

Sexual Harassment in Schools



It's No Joking Matter

Do these kinds of situations make you feel uncomfortable?

- comments about your body or physical appearance;
- questions about your sex life;
- unwanted touching, hugging or kissing;
- hearing sexually suggestive jokes or comments;
- seeing graffiti or T-shirts with sexual messages or pictures;
- being whistled at or having your bra snapped;
- being followed or watched;
- being asked repeatedly for dates after you said no;
- having your shorts pulled down in public;
- being treated unfairly for refusing sexual activity.

Sexual comments and behaviour such as these that humiliate or upset people are sexual harassment! If you act like this to other people, you could be harassing them!

Exactly what is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment is any **unwelcome** behaviour, actions or words which:

- are sexual in nature;
- are likely to offend or humiliate;
- relate to a person's sex, sexuality or body parts;
- the harasser knows or ought to know are inappropriate;
- are repeated after the person has been told to stop.

Sometimes it's hard to tell when a person has crossed the line from flirting or teasing to harassing you. The line between teasing and sexual harassment often has to do with the circumstances. These circumstances may include: whether other people are around; why the person is doing it; and how it makes you feel.



Is sexual harassment against the law?

Sexual harassment is a violation of the Human Rights Code. The Code also protects against discrimination and harassment based on characteristics such as race, colour, sex, religion, marital status, sexual orientation and disability. All forms of harassment show a lack of respect for the rights of others. When harassment takes place in a workplace, including a school, the people in authority are responsible for preventing or discouraging it.

Does it happen in schools?

Yes. Sexual harassment can happen anywhere - including schools. It could occur in the classroom, the locker room, on a field trip or the school bus, or at a sporting event. Demeaning and offensive behaviour often starts early as school yard bullying. Students may also face sexual harassment in their part-time or summer jobs, playing sports, babysitting, on the street, and elsewhere.

Who gets sexually harassed at school?

The majority of victims reported are girls, but anybody can be a victim.

Who might sexually harass a student?

In a school setting, it could be:

- A classmate harassing students of the opposite sex;
- Girls harassing other girls (ex. comments on sexual experience, name calling, etc.);
- Boys harassing other boys (ex. comments on physical appearance, sexual preference or sexual experience);
- A teacher or other school personnel such as a bus driver, coach, secretary or volunteer harassing students of either sex.



When does a joke or flirting become sexual harassment???

Take this quiz to see how you feel!

- | | True | False |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1) Anyone who is offended by a dirty joke has a poor sense of humour. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2) It's okay to tell somebody you think they look really nice. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3) Staring at somebody's body shows that you really like them. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4) It's not a big deal for teenagers and teachers to flirt with one another. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5) Patting somebody on the bottom is a way of flirting with them. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6) If nobody complains when you wear a T-shirt with a sexual message, it means you haven't offended anybody. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7) It shouldn't bother you to be teased about your body and appearance. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8) A teacher who continually makes students uneasy should be told to stop. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Answers to Quiz

1) False. Some jokes offend because the point of the joke is to make someone feel worthless or humiliated. If someone feels less valuable than others when they hear a joke, then it's no joking matter.

2) True. Compliments about a person such as "You look really cool" are usually appreciated. Sexual comments about the body are less likely to be received as compliments.

3) False. Although eye contact usually happens without making anyone uncomfortable, it can cross the line. A quick glance or a smile is usually considered flirting; constant staring at your body's sexual places is not.

4) False. Flirting happens between peers - it is not appropriate between people in authority and somebody over whom they have control.

5) False. Flirting is not patting, grabbing, pinching or groping.

6) False. Just because nobody complains, doesn't mean it's okay. There are lots of reasons why teens don't tell about sexual harassment. They may not want to attract attention or be called a "prude" or a "rat".

7) False. Although teasing and good-natured joking are part of life, constant teasing is hurtful. Boys and girls are both affected by harassment.

8) True. If students worry that a teacher will purposefully say things that embarrass them, it is not just a form of teasing. What the teacher is doing should be reported to parents or school authorities and the teacher should be told to stop.



