

## Section 2

# For Parents and Schools



Parents and educators want our children to have a positive school experience in every way. Many parents fear for their child's safety at school, and educators wrestle every day with the challenge of helping students learn in a harassment-free environment in U.S. schools.

Many of us aren't sure what we can do to make schools safer, especially for students in middle and high school. At those ages, children may be reluctant to talk to adults about sexual harassment. Our children's silent suffering negatively affects school

performance and often makes students want to avoid school, and their grades suffer. Neither parents nor educators want children to feel the pain and confusion of sexual harassment. Both our children and their schools need our help to prevent and stop sexual harassment.

### Efforts to Prevent Sexual Harassment

During the past several years, schools and organizations have conducted significant work on the issue of sexual harassment.

- In 2001 the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation released *Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in School*, which reported the findings of a nationwide survey of students in grades eight through 11. This study followed up on a similar study published in 1993.
- In 1999 the U.S. Department of Education and the National Association of Attorneys General published *Protecting Students From Harassment and Hate Crime: A Guide for Schools*, a comprehensive guide for schools seeking information on how to protect their students from these devastating experiences.
- In 1998 the National Women's Law Center published *Do the Right Thing: Understanding, Addressing, and Preventing Sexual Harassment in Schools*, by Verna L. Williams and Deborah L. Brake.
- Schools throughout the country have developed sexual harassment policies, making it clear that harassment is illegal and a punishable behavior.

Despite these important efforts, sexual harassment remains a serious problem in our schools.

### Did You Know ...

- ❖ Students most often experience sexual harassment for the first time during sixth to ninth grade ... but some instances occur before third grade.

—*Hostile Hallways* (AAUW Educational Foundation, 2001)

- ❖ 91.5 percent of LGBT students report hearing homophobic remarks frequently or often at school—but 82.9 percent report that faculty never or only sometimes intervene when they overhear such remarks being made.

—J.G. Kosciw, *The GLSEN 2003 National School Climate Survey* (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network)

- ❖ Targets of bullying and harassment experience anxiety, distress, confusion, loss of self-esteem, depression, and loss of concentration on schoolwork. ... Severe consequences [of sexual harassment] include developing psychosomatic symptoms, avoiding school, and committing suicide.

—Dan Olweus, Sue Limber, and Sharon Mihalic, *Blueprints for Violence Prevention, Book Nine: Bullying Prevention Program* (Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, 1999)

## Policies Aren't Enough

The findings in AAUW's 1993 and 2001 studies were disturbing. In 2001, as in 1993, four out of five students—both boys and girls—said they had experienced sexual harassment at some point during their school lives, with one-third reporting they experienced it often. The single remarkable difference between the two surveys was that in 1993, only 26 percent of students reported being aware that their school had a sexual harassment policy; in 2001, that percentage jumped to 69 percent.

These experiences have serious consequences: 16 percent of students said they avoided school or cut classes, 20 percent found it hard to pay attention, and 24 percent reported that they talked less in class.

Obviously, there is a troubling paradox at play. If so many more students are aware of antiharassment policies and if so much work has been done to prevent sexual harassment in schools, why are the same numbers of students being harassed?

## Time for Action

Sexual harassment is unacceptable. It is unacceptable in the workplace, and it is unacceptable in school. Students should not fear for their lives or safety on school grounds, just as they should not fear being bullied or harassed. Schools need to be safe zones where all students are given every opportunity to learn and thrive. Students cannot learn when they are scared, and too many students are, in fact, scared on school grounds because every day, students are sexually harassed in our nation's schools.

Research shows that efforts to prevent harassment must start at the earliest ages and continue throughout the time children are in school. Ongoing antiharassment programs will give children the courage to speak up for themselves and the knowledge to recognize behavior that is unacceptable. In that same

I dropped out of school at 17, after being at different schools in Providence. I am gay and was made fun of so much that I got sick of being in school. I couldn't stand worrying about what was going to happen to me each day when I got there, so I stopped going. I was beaten up all during my time in school, and the fights and threats started when I was pretty young. ... I did try different schools including a private one. The last one was pretty good, but by then I was so fed up that I had lost any interest in school.

—Student, *Creating Safe Schools for Lesbian and Gay Students: A Resource Guide for School Staff* (Youth Pride Inc., 1997)

light, training opportunities for parents and school staff must occur regularly. The more knowledge adults have on the issue of sexual harassment, the better they will be prepared to prevent it.

