

MIT Stopit and Harassment on Campus

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When do I contact Stopit?

Stopit is a confidential on-the-record venue for reporting harassment and other inappropriate behavior that occurs electronically - for example through email, a website, or instant message.

To report an incident, email stopit@mit.edu.

What will happen after I email Stopit?

Staff who monitor Stopit will work with other staff around MIT to ensure that the case is handled by the most appropriate office. The goal of Stopit is to get the unwelcome behavior to stop, not to discipline.

It's becoming harder to determine the source of many emails and other electronic messages, so many incidents go unsolved. Still, to assist us in producing a speedy resolution, [forward the full headers](#), as well as the body, of any messages you are providing. For other electronic communications or materials, provide as much contextual information that you can.

What other options do I have as a victim of harassment?

Any member of the community who is victimized by, observes, or has knowledge of a criminal action (or other emergency) should immediately report such action or emergency to the [MIT Police](#) or the Dean on Call by dialing x3-1212 from any campus telephone or 617-253-1212 from a cellular phone.

In **emergency** situations, community members may dial "100" from any campus telephone or push the red button of a blue light emergency telephone and be directly connected to the MIT Police dispatcher.

For **non-emergency** situations, report the incident to an appropriate supervisor or a staff member in Human Resources or the Division of Student Life.

As mentioned above, Stopit's philosophy is to try to get the unwanted, unwelcome behavior to stop. To that end, we provide advice, guidance and general technical support to all concerned. IS&T does not pursue private disciplinary actions. If you feel that pursuing more formal complaints are desirable, you should refer to [MIT Policy section 9.6 on Complaint and Grievance Procedures](#), to [Guidelines for Raising Complaints about Harassment](#) or contact [MIT Human Resources](#), the [Office of Student Citizenship](#) or the [Ombuds Office](#).

Harassment on Campus

Freedom of expression is essential to the mission of a university. So is freedom from unreasonable and disruptive offense. Members of the MIT community are encouraged to avoid putting these essential elements of our university to a balancing test. People who are offended by matters of speech or expression should consider speaking up promptly and in a civil fashion, and should be able to ask others to help them to express concern in a professional manner.

[MIT Policy section 9.5 on Harassment](#) defines it as:

"any conduct, verbal or physical, on or off campus, that has the intent or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual or group's educational or work performance at MIT or that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive educational, work, or living environment. Some kinds of harassment are prohibited by civil laws or by MIT policies on conflict of interest and nondiscrimination.

Harassment on the basis of race, color, sex, disability, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or age includes harassment of an individual in terms of a stereotyped group characteristic, or because of that person's identification with a particular group."

A short history of Stopit

In 1992, MIT was in the third year of a campus-wide dialog to tackle the problem of harassment of all kinds, in all forms. It was also a time when increasing amounts of MIT's day-to-day activities were moving online and reports of harassment by electronic communications were on the rise. Out of these discussions came Stopit, an easy to use, confidential method for members of the MIT community to ask for help if they find themselves being the target of, or witness to, harassment. It still remains available for such cases today.

When the staff from the offices of Information Systems (now Information Services & Technology), the Provost, the Dean for Student Affairs (now the Dean for Student Life and Dean for Undergraduate Education) and the Ombudsperson met in 1992 to address the potentially growing threat of harassment to campus civility, the VP for Information Systems was asked, "How can we take action against on-line harassment and at the same time pursue our traditional stance of vigorous defense of free speech?" The VP took this question to the Ombudsperson who suggested that--~~in line with MIT policy~~--a person offended by speech has a free speech right to express that sense of offense and ask for the perceived offense to stop. IT staff decided to try this idea to see if it worked. From the beginning of the program's inception, almost 100% of those in the MIT community who received a message to stop the offending activity, did in fact change their behavior.

Stopit@ in fact quickly became a national model, and the subject of a well-known article by an author who had been on the IS staff at the time:

"(From our conversations) grew a recognition that averting and stopping antisocial and unethical behavior was sometimes more important than punishing offenders. And out of this recognition grew a simple set of mechanisms designed to stop harassment and improper use quickly, while keeping options for more traditional sanctions open.

The Stopit mechanisms, as they came to be known, were based on a simple proposition: Most offenders, given the opportunity to stop uncivil behavior without having to admit guilt, will do so. The Stopit mechanisms thus were designed to do two things: to discover computer misbehavior rapidly, and to communicate effectively with its perpetrators. The overarching goal is just what the name suggests: to stop it... [The mechanisms] encourage victims who feel they are in danger to call MIT Police immediately, and to provide a clear "if you can't figure out what to do" path to us. The second Stopit mechanism is that path: the mailing address. [1]"

[1] Much of this paragraph is drawn from the article "Promoting Network Civility At MIT: Crime & Punishment, Or The Golden Rule?" by Dr. Gregory A. Jackson, Director of Academic Computing, MIT Information Systems (1991-1996).