

Lesson 5

Sexual Harassment/Assault



Key Terms

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, nonverbal, 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 is sexual harassment
- Locate resources for assisting victims of sexual harassment or assault
- Define the key words contained in this lesson

Introduction

Sexual harassment is not a joke. It's demeaning, degrading, disrespectful, and potentially damaging to another human being. What might seem like harmless fun to you might be very hurtful to another. This lesson looks at sexual harassment and assault. You learn what is considered unacceptable and possibly illegal behavior, and what to do if you feel you have been the target of sexual harassment.

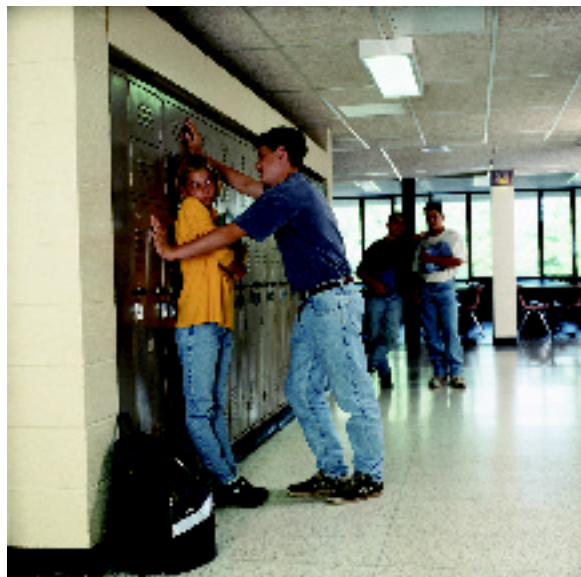
Effects of Sexual Harassment

Peer **sexual harassment** is a problem for both girls and boys, and the effects from this experience can affect students' lives negatively well past their high school days. School performance can suffer as students exhibit absenteeism, a decrease in the quality of schoolwork, skipped or dropped classes, lower grades, loss of friends, 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.

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

Some types of sexual harassment that are happening in schools across the nation are as follows:

- **Inappropriate comments, jokes, gestures, or looks (see Figure 1.5.1)**
- **Sexual pictures, photographs, illustrations, messages, or notes**
- **Sexual messages/graffiti about someone on bathroom walls, in locker rooms, and so on**



Key Note Term

sexual harassment – the making of unwanted and offensive sexual advances or sexually offensive remarks or acts

Figure 1.5.1: Comments and looks can be considered sexual harassment.

Courtesy of Richard Hutchings/Corbis images.

- 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

Key Note Term

vulnerable – capable of being wounded or injured; susceptible to being hurt

perpetrator – one who carries out a crime or a deception

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 behavior 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 experienced by boys as well as girls.

Sexual harassment is a specific type of sex discrimination that has been defined by the courts over the past 30 years. Sexual harassment is defined as *uninvited and unwelcome verbal or physical conduct directed at an individual because of his or her sex*. Schools are required to maintain a grievance procedure that allows for prompt and equitable 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.

Sample Sexual Harassment Policy

Many schools and places of employment have clearly defined policies on sexual harassment, procedures to follow if sexual harassment occurs, and set penalties for those who commit sexual harassment. The following is a sample policy:

[*Company name*] believes that you should be afforded the opportunity to work in an environment free of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is a form of misconduct that undermines the employment relationship. No employee, either male or female, should be subjected verbally or physically to unsolicited and unwelcomed sexual overtures or conduct.

Sexual harassment refers to behavior that is not welcome, that is personally offensive, that debilitates morale and, therefore, interferes with work effectiveness.

Behavior that amounts to sexual harassment may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

Definition

[*Company name*] has adopted, and its policy is based on, the definition of sexual harassment set forth by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The EEOC defines sexual harassment as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of your employment
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct by you is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting you
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with your work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment

Employer's Responsibility

[*Company name*] wants you to have a work environment free of sexual harassment by management personnel, by your coworkers, and by others with whom you must interact in the course of your work as a [*company name*] employee. Sexual harassment is specifically prohibited as unlawful and as a violation of [*company name*]'s policy. [*Company name*] is responsible for preventing sexual harassment in the workplace, for taking immediate corrective action to stop sexual harassment in the workplace and for promptly investigating any allegation of work-related sexual harassment.