Policies alone are not enough. Everyone involved in educating and caring for children must step up to the challenge of making our schools safe places for students. Now is the time for action.

Together, we can make our schools harassment-free.

## Survey and Checklist

Use the following survey and checklist to better understand the problems of sexual harassment, identify harassment, and consider possible solutions. Assess your school by having students or parents (or both) complete the following survey and an

"The more I talked to teachers, the superintendent, and the principal, the more they just kept throwing up brick walls and trying to convince me I would have to let my son go through this," Ms. Cooper said. "But no child should have to go through this, whether he's gay or not. When [harassment] gets to the point where a kid wants to quit school and give up his future, something has to be done."

—Parent, *Ed Week*, June 6, 2001

administrator or other staff fill out the school checklist. Print the survey and checklist from the AAUW website at [www.aauw.org](http://www.aauw.org), duplicate and administer them, and use the results to demonstrate the scope of the problem on your campus.

If the survey is used school wide, responses can be tallied using optical mark reader technology in conjunction with special survey response forms that make it possible to disaggregate the data by gender and grade level while maintaining the anonymity of respondents. Surveys can also be administered via the web or e-mail; gender, age, and other demographic information would need to be requested.

The following survey and checklist were adapted, with permission, from materials developed by Marta Larson of Programs for Educational Opportunity at the University of Michigan School of Education.

## Survey: Is Sexual Harassment a Problem in Your School?

Instructions: Read this definition of sexual harassment and then answer each question as best you can.

Sexual harassment is unwanted and unwelcome sexual behavior that interferes with your school life. Sexual harassment is not behaviors that you like or want (such as wanted kissing, touching, or flirting).

### 1. Do you know of instances of sexual harassment that have happened at your school?

Yes  No

If yes, what kind of harassment was it?  
(Check all that apply.)

- Male student on female student
- Female student on male student
- Male student on male student
- Female student on female student
- Teacher on student
- Other staff member on student
- Staff member on staff member

How many instances have you heard of in the past year?

One  Two to five  Six or more

Where did the incident(s) occur?  
(Check all that apply.)

- In the hall
- In a classroom
- On school grounds outside the school (other than the parking lot)
- In or near the gym/playing field/pool
- In the cafeteria
- At a field trip location, including another school for away games
- In the parking lot
- In or near the locker room

- In the rest room
- In the driver education car
- On school transportation on the way to school/on the way home/on a school trip
- On public transportation on the way to school or on the way home

When did the incident(s) take place?  
(Check all that apply.)

- Before school
- Between classes
- In class
- During lunch
- During recess
- After school

### 2. In the cases that you know about, what did the victims do?

(Check all that apply.)

- Ignored it
- Complained to school authorities
- Told the harasser to stop
- Complained to someone outside the school (e.g., a parent or friend)
- Went along with it

### 3. Do you know students who have had the following experiences?

(Check all that apply.)

- Had difficulty concentrating because they have been or are being harassed
- Had difficulty completing their work because of harassment
- Dropped a class because of harassment
- Had their grades affected because of harassment

**4. What happened when cases of harassment were reported to school authorities?**

(Check all that apply.)

- Charge was found to be true
- Support was provided to the victim
- Remediation was provided to the harasser
- Action was taken against the harasser
- Action was taken against the victim
- Charge was found to be false
- Charge is still being processed
- Nothing happened
- Do not know what happened

**5. If the victim you know of did nothing, why do you think he or she did nothing?**

(Check all that apply.)

- Didn't know what to do
- Didn't want to hurt the harasser
- Didn't think it was necessary to report
- Was too embarrassed
- Didn't think anything would be done
- Didn't think anyone would believe him or her
- Didn't know it violated policy
- Was afraid the harasser would get even
- Thought it would make him or her uncomfortable with the harasser

**6. How widespread do you think sexual harassment is in your school?**

- It doesn't happen.
- It happens to only a few people.
- It happens to a fair number of people.
- It goes on all the time.

Please answer the following:

I am  male  female

Race/ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

Main language you speak \_\_\_\_\_

I am a

- Student
- Staff member
- Parent
- Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

## Checklist for Schools or School Districts: What Has Been Done to Prevent Sexual Harassment in Your School?

Instructions: Mark each action your school has taken, count the number of marks, and turn to “Scoring the Checklist” (on page 15) to see how your school rates.

