
SPEAK UP CIRCLE

Speak Up Guide for Women Circles on Sexual Harassment

You feel inspired by the #MeToo stories that women around the world are sharing. You are not alone. What you have experienced and felt hurt by, may be something that your mother, your neighbour or your colleague has experienced. You never knew their story. They never knew your pain.

For too long, women worldwide have stayed silent, accepting sexual harassment as part of their lives.

There is power in speaking up. When we start sharing our stories collectively, we break the spell. Sharing your story and taking action empowers you.

You now know that sexual harassment is a big problem. Then comes the question:
What do I do next?

“I hope we can form a community where a woman can speak up about abuse and not suffer another abuse by not being believed and instead being ridiculed. That’s why we don’t speak up - for fear of suffering twice, and for fear of being labeled and characterised by our moment of powerlessness”

- LUPITA NYONG’O

Let’s put an end to sexual harassment.

But how?

What can you do to stop sexual harassment - at the workplace and in public?

You and your friends can make a difference through forming a circle. Your little circle creates small ripples to help your group. Many Circles make waves. Over time.... a Tsunami.

Speak Up has prepared this guide for you to use in forming and leading a Speak Up Circle specifically in discussing sexual harassment.

If you’re moved to start a group, consider yourself a Speak Up Champion!

Forming a Speak Up Circle

A Circle is ideally between 8 to 12 people. You can form a circle with likeminded colleagues and friends. Agree on how often you would like to meet. Once a month is suitable for the typical busy woman. Some groups may wish to meet more frequently. It's your call.

We have prepared this guide for a 1 1/2 to 2 hour session. Play it by ear and stay open. You might finish earlier or find that some stories deserve more space and time. That's ok too. This is your space and your rules.

You can meet at a member's house or in a quiet private space within a park, cafe or hotel. Note that the circle meetings are personal and you want people to feel safe without worrying about being overheard by outsiders. It's important that members are able to bring their full attention during the meets - this includes ensuring that children and business don't intrude. It's unfair on everyone else who wants and needs to be heard and supported. So make sure children and work are attended to before your session begins.

You can meet online too, especially where you have made meaningful connections around the world. Use Skype or Zoom where you can see each other as a group.

The first circle meet is an introduction session where members get a chance to know each other and the concept of sexual harassment is discussed. You set shared agreements on how you operate as a group.

At subsequent sessions, members take turns to share their stories of sexual harassment within a safe and supportive space.

If you are the Champion, share this Guide with all Circle members before your meeting and request that they read through beforehand.



**SPEAK
UP**

Speak Up was founded by Animah Kosai in 2017. A lawyer for 23 years, Animah is passionate about supporting people in organisations to speak up - on corruption, unsafe conditions, workplace bullying and most definitely sexual harassment! Find out more on www.speakupatwork.com. We also advise organisations in making workplaces safe against harassment and sexual harassment.

Discover Speak Up Resources on Sexual Harassment: <https://speakupatwork.com/category/workplace-sexual-harassment/>

Share your story on the Speak Up site anonymously: <https://speakupatwork.com/share-your-story/>

- Speak Up @SpeakUpAtWork on [Twitter](#) & [Facebook](#)
- Speak Up founder, Animah Kosai on [LinkedIn](#)



**&
Listen**

Speak Up Circle - First Meet

The Champion welcomes everyone and is the Moderator. You and the members set the tone. The more relaxed the better, as sexual harassment can be a very personal topic. You want everyone to feel comfortable and safe. You can start with an opening meditation, stretching or even a dance! Do whatever works for you and the group.

I - Introduction

1. Introduce the purpose of the Circle. This includes:

- Helping women heal through **sharing their stories of sexual harassment** in a safe space,
- Creating awareness that **you are not alone**.
- Creating **empathy** which may move into other areas of your lives, including schools and workplaces.
- Learning the tools to use when encountering harassment.
- Supporting each member to **step into leadership** - addressing harassment and other areas.
- **Reclaiming your personal power** by no longer accepting harassment by others.
- Considering activism - addressing harassment in a larger societal context.

