Surviving Harassment

Guidance For Trans People for Surviving and Coping with Street and Online Harassment

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SPECTRUM
Waterloo Region's
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Surviving and Coping with Harassment – Guidance for Trans People

Many trans and gender diverse people deal with street harassment and other forms of violence in public every day. Street harassment can have a significant impact on our mental health, our well-being and our sense of safety.

What we know:

- 84% of trans people avoid at least one public space due to fears of harassment and discrimination.

- Street harassment has a proven negative impact on mental health.

- Safety planning is an effective way to reduce risk and best protect yourself should you face harassment.

This resource was created to help individual trans people support themselves if they are subjected to street harassment.

How to Protect Yourself and Reduce the Impact of Street Harassment

1: Plan Ahead

Given that public space is often unsafe for trans people, it is important to plan ahead to reduce the risk of harassment. While trans people should never have to change their behaviour, or avoid certain areas, due to the risk of harassment, harassment is a real and significant risk for us, and we can take steps to proactively protect ourselves.

Key considerations to plan for:

- **Do you have a safer way home?** If you are heading out, particularly in the evening, do you have a safe route home after? You can plan to reduce your risk by asking a friend to drive you home or walk home with you after an event.

- **Do you have a safe place in case of an emergency?** Proactively identify places, including shops, community spaces or other locations in your community, where you feel safe and know you can access support? By identifying local safer places, you can more easily escape unsafe situations.

- **Who is your support person?** In moments of crisis, having a friend in our corner makes a big difference. You can plan ahead of time to know who in your life is able to support you should you be triggered by an experience of harassment.

- **Can you stay with a group?** While all people should be safe alone outside at any and all times, that is not the case for many people, including trans people. Sticking with a group, if and when possible, is a highly effective tactic to minimize risk.

- **Can you defend yourselves?** By taking self-defense classes, or otherwise doing what we can to learn how to better defend ourselves in instances of harassment, we can both build our confidence and become better equipped to escape an unsafe situation, should the need arise.

2: Put Safety First in Instances of Harassment

Every trans person has the right to determine the best course of action when subjected to street harassment, but we can also deploy strategies to de-escalate conflict and prioritize our own health, safety, and well-being during instances of harassment.

Important: harassment of trans people varies. In some situations, our physical safety is place in jeopardy. In such situations, the best option is always to leave the space and get somewhere safe.

- **Ignoring it:** While keeping our cool in moments of harassment is *not a fair expectation*, ignoring instances of harassment, pretending we didn't hear, or continuing to walk away at a steady rate, is often an effective way to minimize risk.

- **De-Escalating:** If we are not able to leave the situation, we can attempt to placate or de-escalate. We can politely decline interest or mention that we are in a rush while walking away. While de-escalation isn't always a viable option, it can help keep a situation from worsening in the moment.

- **Fleeing the area:** If our safety is at immediate risk, or the instance of harassment seems to be escalating, the best option is often to leave as quickly and urgently as possible. We can run to the nearest shop, to a more populated area, or to another previously identified safer space for us.

- **Contacting emergency services:** If you are worried about your immediate safety, or are the victim of violence, you should contact emergency medical or police services, if you feel safe doing so.

3: Caring for Yourself After Harassment Occurs

Dealing with street harassment is exhausting. If it is a big part of your life, it can have a significant impact on your daily happiness and well-being, if you have to be on guard whenever you are in public. Caring for yourself after experiences of harassment could not be more important. By caring for ourselves in those moments, we remember that we do not deserve the violence that we face, and that we are deserving of support, safety and compassion.

After an incident of harassment, you can:

- **Remind yourself of your value:** While it may seem strange in the moment, simply taking a breath and reminding ourselves that we don't deserve the harassment we experience does matter. When harassment is ongoing, we can internalize the experience and blame ourselves for systemic injustices that *we are not responsible for*.

- **De-brief with a trusted person:** While everyone copes with harassment differently, talking to a friend, colleague or loved one about your experience can be an effective way to process the hurt and fear you experienced. Having someone to talk to also helps remind us that there are many people in this world who care for and support us, even if it doesn't always feel that way.

- **Practice Self-Care:** Taking time to decompress and care for our mental health after an instance of harassment is important. We can read a good book, watch our favourite show, and find other calming or mindfulness activities that help us feel good and grounded.

Coping with Anti-Trans Media as a Trans or Gender Diverse Person

Mainstream media is often ill-equipped to cover or talk about trans issues and trans people. Trans rights and trans people are often considered 'up for debate', and sometimes, the media seems fixated on trans issues in a harmful and negative way. Trans people are regularly bombarded with trauma and tragedy when trans issues are covered by the media, and this can have a harmful impact on us. Here are some tips for managing negative media coverage of trans people:

1) **Unplug:** When the media is talking about trans issues in a way that causes harm, it is important to remind ourselves that we can unplug and disengage. We are not obligated to read the articles or scroll through transphobic posts. We can unplug.

2) **Find Affirming News Sources:** There are many trans-inclusive media outlets around the world. Publications like PinkNews and Xtra Magazine feature positive and uplifting stories about trans people and trans identities. Focusing on positive media coverage can help us recognize the immense contributions trans people make to their communities, as opposed to negative coverage from other sources.

3) **Connect with community:** When trans issues are in the media, particularly when issues are sensationalized or trans people's rights are framed as a danger or threat, connecting back to our community can help us feel seen and supported. Our communities are always best equipped to care for us in moments like these, and simply being in community spaces can help ground us in the beauty, brilliance, and resilience of our communities.

4) **Block and Mute Liberally:** If you're finding yourself immersed in anti-trans media coverage, or, as happens for some trans people, you find your social media isn't always a safe place for you, it can have an impact on your mental health and well-being. You deserve virtual spaces where you can be yourself, and where your rights and identity aren't constantly questions. When bigotry comes up on your feed, you have every right to block and mute liberally. You deserve safe environments without having to manage discriminatory comments.

5) **Don't Read the Comments:** Comment sections on mainstream media news articles, and on many social media platforms, often draw out transphobic and homophobic people. While reading the comment section – or getting into an argument in the comments – can be tempting, it is often a source of stress and anxiety. Avoiding comment sections is a good way to reduce the impact of transphobic media and messaging on your well-being.