### 1. Does your school/district have a specific policy against sexual harassment?

- Do you have such a policy?
- Is that policy publicized for all members of the school community?
- Does the policy address sexual harassment and orientation harassment?
- Does the policy clearly state that retaliation against those who report sexual harassment violates school policy and will be treated as seriously as harassment itself?
- Is there a procedure to inform new employees, students, and parents of the policy (e.g., is the policy mailed to parents, posted on bulletin boards throughout the school, and distributed at parent-teacher organization meetings)?
- If you distribute a student handbook, does it include information on the sexual harassment policy and how you will handle incidents of harassment?
- If you distribute an employee handbook, does it refer to the sexual harassment policy?
- Do union contracts and affirmative action plans for the district reference the school's policy on sexual harassment?
- Are student job-training work sites notified of the sexual harassment policy and how incidents of harassment should be reported?

- Are vendors, salespeople, contractors (such as bus drivers), and other visitors made aware of the policy?

### 2. Does your school/district foster an atmosphere of prevention by sensitizing students and staff to issues of sexual harassment?

- Does the school/district mission statement reflect a commitment to respect for all people?
- Have you held training on sexual harassment for school/district administrators in the past two years?
- Have you held sexual harassment training for school/district employees (including those responsible for job training) in the past two years?
- Have you held sexual harassment training for students in the past two years?
- Do staff members model the use of appropriate language and behavior at all times?
- Are pamphlets or posters advising students and employees about the nature of sexual harassment and its legal implications easily found around the school?
- Has a school-wide conference or “speakout” been held to sensitize the school community to the issue of sexual harassment?
- Is information about preventing sexual harassment and what to do if it occurs a routine part of the K–12 curriculum?

- Do student leaders take an active role in the effort to prevent sexual harassment?
- Are students and staff members comfortable talking about harassment incidents, problematic areas, and attitudes (e.g., harassment against gays and lesbians and teachers using grades to coerce students into sexual behavior)?

**3. Is your school/district prepared to receive and respond to complaints?**

- Is there at least one complaint manager in every building in the district, including noninstructional sites such as the bus garage or district administration building?
- Are complaint managers diversified by gender, ethnicity, race, or linguistic group?
- Do all students and staff know the name and location of at least two complaint managers?
- Are those wishing to file a complaint allowed to go to any complaint manager they feel comfortable with rather than being required to see one in their building?
- Have the complaint managers and investigators received regular yearly training?
- Do complaint managers meet on a regular basis to engage in group problem-solving and identify their needs for further training and support?
- Are complaint managers given release time from their regular duties to manage complaints and perform record-keeping tasks?
- Do complaint managers have access to training and legal advice regarding processing complaints and potential legal liability?

- Do administrators work cooperatively with complaint managers (e.g., are sanctions and remedies actually applied)?
- Do the administration and school board receive regular statistical reports by building and district regarding the number and type of formal and informal complaints filed and their disposition?

**4. Does your school/district have a grievance procedure for sexual harassment?**

- Is there a school/district grievance procedure for sexual harassment?
- Does the grievance procedure provide opportunities for both sides of a sexual harassment complaint to express their side of the story? Are procedures in place for impartial investigations that include fact-finding, careful review, and opportunity for appeal?
- Where there is a finding of sexual harassment, does the grievance procedure include the appropriate remedy based on the severity of the offense and institutional corrective action?
- Has information about this procedure been distributed to employees, parents, and students?
- Is a similar grievance procedure written into union contracts?
- Has the grievance procedure been distributed to vendors, salespeople, contractors, and other visitors to the school or district?

**5. How effective has your school/district been in implementing its antiharassment policy?**

- Have events where sexual harassment flourishes, such as “flip-up” days (when male students flip up the skirts of female students) and pep rally cross-dressing skits, been eliminated?

\_\_\_ Do staff members promptly intervene in situations where they observe harassment?

\_\_\_ Is offensive graffiti that violates the sexual harassment policy promptly removed?

\_\_\_ Have past incidents of sexual harassment been resolved fairly and appropriately?

**6. Has your school/district reached out to populations of students known to be especially vulnerable to sexual harassment?**

\_\_\_ Have support groups been established for students enrolled in vocational or academic classes that are nontraditional for their gender, race, or ethnicity?

\_\_\_ Have support groups been established for gay or lesbian students who might feel particularly vulnerable at school?

\_\_\_ Are students who drop classes that are not traditional for their gender, race, or ethnicity routinely surveyed to establish the reason for dropping classes and determine whether sexual harassment played any role in their decision?

\_\_\_ Are student-placement work sites routinely evaluated for freedom from sexual harassment?

### Scoring the Checklist

**37–43 points:** Your school or district has obviously embarked on a well-planned and determined effort to eliminate sexual harassment.