2. Introduce your selves

Share a few personal details (eg. family, job) and your interest and expectations in joining the Circle.

My Expectations (this can include the support you would like from the Circle):

Write, “after 6 months, I would like to ...”

Examples: I am able to respond firmly to a harasser saying that their action is inappropriate; I am able to focus on my job, feeling safe and appreciated).

After 6 months, I would like to ...

Don't worry if this seems unachievable. At this stage you don't need to figure out the “how”. Over the next few sessions, you will gain more clarity and confidence.

ESTIMATED TIME: 10 MINS

II - Creating the Circle Safe Space

A common understanding and shared values are important. At the first meeting, set out your shared agreement. They should include:

- **Confidentiality** Whatever is shared, stays within the Circle. If one of you feel you can support a member outside the Circle, do so only with the clear consent of that person. Some people may only want to share within the Circle and not be inclined to take further action. Respect their wishes.
- **Commitment** Attend and be punctual at meets. Participate and share.
- **Respect** members and give them the space to come up with their solutions. Each person has a wealth of wisdom within them and they

know themselves best. Unless specifically asked, refrain from advising. This is a listening space.

- **Presence** When someone speaks, give them your full attention. This means putting phones and other gadgets aside. Resist interrupting the story teller with questions. Listen openly, with empathy and without judgment.
- **Support** Be encouraging and supportive. Recognise that this may be the first time a woman is speaking about a painful incident that she has repressed. It is not easy to open up. Some participants may take a while to share. Allow everyone their comfortable space. There is no pressure on anyone to speak.
- **Understanding Breakdowns and Breakthroughs** As the stories can be painful, expect various emotions. It is ok to cry. Don't hold back. Releasing repressed emotions are healthy and you are doing so in a safe space. Allow people who cry that space to do so. Allow them to express it. If you sense there is a need for support at a deeper level, you can later suggest professional support. Note however that not everyone will welcome professional support. The Circle is not meant to heal trauma.
- **Re-centering** Many women are intuitively able to handle breakdowns. In order to re-centre a session, move into meditation or suggest a break to replenish the food. Ensure the person who has experienced a breakdown is accompanied by someone who is able to support her and bring her back to centre.

If anyone were to forget and in their eagerness interrupt a speaker, gently remind them of the Safe Space.

Write down your Shared Agreements here and read them out aloud to the Circle

ESTIMATED TIME: 15 MINS

III - Context Setting - Understanding Sexual Harassment

You can find definitions of sexual harassment from your country or organisation. Write it down in the box provided. Alternatively, you can use this definition (from UK's Citizen Advice). *Note that sexual harassment is the same worldwide and legal definitions in most jurisdictions are, in essence, the same.*

Sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature which:

- **violates your dignity**
- **makes you feel intimidated, degraded or humiliated**
- **creates a hostile or offensive environment**

Discuss what you understand about sexual harassment. Notice 3 key points:

1. The words “unwelcome” or “unwanted”
2. The focus on the impact of the harassment - on how the recipient feels and the environment.
3. The intention of the harasser is not a factor.

Write down the definition of Sexual Harassment

There are various forms of sexual harassment: Physical, Visual, Verbal, Non-Verbal and Psychological. Discuss the types that you may have encountered.

Sexual Harassment includes sexual coercion, i.e. unwelcome or inappropriate promise of rewards in exchange for sexual favours, for example a boss promises a promotion or threatens no promotion in expectation of sexual favours. Due to the power distance, it is harder for a person to speak up.

ESTIMATED TIME: 30 MINS

IV - Sharing and Listening



At the first session, you don't have to go too deep. Each person is welcome to share their sexual harassment story. To ensure everyone gets a turn, try not to exceed 5 minutes per person. Allow each person to speak uninterrupted. At the end, acknowledge her by thanking her for her share.

