

Topic 6 — What's Ok And What's Not Ok? (Sexual harassment)

Introduction

Sometimes the boundaries between what's acceptable and unacceptable for young people are confusing. A useful, general rule of thumb is that sexual comments should be WANTED, reciprocal, and make a person feel good. Addressing sexual harassment is important to help young people understand what is acceptable and unacceptable for ethical and respectful relationships. In this session we highlight how assumptions and judgments about gender can contribute to sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is a significant issue in the Australian community. Despite there being laws against it for the past 25 years, it continues to occur in workplaces and schools. In schools, a lot of sexual harassment is based on verbal taunts and teasing. Smartphones, online messaging, and social media multiply the sites for unwanted sexual comments, suggestions, advances, or threats to another person.

Key Messages

- Sexual harassment is any unwanted or unwelcome sexual behaviour which offends you or makes you feel humiliated or intimidated.
- Girls and boys can be victims of sexual harassment.
- Students are entitled to have an education free from sexual harassment.
- If possible tell them to stop. If that isn't possible tell a person in charge.

Time

25 minutes

Preparation and Materials

H1: What Is Sexual Harassment Quiz (1 per student)

H2 What Is Sexual Harassment answer sheet

H3: What To Do (1 per student)

H4: How To Help Yourself Or Help A Friend Who Is Being Sexually Harassed. (1 per student)

Method

1. Explain to the students that sometimes people make comments that are intended to hurt or intimidate another person. When the focus is on things like a person's appearance, body parts, sexual orientation, or sexual activity it may be sexual harassment. It can happen to girls and boys. Sometimes people blame the victim by saying 'its just a bit of fun/ a part of life, people should toughen up', or even that 'they asked for it'.
2. Some of your students may say something like 'you can't say anything anymore', or 'can't you say someone looks nice?' This is a great opportunity to emphasise the difference between WANTED and UNWANTED attention.

Ask:

What is the difference between flirting and sexual harassment?

Draw two columns on the board Whole group to populate the columns (could do pair and share first)

Flirting	Sexual harassment
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is WANTED• Feels good, confident feeling• Is complimentary• Is mutual and shared• Is non-threatening• Builds the self- esteem of both people• Feels equal to both people	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is UNWANTED• Feels bad; degrading; insulting• Is one-sided• Is threatening• Builds up the ego of the giver while tearing down the self-esteem of the recipient• One person is misusing their power

3. Organise students into groups of 3 or 4.

Handout H1: What Is Sexual Harassment Quiz

Get groups to complete quiz.

You have probably decided that some were definitely sexual harassment, some were more general bullying and some you could not be sure about.

When everyone is finished, find out how they answered each question and

check the answers against the answer sheet provided. (H2 What Is Sexual Harassment answer sheet)

4. In their small groups ask students to choose one of the cases from the quiz and discuss the following questions listed on H3: What to do?
Write down the advice raised by members of the group.
Ask each group to read out their scenario and share their responses with large group.

Finish with handout H4: How To Help Yourself Or Help A Friend Who Is Being Sexually Harassed.

WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Just like other kinds of bullying, sexual harassment can involve comments, gestures, actions, or attention that is intended to hurt, offend, or intimidate another person. It is UNWANTED. With sexual harassment, the focus is on things like a person's appearance, body parts, sexual orientation, or sexual activity. Sexual harassment is not your fault. If someone does or says something that you think is harassment talk to a trusted adult. It can happen to girls and boys.

Sexual harassment or bullying can include:

- making sexual jokes, comments, or gestures to or about someone
- spreading sexual rumours (in person, by text, or online)
- writing sexual messages about people in public places
- showing someone inappropriate sexual pictures or videos
- pressuring someone to send you naked pictures of themselves (“nudes”)
- posting sexual comments, pictures, or videos on social networks or sending explicit text messages
- asking someone about their sex lives
- making sexual comments or offers while pretending to be someone else online
- touching, grabbing, or pinching someone in a deliberately sexual way
- pulling at someone's clothing and brushing up against them in a purposefully sexual way.



Imagine that you heard the comments and saw the incidents listed below.

Would they be examples of 'sexual harassment'?

Is this an example of sexual harassment?	Yes	No	Don't know
1. "What they'd do was get a ruler and try to stick it up your skirt. They'd do it all the time. It was so bad that I was begging the teachers to let me go to another class."			
2. "I was sitting in the classroom and this boy walked behind me and shouted right in my ear: 'UGLY'. Then he kept on walking.			
I was so shocked. I left the room, I couldn't cope. At that age you're going through a vulnerable period – so that just crushed me."			
3. A girl approaches a group of girls. They turn away and ignore her, and exclude her from their group, saying "We don't want a lezzo like you with us".			
4. A boy calls a girl over to look at his phone. He shows her a picture of a naked woman. The girl looks and then walks quickly away.			
5. A boy and a girl are hugging each other. She laughs and tells him that he's only after one thing. He laughs, pulls her closer and kisses her. It is clear that they like each other.			
6. "I usually get a hard time about hanging out with the girls in class and at lunchtime. There is a bunch of girls that call me a faggot – which makes me feel pretty bad, like I'm not a real guy."			
7. A group of students post comments about another girl and her sexual experiences.			

WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT - ANSWER SHEET

How do your answers compare? You can check your answers provided by the Australian Human Rights Commission.

<i>Answers to 'Comments in the schoolyard..'</i>	
1.	Yes – this is sexual harassment. The overtly sexual nature of what the boys were doing and saying wasn't welcomed by the girl and made her feel very hurt and upset.
2.	This probably isn't sexual harassment – but it is certainly a pretty nasty form of bullying. Shouting something insulting like 'ugly' is done to deliberately hurt and humiliate someone else.
3.	It's not clear if this is sexual harassment – but it is a form of bullying and homophobia. There are laws to protect people from homophobic behaviour in every Australian state and territory.
4.	This could be sexual harassment – it depends on how the girl feels about seeing the pictures. It would be harassment if she didn't want to look at those sort pictures or she felt offended by them.
5.	This would not be sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is not about friendships, mutual attraction or consensual relationships like boyfriend-girlfriend.
6.	This may be a form of sexual harassment covered by a state law. There are laws to protect people from homophobic behaviour in every Australian state and territory. Girls can sexually harass boys just as boys can harass girls.
7.	Writing explicit comments that are offensive or humiliating can be sexual harassment, even if the girl doesn't see it.

WHAT TO DO

Summarise your ideas on each of the questions in the spaces below. Comment on it from each of the following points of view:

The student being harassed	How might they feel? What action could they take?
One of the harassers	How might they feel? What if they wanted it to stop? What action could they take?
A friend of the student being harassed	How might they feel? What action could they take?
A bystander	How might they feel? What action could they take?
A teacher on yard duty	How might they feel? What action could they take?

HOW TO HELP YOURSELF OR HELP A FRIEND WHO IS BEING SEXUALLY HARASSED.

<p>What are the best things a person who is being harassed can do about it?</p>	<p>TELL THEM TO STOP. It can be helpful to start by telling the person doing the harassing to stop. Let him or her know that this behavior is not OK with you. Sometimes that will be enough, but not always. The harasser may not stop. He or she might even laugh off your request, tease you, or bother you more.</p> <p>TELL AN ADULT AT SCHOOL. That’s why it’s important to share what’s happening with an adult you trust. Most schools have a sexual harassment policy or a bullying policy to protect you. If you find the adult you talk to doesn’t take your complaints seriously at first, you may have to repeat yourself or find someone else who will listen.</p> <p>In most cases, telling someone sooner leads to faster results and fewer problems down the line, so it’s worth it.</p> <p>TELL AN ADULT AT HOME.</p> <p>TAKE SCREEN SHOTS OR WRITE DOWN THE BEHAVIOURS.</p>
<p>You see someone being harassed – what are the best things you can do?</p>	<p>IF YOU CAN, SPEAK UP. Bystanders play an important role in stopping bullying and sexual harassment. If it feels safe and natural to speak up, say, “Come on, let’s get out of here” to the person you see getting bullied. You probably shouldn’t try to change the bully’s behavior by yourself, but it is OK to let the bully know people are watching and will be getting involved.</p> <p>TELL AN ADULT AT SCHOOL. If you don’t feel you can say something at the time you see the incident, report the event to a teacher or principal. It can make the world of difference to the young person who has been harassed to know someone is on their side. It’s standing up for what’s right.</p> <p>OFFER SUPPORT. You could also talk to the victim afterward and offer support. Say that you think what happened is not OK and offer some ideas for dealing with harassment.</p>

WHAT'S THE LEGAL SITUATION WITH SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

At school

As a student you are entitled to an education free of sexual harassment. The same applies to teachers – they are entitled to a workplace free from harassment. Schools have an obligation to deal with sexual harassment and all other forms of bullying.

Sexual harassment by a member of staff

Regardless of your age, it is unlawful for a teacher to sexually harass you.

Sexual harassment by another student

Regardless of your age, it is unlawful for an adult student (definition) to sexually harass you. Certain types of bullying, about sex or sex-based characteristics, may also be sexual harassment.

Who is responsible?

Anyone aged over 16 years is considered an 'adult student', which means they are personally liable for sexually harassing another student or teacher. If you are harassed, you may be able to lodge a complaint against the student and, in some cases, against the school.

A complaint of sexual harassment can't be made against another student if the harasser is under 16 years of age. In these circumstances, however, you may be able to make a complaint against the school as it has a duty of care to protect students from harassment and discrimination.