

Sexual Harassment Defined and its Impact on Students

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Content Warning

****SASH Club Power Topics may include sensitive content that may be difficult to present and may possibly be triggering to some participants.****

You may want to seek the support of an ally during this presentation, especially if you're a survivor of sexual violence.

What's Ahead: (part 1)

- How does sexual harassment harm students?
- When does it begin and how prevalent is it?
- Feelings associated with sexual harassment
- The importance of recognizing sexual harassment
- Types of sexual harassment and assault
- Who are the harassers and who gets harassed?
- Sexual harassment by teachers and school staff



**Due to length,
this presentation
is segmented
into two parts.**

What's Ahead: (part 2)

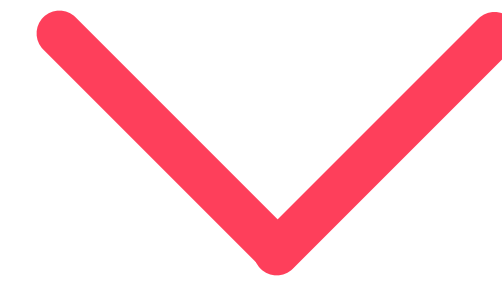
- Frequently asked questions
- Bystander intervention
- What can I do if I am sexually assaulted?
- What can I do if I experience or witness sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment violates civil rights

- Civil rights are the protections we all have to be treated equally, regardless of our race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, or sexual.
- Sexual harassment and sexual violence violate our civil rights.
- Each year, at least 56% of girls, 40% of boys, and 75% of transgender students in grades 7-12 are sexually harassed. Overall, at least 20% of teen girls and 3% of teen boys have experienced sexual battery, assault, or rape in school.

Why define sexual harassment?

- The #MeToo Movement against illegal sexual harassment in the workplace is widely recognized.
- But do schools have a responsibility to protect students from sexual harassment at school?



YES!! Sexual harassment is, by definition, unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature. Schools also have a responsibility to protect students from a hostile environment even if the harassment occurred off-campus or online. Helping people understand the damage sexual harassment causes will show why we need to stop it!

Impact of sexual harassment

Sexual harassment and sexual assault can:

- Traumatize students
- Interfere with their ability to get an education
- Exact a physical, emotional, educational, and economic toll on students
- Cause students to drop out of school
- Make it harder for students to go to college or get good jobs



Sexual harassment starts early

Sexual harassment can begin as early as kindergarten. It includes making fun of children when they do not look or act like a stereotypical girl or boy.

Many elementary school children are groped or sexually assaulted in the bathroom, often by students of the same sex, or on the playground, or in school buses by peers, older students, and sometimes bus drivers.

