

Meta adds 'personal boundary' tool after virtual world harassment

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Meta stops avatars from getting too close to one another to thwart unwanted touching in its Horizon virtual worlds.

Facebook parent Meta began rolling out Friday a minimum distance between users' avatars in its virtual reality Horizon network after reports

of harassment, one of the thorny issues for its metaverse vision.

The "personal boundary" function in the immersive platform, where people can socialize virtually, puts a ring of space around users' digital proxies.

"A personal boundary prevents anyone from invading your avatar's [personal space](#)," Horizon vice president Vivek Sharma wrote.

"If someone tries to enter your personal boundary, the system will halt their forward movement as they reach the boundary," Sharma added.

The new function comes after complaints have emerged in press reports and in [social media](#) or blog posts of incidents of harassment.

"Within 60 seconds of joining—I was verbally and sexually harassed," one user wrote in a blog of her experience.

"A horrible experience that happened so fast and before I could even think about putting the safety barrier in place. I froze," she added.

The boundary function is turned on by default, said Sharma, who added users will still be able to bump fists or give one another high-fives.

Horizon already has an anti-harassment feature that makes an avatar's hands vanish if it tries to inappropriately touch another virtual character, according to its creator.

Meta opened its Horizon Worlds virtual reality platform to the public in North America in December, in a step toward building its metaverse vision for the future.

Facebook rebranded itself Meta last year to move past being a scandal-

plagued social network and toward its plans to build a virtual universe blurring the lines between the physical world and the digital one.

But critics of the [social networking](#) giant fear that certain mass phenomena observed online, such as harassment or misinformation, will be reproduced in these ultra-immersive worlds.

Horizon Worlds is far from a fully realized metaverse, which even Meta concedes will require years of work and significant technological advances.

But headset-wearing users in the United States and Canada can now gather with friends or others, play games and build their own virtual worlds on Horizon as long as they are 18 years old and have the proper equipment.

"It's an important step, and there's still much more work to be done," Sharma wrote of the new safety feature.

Options being explored include letting people adjust the distance for their personal boundaries, he added.

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