

Not “Just a Joke”

A video resource about humour in construction



Facilitator's guide
2025



Overview

Not “Just a Joke” is a video resource about humour in construction workplaces. The goal of the resource is to make viewers more aware of:

- how workplace humour can be used in positive and negative ways
- how negative humour can cross the line and become sexual harassment, discrimination and/or bullying, and
- what individuals can do to help maintain a respectful workplace culture of positive humour.

The resource is comprised of 10 short sections. Each section can be viewed independently or screened to a group of people in a facilitated session. Without pausing for group discussions, the resource runs for approximately 12 minutes.

This guide summarises the content of the video resource. In a group session, the facilitator may pause between sections for group discussion. Some discussion questions are posed within the video resource. This guide suggests some additional discussion questions for facilitated group sessions.



Scan this QR code to access the video resource, or click the text below:

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When one section ends, the next will start automatically. For a first viewing, it is best to watch the sections in the order in which they are sequenced. You can revisit specific sections by selecting them from the playlist.

Video summaries

1) Positive and negative humour

- Positive humour is respectful – it brings people together and makes people feel welcome.
- Negative humour is the opposite – it is disrespectful, divides people and makes people feel isolated.
- Finding something funny is no excuse for disrespecting the people you work with.

Discussion questions: Think about the humour that you use, experience or observe in your workplace. Does this humour bring people together and make them feel welcome? Does it ever do the opposite?

2) What does positive humour look like?

- Humour can be a great way to relieve stress and bond with your workmates.
- But remember to think before you make a joke. If there's a good chance that it will embarrass or insult someone then just don't say it.

Discussion questions: Can you think of examples of humour that helped to relieve stress or helped you bond with teammates? Why did this humour have this effect? Would things be different with other people?

3) Taking responsibility

- If you offend someone, even by accident, the best thing to do is to take responsibility and apologise.
- However, some cases of negative humour are so inherently disrespectful that they should not be treated as jokes that went wrong.

Discussion questions: Take a moment to think about when humour crosses the line for you. What are some things that you think should never be joked about at work? Why should these things be avoided?

Video summaries (cont.)

4) Harassment, not humour

- Numerically, women are underrepresented in the construction industry, and their experience of humour in construction can often be quite different to men.
- A recent survey of women in the NSW construction industry shows that 65% of women had experienced sexual harassment at work.
- Any unwelcome sexual advance or conduct towards someone is sexual harassment. This can be physical or verbal and saying "It's just a joke" is never an acceptable excuse.
- Marsha's story: *"This group of men would call me 'the safety slut' over the radio... they didn't care if I heard them... they made comments about my body or the girls doing traffic. They were also constantly sending each other disgusting videos and showing them to me... they just laughed like it was all a joke."*

Discussion question: Which parts of Marsha's story could be identified as sexual harassment?

Answer: All of them. It doesn't matter if the men are not speaking directly to Marsha, or the traffic controllers – they are still being sexualised. Sharing inappropriate sexual content can also constitute sexual harassment.

5) Sexual harassment and sexism

- Making jokes about women who are not present, or women in general, creates a workplace culture of negative humour and sexism.
- Sexist humour refers to any jokes that imply that someone is inferior based on their gender.
- Sexual harassment and sexism often overlap with each other, and both are unacceptable.
- Emma's story: *"So many men make the same stupid jokes, saying that I belong in the kitchen... they act like women are useless... I wouldn't call it humour, it's just sexism pretending to be funny."*

Discussion question: Have you experienced or witnessed humour being used in the workplace to disguise unacceptable views or behaviours, such as sexism or racism?

6) Impacts

- Sexual and sexist jokes at work can damage women's health and careers.
- It makes no difference if someone delivers a sexual or sexist comment in a serious way or a joking way, the impacts can be equally damaging.

Discussion question: What do you think these impacts mean for the construction industry's ability to attract and retain women?



Video summaries (cont.)

7) Discrimination and bullying

- Any joke that discriminates against someone's personal characteristics, such as race, age, religion, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity is unacceptable.
- Bullying is when a person or group of people repeatedly and intentionally cause harm to another person or group. Positive humour has to be positive for everyone.
- Brooke's story: *"I was bullied for months... so I left the project. I had lost all my confidence, became very unwell, it was horrible. They would say it was just banter, but it wasn't. Banter's supposed to be back and forth, this was just bullying."*

Discussion question: When does workplace banter become discrimination or bullying?

8) Reporting

- Many people choose to not to report unacceptable humour because they believe it would damage their work relationships and career.
- In some cases, they might even laugh along or try to fit in with the people making offensive jokes, in the hope that that won't be targeted further.
- People who are in a minority group in their workplace can often feel an additional pressure to not "rock the boat" by reporting incidents.
- May's story: *"When I first started, I tried to fit in and be one of the boys... Eventually though, I just started switching off from it and tried to pretend I couldn't hear the bad stuff... I could have reported them, but I was just an apprentice. I didn't want to be seen as that overly sensitive girl who can't take a joke."*

Discussion questions: Is there anyone at your workplace who could be reluctant to speak up about negative humour due to their age, position, or minority status? What would make it easier for them to speak up about negative humour? What can workmates do to help?

9) Being an active bystander

- People affected by negative humour at work will feel more confident about calling it out when they know they are supported by a culture of positive humour.
- Being an active bystander means that when you witness humour that crosses the line, you take action to prevent harm or improve the situation.
- Sarah's story: *"I was at a work function and someone made a horrible joke about me in front of a big group... so I left the party... If any of those men standing there had said something or defended me in any way, I probably wouldn't have left. But no one did, they just laughed."*

Discussion question: What could an active bystander say or do if they witness negative humour targeting someone?

10) Recap and reflection

To maintain a culture of positive humour, remember:

- think before you make a joke
- apologise if you're in the wrong, and
- intervene as an active bystander if you see someone cross the line.

Discussion question: What are some specific things you could do to help create a culture of positive humour where you work?

Additional resources

For more information about prevention of sexual harassment, discrimination and bullying or dealing with this behaviour if you think it is occurring in your workplace, visit:

safework.nsw.gov.au

nsw.gov.au/business-and-economy/respect-at-work

humanrights.gov.au

fairwork.gov.au



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Contact

If you experience any technical faults or have difficulty accessing the training videos, please contact Dr. Jack Clarke:

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For more training videos and interactive resources, visit the Play It Safe hub:
rmit.edu.au/playitsafe