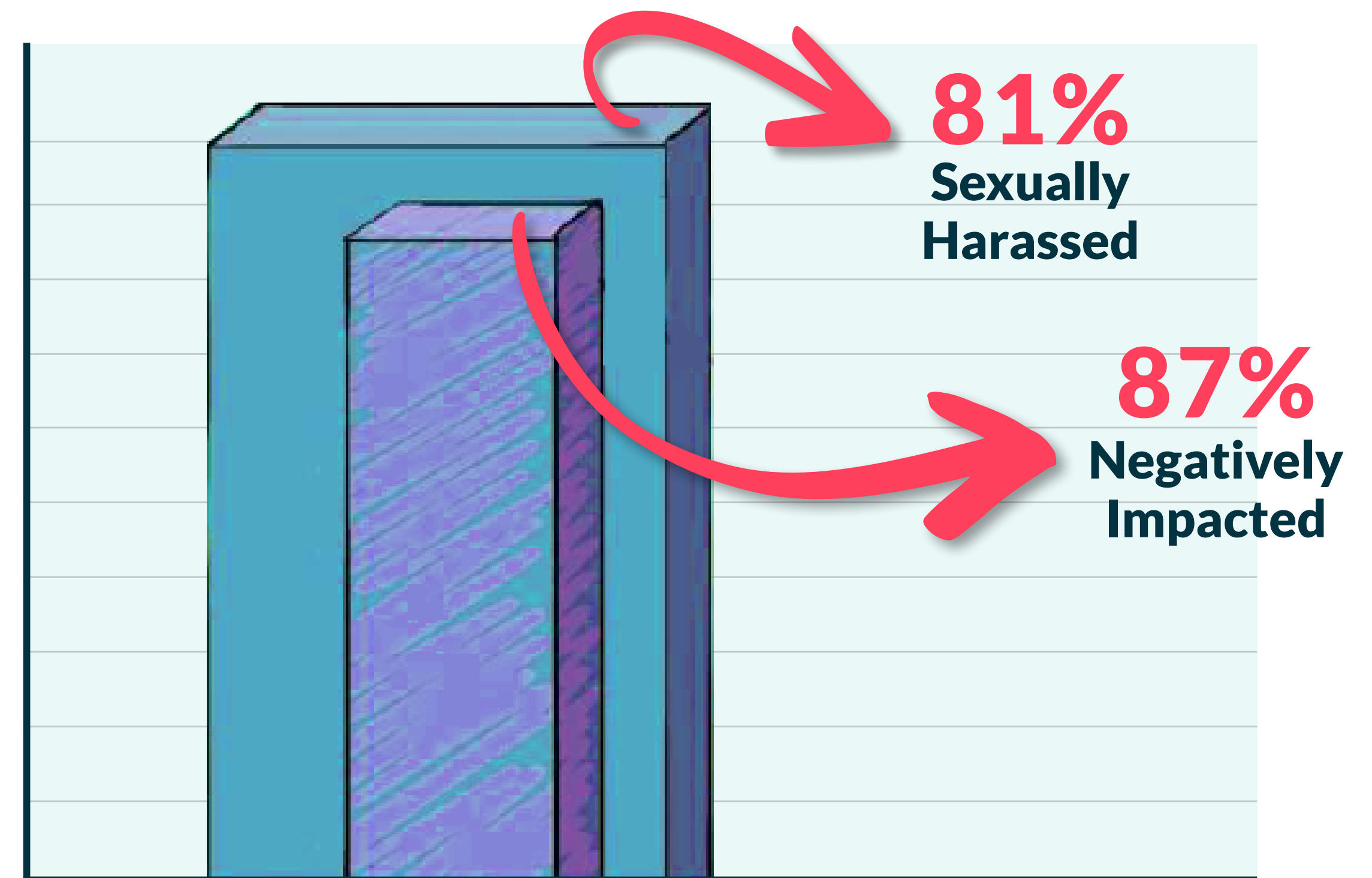


It's important
to stop sexual
harassment early
before it gets
worse!

Frequency of sexual harassment

Sexual harassment in K-12 schools happens a lot more often than you think. In one national survey, 81% of students in grades 8 through 11 reported they experienced sexual harassment and 87% of those students felt that it had a negative impact.

STUDENTS SEXUALLY HARASSED



Feelings associated with sexual harassment

- > Identifying sexual harassment or assault is often confusing. We may be shocked, unsure of what happened, or why it happened, especially if the harasser is a friend. We may be angry, embarrassed, or feel shame.
- > Victims may wrongly blame themselves for sexual harassment or assault. **They are never at fault under any circumstance!**
- > Many times, victims don't acknowledge that they've been sexually harassed or assaulted. That's because many have come to accept sexual harassment as normal--a regular part of going to school.

Sexual harassment should never be normalized or tolerated!

Sexual harassment is discrimination

- Sexual harassment is a type of discrimination based on sex. Just like people are discriminated against because of their color, ethnicity, race, religion, or sexual identity/orientation, sexual harassment is discrimination based on the person's gender.
- Because sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination, schools receiving federal funding are legally responsible to prevent it under the civil rights law called Title IX. See our [presentation on Title IX](#).
- Schools receiving federal funding must also prevent discrimination based on sex, even if it is not sexual in nature. For example, schools can't discourage female students from taking an auto mechanics class.

Recognizing sexual harassment

- Everyone must recognize the many forms of sexual harassment and assault so students' rights are not violated.
- Let's start with sexual harassment that takes the form of sexually suggestive **sounds and gestures**, for example catcalls, whistling. Example: the harasser licks their lips and/or makes movements imitating a sexual act.

