



## Street Harassment Discussion Group Guide

*(Feel free to adapt, remove, re-arrange, and add to this)*

### **Preparation:**

This guide is best for groups of up to 25 people. Allot for up to 90 minutes.

Materials: Flipchart, white/black board or something else to use for brainstorming actions + writing materials.

Optional Materials: Printed executive summaries from the [2014](#) and [2018](#) surveys. Printed quarter sheet flyers "[8 Ways to Respond to Street Harassment](#)." [SSH stickers or buttons](#).

### **Discussion:**

As the facilitator, introduce yourself and why this issue matters to you. Invite people to view this a safe space to talk about their stories and ideas. If it's a small enough group, you could ask them to introduce themselves (30 seconds or less each).

Ask: **Do you remember the first time you felt unsafe while in a public space like a street, park, public bus or store?**

Share your own answer.

**Invite them to pair-share their answer with someone next to them.** (2-3 minutes)

Feeling unsafe is not that uncommon. In the U.S., a 2014 Gallup Poll of adults found that 45% of women felt unsafe walking alone at night, as did 27% of men.

Let's define street harassment so that everyone is on the same page. SSH's definition is: Gender-based street harassment is unwanted comments, gestures, and actions forced on a stranger in a public space without their consent and is directed at them because of their actual or perceived sex, gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation.

Of course, people may also be targeted because of factors like their race, religion, nationality, disability, or class; some people are harassed for multiple reasons within a single harassment incident. No harassment is ever okay.

Gender-based street harassment ranges from legal acts like whistling, leers, kissy noises to persistent requests for a name/date/number, sexist, homophobic and transphobic slurs, sexually explicit demands or comments, to illegal acts like following, flashing, public masturbation, and sexual assault. It falls on the spectrum of gender-based violence.

Ask: **If you feel comfortable, with a quick show of hands, how many of you have experienced or witnessed these kinds of behaviors in public spaces?**

You're not alone. In the U.S, Stop Street Harassment (SSH) worked with survey firm GfK in 2014 to conduct the country's first large-scale nationally representative survey on the topic.

- a. It found 65% of women and 25% of men and experienced street harassment.
- b. Women were most often faced sexualized verbal harassment and men most often faced homophobic or transphobic slurs.

- c. Alarming, nearly 1 in 4 women total had been groped, 1 in 5 stalked, and nearly 1 in 10 forced to do something sexual.

In 2018, SSH worked with GfK again on another national study, this time on sexual harassment and assault in all locations. It was inspired by the #MeToo Movement which has focused heavily on workplaces, but the problem is so much bigger.

The survey found that 81% of women and 43% of men had experienced sexual harassment or assault at some point in their lives.

What is new about this survey compared with others is that it tracked harassment by location and showed that the top site for sexual harassment IS a public space. Slightly more women compared to 2014 reported that, at 69% and about 26% of men did too.

Some of the other more common locations for sexual harassment and assault were the workplace (38% of women and 13% of men); their own residence (35% of women and 13% of men); at school (30% of women and 14% of men); and online (25% of women and 11% of men.)

Ask: **When you think about your experiences of sexual harassment across your life, where has it happened the most for you?** (You can invite a few people to share with the full room or have them share in smaller groups of 3-4 people).

The 2018 survey found that among all locations, a public space was the place most people had their first experience of sexual harassment. In the 2018 survey, 57% of women and 42% of men said their first instance of sexual harassment occurred by age 17. An alarming 30% of women and 22% of men said their first experience happened by age 13.

Ask: **Where did your first experience of sexual harassment occur and how old were you?** (You can invite a few people to share with the full room or have them share in smaller groups of 3-4 people).

The survey showed that 88% of women and 86% of men experienced sexual harassment in more than one location and most indicated at least 4-5 locations. This means, maybe they experienced it on their way to or from school or work, at school or work and then also in an interpersonal relationship or online.

Ask: **How many of you have experienced sexual harassment in more than one location?** (You ask people to raise their hands to answer this question).

When sexual harassment becomes this ubiquitous, it may feel like it's hard to avoid and it may come to feel like a "normal" experience, one with which we feel we must put up with.

