

Types of Sexual Violence: Sexual Harassment

What is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual harassment consists of unwelcome visual, verbal or physical behavior of a sexual nature that interferes with a person's education. **Sexual harassment is illegal** — Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination, including sexual harassment. (As defined by the Iowa Civil Rights Commission.)

Sexual harassment is a real and serious problem that can affect any child or youth regardless of gender, race, or age. It can threaten physical or emotional well-being, influence school performance, and make it difficult to achieve career goals.

There are two types of harassment:

- 1) When a person in authority demands sexual favors in return for a benefit for the child or youth, *or*
- 2) When a child or youth is subjected to sexual conduct that creates an offensive, hostile or intimidating atmosphere.

Sexual harassment can include behaviors such as:

- Making sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or commenting about a person's body or sex life;
- Looking or staring at a person in a sexual manner;
- Touching, grabbing, pinching, or brushing up against someone in a sexual way;
- Flashing or mooning;
- Spreading rumors about a person's activities or relationships;
- Blocking passage in a sexually suggestive or offensive way;
- Writing sexual messages, love notes, or sexual graffiti;
- Pulling clothing down or off;

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Facts:

Nationally, 81 percent of students in grades eight to 11 experienced some form of sexual harassment.

Every school in Iowa is required to have a Title IX (or Equity) Coordinator that will listen to your complaint and follow the school's procedure to resolve the problem appropriately.

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Fact:

Hallways and classrooms were the places where harassment most frequently took place. Other places included school grounds, gymnasium, pool, locker rooms, restrooms, parking lot, school busses, and on field trips.

- Calling a person a sexual name;
- Spying on someone or using camera phones to take pictures of someone while showering or dressing;
- Forcing kisses or other sexual advances;
- Forcing someone to look at sexual pictures or materials;
- Using computers, text messaging, or other technologies to circulate demeaning information or pictures.

Prevention Tips for Families

- **Model appropriate behavior.** For example, don't tell or laugh at jokes that are sexually demeaning. Use language that avoids stereotyping individuals by gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, or other personal characteristics.
- **Set clear expectations for your child's behavior toward others** and talk about what to do when others are harassing or being harassed.
- **Talk about healthy dating relationships** and the fact that a great deal of sexual harassment occurs within current, past, or perceived dating relationships.
- **Request a copy of your school's harassment policy.** Read it, discuss it with your child/youth, and keep it on hand as a reference. If any part is unclear to you, make an appointment with an administrator and ask questions.
- **Ask your school to put sexual harassment on the agenda** for parent-teacher organization meetings or parent discussion topic lists. If you are qualified, offer to lead a discussion group or series of talks for the parent community.

Red Flags: What to look for as a family member if your child or youth is being sexually harassed.

Does your child/youth:

- Avoid school, want to stay home, or cut class;
- Avoid talking about their activities or school;

- Find it hard to pay attention, show signs of being socially withdrawn or depressed;
- Suddenly have consistently lower grades on a test or in a class;
- Want to change schools or even drop out;
- Drop out of chosen classes or field of study;
- No longer show interest in an activity, club, or events that were previously important;
- Find it hard to get letters of reference from a teacher;
- Engage in abusive behavior towards other children, siblings, or a family pet;
- Use inappropriate sexual comments, jokes, and/or gestures in their social interactions.

What to Do: If harassment happens to your child or youth.

- Listen to what your child or youth tells you with an open mind — don't be too quick to judge them.
- Don't ignore the harassment; it usually doesn't go away by itself, and may get worse if no action is taken.
- Report it to school administration or someone in charge of the child's/youth's activity. Ask that the school/organization keep you informed of the actions taken, as well as future plans, to ensure that this type of harassment doesn't occur again.
- Encourage your child or youth to tell the harasser in person or in writing: 1) the specific actions or words that make them uncomfortable; 2) that the behavior is not welcome; and 3) that the behavior must stop.
- Keep a written record of the incidents of harassment. This will be important if an investigation becomes necessary. Make notes of any witnesses who might have observed the incident(s).
- Support your child or youth while at school, or other activities, by making sure that another adult knows about the harassment such as a teacher, counselor, or other staff person.

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Fact:

Nearly nine in 10 students (85 percent nationally) reported that students harass other students at their schools.

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Fact:

Four out of five students who are harassed are targeted by a current or former student of their schools, with the remainder of the harassment coming from adults or school staff.

- If the institution does not take prompt action to stop and resolve the harassment after you have reported it to them, file a complaint with an outside agency such as the Iowa Civil Rights Commission.
- If your child or youth reports harassment of a friend, direct and support their efforts to get help for this friend.
- If your child or youth has been found to be a perpetrator of sexual harassment, talk with him/her about your expectations for his/her behavior in clear and certain terms. Reinforce your expectations with clear consequences for his/her actions and follow-up to ensure that the behavior has stopped.

For more information on sexual violence go to:

www.icyd.org