Recognizing sexual harassment

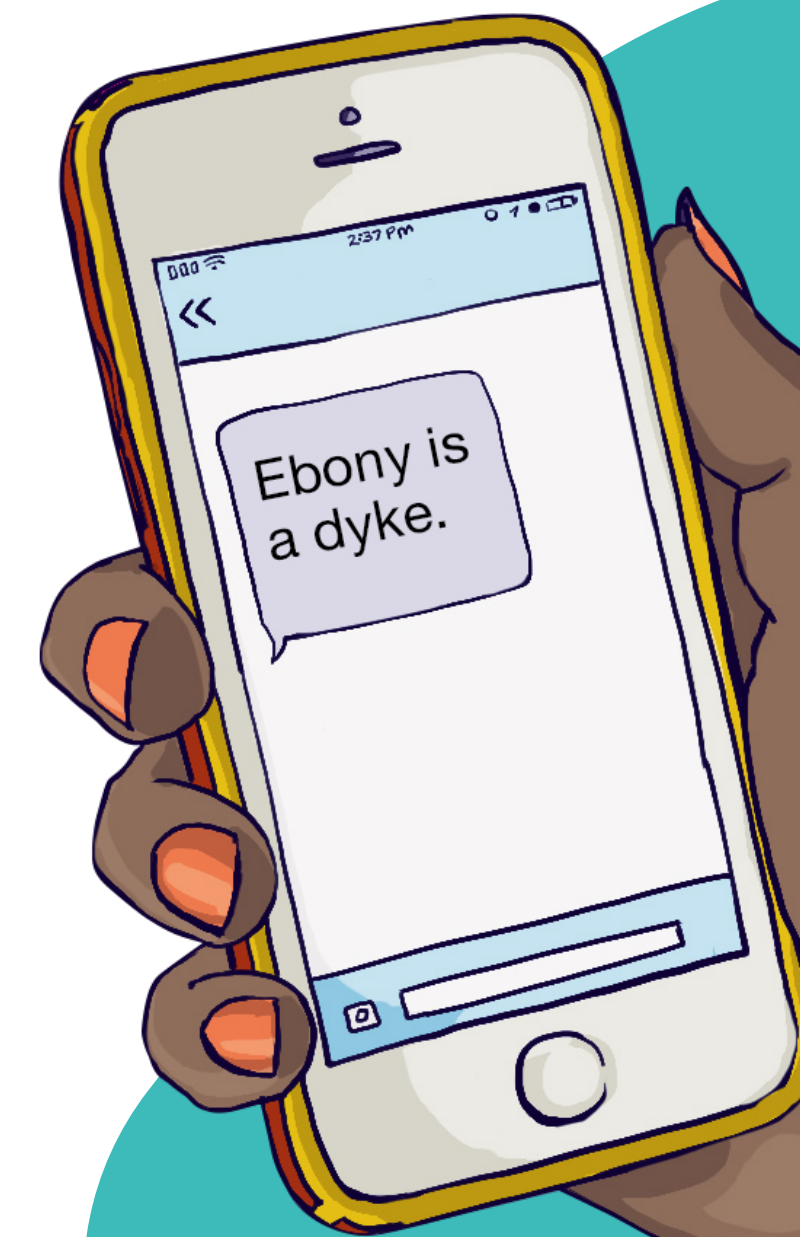
Sexual harassment can occur **through words:** sexual jokes and slurs, graffiti, or posts on social media that refer to someone's sexuality, body parts, or sexual behavior.

Passing rumors of sexual acts is another form of sexual harassment through words.



Recognizing sexual harassment

Sexual harassment can occur in **texts**, including sending sexually explicit videos, drawings, and pictures. It can also include showing the victim pornography against their will.



Recognizing sexual battery/ indecent assault

- In most states, certain forms of sexual harassment fall into a category called “sexual battery” or “indecent assault.” These are terms for unwanted sexual touching outside or inside the clothing (depending on the state), touching intimate parts (sexual organs, anus or groin, buttocks, or breast of female) against the will of the victim, for the harasser’s specific sexual gratification or for sexual abuse.
- It also includes forcing a person to touch an intimate part of the offender’s body for the same purpose.
- Sexual battery or indecent assault does not involve penetration.



