

Sexual Harassment: What Parents and Students Should Know

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Sexual harassment has long become a topic of concern for school districts as they struggle to deal with this type of gender discrimination. The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA)

has written several articles to help keep school districts informed on sexual harassment laws, litigation, policies and districts' responsibilities (Penny-Velázquez, 1994; Penny-Velázquez 1995; Scott, 1996;

Yáñez-Pérez, 1997; Yáñez, 1998). Below is a handout on sexual harassment that can be distributed to parents and students. A version in Spanish is on the next page.

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What Parents and Students Should Know

What is sexual harassment?

- Sexual harassment is unwanted and unwelcome sexual behavior that makes you feel bad. Sexual harassment can include: spreading rumors, sexual cartoons, posters or jokes; touching; requesting sexual favors; or making physical attacks. Sexual harassment is not about sexual attraction, it is about *power*.
- Students are protected under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX prohibits sexual harassment, a type of sex discrimination.

There are two identified types of sexual harassment:

- *Quid pro quo* sexual harassment basically means "you do something for me and I will do something for you." Examples include: A teacher threatens to flunk a student unless the student has sex with the teacher. A student threatens a classmate with spreading rumors about her if she refuses to go on a date with him.
- *Hostile environment* sexual harassment involves recurring behavior that creates a frightening, offensive and intimidating school environment. Examples include: Students get grabbed or insulted when they walk from class to class. Nasty remarks are written about lesbian or gay students in the restrooms.

Who does it happen to? What is the impact on the victim?

- Sexual harassment can happen males to males, males to females, females to males, and females to females. It can also occur student to student and adult to student.
- Victims of sexual harassment often feel confused, misunderstood, guilty, ashamed, angry, frightened, lonely, powerless and hopeless.

What can you do about it if it happens to you?

- Tell your parents, a friend or a trusted adult. You do not have to handle the situation alone.
- Tell harassers to *stop*. It is your right.
- Inform the school by telling a teacher, counselor, principal, school or district Title IX coordinator, superintendent, school board member and/or state education agency. Keep insisting until the harassment stops.
- Keep a detailed record of what has happened (who, what, when, where and how).

Who can you turn to if you or someone you know has been a victim of sexual harassment?

- Title IX coordinator or manager: Most districts have individuals at the campus or district level whose job is to investigate complaints. If your school does not have a Title IX coordinator, contact a principal, counselor or teacher.
- Office for Civil Rights (OCR): If you feel the district has not done enough to help you, call or write OCR. OCR is the federal agency that enforces Title IX (Office for Civil Rights, Family Policy Compliance Office, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C. 20202-4605; Phone 202-260-3887).

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