If you or anyone does not wish to share, that's ok too. You have complete power over when and what you choose to share.

Once everyone has had a chance to share their brief story, go around the circle again to allow each person to express what they feel in hearing each others' stories. Write down what you have experienced and learnt.

My experience in listening to others' shares



ESTIMATED TIME: 1 HOUR (MORE TIME IF OVER 10 PEOPLE)

V - Next Steps

Discuss what you wish to do to address sexual harassment as a group or individually. At this stage it does not have to be detailed. Some ideas:

- research on sexual harassment
- find out what your employer has in place
- start the conversation at work with colleagues or your boss
- talk to your children or teachers
- write an article on your blog or Facebook page

After the session, write out your next steps. This helps hold you accountable and you can share it at the next meeting.

My Next Steps

ESTIMATED TIME: 10 MINS

VI - Wrap Up

Agree on the date and venue for the next meeting. Appoint the moderator (you should take turns).

Remind everyone to write down their Take Aways (next page) after this session, ready to share at the next session.

At the next session, the Circle will go deeper into sexual harassment experiences. Two people can volunteer ahead of time to share their stories. Read section III of the Next Meeting in order to prepare.

Congratulations! This is the start of your Circle’s journey.

Speak Up Circle - Take Away

Write down your experience of sexual harassment. If you have several, chose one.
If this were to happen to you today, given what you know now, what would you do differently?

My Story

Stepping Into Leadership

- What is your role? For example, you are a mother/sister/ teacher/ manager/ coach/ writer.
- Who can you influence? For example your children/ colleagues/ readers/ clients

Now consider, in your role, and you may have multiple roles, ***what can I do to advance the awareness of sexual harassment with the goal of reducing it?***

What I can do

Speak Up Circle - Subsequent Meets

I - Opening

The Moderator welcomes everyone and confirms the two members who will share their stories. Begin with an opening meditation, an icebreaker or whatever makes the group feel relaxed.

Shared Agreements

Read out the shared agreements from the last meeting.

ESTIMATED TIME: 10 MINS

II - Checking In

Each member shares their:

- Next Steps (from last meeting)
- Leadership Role (in the Take Away from the first meeting and as may evolve after subsequent meetings)
- Support needed from the other members

After each member shares, others can offer types of practical support. For example, introduce a connection or help publicise on their social media.

ESTIMATED TIME: 15 MINS

III - Retelling My Experience of Sexual Harassment

Two members have volunteered to share their stories. Anticipate 30 mins for each person, including questions and feedback.

1. Telling Your Story

In sharing your story:

- **Tell the Circle what happened**
- **Explain what happened after the incident**
- **What I felt/experienced at the time and after**
- **Who I told**

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you”

- MAYA ANGELOU

- **What prevented me from (whichever applies)**
 - **stopping it**
 - **confronting the harasser**
 - **reporting it**
 - **getting support**

You now know more about sexual harassment and feel safer as you are supported by others. Reflect and complete this sentence: **If I knew this was harassment, that it was wrong and I would be supported, I would** _____

2. Noticing Your Responses

As you are listening, you may notice certain physical reactions, such as your stomach lurching, you clenching your fists or holding your breath. You may realise you feel anger or your hurt coming up. This is not unusual and indicates that her story is triggering something in you. Write this down. If you are comfortable, you can share this in Section IV (Reflecting & Responding)

My reaction

3. Validating Her

It can be very difficult telling a personal story in a group setting. Make her feel she is supported.

Listen with compassion and do not judge her or others in her story. Know that she has processed her feelings before she has shared them with you. Some women may still experience shock, sadness and anger. Others may have already processed this and do not need to relive the pain. Your responses should be sensitive to what she needs and not a projection of your emotions on the issue. You have written down your own feelings and if you wish to share you can do so later.

When she has finished sharing, thank her and always stay focused on her.

Each member is welcome to share their reflections on her story. Your reflections are for her and not about you. For example you might say, *I feel that was very brave of you to...* or *I'm so sorry you had to experience ...* And of course, you might want to hug her - if she welcomes it.