Recognizing sexual harassment

- > Sexual assault is unwanted sexual touching inside clothing.
- > Rape is the most extreme form of sexual assault. Rape definitions vary by state but typically include:
 - Unwanted vaginal or anal penetration with any body part or foreign object
 - Oral penetration by a sex organ of another person
- > “Hazing” is a term which can include sexual harassment or assault, often by older students to humiliate and “initiate” younger teammates or club members. It is traumatizing and can be brutal. Hazing should never be dismissed as an innocent or traditional ritual. See our Power Topic [Sexual Harassment and Assault Happen to Males Too](#).

Examples of harassing behaviors

- Sexual comments, jokes, rumors
- Sexual looks, gestures/motions, or sounds
- Written sexual messages, notes or graffiti in bathrooms or locker rooms
- Showing or sharing sexual pictures, photographs, or illustrations
- Requesting sexual photographs
- Unwanted pressure for dates or sexual favors
- Being called gay or lesbian in a disparaging manner
- Being listed in “slam books,” “slut pages,” or being the subject of online posts that include students’ names and derogatory sexual comments

Examples of harassing behaviors

- Being spied on while dressing or showering at school
- Being “flashed” or “moonied”
- Being touched, grabbed, or pinched in a sexual way
- Having clothing pulled off or down, such as “pantsing”
- Being intentionally brushed up against by someone in a sexual way
- Being blocked or cornered in a sexual way
- Being forced to kiss or hug someone or experience some other unwelcome sexual behavior

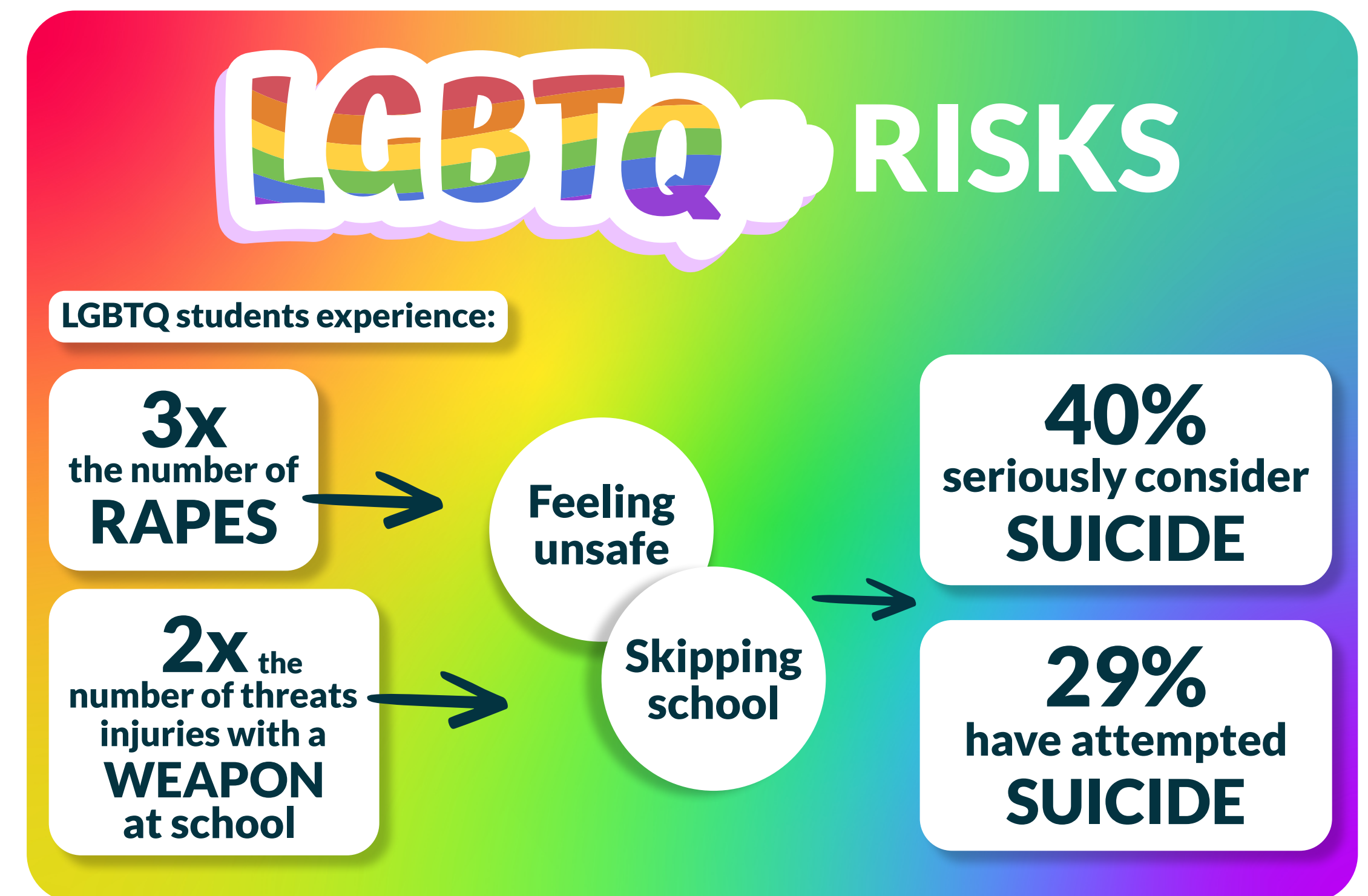
Who does the harassing?

