

Please review this document and keep it on hand so that you are prepared if you encounter a situation that makes you or others feel unsafe and/or uncomfortable.

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## Witnessing an Incident

Harassment at conventions is a high-profile issue in the SFF community right now. While we hope that there will not be any incidents at [convention name], you may witness a situation that makes you uncomfortable or that needs intervention. This document will cover how to avoid, prevent, or disrupt these situations.

Common attributes/examples of harassment:

- Unwanted touch, talk, or attention (even if these are "complimentary")
- Using words or gestures that may have racist/sexist/homophobic (etc) connotation
- The behavior persists after it became clear it was unwelcome
- The harasser may have a history, over multiple days or multiple cons, of this behavior
- The harassed people feel angry, scared, and cannot enjoy the con experience

It is important to remember that the person doing the harassing is responsible for the harassment, even if it is done "unknowingly". **The fault does not lie with the person who is feeling harassed.** A person being respectful will hear you say "I don't like that" and stop, even if they weren't intending to bother you with their action. A person being disrespectful will care only about what they want and not listen to what you are saying.

Clear communication and respect for boundaries may prevent many of these situations from escalating. In situations where the harasser knows he or she is out of bounds, we need **witnessing, intervention, and reporting** to stop it.

### Is this harassment?

One thing to watch for is people setting boundaries and those boundaries not being respected. Many of us are not taught to communicate directly about boundaries. Listen and watch for indirect cues—not just in your own interactions, but also in others'.

#### **Passive cues about boundaries:**

- Closed body language
- Limp or frozen posture and gestures
- Eyes that are looking down or to the side so that there is no eye contact

**Closed body language** may indicate that someone is feeling threatened: arms crossed, hunched, huddled, looking down, turning back, inching chair away, shrinking away from touch or attempted touch.

**Open body language** may indicate that someone feels comfortable about boundaries *at that particular moment*: relaxed eye contact, smiling, inviting or initiating touch--asking permission is nice--leaning in, moving closer.



- An apologetic or whiny tone of voice
- Sighing or shrugging
- Hesitant, unclear language
- Ignoring their harasser's voice, or presence
- Walking away; joining another group
- Responding with very generic positive statements ("That's nice"; "Uh-huh") or neutral statements ("Whatever") or with references to a boyfriend, spouse, authority figure, etc.

### **Aggressive cues about boundaries:**

Aggressive cues do signal boundaries, but they aren't usually the best way to end a boundary transgression because they make people defensive. These are often signs of a conflict that is going to escalate. They are also not a good choice for intervening in a conflict. Watch for these in yourself as well.

- Glowering face—lowered head, direct stare
- A tense, rigid posture
- An irritated or loud voice
- Jabbing or jerky body language and gestures
- Insulting language and loaded words
- Leaning forward into someone's face
- Crowding into the space of others
- Interrupting others impatiently
- Not listening
- Acting annoyed or angry

**Note:** Do NOT directly intervene in a violent situation, or one in which you do not feel safe. Get help, call hotel security or call the police if you feel the situation warrants. Your personal safety is important.

### **What should I do?**

Any situation that makes people uncomfortable or unsafe requires intervention. If the situation is having a negative impact on anyone – those directly involved or anyone observing the situation – take action if you are comfortable doing so.

If you decide to speak up in a harassment situation, you want to use *assertive* - not aggressive - body language and communication.

- Balanced, confident posture (like a superhero!)
- Make eye contact
- Neutral facial expression
- Language that is clear and respectful, such as, "Excuse me!" "Please stop!"
- Voice loud enough to be easily heard and positive instead of soft, hesitant, or angry
- A firm tone (not angry or pleading)



## What you can say/do to interrupt an active situation:

### Verbal response

- **Name the behavior** that is causing problems.
- State the **effect** the behavior is having.
- Say **what you want the person to do**. (You can say "please" if you want.)
- If you know their name, use it.

*"John, your comments are making me feel uncomfortable, and I want you to stop talking to me."*

*"Touching her like that is inappropriate and disturbing. Keep your hands to yourself."*

*"I don't like that you've been following me. I want you to stay away from me."*

### Handling the response

It is normal for people to dislike being told what to do. Be ready to follow up your boundary setting efforts if you get reactions like:

- **Denial**: "I never did/said/meant that...You misunderstood me."
- **Minimizing**: "You're overreacting.... It was just a joke"
- **Counterattacking**: "So, you're saying I'm no good...You're jealous... You're crazy... You're defensive."
- **Denying** your right to have a boundary: "You can't stop me. If you don't you will lose –our relationship/your job/your book deal."
- **Guilt** tripping: "I am so awful for saying that....I hate myself for having done that."

To maintain your boundary, first take a breath and get centered. Then decide what you want to do. Here are some options:

- **Restate your boundary**: The Broken Record Technique is especially useful when someone appears intoxicated or is indecisive on what to do next. (i.e. "Leave my room. LEAVE MY ROOM NOW!")
- **Acknowledge their feelings, but also restate your boundary**: "Now that you've told me how you feel, I expect you to do what I asked."
- **State a consequence** that is realistic and balanced. "Stop or I will leave...Stop or you'll have to leave...Stop or I will report you."
- **Widen the circle**, or threaten to: "If you still can't understand what I'm saying, we can ask [authority figure] to help us sort this out." This strips away the power of secrecy and sends the message that you are not ashamed to call attention to the situation in public.
- **Make a scene**. Let others around you know what is happening. To enlist the help of others, pick a person out of the crowd and address them directly with commands: "You in the red shirt: Please take a photo of what he is doing."
- **Write it down**. Writing things down gets people's attention and creates documentation for later. Photos/video are good too.



- **Leave and get help.** If someone is threatening or violent or any time your personal safety is at risk, leaving is almost always the safest thing to do.
- **Don't engage with their defensive reaction. Remember, you're not in a negotiation.** Don't make the conversation about them and their feelings.

## **Reporting**

[This an example. Please add or substitute your own convention policy and details below.]

If you are not a volunteer or convention staff member, please find a Safety Team member and tell them about the incident. If the targeted person or a witness is willing to make a report, assist them to the Safety Team. Even if they're not, please report the incident yourself so that the convention has a record of the incident.

