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U2C1L5

Sexual Harassment/Assault

Key Words:

Date Rape

Perpetrator

Sexism

Sexual Harassment

Vulnerable

What You Will Learn to Do

Take action to prevent and/or stop sexual harassment and assault

Linked Core Abilities

- Communicate using verbal, non-verbal, visual and written techniques
- Take responsibility for your actions and choices
- Treat self and others with respect

Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- Determine the potential consequences of sexual harassment/assault for the individuals involved
- Assess the role of individual point of view in determining what sexual harassment is
- Locate resources for assisting victims of sexual harassment or assault

Introduction

Peer **sexual harassment** is a problem for both girls and boys. The effects of sexual harassment can negatively affect students' lives well past high school. Students who encounter sexual harassment might miss more school, decrease the quality of their schoolwork, skip or drop classes, or exhibit lower grades, friend loss, tardiness and truancy. These symptoms can ruin chances for college admission or merit scholarships, and can lead to fewer career choices and lost opportunities for a bright future. Plus, students who are sexually harassed are typically undergoing a wide variety of emotions.

Physical symptoms of sexual harassment include sleep disturbance and appetite changes. Students may feel angry, upset, and threatened, which contributes to lowered self-esteem and confidence.

Examples of Sexual Harassment

- Inappropriate comments, jokes, gestures, or looks
- Sexual pictures, photographs, illustrations, messages, or notes
- Sexual messages/graffiti
- Sexual rumors about someone
- Calling students gay or lesbian
- Spying on students in dressing rooms or showers
- Flashing or "mooning" others
- Touching, grabbing, or pinching others in a sexual way
- Pulling at clothing in a sexual way
- Intentionally brushing against someone in an inappropriate way
- Pulling someone's clothing off or down
- Blocking someone's way, or cornering him or her in a sexual way
- Forcing someone to kiss you
- Forcing someone to do something sexual, other than kissing

Many students have reported sexual harassment as the norm in their school. Aside from inappropriate language, rumors, and inappropriate touching, sexual assaults and rapes have also been reported on some school campuses and in school buildings. When this happens, everyone is a victim. Students begin to see school as an intimidating, hostile, and unsafe place. They feel **vulnerable** and may even alter their own behaviors in attempt to decrease that sense of vulnerability.

Most of the literature on sexual harassment indicates that over 90 percent of the time, males are the **perpetrators** of sexual harassment against females. Recent studies, however, have documented a high level of sexual harassment is experienced by boys, as well as girls.



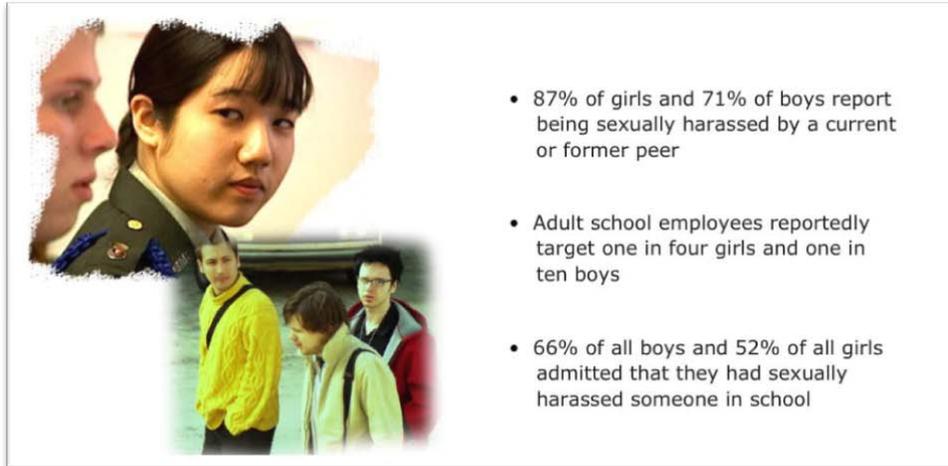
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Sexual harassment is a specific type of sexual discrimination that has been defined by the courts over the past 30 years. Schools are required to maintain a grievance procedure that allows for a quick resolution of all sex discrimination, including sexual harassment. The procedures must clearly prohibit sexual harassment of students by faculty and staff. It must also prohibit harassment of students by students.

Hostile Hallway Statistics

One sexual harassment study, called Hostile Hallways, documented that the majority of sexual harassment that occurs in American high schools is between peers. Eighty-seven percent of the girls and 71 percent of the boys reported being sexually harassed by a current or former student at school. Adult school employees reportedly had targeted one in four girls and one in 10 boys.

In this study, 66 percent of all boys and 52 percent of all girls surveyed admitted they had sexually harassed someone in the school setting. Of the 59 percent of students who said they had sexually harassed someone in the school setting, 94 percent claimed they themselves had been harassed.



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Important descriptive information regarding sexual harassment became clear throughout the Hostile Hallways study. It identified who was being sexually harassed, when they were being harassed, and where. Students were asked why they engaged in sexual harassment and which of the following six reasons applied to their behavior:

- It's just a part of school life/a lot of people do it/it's no big deal
- I thought the person liked it
- I wanted a date with the person
- My friends encouraged/pushed me into doing it
- I wanted something from that person
- I wanted the person to think I had some sort of power over them

Peer sexual harassment in high schools has only recently been the focus of sexual harassment researchers, and to date, has resulted in limited documentation. However, it is important to understand that what is perfectly clear, is that all students are affected by these behaviors.