ESTIMATED TIME: 1 HOUR (FOR 2 PERSONS)

IV - Reflecting and Responding

1. Now you are welcome to ask questions of the two storytellers.
2. Next, each person gets to share what hearing the stories brought up for them, if they are comfortable doing so.
3. Discuss what support each storyteller should have had before, during and after the incident which could have avoided or reduced the impact of the harassment. Please note: no victim blaming! The conduct and appearance of the storyteller is not a factor. Rather, focus on the perpetrator and the environment.

Support which should have been in place

ESTIMATED TIME: 30 MINS

V - Moving Into Action

Based on your collective findings, **what action do you believe is needed to address sexual harassment?**

Action Needed

What can you and your Circle do to achieve this action within your spheres of influence? *Note: It is possible to increase your sphere of influence as you step further into your leadership role (i.e. the role you identified in the Take Away).*

What I can do	What others in the Circle Can Do

ESTIMATED TIME: 20 MINS (THIS MAY DIFFER DEPENDING ON THE NUMBER OF MEETINGS YOU HAVE HAD)

VI - Wrap Up

Agree on the date and venue for the next meeting. Appoint the moderator and the two persons sharing their story.

Speak Up Circle - After 6 Sessions... Moving into Action

Once your Circle has had several sessions, you may notice certain developments. Each member would have developed a stronger sense of standing up for herself and others when it comes to sexually harassing conduct in their presence.

Look back at the Expectations you wrote in your first session. Have you met your expectations? Have you made new discoveries - epiphanies about yourself, those around you, and even your harasser!

Write them down!

What I have discovered

You might find journaling useful.

Have you noticed? You are reclaiming your power!

6 Things you can do next

1. Explore New Topics

As you begin to Speak Up against sexual harassment, you will notice people around you becoming more mindful of how they behave.

You could start having conversations around the following with your Circle:

- The changes among your colleagues
- Your increased sense of empowerment
- Your awareness of micro-aggressions, sexism and offensive behaviour which you may have dismissed in the past
- Speaking to harassers about their conduct
- Supporting people who have been harassed
- Changing the workplace and schools in addressing sexual harassment
- Your own mindfulness before you say or do something which could hurt others

We have written and spoken extensively about sexual harassment and you can use the articles, videos and podcasts as topics in your circle.

2. Move into Action

You could start campaigns or initiatives to address sexual harassment in a bigger context.

We encourage you to share your initiatives on the Speak Up site as a Speak Up Champion! This way other Circles get to know what you are doing and you can change ideas and support each other.

3. Start a new Circle

You might decide the circle has come to a natural end, and start a new circle to support others.

4. Discover other Women with a Story

If you feel a yearning to communicate with others, there are many women who have shared their stories through books or videos on social media. Here are a few: [The Women Who Reclaimed Their Power Through Telling Their Story](#).

5. Share your Story

Inspired to share your story? You can do so publicly or anonymously with Speak Up.



Find us on www.speakupatwork.com.

Discover Speak Up Resources on Sexual Harassment: <https://speakupatwork.com/category/workplace-sexual-harassment/>

Share your story on the Speak Up site anonymously: <https://speakupatwork.com/share-your-story/>

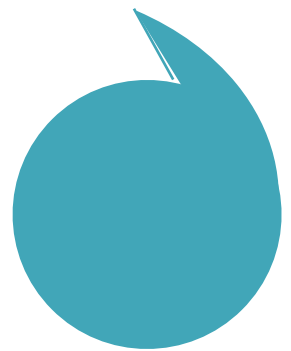
- Speak Up @SpeakUpAtWork on [Twitter & Facebook](#)
- Speak Up founder, Animah Kosai on [LinkedIn](#)

6. Make a Pledge to Speak Up and Intervene

Print and cut out your pledges. Put them on your work desk.



If I am sexually harassed again, I will tell my harasser



If I witness sexual harassment, I shall

