



Shaping a better world through research and action

Strategies from Sexual harassment overview: Concerns, new directions, and strategies.

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1. Integrate the subject of sexual harassment and gender violence into the whole curriculum in a cross-disciplinary way. The lessons should be long-term, engaging, fun (not lectures by the school board attorney), and age-appropriate. When the subjects of sexual harassment and gender violence are integrated into the curriculum as opposed to being tacked on as an afterthought, there is less of a burden placed on the teachers and the subject makes more sense to students. For example, these topics can be integrated into literature and English classes when reading Anne Frank, William Shakespeare, Jane Austen and many other authors, and also can be seamlessly placed into history and social studies classes, family and consumer science classes, and health education (Stein & Cappello, 1999)
2. Use evaluated and accurate materials. School personnel should use curriculum materials that have been evaluated for and found to be effective, but that are also vetted for their accuracy. The popularity or expense of a particular curriculum does not guarantee its effectiveness or speak to the amount of evaluation the curriculum has undergone. Moreover, the curriculum products need to be examined for the use of euphemisms such as "bullying in a dating relationship" instead of "teen dating violence" or "sexual bullying" instead of "sexual harassment." Such substitutions are grave distortions that in certain instances might misrepresent law while also infantilizing the students. No amount of evaluation will correct such inaccuracies and distortions.
3. Highlight the October 26, 2010 Dear Colleague Letter on Harassment and Bullying by offering widespread, repeated technical assistance sessions throughout the country led by staff from the Office for Civil Rights. (<http://www2.ed.gov/ocr/letters/colleague-201010.html>).
4. Offer professional development on sexual harassment and gender violence for all school staff including the administrators, custodians, school secretaries, bus drivers, coaches, teachers, guidance counselors, playground and lunchroom supervisors, and school psychologists. The training sessions should be more than a casual staff meeting – instead offer repeated sessions scheduled throughout the school year.
5. Collaborate with staff from sexual assault and domestic violence agencies who are fluent in topics related to violence against women and children. These agency staff can offer workshops for school personnel and classroom presentations to students, and also can provide suggestions for curriculum materials on gender violence. While the agency staff may not have teaching credentials licensed by the state, they may be trained as social workers or have other relevant experience that would enhance the efforts of the school personnel. Furthermore, agency staff would be enthusiastic about partnerships with school personnel to implement on-going training sessions for both staff and students.
6. Designate several ombuds (people), diverse in gender, sexuality, race, and nationality in order to enhance approachability – individuals to whom students can bring their inquiries or concerns and who will act on their behalf. These special staff will need extra training, and possibly course release time to serve in this capacity. In addition, the placement of their offices is a matter for serious consideration, and their locations as well as their names should be publicized throughout the school community. Finally, the titles given to these special staff matter; calling them "sexual harassment grievance coordinators" or "complaint managers" might not be conducive for encouraging visits by students. (The success of "Civil Rights Teams" and "Gay Straight Alliances" to reach students who wouldn't attend a group marked as queer-only is an illustration of the importance of titles).

7. Develop school-based disciplinary procedures for addressing sexual harassment that ensure due process rights for the accused, as well as assurances that the student who makes the complaint will be protected from retaliation from the alleged harasser and friends of the harasser.
8. Develop school-based restraining orders/stay-away orders that would include attention to class schedules, walking routes, bus assignments, lunchtime and other less regulated times and places, and would ideally function to protect the student who has made a complaint of harassment against another student.
9. Create multiple strategies for resolution which may involve face-to-face meetings between the harasser and the target, as long as these sessions are voluntary and adults are present in the room (it is not up to the students to solve the sexual harassment problem). There should be no requirements for mediation, and student mediators should not be used without adult presence. Any voluntary efforts, which may include the technique “write a letter to the harasser,” cannot take the place of creating accountability on the part of the instigator, especially if the incident involved alleged physical contact and/or if it was a repeated event.
10. Offer compassionate responses to the harasser in addition to punitive ones. This may take the form of either individual or group counseling sessions.
11. Involve parents—both through open community forums and in private discussions, especially if their children are involved in incidents of sexual harassment (even as a bystander/witness). Provide the parents with the classroom lessons that their children are using, ask them to participate in the assignments, and show them their child’s assignments.
12. Administer sexual harassment surveys that include questions about the relationship between the harasser and the target: Were they in a dating relationship? Did one person want to date the other who wasn’t interested? Is this harassment due to a romance (mutual or otherwise) that went sour? The answers to such questions will help to create more situation-specific approaches.
13. Collect information from the students about their environment through mapping activities and ethnographic research. Mapping areas of the school where students feel less safe (known as “hot spots” among criminologists) provides information to the staff about zones of the school where extra support and supervision might be needed at certain times of the day. Teach ethnographic research to students as a way to gather “members’ knowledge” from the students about sexual harassment and gender violence that take place within the school community.
14. Incorporate the topics of teen dating violence and student-to-student sexual harassment into college teacher-preparation courses and state requirements for teacher recertification.
15. Correct the definition of sexual harassment used in the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSCOS, 2007-2008, 2005-2006, 2003-2004, 1999-2000) to make it identical to the one used by OCR and the U.S. Supreme Court. Expand the questions on sexual harassment to examine the frequency of occurrence and demographic information about victims and perpetrators. Furthermore, ensure that data is disaggregated so that gendered crimes such as rape and sexual assault are distinguished from other forms of violent crime. Data on the gender of the victim and perpetrator must be collected and reported in published and online documents.

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