

"This kid won't stop talking dirty to me."

Sexual Harassment

What is it?

Sexual harassment is unwanted sexual behavior. It may take different forms, including:

- Physical contact, such as grabbing, pinching, or touching your breast, butt or other body parts, kissing you against your will;
- Sexual comments, such as name-calling (slut, whore, fag), starting rumors about you, making sexual jokes at your expense, or making sexual gestures at or about you;
- Sexual propositions, such as asking you for sex or repeatedly asking you out when you have said no;
- Unwanted communication, such as phone calls, letters, or e-mails. These can be mean, nasty, or threatening, or they can seem flattering or nice but still make you uncomfortable.

These are only examples; there may be other forms of behavior that are not listed here but still can be considered sexual harassment.

Both the harasser and the victim can be either male or female, and they do not have to be the opposite sex. The harasser can be another teenager or an adult.

Some flirting between kids is normal and healthy, but sometimes it can be hard to tell the difference between flirting and sexual

harassment. The following lists can help you figure it out.¹ (NOTE: An adult flirting with a kid is not normal or ok.)

Flirting

Flirting is welcome attention.

Flirting goes both ways.

Flirting makes you feel flattered or attractive.

Flirting makes you feel in control.

Flirting makes you feel good about yourself.

Flirting is legal in school.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is not wanted.

Sexual harassment is one-sided.

Sexual harassment makes you feel put down or ugly.

Sexual harassment makes you feel powerless.

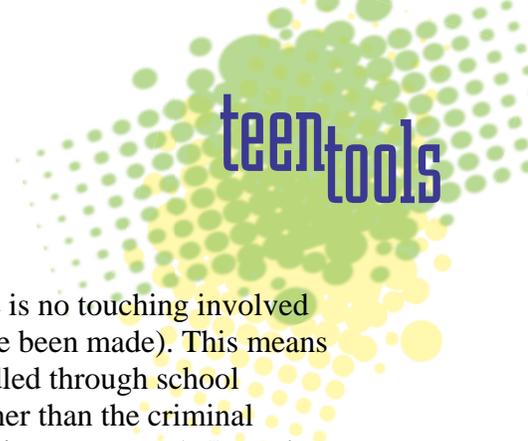
Sexual harassment makes you feel bad or dirty.

Sexual harassment is a violation of school rules.

If you think you are flirting with someone, but they do not respond the way you want them to, consider this...

- if the person does not seem happy with your attention,
- if you flirt but they do not flirt back,
- if you make a sexual joke and they do not laugh,
- if the person seems to be avoiding you...

...you might be making them uncomfortable. The bottom line is that if the person



receiving your sexual or romantic attention doesn't want it and you continue, that's harassment and you should stop it.

If you are a victim of sexual harassment, you might...

- Feel angry, embarrassed, frustrated, scared, or depressed.
- Feel helpless to stop the harassment.
- Feel hopeless that anything can be done.
- Not feel good about yourself.
- Fear that your reputation will be destroyed.
- Go out of your way to avoid the harasser(s).
- Experience headaches, stomach aches, or sleeping or eating problems because of the stress caused by the harassment.

You're Not Alone²

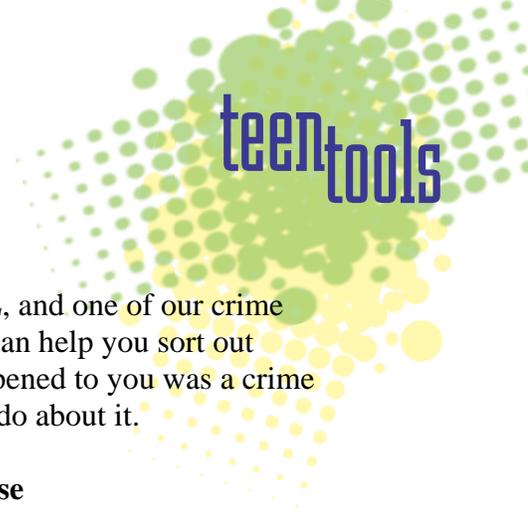
- 81 percent of students will experience some form of sexual harassment at some time while they are in school, with 27 percent experiencing it often.
- 85 percent of students report that students harass other students at their schools.
- Almost 40 percent of students report that teachers and other school employees sexually harass students in their schools.

