

GLOSSARY

THIS GLOSSARY provides simple definitions for key terms bolded in the FAQs, but it is not legal advice, and some legal definitions will vary from state to state. For more detailed legal information, you should talk with a lawyer.

Actual malice: When someone makes a statement knowing that it is false or not caring that it is very likely false.

Answer: In a **lawsuit**, the document **filed** by the **defendant** that contains their responses to the **plaintiff's complaint**.

Anti-SLAPP law: A law that protects people who speak out about misconduct from being targeted by a **SLAPP**.

Appeal: To ask a higher court to change a lower court's decision. The appellate court can "affirm" (agree with) or "reverse" (disagree with) the lower court's decision. It can also "vacate and remand," which means getting rid of the lower court's decision and telling it to re-decide the case based on what the appellate court said.

Assembly or association. Your right to assembly or association includes joining a group of people to promote a shared interest.

Civil protection order: A court order that requires a person to stop doing something, like requiring your harasser to stay away from you or to stop contacting you. Depending on your state and the relationship between you and your abuser, it might be called a "protective order," "injunctive order," "restraining order," or something else.

Claim: A formal demand for a person to repair a wrong or injury.

Complaint: In a **lawsuit**, the document that states what the **plaintiff** thinks the **defendant** did wrong. In a non-lawsuit setting, a document that asks an organization (like a school, employer, or agency) for help with misconduct.

Dating violence: Insults, threats, violence, and/or **stalking** from someone you are dating or used to date. Dating violence is also called "intimate partner violence."

Defamation: A false statement that harms someone's reputation.

Defendant: In a **lawsuit**, the person who is being sued by the **plaintiff**.

Defense: A reason given by the **defendant** in a **lawsuit** about why the defendant should win. A defense can be based on facts or procedure.

Deposition: A formal interview of a **plaintiff**, **defendant**, or other person (like a witness) under oath that aims to collect information for a **lawsuit**. The interview is recorded in writing, audio, or video.

Discovery: In a **lawsuit**, a process where the **plaintiff** and **defendant** get **evidence** and information from each other.

Dismiss: A court's decision to end a **lawsuit**.

Domestic violence: Insults, threats, violence, and/or **stalking** from someone you are dating or used to date, living with or used to live with, or have a child with. Domestic violence is also known as "intimate partner violence."

Evidence: In a **lawsuit**, a fact or thing that is used to prove the **plaintiff's** or **defendant's** side of the story.

File: To start a **lawsuit** or a **complaint** with a school, employer, agency, or other organization.

Government proceeding: A government meeting or hearing, such as a lawsuit, agency investigation, legislative hearing, school board meeting, or workers' rights commission.

Judge: A person whose job is to run a courtroom and decide the outcome of a **lawsuit**.

Jury: A group of six to 12 people who decide the outcome of a **lawsuit**.

Lawsuit: A formal dispute between two or more people or organizations that is **filed** with a court.

Lawyer: A person whose job is to offer advice about the law or represent someone in a legal matter. Lawyers are also called “attorneys.”

Libel: Defamation that is written.

Motion: In a **lawsuit**, a document that asks the court to do something specific, like end the lawsuit or give more time to **answer a complaint**.

Negligence: When someone fails to act as a reasonable person would (when they should have known to do something but didn’t do it).

Nondisclosure agreement: An agreement that prohibits someone from publicly sharing certain information, like information about harassment or an investigation of harassment.

Nondisparagement agreement: An agreement that prohibits someone from saying anything bad about the other side, such as their school or employer.

Petition: Asking your government to fix a bad outcome or change a policy. In most states, your right to petition includes speaking at a **government proceeding** or talking about an issue being considered by a government proceeding.

Plaintiff: In a **lawsuit**, the person who sues the **defendant**.

Press: Your right to press includes publishing information in the news and other media.

Private figure: Someone who is not widely known by the public.

Public figure: Someone who is widely known by the public.

Retaliation: Punishment or backlash against someone who speaks out or reports misconduct. The legal definition of retaliation refers to a school punishing you because you reported harassment or other discrimination as a student, or an employer punishing you because you reported harassment or other discrimination as an employee.

Safe space: A place that gives you physical and emotional safety. You can find safe spaces in school organizations, support groups for survivors of **sex-based harassment**, or among friends.

Safety plan: A personalized set of actions that can help keep you safe. For more on making a safety plan, check out these guides from **Love Is Respect** and the **National Domestic Violence Hotline**.

Service: In a **lawsuit**, the process of telling the **defendant** they are being sued by giving them the **complaint** and other documents related to the **lawsuit**.

Settlement: An agreement outside of court between the **plaintiff** and **defendant** to do certain things to drop the **lawsuit**.

Sex-based harassment: Unwanted conduct based on sex. Sex-based harassment includes sexual harassment, **sexual assault**, **dating violence**, **domestic violence**, and sex-based **stalking**. It also includes unwanted conduct (whether sexual or non-sexual) based on your gender, pregnancy, sexual orientation, or transgender status.

Sexual harassment: Unwanted conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment includes unwanted “jokes,” insults, rumors, gestures, messages, pictures, videos, kissing, or touching, including **sexual assault**.

Sexual assault: Unwanted touching of a sexual nature, including rape.

Slander: Defamation that is spoken.

SLAPP: A **lawsuit** aimed at intimidating someone from speaking out about misconduct or **retaliating** against them for speaking out. Short for “Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation.”

Speech: In most states, your right to speech means speaking in a public place about an issue of public interest.

Stalking: Being followed by someone you know or don’t know in a way that makes you afraid for yourself or someone else.

Statute of limitations: The deadline for **filing a lawsuit** or other **complaint**.

Support system: A network of people who can give you practical or emotional support. This can include family members, friends, or mentors whom you feel comfortable speaking with about your experiences.

Title IX: A federal law (pronounced “title nine”) that prohibits sex discrimination in schools that receive federal funding. Title IX requires schools to address **sex-based harassment** that affects a person’s access to education.

Title VII: A federal law (pronounced “title seven”) that prohibits employers from discriminating against someone based on race, color, national origin, sex (including pregnancy, sexual orientation, and gender identity) or religion. Title VII requires employers to address **sex-based harassment** in the workplace.

Trial: In a **lawsuit**, the process of showing **evidence** to a court about what happened. After seeing the evidence, a **judge** or **jury** decides the outcome of the lawsuit.