

# Crossing the line?

– how to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace by playing the game “Crossing the line?”



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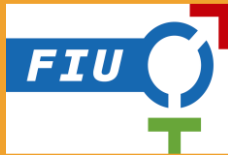


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Welcome to a course about:

- Why sexual harassment does not have a “quick fix”-solution
- How *you* can start preventing sexual harassment in your workplace by playing the game “crossing the line?” with your co-workers


Welcome to this course where you will learn about why it is not a simple task to create a sexual harassment-free work environment – why there are no quick fixes. To tease the content of this course a little, this has something to do with how sexual harassment is defined...

The main part of this course consists of playing the game “Crossing the line?” – a game that has been developed with the aim of preventing sexual harassment through facilitating a space in which co-workers can have an open conversation about boundaries. The game will hopefully both get you to 1) think about where your boundaries are for what is and isn’t proper workplace behaviour/language, 2) make you aware of how much other people’s boundaries may differ from your own and 3) practice your ability to communicate with other people about boundaries.

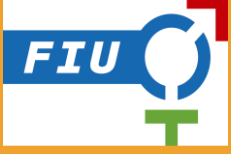
And, last but not least, the aim of this course is also to enable *you* to play the game “Crossing the line?” with your co-workers and thereby facilitate a space where you and your co-workers can learn about each others boundaries and how to communicate them to each other.

But first we will quickly run through what sexual harassment is so that we are all on


the same page about that before be we begin to play the game.



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## Sexual harassment: Definitions & who is at risk

Three types of sexual harassment:

- Physical (touch)
- Verbal (sexist/sexual “jokes”, comments, conversation)
- Non-verbal (sexual posters in the workplace, stares)

Who is at risk?

- Primarily young females in a low-power position
- The three factors: gender/sexual orientation <-> age <-> power

Sexual harassment is defined by **experience**, not **intention**

To get started it is a good idea to establish 1) what sexual harassment is and isn't and 2) what determines who is mostly at risk for being subjected to sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment can be divided into three different types: physical, verbal or non-verbal sexual harassment.

- 1) Physical sexual harassment is where someone experiences unwanted touch anywhere on the body.
- 2) Verbal sexual harassment can be everything from unwanted conversations about sex, body and other private/uncomfortable topics to sexist or sexual “jokes” or comments about someone’s body, sex life, appearance and so fourth.
- 3) Non-verbal sexual harassment can be someone experiencing being stared at/eyed up or posters with sexual content hanging on the walls of the workplace

It is also important to have an idea about who is mostly at risk for being subjected to sexual harassment in order to professionally and effectively both deal with and prevent sexual harassment.

Studies show that young women in a less powerful position in a workplace are most at risk of being subjected to sexual harassment. However, who experiences sexual


harassment can be understood as an interaction between three factors: gender(/sexuality), age, and power. This means that a female CEO with a lot of power will perhaps not be thought of someone who is likely to be subjected to sexual harassment because she is in a position of power. However, because of her gender it is not unlikely that the female CEO will experience sexual harassment from her male subordinates. Studies have also shown that gay men may be at a higher risk of being subjected to sexual harassment. Even though it is more unlikely, the male, straight, powerful, experienced CEO *can* also be subjected to sexual harassment – it is just a lot more statistically unlikely than the young, less powerful woman or even the female CEO.

Sexual harassment should be defined by the experience of the offended and not by intention of the offender – and this is the reason why sexual harassment can be quite complex to eliminate.

What this definition means and why:

The fact that experience trumps intention means that if someone has an *experience* of being sexually harassed, that person *was* sexually harassed. Therefore, defining what is and what isn't sexual harassment is never dependent on whether or not the offender had the intention to sexually harass someone or not. And that cannot not be disputed.

The reason why this is an important principle to agree upon when talking about sexual harassment – and in both dealing with and preventing sexual harassment in the workplace – is that you can only create a good, trustful and thriving work environment, if every single person's experiences and feelings are seen as valid and worth taking into account. It is a matter of respecting each individual in the workplace. The alternative – thinking that sexual harassment is defined by the intention of the offender – is not a solution, because then there is *principally* no limits to what someone can do or say and get away with it, as long as the intentions are good. And surely no one thinks that makes for a great solution or a great work environment. However, this does not mean that intention isn't relevant at all. It is very relevant when *dealing with* a sexual harassment case. But in *defining* what counts as sexual harassment, then intention is not relevant.



Preventive paths that won't work:

- Just relying on peoples "common sense"  
→ Everyone's idea of "common sense" differs. Who's counts?
- By banning all potentially harassing behaviour (joking, complimenting, any physical touch)  
→ Not realistic. Plus, very strict rules will not create a great work environment

A preventive path that will work:

- Talking openly about boundaries in the workplace

Why?