This pamphlet is published by



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The Fredericton Sexual Assault Crisis Centre (F.S.A.C.C.) is a volunteer organization whose primary goal is reflected in a commitment to work toward the eradication of sexual violence against women and children through public education and the provision of direct services to those affected by sexual abuse.

This pamphlet was developed in consultation with an Advisory Committee which included: representatives from the Department of Education and the Fredericton Family Enrichment and Counselling Service, as well as a school guidance counsellor. We wish to thank the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission for their valuable input.

This pamphlet does not contain a complete statement of the law in the area. If you need legal advice, contact a lawyer.

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Is sexual harassment harmful?

- It hurts.
- You might feel angry, confused, uncomfortable and frightened.
- You might feel sick.
- You might feel powerless.
- You might lose your concentration.
- Your grades might go down.
- You might feel like avoiding certain school hallways, skipping classes, dropping courses, transferring schools or quitting your job.

... HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT IT?



Maybe I should just ignore it?

If you are being sexually harassed, don't ignore it. You have the right to go to school in an environment that is emotionally and physically safe and non-threatening. If you skip classes or drop courses to avoid harassment, it could affect your future career choices. If you are being harassed - whether at school, on the job or playing sports - it can reduce your ability to concentrate and do your school work.

What can I do if I'm being sexually harassed?

Learning to deal with sexual harassment is important. Here are some things to consider:

- **Don't blame yourself**
You may feel that it is your fault, but it's not. Trust your emotional responses. If someone makes you feel uncomfortable, the problem may be the other person's.
- **Tell the person to stop**

Sometimes people don't understand that their actions offend others until somebody tells them. If you feel safe, tell the person harassing you what has upset you and ask him/her to stop. Speak up early. It may end the harassment. If you feel uncomfortable doing this, ask a friend, a parent, a teacher or a guidance counsellor to help you.

- **Tell someone**
Tell someone you trust about what happened, like a parent, teacher or guidance counsellor. Emotional support is important.
- **Look for peer support**

Peer support helps. Ask other students whether they are being harassed by the same person. If others have the same problem, consider collective or group solutions. Get a class, all the students in a grade level, the student council, or a student organization to take action.

- **Keep a written record**

Write down what happened, when, where and who saw it. Note how you reacted. If the harasser sends you notes or pictures, keep them to show the behaviour that is causing a problem. A written account helps you document the harassment if you need to take further action.

- **Report the harassment to a school official**

If the problem continues, talk to the principal or another school official. If your school has a sexual harassment policy, arrange to meet with the person who looks after complaints. If you feel uncomfortable talking to that person, speak to a trusted adult. If you want, ask a parent or friend to come with you.

- **Contact the Human Rights Commission**

The Commission can offer information and assistance on dealing with sexual harassment. You can also file a complaint with the Commission.

- **Get help in a crisis**

Some unwelcome behaviours, such as grabbing, kissing, fondling or sexual activity are criminal in nature. If you are being physically or sexually assaulted, you should talk to the police or R.C.M.P. Depending on your age, child protection officials may be able to help you. You can also get emotional support and advice from your local sexual assault crisis centre or a helpline.

*Remember,
Sexual
Harassment...*

...is no joking matter!!

What can I do if I see somebody else being harassed?

Speak out against harassment. Even if you are not being harassed personally, seeing others harassed can make the learning environment uneasy for everyone. Ask your guidance counsellor to put up posters that discourage sexual harassment. Refuse to listen to sexist jokes or comments. Everyone should speak out against sexual harassment!

FOR HELP OR INFORMATION CONTACT:

- **Your school guidance counsellor**
- **The Kids Helpline: 1-800-668-6868**
- **Sexual Assault Crisis Centre
506-454-0437**
- **CHIMO: 1-800-667-5005**
- **In an emergency - 911**
- **Child Protection
1-888-992-2873
After Hours: 1-800-442-9799**
- **N.B Human Rights Commission
1-888-471-2233**
- **Public Legal Education and Information Service: 453-5369**

