if you hear a colleague asking intrusive or offensive questions, and [X] out of 10 said they themselves will intervene in the moment if they witness sexism or sexual harassment.**

People are sometimes not aware their questions are intrusive or unwelcome. That's why it's important to intervene, both to support the target and communicate that this behaviour is not okay. Next time you witness an intrusive or offensive question at [your workplace], here is what you can do:

<b>In the moment</b>	Make it clear verbally you don't approve and <b>diffuse the situation in the moment</b> . You can do this in a light-hearted way by saying "Pauline has better things to do than answer a question like that".
<b>After the moment</b>	If the question is very offensive, or part of a pattern of harassing behaviour you can <b>report the incident after the moment</b> . Speak to <b>[your workplace team]</b> to discuss making a report or submit a written report at <b>[your workplace reporting channel]</b> .

Click [here](#) for further suggestions on how you can take action.

[Messenger]

*If you have experienced sexism or sexual harassment, or know someone else who has, please come and talk to [your workplace] team or call 1800RESPECT*

*While intervening in sexism and sexual harassment is important, your safety is more important. If it is unsafe to intervene, or the perpetrator responds aggressively when you intervene, remove yourself from the situation.*

See [\[here\]](#) for more information about this email.

*Want to opt-out of receiving these emails? You can unsubscribe below.*



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VicHealth is committed to health equity, which means levelling the playing field between people who can easily access good health and people who face barriers, to achieve the highest level of health for *everyone*.



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VicHealth acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land. We pay our respects to all Elders past, present and future.