Complaint Procedure

If you experience or witness sexual harassment in the workplace, report it immediately to _____. You may also report harassment to any other member of [*company name*]'s management or ownership. All allegations of sexual harassment will be quickly investigated. To the extent possible, your confidentiality and that of any witnesses and the alleged harasser will be protected against unnecessary disclosure. When the investigation is completed, you will be informed of the outcome of that investigation.

Retaliation Prohibited

[*Company name*] will permit no employment-based retaliation against anyone who brings a complaint of sexual harassment or who speaks as a witness in the investigation of a complaint of sexual harassment.

Written Policy

You will receive a copy of [*company name*]'s sexual harassment policy when you begin working for [*company name*]. If at any time you would like another copy of that policy, please contact _____. If [*company name*] should amend or modify its sexual harassment policy, you will receive an individual copy of the amended or modified policy.

Penalties

Sexual harassment will not be tolerated at [*company name*]. If an investigation of any allegation of sexual harassment shows that harassing behavior has taken place, the harasser will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

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Hostile Hallways 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 ten 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.

The Hostile Hallways study 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 so far 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.

The best way you can help in creating a safe school environment is to believe in and act according to the lessons discussed in the Lesson 3, Leadership from the Inside Out, and live to the values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage.

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 that has been divided into two types:

- **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, though it is far more common for women to be subjected to harassment by men. Unfortunately, even as women continue to gain equality, **sexism** remains alive. Male 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 trauma that such harassment can cause are extremely harmful.

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 an 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 toward you. Either way, address the problem. Don’t let inappropriate behavior go unchallenged.

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. Here are some rape statistics:

- **An estimated 868 rapes or attempted rapes are committed every day. This means 36 per hour, or 1 rape or attempted rape every 1.6 minutes.**
- **Nearly three-fourths 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 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.

Key Note Term

sexism – behavior or attitudes, especially against women, that promote gender-based stereotypes or that discriminate based on gender

Key Note Term

date rape – sexual assault perpetrated by the victim’s escort during an arranged social encounter

Beyond the initial harm, rape has serious effects on mental and physical health. Approximately 31 percent of all rape victims develop rape-related post-traumatic stress disorder and can experience short-term, intermediate, and long-term effects.

Short-term effects (from 3 to 4 months) are as follows:

- **Generalized anxiety and fear**
- **Disturbance of eating, sleeping, thoughts, relationships**
- **A need to create safety such as changing one's phone number**
- **Impaired social functioning**
- **Difficulty in maintaining/establishing relationships**
- **Guilt for not preventing assault**
- **Sudden, unpredictable changes of residences and disappearances**

Intermediate effects (up to 1 year) are as follows:

- **Disruption and change in lifestyle such as a change of residence or change of job**
- **Increased dependence on family**
- **Sleep disturbance, often nightmares**
- **Fear and phobias, such as going out in public or being alone or obsessive cleanliness**
- **Sexuality issues such as poor body image, flashbacks, or loss of enjoyment**
- **Poor self-esteem; thinks in terms of “damaged goods”; thinks others can tell**

Long-term reactions (up to 4 years) are as follows:

- **Anger toward offender, legal system, family, or friends**
- **Diminished capacity to enjoy life**
- **Hyper-vigilance to danger such as being fearful of new and risky situations**
- **Continued sexual dysfunction**

Remember that “no” means “no!” Any sexual activity against another person’s will is rape.

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. The following are some possible steps to take:

- **Avoid situations that present clear dangers.** Don't walk or exercise alone at night or in unsafe areas (see Figure 1.5.2) 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 or obliterates your judgment will make you more vulnerable to any kind of assault.



Figure 1.5.2: Always go with a buddy when you're exercising outdoors.

