



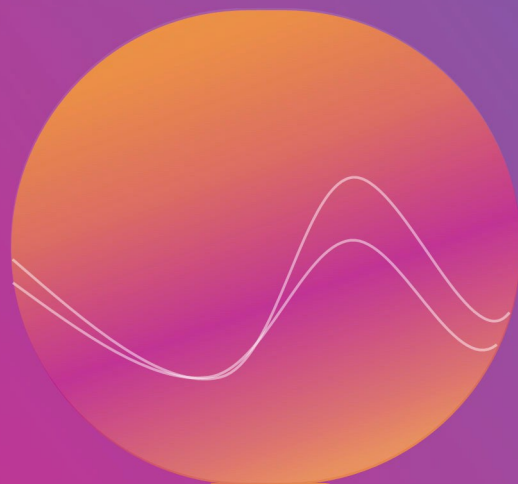
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Prevention of Sexual Harassment in Secondary Schools

Information for
parents





Prevention of sexual harassment in schools

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature in the workplace or learning environment (RAIIN, 2023a).

Sexual Harassment in schools is a global phenomenon and a public health issue, affecting adolescents of both sexes, with girls often being more harassed than boys (Hill & Kearl, 2011; Gådin & Stein, 2019).

Examples of Sexual Harassment

To clarify the concept of sexual harassment, demonstrated below are examples of sexual harassment (DEAL, 2022):

- Pressuring or forcing someone into intimate play.
- Pressuring or forcing others into sexual poses or acts.
- Spying, photographing, or filming without consent
- Sharing someone's private information without their consent.
- Causing discomfort by calling, leaving messages, gifts, or showing interest in someone who is not interested.

Sexual harassment is more common than we think. Included below is epidemiological data that displays the issue of sexual harassment in numbers:

- One in five women and 1 in 13 men report having been sexually abused as a child aged 0-17 years.
- 120 million girls and young women under 20 years of age have suffered some form of forced sexual contact (W.H.O., 2022).
- Females exposed to child sexual abuse are at 2-13 times increased risk of sexual violence victimization in adulthood.
- People who experienced child sexual abuse are at twice the risk for non-sexual intimate partner violence (CDC, 2022).



From: Sexual Harrassment [Online Image], by Nick Youngson,
Picpedia <https://www.picpedia.org/chalkboard/s/sexual-harassment.html>



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Prevention strategies

It is essential to have strong relationships with your children and advise them to have healthy habits and attitudes. Here are some phrases you can tell your children to prevent them from becoming victims of sexual harassment (LEAD, 2022):

- “Surround yourself with people you trust”
- “Try to stay in familiar and safe places”
- “Know emergency contacts that are useful”
- “Be careful what you drink and eat at a party, mainly alcohol and/or mind-altering substances can increase your vulnerability, and because someone else might want to manipulate from what you consume”

Schools are considered by many authors to be privileged places for sexual education, since it is the place that adolescents spend most of their time, and it is also the place where the first amorous experiences appear (Kazdouh, et al., 2019). Adolescence is a unique stage of human development and an important time for laying the foundations of good health. is an important period of development to acquire concepts for a healthy life (W.H.O., 2023). Therefore, it is advised that parents should also be in close contact and collaboration with the school their children attend.

How to start a conversation with your child

When you are parent, it is beneficial to discuss with your children about how to be safe and how to protect themselves from probable case of sexual harassment. So, it is useful to know how to start a conversation with the child when is still young. Here are some tips for a constructive conversation (RAIIN, 2023b):

- Teach children the names of their body parts.
- Explain that some parts of the body are private.
- Give emphasis that it's OK to say “no”
- Talk about secret that may he/she have kept.
- Reassure them that they won't get in trouble.
- Show them what it looks like to do the right thing.
- When they want to talk to you, you should spend time with them.





From: *Mother & Son* [Online Image], by Alex Brown, 2011,
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Signs of sexual harassment

Below are physical and psychological symptoms that affect people who are victims of violence (LEAD, 2022) and can help you to identify a victim:

- Sleep disorders
- Mood swings
- Eating disorders
- Fear
- Stress and physical pain
- Anxiety, difficulty concentrating, and irritation

More specifically, below are signs that refer to changes in children's emotional state, behavior and in school and social life (Raising Children Network, 2023):

Emotional Changes

- The child is aggressive or seems angry for no apparent reason.
- The child has headaches or stomach aches for which there does not seem to be a physical cause.
- The child becomes angry or upset when a particular person or place is mentioned.
- The child has trouble developing or maintaining relationships.
- The child cries for no obvious reason.
- The child has nightmares.
- Has low self-esteem.
- The child seems withdrawn or scared or shows signs of teenage depression or teenage anxiety.
- The child is confused about their sexual identity.



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Behavioral Changes

- The child is dressing differently.
- The child has clothing, shoes, bags, jewelry, or electronics from unknown sources.
- The child is showing harmful sexual behavior.
- The child is spending a lot of time online and is secretive about online communications.
- The child is eating more or less than usual.
- The child is having sleeping problems.

Changes in School and Social Life

- The child is spending more time on its own than usual.
- The child has changed friendship groups.
- The child is avoiding particular people or places, like a friend's house or a sport group.
- The child is avoiding activities or events that previously enjoyed, or asks questions like 'Do I have to go to music class today?'
- The child is performing less well at school.

What to do when your child confides sexual harassment

It is especially important for you to know what to do when your child confides that they have been sexually harassed. You must not forget to listen and react calmly, seriously, and responsibly. Ask them to tell you what happened. If your child cannot find the words or the strength to talk to you about it directly, know that this is a completely normal reaction (NSPCC, 2023).

Here are some tips to follow to approach your child when they confide sexual harassment:

- Listen carefully to what your child is saying.
- Let them know that they have done the right thing by telling you.
- Tell your child it is not their fault.
- Say to your child that you will take them seriously.
- Do not confront the alleged abuser.
- Explain to your child what you will do next.
- Report to the authorities (police, etc.) what the child has told you as soon as possible (NSPCC, 2023).



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From: *Teaching English at Cheongdam Middle School* [Online Image],
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What to do if your child commits sexual harassment

If your child is a perpetrator of sexual violence against a peer, here are some steps to prevent recurrences of this behavior.

Address Your Child's Perpetration

- Communicate honestly and empathetically with your child about the negative impact of their actions on the victim.
- Encourage your child to take responsibility and apologize sincerely to the victim (Holman, 2001).
- Work with school officials to implement protective measures to protect the victim (i.e., restraining orders).
- Educate your child about consent and healthy relationships (Basile, et. al, 2016).

Target the source of your child's perpetration

Seek professional advice and assistance: Seek counseling or mediation services for your child to do the following:

- Conduct a thorough individual assessment.
- Identify underlying psychological issues contributing to behavior.
- Develop emotional regulation and empathy skills through cognitive-behavioral therapy.
- Provide long-term follow-up to prevent re-offending (Holman, 2001).



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Prevent repeat offenses

- Encourage schools to implement prevention and education programs that discuss consent, healthy relationships, and respectful behavior.
- Encourage your child to intervene against demeaning behaviors and language in their peer groups.
- Empower your child to take a strong attitude and behavior against sexual violence (Basile, et. al, 2016).



From: "Stay Away – Women showing STOP gesture with hand" [Online Image],
by Marco Verch Professional Photographer, 2021,
Flickr <https://www.flickr.com/photos/30478819@N08/51596595782> CC BY 2.0

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