Clearly, sexual harassment is wrong and YOU are responsible to help create and foster a positive school climate that does not tolerate behaviors associated with discrimination and sexual harassment.

You can refer back to the BE, KNOW, DO attributes model, profiled in the previous lesson. Sexual harassment behaviors are not part of who you want to BE. You KNOW what sexual harassment is and why it is harmful. When you see it happening to others, or when you experience it yourself, take action and DO something about it. Tell a teacher, a counselor, your parents, or a police officer immediately.



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Sexual Harassment and Assault

Your sexuality is a private matter for you to express when, where, and to whom you choose. Sexual abuse occurs when someone violates that privacy or tries to interfere with, or take away, your choices. It can range from an offensive sexual comment or display, to spousal abuse and rape. This section describes the different types of sexual abuse and presents strategies for coping and prevention.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment covers a wide range of behavior, and is divided into two types – Quid pro quo and hostile environment harassment.

- **Quid pro quo harassment**
This refers to a request for some kind of sexual favor or activity in exchange for something else. It is a kind of bribe or threat, such as, "If you don't do X for me, I will fail you/fire you/make your life miserable."
- **Hostile environment harassment**
This indicates any situation where sexually charged remarks, behavior, or displayed items cause discomfort. Harassment of this type ranges from lewd conversation or jokes to display of pornography.

Both men and women can be victims of sexual harassment, although the more common situation involves a woman subjected to harassment by a man. Unfortunately, even as women continue to gain equality, **sexism** remains alive. Sexist attitudes can create an environment where men feel they have the right to use words, ideas, and attitudes that degrade women. Even though physical violence is not involved, the fear and mention of trauma and harassment are extremely hurtful.

How To Cope

Sexual harassment can be difficult to identify and monitor because what offends one person may seem acceptable to another. If you feel degraded by anything that goes on at school or work, address the person you believe is harassing you. If that makes you uncomfortable, speak to another authority. Try to avoid assumptions—perhaps the person simply has no idea that his or her behavior could be perceived as offensive. On the other hand, the person may have dishonorable intentions towards you. Either way, you are entitled to request that the person put an end to what has offended you.

Rape and Date Rape

Any sexual act by a person against another person's will is defined as rape. Rape is primarily a violent act, not a sexual one. It is an expression of power and control. Rape statistics include:

- An estimated 868 rapes or attempted rapes are committed every day. This means 36 per hour, or one rape or attempted rape every 1.6 minutes.
- Nearly three-quarters of rape and sexual assault survivors know their attackers.
- It is estimated that 68 percent of rape survivors do not report the crime to the police. The most common reason given for not reporting the crime is that the attack was a "personal matter."
- More than half of rape or sexual assault incidents are reported to have occurred either within one mile of the victim's home or at the home.

Rape is a problem on many campuses, especially acquaintance rape. This is also called **date rape**. Any sexual activity during a date that is against one partner's will constitutes date rape, including situations where one partner is too drunk or drugged to give consent. Most date rape victims do not report the incidents. Victims may believe that they can't prove it, that they might have asked for it, that she should be ashamed if drugs or alcohol were involved, or that their assailants may seek revenge if accused.

Beyond the physical harm, rape has serious effects on mental health. Campus Advocates for Rape Education (C.A.R.E.), an organization at Wheaton College in Massachusetts, described the specific harms of date rape. "One's trust in friend, date, or acquaintance is also violated. As a result, a victim's fear, self-blame, guilt, and shame are magnified because the assailant is known." Approximately 31 percent of all rape victims develop rape-related, post-traumatic stress disorder.



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Staying Safe

No matter how safe you feel in any situation, you can never be too sure. Take steps to prevent incidents, sexual or otherwise, from occurring. These steps can include:

- Avoid situations that present clear dangers.
- Don't walk or exercise alone at night or in unsafe areas, and always travel with at least one other person. Don't work or study alone in a building. If someone looks suspicious to you, contact security or someone else who can help you.
- Avoid the use of drugs or alcohol.
- Anything that reduces your judgment will make you more vulnerable to any kind of assault.
- Watch your belongings.
- Keep your keys with you at all times, but don't attach them to anything that could identify them as yours, such as an ID, credit cards, etc. Carry bags or backpacks close to your body. If someone tries to grab your purse or bag, let it go rather than risk injury.
- Communicate
- Be clear about what you want from people with whom you associate, either personally or professionally. Don't assume that others want what you want, or even know what you want. If you have a request, make it respectful and invite a response.

Conclusion

Sexual harassment is never appropriate in any setting, whether it's at school or elsewhere. The sexual harassment of another person is demeaning, cruel, demoralizing, and humiliating, as well as illegal. It shows a lack of respect for another human being, and should never be tolerated. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, tell someone as soon as possible.



Lesson Check-up

1. In your own words, define sexual harassment.
2. What are symptoms that might be exhibited by someone experiencing sexual harassment?
3. If you or a friend were being sexually harassed, what would you do?
4. Is sexual harassment a problem on today's campuses? Explain your answer.