The harassers (perpetrators) can be other students, friends, strangers, teachers, coaches, school staff, bus drivers, parents of friends, or people in positions of authority, among others. People of any gender can be harassers.



Who gets harassed?

- Each year, at least 56% of girls, 40% of boys, and 75% of transgender students in grades 7-12 are sexually harassed. Overall, at least 20% of teen girls and 3% of teen boys experience sexual battery, assault, or rape at school.
- The majority of all cases are unreported, so many more students are actually affected.
- **LGBTQ students, students of color — especially Black girls — and people with developmental disabilities are more frequently harassed and assaulted.**
- School staff are also victims of sexual harassment, by students and other school staff.



Sexual harassment by teachers, coaches, or school staff

- It's estimated that at least 10% of students are victims of sexual misconduct by teachers or other school staff. Students are manipulated by teachers and school staff through grooming behaviors, typically over many months. Grooming includes, but is not limited to:
- Promising better grades or opportunities
 - Spending time on 1:1 projects or tutoring which establish a sense of trust, breaking down family and peer relationships, and isolating the victim
 - Showering a student with special privileges, compliments, treats

Sexual harassment by teachers, coaches, or school staff

- Even when a student is 18 or older (legally an “adult”), several state courts have ruled that sexual relationships between students and teachers are illegal.
- Romantic relationships with teachers or school staff are unhealthy and damaging due to the imbalance of power due to position, age, and life experience. See our Power Topic **Sexual Harassment and Assault Happen to Males Too.**

Part 2

If you are short on time, here's a good place to pause and continue the discussion next time you meet.

You may want to review “**Examples of harassing behaviors**” before continuing with Part 2.

Why am I being harassed? Does the harasser like me?

- Harassers are people with a desire to control others. They use aggression and hostility to feel powerful by making others scared or uncomfortable.
- Do you think someone who genuinely likes you would treat you like this? These behaviors must be identified as controlling and stopped.

What is the difference between flirting and sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment:

- Feels bad, uncomfortable, insulting, humiliating, and/or threatening
- Brings about feelings of shame
- Is unwanted by receiver
- Builds up the ego of the “giver” by bringing down the esteem of the “receiver.” It is used to show power over another.

Flirting and NOT Sexual Harassment:

- Feels good, builds confidence for both parties
- Is non-threatening
- Is reciprocal
- Feels equal to both parties; power is equal

Can expressing sincere attraction be considered sexual harassment?

- Sexual harassment is **unwelcome** conduct of a sexual nature. If you express a genuine attraction to someone you know and like in a manner that is not offensive, then it is not sexual harassment.
- However, it is not acceptable if the other person:
 - informs you in any way that the sexual interest is not mutual, or
 - does not respond affirmatively they are interested in you in the same way, or
 - is not in a position to make a conscious response (for example, the person is intoxicated)

Can expressing sincere attraction be considered sexual harassment?