- Sensitivity to people's different boundaries is increased
- Improving communicative skills of own boundaries
- Validation of everyone's differences and experiences

The argument that if everybody just used their common sense, then sexual harassment wouldn't be an issue, is not a path that very effectively leads to prevention of sexual harassment. The reason is that everyone has different ideas about what is "common sense" – what someone will say is clearly a joke and just really funny, might be very offending to someone else. And then the question arises: Who is in a position to define what is "common sense" and good/non-harassing behaviour?

This very free or laissez faire attitude – that people should just figure out themselves what is common sense, and what is appropriate behaviour – is not a very promising path. The reason is that this attitude does not seem to include, or invite to, a lot of active, intentional and inter-personal work or conversation which is exactly what is needed if one wishes to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace.

However, swinging the pendulum in the complete opposite direction by implementing very strict rules and regulation about exactly what people can and cannot say or do is not the solution either. Making rules that ban every single thing that opens up for the *possibility* of sexual harassment is neither realistic (you would practically have to make rules that forbid all communication) nor what constitutes a good work environment where people can come to work and be their authentic

selves. Of course it is important to have some general rules about how you can and cannot act in a workplace – but rules and regulations cannot be the only solution.

The shared fault of each path is that they do not include any intentional interaction or conversation that can dive deep into the root issues of (some cases of) sexual harassment.

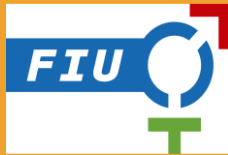
Therefore, one of the best paths to a sexual harassment-free work environment is to practice talking about boundaries – what kind of language and behaviour is crossing the boundaries and what is not.

The reason why this works as a way to prevent sexual harassment, is that talking openly about boundaries increases people's sensitivity to the fact that each person has different boundaries and different ideas about what is proper behaviour. Furthermore, an open conversation in the workplace about boundaries will improve everybody's communicative skills when it comes to expressing and setting their own boundaries – as well as welcoming and respecting other people's boundaries.

And last but not least: When talking openly about boundaries in the workplace – where they are and why – then you also create a culture where people know that their boundaries and experiences matter and are valid. When this principle or norm is established in a workplace, it is much more likely that the people in the workplace will also know that if they *feel like* something was crossing the line, then that feeling or experience is true and valid. And this alone will most likely lead to more people speaking up, if they have experienced sexual harassment – both because they know that *they* define what is all right and what isn't – *and* this will also likely mean that a manager/boss/colleague will be helpful, when a person speaks up, because the workplace has already established that everybody's boundaries are valid.



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To really understand why sexual harassment can't just be eliminated by stating in a policy:

"Sexual harassment is not allowed!"

And to understand what it takes to start preventing sexual harassment, we will now play the game:

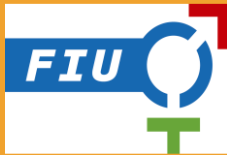
"Crossing the line?"

Now it is time for us to begin playing the game "Crossing the line?". This game will hopefully make it very clear to you why all cases of sexual harassment are *not* just very quick and simply to eliminate – and why intentional, thorough conversation is a must.





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#### Rules: How does it work?

- The game in real live versus playing it online
- On each slide: One statement + a horizontal line with numbers 1-10
- For each statement write down a number (1-10):
  - If you think the statement is very much crossing the line, you give it a 10
  - If you think the statement is completely okay, you give it a 1
  - If you think the statement is both/and, you give it a 5
  - And so on...
- You will get two minutes to write down a number *and* the reason why you chose that number
- One by one, you reveal your number. We'll talk about the statement and why you gave it your chosen number
- Sometimes a statement will appear with a special condition you'll have to consider when deciding on a number

First some game rules:

When playing the game in real life, and not virtually, you would first of all gather a group of co-workers. The game revolves around a stack of cards where each card has a statement like: "You look nice today". Then someone would draw a long, horizontal line with a mark in the middle – for example on a white board or on the floor. The part of the line to the right of the mark symbolizes something that is crossing the line – something that is definitely not appropriate under any condition to say in a workplace. And the part of the line to the left of the middle-mark is where you will place the cards/statements that you find completely fine to say. The area around the middle mark symbolizes something that is in a grey area.

Then, in groups of about 3-6 people (or how many you prefer), you would take one card at a time and discuss what you think about the statement: Is the statement on the card crossing the line, not crossing the line or somewhere in the middle/in the grey area – and to what degree it is or isn't the statement crossing the line? When the group has discussed the statement and agreed upon a verdict, then you place the card on the line where you, as a group, think it belongs.