**27–36 points:** Although your school or district has made good inroads in its efforts to prevent sexual harassment, a few areas still need improvement. Identify the areas you didn't check and consider how you can improve.

**17–35 points:** While you are making some efforts to prevent sexual harassment in your school or district, you need to supplement your efforts in many areas. Consider administering

the "Is Sexual Harassment a Problem in Your School?" survey on page 11 to determine the level of harassment in your district, and use the results of the survey to begin identifying areas on which to concentrate.

**1–16 points:** Your school or district should examine sexual harassment from the standpoint of legal liability. Assess district policies and work toward basic awareness of the problem within the school or district. Set specific deadlines for completing each phase of the effort. Consider asking for assistance from an outside agency to guide your efforts.

## Strategies for Parents to Prevent Sexual Harassment

These strategies may be duplicated and distributed.

- Encourage your children to discuss school life with you, including grades, sports, extracurricular activities, and friends. Let your children know you are interested and available to talk, no matter what the topic.
  - Encourage your children to speak up for themselves. Promoting self-confidence in children is the first step to prevent them from becoming victims of sexual harassment or abuse.
  - Model appropriate behavior. For example, refuse to laugh at sexist comments or jokes. Use language that is inclusive of both genders and avoids stereotyping individuals based on gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, or other characteristics.
  - Suggest that your children participate in leadership training opportunities at school or elsewhere. This will help your child gain the confidence needed to ward off sexual abuse and harassment.
  - Raise your children's awareness of other people's feelings. Fostering a sense of respect, empathy, and compassion will help prevent your child from hurting others.
  - Talk to your children about healthy dating relationships and the fact that a great deal of sexual harassment occurs within current, past, or perceived dating relationships.
  - Request a copy of your school's sexual harassment policy. Keep it on hand as a reference. If any part is unclear to you, make an appointment with an administrator or Title IX coordinator and clarify any concerns. (Title IX is the federal law that prohibits sex discrimination in education.)
- Discuss the school policy with your children. Let them know that you are aware that sexual harassment in schools is a big problem and that you are available to talk about it.
  - Ask your school to put sexual harassment on the agenda for parent-teacher organization meetings or parent discussion topic lists. If you are qualified, offer to lead a discussion group or series of talks for the parent community.
  - Create and distribute materials to help parents and their children discuss issues like sex education, gender equity, and sexism.
  - If you are concerned that your school does not have a sexual harassment policy or has a policy that is confusing or inaccessible, talk to your school administrator or school board representative. You have the right and responsibility to make sure your children are protected from violence and harassment at school.

Dear Beth: I'm 18 and in high school. I have this really cute math teacher. One day he asked me to a fancy restaurant to talk about my grades. He just kept telling me how beautiful I was and asked if I could come over to his house next week. ... He told me it would bring up my grades. I get very bad grades in math. What should I do?

—Beth Winship, "Ask Beth,"  
*San Francisco Chronicle*, March 2, 1997

## Strategies for Schools to Prevent Sexual Harassment

These strategies may be duplicated and distributed to key education stakeholders.

### What Teachers, Counselors, and School Staff Can Do

- Borrow or create your own sexual harassment curriculum. Integrate it into civil rights, diversity, tolerance, or other units, providing opportunities for students to discuss their ideas and feelings. (See Section 4 for curriculum ideas.)
- Use case studies to help students better understand sexual harassment. Divide students into groups, each taking a particular aspect of the case to discuss and present to the rest of class. Follow up with group discussions designed to consider the perspectives of all those involved—victims, perpetrators, and bystanders.
- Show a video addressing sexual harassment (such as *Flirting or Hurting*), and follow up with a classroom discussion. (See Section 4 for a list of videos.)
- Compile a list of resources for students who may be experiencing sexual harassment. Include articles, websites, and hot lines. Make the list and resources accessible in your classroom and office. (See Section 4 for a list of resources.)
- Encourage students to form or join school groups that work to educate others about and prevent sexual harassment.
- Support and validate students' feelings about their sexuality. Make yourself approachable or refer students to someone who is. Educate yourself on sexuality and homophobia by reading or talking to peers who understand these issues and can communicate with young people about them.