Without consent to continue the attention must stop.

- Beyond this point, if you continue to engage in any sexual advances it would be considered sexual harassment.
- In addition, behavior of a sexual nature, even when there is mutual consent, is not appropriate at school as it disrupts the learning environment and can make others uncomfortable.

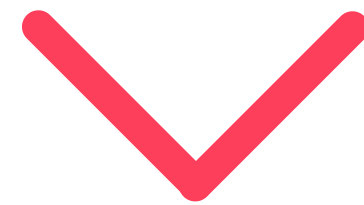
Should schools address cyber-sexual harassment that occurs outside of school?

- **YES!** Schools that receive federal funding are obligated under Title IX to investigate and may take disciplinary action if:
- the cyber-sexual harassment takes place **outside** of a school program and has a negative impact at school on the targeted student(s) (for example, it creates a hostile environment, retaliation, or safety concerns)
 - the cyber-sexual harassment takes place **as part of** a school program (for example, remote learning)

Is there a difference between sexual harassment and bullying?

- Bullying is any severe physical or verbal act that occurs one or more times towards a student that causes a student to feel fearful, that has a negative impact on the student's physical or mental health, or that otherwise interferes with the student's ability to fully and safely participate in school activities.
- Some forms of bullying are not sexual in nature so are not considered sexual harassment, however sexual harassment is always also considered to be bullying!
- Recall that some forms of cyber-bullying, such as sexually offensive posts on social network sites, are forms of sexual harassment.
- It's important that schools properly label incidents of sexual harassment/assault as such. Schools should not wrongly label them as bullying because students are protected against sexual harassment/assault by the federal law called Title IX.

What about nude photos or videos?



When a student voluntarily sends a nude or partially nude image of themselves to a friend who wants the image, it is sexual harassment. Asking for and/or sending nude/partially nude images of oneself or others can have very serious consequences, both legal and personal, **and is never okay, under any circumstances.**

- Furthermore, it is illegal to possess or distribute nude or partially nude images of minors (people who are under 18). These images are considered “child pornography” and a person, even a youth, who sends or voluntarily receives a nude/partially nude image can be charged with possession or distribution of child pornography, which is a felony and may result in arrest, incarceration, and placement on probation.
- It is illegal for a person who is 18 or older, even if a high school student, to send a nude/partially nude image to a minor. There are recent cases where students age 18 or older have been required to register as sex offenders for possessing or sending nude or partially nude images of those under 18.

What about a relationship with a teacher, coach, or school staff?



- Romantic or sexual relationships with teachers or school staff invite abuse by adults who have more life experience and can therefore manipulate and harm students.
- Ask yourself why an older adult would want to have a relationship with a student.
- Students end up feeling used and exploited.
- What do you think?
- Learn more in our Power Topic **Sexual Harassment and Assault Happen to Males Too.**

While it might seem exciting or cool to be involved with a teacher or staff member, **such relationships are unhealthy because of differences in age, experience, and power.**

What if I see harassment but the victim doesn't?

- There may be a time when you are aware of an act at school that you think is sexual harassment but the targeted student says that they don't mind, or even welcomes the behavior.
- You can explain to the student how some behaviors are unacceptable even though they have become normalized in the culture. You can do this by showing why these behaviors are considered sexual harassment.
- You can also explain that if the act has a negative impact on academic performance — or creates a hostile educational environment for anyone else — it could be considered sexual harassment and should be addressed through the school's processes.
- **Naming it and calling it out raises awareness!**

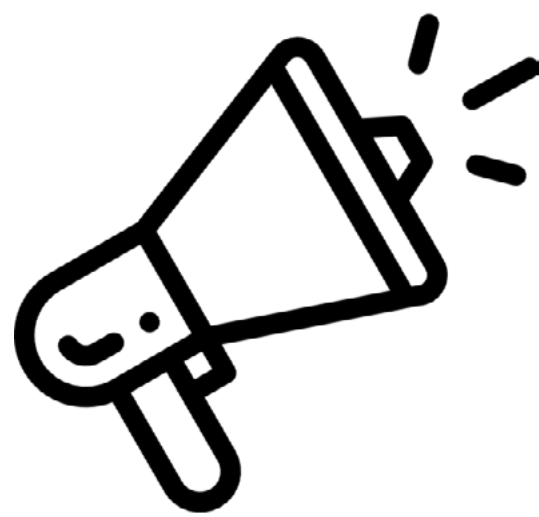
Bystander intervention when you witness sexual harassment



An engaged bystander is someone who intervenes safely before, during, or after a situation when they see or hear behaviors that are threatening, harassing, or violent.