Today, because this course is virtual, it is a little difficult to play the game like you

would in real life. Therefore, the game is a little different. We will play the game like this: On each following slide a statement will appear. Then – without speaking to each other – you will each write down a number from 1-10 that signifies where on the line, you think the statement should be placed. 1 means that the statement is completely fine, 5 means that you think the statement is somewhere in the middle/in a grey area, and 10 means that the statement is definitely and very much crossing the line. You will also write down or think through why you have given the statement the number you have.

Then, when everyone has finished writing down a number that they think matches the statement – symbolizing where on the line you think the statement belongs – one by one, each person says the number they have chosen and why. After that, we can have an open conversation about what you thought about the statement; why you might agree/disagree with someone, why it was easy/hard to number the statement and so on.

Sometimes there will be some special conditions that you have to consider when giving the statement a number.

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*"That dress really fits you nicely"*

Is this statement crossing the line, maybe or not?  
To which degree?

Completely ok!      Grey zone      Crossing the line

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The first statement is: “That dress really fits you nicely”.

Write down whether – and to what degree – this statement is crossing the line or not when it comes to what you think is appropriate to say in your workplace. You will get 2 minutes or so to write down a number from 1-10 and the reason why you gave the statement that exact number.

(When the time is up, you hear each participant, one by one, what they have written down and why. Let it become a conversation/discussion. The important thing here is to dive deep into why some people feel a statement is or isn't crossing the line, or why they think it is a grey zone. The discussion is what is important about the game – not so much reaching some kind of agreement about a number. It is important that all perspectives are heard. It may be a good idea to change who is first to speak, and to state explicitly that all thoughts and opinions matter)

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*“Oh no, it’s raining. Feel how wet my thighs are”*

Completely ok!      Grey zone      Crossing the line

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The statement is: “Oh no, it’s raining. Feel how wet my thighs are”

Write down whether – and to what degree – this statement is crossing the line or not when it comes to what you think is appropriate to say in your workplace. You will get 2 minutes or so to write down a number from 1-10 and the reason why you gave the statement that exact number.

(When the time is up, you hear each participant, one by one, what they have written down and why. Let it become a conversation/discussion. The important thing here is to hear everybody out: why some people feel a statement is or isn’t crossing the line, or why they think it is a grey zone. The discussion is what is important about the game – not so much reaching some kind of agreement about a number. It is important that all perspectives are heard. It may be a good idea to change who is first to speak, and to state explicitly that all thoughts and opinions matter.)

(After the initial discussion, ask the participants how and why their number would change if they were told that the person expressing this statement is a powerful man in the workplace and the recipient is a younger, newly hired female. And after that you can turn it around and say the the person expressing the statement is a powerful

female in the company and the recipient is a younger male. Ask if this changes the participants' number, how and why. Make room for a discussion)

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*"Promotions take place in the copy room"*

Completely ok!      Grey zone      Crossing the line

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The statement is: "Promotions take place in the copy room"

Write down whether – and to what degree – this statement is crossing the line or not when it comes to what you think is appropriate to say in your workplace. You will get 2 minutes or so to write down a number from 1-10 and the reason why you gave the statement that exact number.

(When the time is up, you hear each participant, one by one, what they have written down and why. Let it become a conversation/discussion. The important thing here is to dive deep into why some people feel a statement is or isn't crossing the line, or why they think it is a grey zone. The discussion is what is important about the game – not so much reaching some kind of agreement about a number. It is important that all perspectives are heard. It may be a good idea to change who is first to speak, and to state explicitly that all thoughts and opinions matter.)

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*"You have always been my favourite"*

Condition 1: Female to male (co-workers)  
Condition 2: Male employee to female boss

Completely ok!      Grey zone      Crossing the line

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The statement is: "You have always been my favorite"

Write down whether – and to what degree – this statement is crossing the line or not when it comes to what you think is appropriate to say in your workplace.

The condition you have to take into account when giving the statement a number, is: The person expressing this is a female and the recipient is a male – they are co-workers with the same level of experience/status and years in the company. You will get 2 minutes or so to write down a number from 1-10 and the reason why you gave the statement that exact number.

(Hear what the participants have written down and why. Make room for a discussion where everybody is heard.)

Now you have to give the statement a number if the person expressing the statement is a male employee and the recipient is a female boss.

(Hear what each participants have to say about the statement and how this new condition influences their number and why.)

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*"You are so lovely"*

Completely ok!      Grey zone      Crossing the line

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The statement is: "You are so lovely"

(Tell each participant to write down whether – and to what degree – this statement is crossing the line or not when it comes to what you think is appropriate to say in your workplace. Give them 2 minutes or so to write down a number from 1-10 and the reason why you gave the statement that exact number.)

(When the time is up, you hear each participant, one by one, what they have written down and why. Let it become a conversation/discussion. The important thing here is to hear everybody out: why some people feel a statement is or isn't crossing the line, or why they think it is a grey zone. The discussion is what is important about the game – not so much reaching some kind of agreement about a number. It is important that all perspectives are heard. It may be a good idea to change who is first to speak, and to state explicitly that all thoughts and opinions matter.)



