



# Finding Help and Support

Being harassed and abused can be very traumatic and distressing. Often when you have been experiencing harassment, particularly over a long period of time, you may experience feelings of helplessness, depression and anxiety. There are a number of things you can do to get support and help you recover.

Every person's response to harassment and abuse is different. The way you react may depend on many factors including:

- The nature of the harassment. For example what happened and how long it went on for.
- Past experiences of harassment and abuse.
- Other stress or things happening in your life.
- The amount of emotional and practical support you have.
- The personal impact of the harassment. That means how you feel about it or what it means to you.

*"At first when the harassment started at work I just tried to forget about it. Then I started to feel edgy and depressed all the time. A few times I lashed out at my friends. When I finally told them about what was happening and started seeing a counsellor I was able to deal with the horrible feelings." Kate, 26, Dapto.*

## Common reactions to harassment

- **Fear.** If you have felt threatened you may be left feeling vulnerable and afraid. Being alone, or in the place where the harassment occurred, may trigger feelings of fear.
- **Disturbed sleep.** It is very common to have trouble sleeping after an unsettling experience.
- **Anger.** The experience of harassment may leave you feeling helpless and angry. Your emotions may range from irritability to rage. You may find yourself lashing out, even at people you care about.
- **Repeated thoughts about the situation.** If your experience of harassment has dominated your thoughts, you may find it hard to stop thinking about what has happened. These repeated thoughts may keep bringing up feelings of distress.
- **Feelings of depression/anxiety.** It is common to feel low or depressed when the harassment is happening. Sometimes these feelings can continue after the harassment has stopped. You might blame yourself or wish that things had happened differently. If your feeling of depression becomes unmanageable or if you have any thoughts of suicide it is vital that you seek professional help immediately. A qualified and experienced professional can help you manage and deal with these feelings.
- **Isolation.** If you have been harassed at a place where you need to work, study or live it might be difficult to go back to these places without being reminded of your experience. This may mean that you stop seeing people like your workmates, neighbours or colleagues. You might feel embarrassed about telling them what has happened.
- **Feeling 'switched on'.** After a period of harassment you might feel like you are extra sensitive to everything around you. You might have feelings of 'losing control'. Remember that these feelings are normal and will pass with time.

**LIVING FREE FROM FEAR**

**STOPPING HOMOPHOBIC HARASSMENT**





## What you can do

### 1) Talk to someone – a friend or professional.

It can help to talk to someone you trust about your feelings during and after your experience of harassment. Don't be afraid to call on friends for support. If your reaction to the harassment is so intense that it stops you from doing things that you would normally do, you should consider seeking professional help. Some numbers for support services are listed below.

### 2) Be kind to yourself

Trying to go back to life as normal after an experience of harassment can be difficult. You might feel like changing everything at once to try and forget the experience. Treat yourself gently and remember that you have been through a stressful experience. Make sure that you take things slowly ask for help when you need it.

### 3) Do things to de-stress

Every person has different things that they do to de-stress but exercising or any activity that burns energy has been known to assist in dealing with stress and anxiety. Remember to do things that you enjoy and ask your friends to join you in doing them.

### 4) Keep yourself safe

Experiencing harassment can make you fearful of your safety. Make sure that you keep yourself as safe as possible to help deal with your feelings of fear. If you feel scared or embarrassed about going back to the place where you have been harassed take a supportive friend or family member with you.

## Services that can help

### Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project (a project of ACON)

The AVP takes reports of violence, abuse and harassment from victims and witnesses and can provide information and referrals, and advocacy where appropriate.

<b>AVP Report-Line</b>	<b>(02) 9206 2116</b>
<b>Free Call</b>	<b>1800 063 060 (outside Sydney)</b>
<b>General Enquires</b>	<b>(02) 9206 2066</b>
<b>TTY</b>	<b>(02) 9283 2088</b>
<b>E-mail</b>	<b>avp@acon.org.au</b>

### Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service

Volunteer phone counselling and referral service provided seven nights a week from 4pm to midnight.

**(02) 8594 - 9596**  
**1800 805 379 (outside Sydney)**

### Telephone Interpreting Service

Interpreting service for people who speak a language other than English.

**131 450**

### ACON regional branches

ACON branches can make referrals to lesbian and gay friendly services (e.g. medical, counsellors) in their areas.

<b>Hunter</b>	<b>(02) 4927 6808</b>
<b>Illawarra</b>	<b>(02) 4226 1163</b>
<b>Northern Rivers</b>	<b>(02) 6622 1555</b>
<b>Mid-North Coast</b>	<b>(02) 6584 0943</b>

### Victims Support Line (VSL)

The VSL provides support and referral to victims of crime. Call for information about the Approved Counselling Scheme (ACS) or to get information sent out to you. The AVP has ACS application forms and can help you fill them out.

<b>VSL</b>	<b>(02) 9374 3000</b>
<b>Free Call</b>	<b>1800 633 063 (outside Sydney)</b>
<b>TTY</b>	<b>(02) 9374 3000</b>
	<b>www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs</b>