- Assure students that you will guarantee their confidentiality to the extent that you are able to do so and that they will never be penalized for reporting sexual harassment. Create a trustworthy environment within your classroom, your office, the locker room, the hallways, and other school places. Students need to know that there are people they can confide in about these issues.
- Discuss sexual harassment in the workplace and the fact that the perpetrator could be fired or sued. If you have a school-to-work curriculum, include a discussion on sexual harassment. Stress that sexual harassment is no more acceptable in school than it is in the workplace.
- Discuss sexual harassment and sexual violence that occur in current, past, or perceived dating relationships, stressing the fact that a great deal of sexual harassment is perpetrated by someone with whom a victim may be or has previously been involved.
- Model appropriate behavior by avoiding sexual references, innuendo, and jokes.
- Report any sexual harassment that you witness directly or indirectly to a complaint manager. Do not be a passive bystander.

### What School Administrators and School Boards Can Do

- Create a clear and accessible sexual harassment policy. (See Section 3 for models.)
  - Be sure your school's sexual harassment policy is written clearly and is easy to understand.
  - Post the policy in an accessible place in the school and print it in your student handbook.
  - Include sexual harassment in your school's discipline policy.
  - Include provisions for protecting students from harassment that occurs within current, past, or perceived dating relationships.

- Translate the policy into the languages that are spoken in your students' homes. Make sure every student and family has a copy of the policy in a format they can understand.
  - Create student-friendly versions that are clever and eye-catching (such as cartoons or comic strips), illustrate what sexual harassment is, and explain how the school handles complaints.
  - Clarify that retaliation as well as the underlying sexual harassment are strictly forbidden.
- Have conversations, training, and workshops about the policy in assemblies, staff meetings, and classrooms. Plan various venues to discuss the policy and the punishment for sexual harassment in your school.
  - Plan periodic in-service sessions on the policy. Include discussions to help teachers and staff members understand the policy and know what to do when sexual harassment is reported. Repeat staff training; avoid the one-shot approach!
  - Make clear to all staff members and school personnel that they have an obligation to report any sexual harassment they witness or learn about.
  - Bring in national experts to train staff on how to recognize, respond to, and prevent sexual harassment. Send groups of staff members to training sessions on the subject.
  - Designate staff members (teachers, guidance counselors, etc.) with in-depth knowledge of sexual harassment and the school's grievance procedures as the "go-to" people on harassment and Title IX (the federal law prohibiting sex discrimination in education). Make sure all students and teachers know who these people are. Provide the designated staff with training on recognizing and responding to sexual harassment. Designate at least two people—one male and one female—per building. One person per building or district is not enough!

To help those who believe that harassment happens only in other schools, survey your own students. The results will personalize the problem and show that harassment is indeed a problem at "home"—one that needs to be addressed. ... From my perspective as an administrator, a key responsibility is to help create a school environment that is physically and emotionally safe for all students. Doing that means ensuring that students are safe from harassment in any form—physical, verbal, emotional. Harassing behaviors are born in schools, homes, and communities where such behaviors and attitudes are accepted or tolerated. Schools have a duty to help students learn the importance of respectful behavior.

—Jackie DeFazio, retired high school principal  
and AAUW Educational Foundation  
Sexual Harassment Task Force Chair

- Train staff to work with victims of sexual harassment as well as harassers and bystanders; remediation is necessary for students and bystanders. Remember that training should emphasize the importance of the school's policy on retaliation and the fact that retaliation will be treated as seriously as the harassment itself.
- Encourage students to form organizations focused on preventing sexual harassment and other related issues. Consider recruiting a staff

We have done the prudent thing in our schools to inform students of their rights to a safe education without fear of harassment of any kind. Yet, the words "gay," "fag," "dyke," "queer," "lesbo," and others ring through our hallways, locker rooms, and classrooms as a way to stop those students who "dare to be different" in how they self-identify or how they relate to someone romantically. We have not been able to stop the control of a culture that continues to label, demean, and sort through who "belongs" and who is "outside" the gender box.

—Mary Grady, high school teacher and coach, Illinois

- member to start such a group and then aggressively encourage students to become involved.
- Provide training to student leaders on how to educate their peers about sexual harassment. Training should outline the school's harassment policy, the process for filing a formal complaint, and strategies to deal with the outcomes. As you would with any similar training, offer regular and ongoing sessions.
- Make it clear to students, teachers, and staff that sexual harassment and retaliation against those who report harassment will not be tolerated.
- Educate parents about sexual harassment through meetings and workshops that explain your sexual harassment policy. Enlist their support and listen to their ideas. Give parents strategies for gender-fair parenting.
- Partner with community agencies that provide counseling and support for victims of sexual harassment in all its forms, including domestic violence and dating violence.