- 1 Take action to safely redirect the situation and reassure the victim they are not to blame for the harassment.
- 2 Remain calm, speak firmly to the harasser in a respectful, direct, and honest way that their words or actions are not okay.
- 3 Help the victim leave quickly.
- 4 Focus on the needs of the victim: reassure them that it was not their fault, and offer your support to help them report the harassment to the school or other authorities in charge.

Talk About It



- How often do we experience sexual harassment as students?
- What are examples of sexual harassment that you have experienced or seen/heard about from students?
- What kind of peer pressure is there to commit and/or tolerate acts of sexual harassment?
- How and why does the school allow this to happen?
- Do you think unwanted touching through clothing (sexual battery/indecent assault) is a serious offense?

Do More

- > What can we do to raise awareness about sexual harassment and change the culture?
- > Create content about sexual harassment:
 - Create flyers, visuals, zines, notebook inserts
 - Post on social media
 - Write about it in the school newspaper
 - Use art, drama, music, dance, video or other creative outlets
- > Role play a situation where you talk with someone you believed was sexually harassed and they weren't sure.
- > Can everyone in the room share one thing they learned today and one thing they will commit to doing to move forward?

Learn More

- Find out what your school is doing to address sexual harassment. Use the SSAIS guide [How to Gather Information about a School District's Title IX Policies](#)
- Find out how to report sexual harassment at school. Use the SSAIS guide [Investigating What Happens When a Student Reports Sexual Harassment](#)
- Explore suggested activities in the “[How to Start a SASH Club](#)” guide and on our page [Additional Activities for Your Club](#).

Sources & Acknowledgments

- > Statistics in this presentation from AAUW:
 - **Survey: Nearly Half of Students Sexually Harassed in School**
 - Hostile Hallways II: Bullying, Teasing and Sexual Harassment in School
- > Ontario Human Rights Commission: “Sexual Harassment in Education”
- > Shout out to BHS Stop Harassing for sharing unpublished information used in this presentation
- > Graphics adapted from original illustrations by AR Cribbins

To Do Immediately if Sexually Assaulted

- Get away from the attacker to a safe place as fast as you can.
- Then call 911 or the police.
- Call a friend or family member you trust.
- You can call a crisis center or hotline to talk with a counselor.
- One 24/7 option, for all genders, is the Rape, Abuse & Incest National
- Network (RAINN) National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800-656-HOPE(4673).
- RAINN will connect you with a rape crisis center in your area.
- Visit the [Survivor Support page](#) for more helpline options and details.

To Do Immediately if Sexually Assaulted

- > Preserve the evidence, even if you are unsure you will report.
- > **Do not:**
 - Wash, comb your hair, or clean any part of your body
 - Brush your teeth
 - Change clothes, if possible, so the hospital nurse can collect evidence
 - Touch or change anything at the scene of the assault
- > **Seek medical attention ASAP at your nearest hospital ER:**
 - You need to be examined, treated for any injuries, checked for possible sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or pregnancy, and can receive preventative medicine.
 - The nurse or doctor will collect evidence the attacker may have left behind.
- > **Ask hospital staff to connect you with a local rape crisis center**

If You are Sexually Harassed

It isn't your fault... and you can get help to make it stop.

- Reach out ASAP to a friend, school counselor or trusted adult for immediate safety & support to bring the issue to your Dean of Students, Principal, or Title IX Coordinator.
- Confidential National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-4673
www.rainn.org
- Learn about your rights and how to take action on the [Stop Sexual Assault in Schools website](http://StopSexualAssaultinSchools.org)

Feedback & Suggestions:

SASH Club welcomes your feedback and suggestions on the content of this presentation. Contact us via:

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