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*"You are so sexy"*

Completely ok!      Grey zone      Crossing the line

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The statement is: *"You are so sexy"*

(Tell each participant to write down whether – and to what degree – this statement is crossing the line or not when it comes to what you think is appropriate to say in your workplace. Give them 2 minutes or so to write down a number from 1-10 and the reason why you gave the statement that exact number.)

(When the time is up, you hear each participant, one by one, what they have written down and why. Let it become a conversation/discussion. The important thing here is to hear everybody out: why some people feel a statement is or isn't crossing the line, or why they think it is a grey zone. The discussion is what is important about the game – not so much reaching some kind of agreement about a number. It is important that all perspectives are heard. It may be a good idea to change who is first to speak, and to state explicitly that all thoughts and opinions matter.)

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*"Your top is see-through – if you look closely"*

Condition 1: Older male to younger female (co-workers)  
Condition 2: Female to male (co-workers)

Completely ok!      Grey zone      Crossing the line

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The first statement is: “Your top is see-through – if you look closely”

(Tell each participant to write down whether – and to what degree – this statement is crossing the line or not when it comes to what you think is appropriate to say in your workplace. The first condition they have to take into account is that the person saying the statement is an older man to a younger female – the two are co-workers. Give them 2 minutes or so to write down a number from 1-10 and the reason why you gave the statement that exact number.)

(When the time is up, you hear each participant, one by one, what they have written down and why. Let it become a conversation/discussion. The important thing here is to hear everybody out: why some people feel a statement is or isn't crossing the line, or why they think it is a grey zone. The discussion is what is important about the game – not so much reaching some kind of agreement about a number. It is important that all perspectives are heard. It may be a good idea to change who is first to speak, and to state explicitly that all thoughts and opinions matter.)

(Afterwards, ask the participants to think about how their thoughts about the statement change or not, if the condition changes, and the person who expresses the

statement is a female co-worker to a male co-worker. Make room for discussion.)

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*"I could see on Facebook you've been on holiday. You look good in swimwear"*

Completely ok!      Grey zone      Crossing the line

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

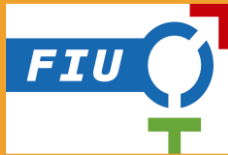
The statement is: "I could see on Facebook you've been on holiday. You look good in swimwear."

(Tell each participant to write down whether – and to what degree – this statement is crossing the line or not when it comes to what you think is appropriate to say in your workplace. Give them 2 minutes or so to write down a number from 1-10 and the reason why you gave the statement that exact number.)

(When the time is up, you hear each participant, one by one, what they have written down and why. Let it become a conversation/discussion. The important thing here is to hear everybody out: why some people feel a statement is or isn't crossing the line, or why they think it is a grey zone. The discussion is what is important about the game – not so much reaching some kind of agreement about a number. It is important that all perspectives are heard. It may be a good idea to change who is first to speak, and to state explicitly that all thoughts and opinions matter.)



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What have you learned by playing the game?  
(Open discussion)

(Ask the participants what they have learned about what makes sexual harassment, sexual harassment, and why it may be hard to say in advance – before knowing the concrete context – if a statement is or isn't crossing the line. Open up for a discussion and hear every participant about what they have learned.)



**Conclusion**

- Of course some cases of sexual harassment clearly cross the line. Some kinds of behaviour are never appropriate in any workplace or in any context.
- However, some cases depend highly on the situation: Who said what? To whom? In what tone? In what situation? Where?
- Gender, age, status, power, personal relationships, and much more will influence whether or not something is experienced as crossing the line
- And at last: People's different boundaries also determine what is and isn't crossing the line

A link for the game so that you can play with your co-workers:  
[http://fiu-ligestilling.dk/en/tools\\_materials/crossing-the-line-a-kickstarter-kit/](http://fiu-ligestilling.dk/en/tools_materials/crossing-the-line-a-kickstarter-kit/)

To sum up what we have learned today:

The point is not to say that all cases of sexual harassment is a question of context, different boundaries and so on. Some kind of behaviour are never appropriate in any workplace or in any context.

However, some cases depend highly on the situation: Who said what? To whom? In what tone? In what situation? Where?

Gender, age, status, power, personal relationships, and much more will influence whether or not something is experienced as crossing the line

And at last: People's different boundaries also determine what is and isn't crossing the line

Therefore, it is very important to be able to talk about boundaries with each other in a workplace: What is and isn't crossing the line. Because in those cases where it is not black and white, it is necessary to learn how to be very sensitive to context, situation, age, gender, power, status and all the other factors that may play into

whether or not something may be experienced as sexual harassment.