



Sexual Harassment in the Schools

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What is Sexual Harassment in the Schools?

Sexual harassment is unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment can include unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment of a student can deny or limit, on the basis of sex, the student's ability to participate in or to receive benefits, services, or opportunities in the school's program. Sexual harassment of students is, therefore, a form of sex discrimination prohibited by Title IX. Title IX protects students from unlawful sexual harassment in all of a school's programs or activities, whether they take place in the facilities of the school, on a school bus, at a class or training program sponsored by the school at another location, or elsewhere. Title IX protects both male and female students from sexual harassment, regardless of who the harasser is.

It is important to recognize that Title IX's prohibition against sexual harassment does not extend to legitimate nonsexual touching or other nonsexual conduct. For example, a high school athletic coach hugging a student who made a goal or a kindergarten teacher's consoling hug for a child with a skinned knee would not be considered sexual harassment. Similarly, one student's demonstration of a sports maneuver or technique requiring contact with another student will not be considered sexual harassment. However, in some circumstances, nonsexual conduct may take on sexual connotations and rise to the level of sexual harassment. For example, a teacher's repeatedly hugging and putting his or her arms around students under inappropriate circumstances could create a hostile environment.

Sexual harassment of students is a real and serious problem in education at all levels, including elementary and secondary schools as well as colleges and universities. It can affect any student, regardless of sex, race, or age. Sexual harassment can threaten a student's physical or emotional well-being, influence how well a student does in school, and make it difficult for a student to achieve his or her career goals. Preventing and remedying sexual harassment in schools is essential to ensure nondiscriminatory, safe environments in which students can learn. A school should not excuse the harassment with an attitude of "that's just emerging adolescent sexuality" or "boys will be boys," or ignore it for fear of damaging a professor's reputation. This does nothing to stop the sexual harassment and can even send a message that such conduct is accepted or tolerated by the school. When a school makes it clear that sexual harassment will not be tolerated, trains its staff, and appropriately responds when harassment occurs, students will see the school as a safe place where everyone can learn.

What Can You Do If You Have Been Sexually Harassed?

A student who believes he or she has been sexually harassed (or a parent who believes that his or her child has been harassed) should immediately report it to a responsible school official. This could be a teacher, principal, faculty member, administrator, campus security officer, affirmative action officer, staff in the office of student affairs or the school's Title IX coordinator. If the student feels comfortable doing so, the student should let the harasser know that he or she does not welcome the conduct and wants it to stop.

Filing a Formal Complaint:

Students and their parents can file formal complaints with:

- the central administration of the student's school



- the [Connecticut State Department of Education](#)
- the [U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights](#)
- the [Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities \(CHRO\)](#) can provide information and guidance on appropriate legal actions

To Find Providers in Connecticut's Community Resources Database:

Search by service names:

- [Discrimination Assistance](#)
 - [School Districts](#)
 - [Sexual Assault Hotlines](#)
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SOURCES: U.S Department of Education;

- *Sexual Harassment: It's Not Academic* <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ocrshpam.html>
- *National Coalition for Women & Girls in Education's, "Ending Sexual Harassment: Enforcement is Key",* <http://www.ncwge.org/TitleIX40/Harassment.pdf>

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