Of course, issues of sexual harassment do not affect people equally. Both studies showed that straight, able-bodied white men were the least likely to experience sexual harassment and sexual assault. LGBTQ-identified folks and persons with disabilities were among the demographics to face the highest rates of sexual harassment and assault.

Ask: **Why do these differences occur?** (Open it up for a few responses)

(Some things to possibly mention if others don't: sexual harassment, including street harassment, reflects the discrimination and oppression that exists in society. In areas with

homophobia, ableism, racism as well as sexism, persons in marginalized groups will experience street harassment the most.)

Street harassment can have a big impact on people's lives. These are examples of how:

- 1) It can negatively affect people, especially women, emotionally and make them fearful, like they have to constantly assess their surroundings.
- 2) It can escalate without warning into physical violence, causing many people, especially women, to feel on guard in public spaces and even wary to go places alone.
- 3) It can be traumatizing and re-triggering for those who have experienced sexual abuse before.
- 4) It can limit people's mobility and ability to live a full life. Too often we feel we must – or are told we must – change our lives to avoid harassers. We may change where we go, when, with whom, and how we dress. We may change our hobbies and habits, our routes and routines. SH can have a financial impact, like if we feel we must pay to exercise at a gym instead of outside or if we pay for a taxi instead of taking public transit or walking. It has even caused some people to move or quit jobs because of harassers.

For these reasons, street harassment is a human rights violation.

Ask: **How has street harassment affected you? Have you changed yourself or your life because of it?** (You can invite a few people to share with the full room or have them share in smaller groups of 3-4 people).

So, we can see that street harassment is a widespread problem, it starts early, and it affects our lives in profound ways. Let's talk about what can we do about it, both at an individual level and a community level.

(If you have access to a black/white board, flip chart paper or some other place to do brainstorming, this would be a good time to use it)

Ask: **First, let's brainstorm what we can do when we experience street harassment.**

(You can share suggestions from these webpages as needed:

<http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/strategies/moment/> & <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/strategies/beforeharassment/>. The book [\*50 Stories about Stopping Street Harassers\*](#) has 50 ideas!)

Ask: **Now, let's think about ideas for what we can do when we witness street harassment.**

(You can share suggestions from this webpage as needed:

<http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/strategies/bystander-responses/>)

Ask: **Lastly, what can we do at a community level to try to stop street harassment?**

(You can share suggestions from this webpage as needed:

<http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/toolkits/>. The books [\*Stop Street Harassment\*](#) and [\*Stop Global Street Harassment\*](#) are full of ideas, too.)

To conclude, remind people that street harassment is not their fault and however they choose to respond in the moment and later is okay. There is not “right” way and also, let them know that no action to stop street harassment is too small to make a difference.

## Resources:

- If they want to share their stories, they can submit them to the SSH blog.
- If they want more information about street harassment, they can read our books: <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/book/>.
- If they need emotional support or assistance, they can contact the National Street Harassment Hotline.



A poster for the National Street Harassment Hotline. The top half features a dark blue background with several red speech bubbles containing common street harassment phrases: "YO, SHORTY!", "SHAKE THAT ASS", "SMILE FOR ME", "HOW MUCH?", "PSST-PSST", "HEY, MAMASITA!", and "SEXY LEGS, BABY". The bottom half has a white background with the text "LÍNEA DE AYUDA NACIONAL PARA EL ACOSO CALLEJERO / NATIONAL STREET HARASSMENT HOTLINE" in bold black letters. Below this, it provides the toll-free number (855) 897-5910 and the website www.stopstreetharassment.org, noting that services are available in English and Spanish 24/7. At the bottom, there are three logos: the "STOP STREET HARASSMENT" logo, the "RAPE, ABUSE & INCEST NATIONAL NETWORK" logo, and the "defend yourself" logo with a pink heart and the tagline "Skills for recognizing harassment, abuse and assault".

YO, SHORTY!

SHAKE THAT ASS

SMILE FOR ME

HOW MUCH?

PSST-PSST

HEY, MAMASITA!

SEXY LEGS, BABY

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