Courtesy of Jim Craigmyle/Corbis Images.

- **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 your ID or credit cards. Carry bags or backpacks close to your body. If someone tries to grab your purse or bag, let it go rather than risk injury.
- **Avoid people who make you feel uneasy.** If there is a fellow student or coworker who puts you on your guard, avoid situations in which you need to spend time alone with them. Speak to an instructor or supervisor if you feel threatened.
- **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.

Staying Safe on the Internet

One of the attractions of the Internet is the anonymity of the user, and this is why it can be so dangerous. You don't always know with whom you are interacting. You may think you know, but unless it's a school friend or a relative, you really can't be sure. Because of the way the Internet works, you can actually be interacting with a pedophile or sexual predator and not know it until it's too late. With the explosion of the Internet into a powerful, worldwide medium, the danger to young people has drastically increased.

The most common means by which sexual predators contact children over the Internet is through chat rooms, instant messages, and e-mail. In fact, 89 percent of sexual solicitations were made in either chat rooms or instant messages and 1 in 5 youth (ages 10–17 years) has been sexually solicited online (*Journal of American Medical Association*, 2001). Considering that 25 percent of kids online participate in real-time chat and 13 million use instant messaging, the risks of such children, either knowingly or unknowingly, interacting with a predator is alarming.

To Report Illegal Online Activity

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) provides excellent resources concerning sexual exploitation of children and related issues for the lay public, counseling community, and law enforcement agencies. NCMEC has created an extensive Web presence for its Exploited Child Unit: <http://www.missingkids.com>. These Web pages

provide background information on laws and legislation, tips and pointers for parents and children, and lists of preventive resources on the various aspects of child sexual exploitation.

In addition to its Web pages, NCMEC, in partnership with the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the U.S. Customs Service, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, serves as the National CyberTipline. To report possible illegal online activity related to child pornography, predation, or any other type of child sexual exploitation, call the CyberTipline: 800-843-5678 (800-TheLost) or visit their Web site: <http://www.missingkids.com>.

If you have been sexually exploited online, or you want more information about this activity, check out www.katiesplace.org.

Adapted from www.protectkids.com.

Seeking Help

What should you do if you've been raped? If you're raped, you should first get to a safe place, away from your attacker. You should then go to a hospital emergency room to be checked. You can call the police from the hospital. Don't bathe or change your clothes before you go to the hospital. Just get there as fast as you can.

Being raped can have a huge effect on your life. You may feel disbelief, fear, anxiety, and possibly even guilt. You may have an upset stomach or feel nervous. About half of all people who are raped say they are depressed the first year after the attack. It's important that you keep appointments with your doctor. Be sure to tell him or her about any physical, emotional or sexual problems you have during this time, even if you don't think they're related to the rape.

Be sure to visit your doctor one or two weeks after the rape to review the results of the tests done in the emergency room. Your doctor will give you information and tell you more about other support services, too. Some of these services include hospital social workers, local rape crisis services, your local public health department and the state attorney general's office.

Remember, sexual assault is a terrible crime. But it's not your fault, and you didn't cause it to happen. Rape is against the law. You have the right to report this crime to the police, and you have the right to be treated fairly during the justice process.

Conclusion

Sexual harassment is never appropriate in any setting, whether at school or at work. Sexual harassment is demeaning, cruel, demoralizing, and humiliating as well as illegal. It shows a lack of respect for others and can create a climate of fear that could lead to more potentially serious violations such as rape and date rape. Sexual harassment should never be tolerated. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, challenge the individual, notify an authority, do something to eliminate the problem before it spins out of control.

This lesson concludes the chapter, “Being a Leader.” Practice what you have learned in these lessons and continue to sharpen your leadership skills. These skills will help you be the kind of person you want to be as you go through your life.

Lesson Review

1. Define the term *sexual harassment*.
2. List four types of sexual harassment.
3. What are three symptoms that might be exhibited by someone experiencing sexual harassment?
4. If you or a friend were being sexually harassed, who would you talk to about it?