Get Help

Because "sexual harassment" is a term that can describe many different behaviors, the kind of help available to you may differ depending on exactly what the person harassing you has done. In many cases, the harassment will probably not constitute a crime, but rather a violation of school rules

(especially if there is no touching involved and no threats have been made). This means that it will be handled through school administration rather than the criminal justice system (police, court, etc.). In such a case, you can begin by following the steps outlined below.

- Tell the person harassing you that their behavior makes you uncomfortable and you want them to stop. You can do this face-to-face or in writing. If you write them a letter, save a copy of it for yourself. In some cases, this will be enough to stop the behavior. (If you don't feel comfortable doing this by yourself, you can ask a friend or an adult for help. Or just skip this step and begin with the next one.)
- If the person doesn't stop when you ask them to, get a copy of your school's sexual harassment policy. By law, the school has to have one. The policy will tell you who to report to and how to do it. It can also help you understand what behaviors are considered harassment.
- Report the harassment to the appropriate person in your school, and/or tell a parent.
- If the harassment doesn't stop, keep a journal documenting each incident. Write down what happened, when and where it happened, whether there were any witnesses (and their names if you know them), how it made you feel, and how you responded. Then take this documentation to school administrators and ask them to take action to stop the harassment.
- Be persistent. If the first person you tell doesn't take you seriously, keep telling someone in authority until something is done about it. The



school's policy should indicate the "chain of command" your complaint should go through. (For example, if the person the school has assigned to handle sexual harassment complaints doesn't take action, you may need to go to the principal, and if the principal also does not respond, you might next go to the superintendent. See your school's policy for details.)

- If the school administration does not stop the harassment, you may wish to consult an attorney. If you don't know who to call, you can contact the **National Crime Victim Bar Association** at **202-467-8753** for a referral.

Certain behaviors that are sometimes part of a pattern of sexual harassment are, in fact, crimes. These can include **threats, assault** (such as a push, shove, punch, or kick), **stalking** (when a person's pattern of behavior makes you fear for your safety), **sexual assault** (when someone forces you into a sexual act), and **property crime** (when someone takes, vandalizes, or destroys a possession of yours). Criminal law varies from state to state, so it is impossible to give exact definitions of these crimes. If you are confused or unsure about your own case, you can call

1-800-FYI-CALL, and one of our crime victim advocates can help you sort out whether what happened to you was a crime and what you can do about it.

Help Someone Else

If you see harassment happening in your school, you can help put a stop to it.

- Refuse to join in.
- If you feel safe doing so, step in and interrupt the harassment.
- Tell an adult you trust. Don't be a bystander.
- Talk to the person being harassed and try to get them to talk to an adult. Offer to go with them.

If you want to read more...

- ...about harassment that includes threats or makes the victim fear for his/her safety, read our **GET HELP** series bulletin on stalking; *or*
- ...about unwanted sex, read **our GET HELP** series bulletin on sexual assault; *or*
- ...about violence in teen dating relationships, read our **GET HELP** series bulletin on teen dating violence at **www.ncvc.org/gethelp**.

¹ The information in this table and parts of the definition above come from the Texas Alliance Against Sexual Assault's STARS program (Students Taking Action for Respect.) For more information, visit www.taasa.org.

² America Association of University Women. *Harassment-Free Hallways: How to Stop Sexual Harassment in Schools*. For more information, visit www.aauw.org/research/girls_education/hostile.cfm.

The Teen Victim Project, a program of the National Center for Victims of Crime, is dedicated to improving the national response to teen victims of crime by raising awareness of the incidence and impact of teen victimization and encouraging youth leadership and community collaboration to identify, support, and refer teen victims of crime.