

High Schools and Sexual Assault: Some Resources for Schools and Students

Violence is an all too common problem experienced by students in and out of school. One type of increasingly recognized violence is sexual assault. This brief document highlights general information and major resources relevant to schools and students.

Definition

Sexual assault is defined as any type of sexual activity or contact that a person does not consent to including when the person lacks the capacity to consent. Sexual assault includes rape and sexual coercion. State laws vary with respect to what constitutes sexual assault.

Prevalence of Sexual Assault Among Teens

- Over the course of a lifetime 28% of youth ages 14 to 17 have been sexually victimized
- One in four teen girls every year are verbally or physically pressured into having sex
- One in 10 high school girls-and one in 20 high school boys- reported being forced into sex
- More than one third of acquaintance rape victims are between the ages of 14 and 17
- One in three teens is a victim of sexual or other abuse by a dating partner each year

Indicators Students Might Have Experienced an Assault

- Physical marks on their body including but not limited to bruises and cuts (it is common for victims to try and hide them). If these marks are frequent this could be a sign of repeated child abuse.
- Dramatic change in the victim's appearance. Examples include cutting hair very short and dressing differently.
- Rapid weight loss or weight gain
- Less attention to personal hygiene and self-care
- Drastic drop in grades
- Seeming distracted in class/ issues with concentrating
- Frequent missing assignments
- Frequently cutting class
- Symptoms of depression
- Seem less engaged with peers and avoid socializing with them
- Binge drinking
- PTSD which is included but not limited to: panic/ anxiety attacks, flashbacks, exaggerated startle response, self-destructive and reckless behavior, difficulty with concentration, sleep deprivation, and hypervigilance.

Clearly, any of these indicators can stem from a variety of problems, and all warrant efforts to help make things better. And as with all such indicators, care must be taken not to misinterpret cause.

What's a School to Do?

(1) Educate all staff (e.g., through inservice training, memoranda, emails) so they are prepared to

- help students who come forward indicating they are victims
- spot warning signs
- report problems to appropriate personnel/authorities (e.g., administrators, Title IX coordinator, police)
- follow-up to make sure that identified students are being helped and not further harrassed or bullied
- address concerns related to alleged perpetrators

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- (2) *Ensure that student support professionals are prepared and available to handle sexual assault cases.*
- (3) *Include policies and procedures related to all violent events on district and school websites.* As with all such communications, attention must be paid to making the material readily accessible and easy to understand by parents and students (including translations to accommodate those for whom English is not their primary language). Website messages should also be sent directly to homes.

Some cases are particularly complex and time consuming. They require a variety of special assistance while claims are being investigated (e.g., schedule changes, separating the individuals involved, providing appropriate supports and accommodations to those who report being victimized and those who are accused). Also, it is essential to attend to the reactions of peers. It is not uncommon for those who have been sexually assaulted to be further harassed by peers' comments such as, "(s)he wanted it" and "(s)he's just a slut." There are also cases where naked photos of victims have been circulated (e.g., on social media). Quick action by a school is called for to avoid escalation of such bullying.

Examples of a Few Programs

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) – “is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. RAINN created and operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline (800.656.HOPE, online.rainn.org y rainn.org/es) in partnership with more than 1,000 local sexual assault service providers across the country and operates the DoD Safe Helpline for the Department of Defense. RAINN also carries out programs to prevent sexual violence, help survivors, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.”

<https://www.rainn.org/about-national-sexual-assault-telephone-hotline>

Standing Together to End Sexual Assault – is an example of a smaller regional non-profit organization that not only provides education and awareness about the issue of sexual assault to schools, but also provides confidential counseling, support groups, medical services, and advocacy help through legal processes. <http://sbstesa.org/about/>

Green Dot Program – is designed to increase self-reported, active-bystander behaviors and reduce dating and sexual violence on campuses. Students are trained to assess situations, identify potential risks for violence, and safely intervene. The program is rated Promising. The findings showed that students receiving components of the Green Dot program had significantly more observed and self-reported active-bystander behaviors than students who received no intervention. <https://www.crimesolutions.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?ID=509>

Coaching Boys to Men (CBIM) – is a violence prevention curriculum for coaches and their athletes. The CBIM Card Series equips athletic coaches with strategies, scenarios, and resources needed to build attitudes and behaviors that prevent relationship abuse, harassment, and sexual assault. CBIM's core goal is to inspire men to teach boys the importance of respecting women and that violence never equals strength. It emphasizes incorporating conversations into regular coaching and strategy sessions. One study reported that boys who had received the lessons were less likely to report abuse perpetration and less negative bystander behavior (e.g., not saying anything, or laughing) when witnessing abusive or disrespectful behavior among peers. <http://www.pcadv.org/Learn-More/Prevention/Curricula/Youth/Coaching-Boys-Into-Men/>

Embedding Concerns about All Forms of Violence into a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching

From our perspective, as the focus on all violent behavior is expanded at schools, it is essential for policy makers to think beyond discrete interventions if they are to ensure equity of opportunity for every student to succeed at school. Given sparse resources, schools must embed their focus on problems such as sexual assault into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports. And in doing so, they must outreach to the community and weave school and community resources together. (See *Improving School Improvement* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html .)

Some Resources

About sexual violence – <http://www.pcar.org/about-sexual-violence/teens>

Considerations for school district sexual misconduct policies – <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/file/900716/download>

District sexual harassment policy – <https://achieve.lausd.net/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/383/BUL-3349.1-Sexual%20Harassment%20Policy.pdf>

Let's take a stand against sexual harassment in schools – http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct18/vol76/num02/Let's-Take-a-Stand-Against-Sexual-Harassment-in-Schools.aspx?utm_source=marketing&utm_medium=email&utm_content=el&utm_campaign=el-newissue-oct18-email-100518

Love doesn't have to hurt – <https://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/love-teens.pdf>

Love is respect – <https://www.loveisrespect.org/>

Preventing and responding to teen dating violence – <http://vawnet.org/sc/preventing-and-responding-teen-dating-violence>

Preventing child youth and sexual harassment, abuse and assault – <http://www icyd.iowa.gov/Parents/files/PREVENTdocument.pdf>

Preventing Teen Dating Violence – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/dating.pdf>

Relationships and Safety – <https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/sexual-assault-and-rape/sexual-assault>

School policy on dating violence – http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/school_policy_kit.page

Sexual Harassment by Peers in Schools – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/harass.pdf>

Sexual harassment: it's not academic – <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ocrshpam.html>

Sexual harassment prevention in schools – <https://www.ccasa.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Sexual-Harassment-Prevention-in-Schools-Curriculum-Manual.pdf>

Teen dating violence – https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teen_dating_violence.html

Title IX litigation and enforcement for K12 sexual assault survivors – <https://www.publicjustice.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Title-IX-and-K-12-Sexual-Assault.pdf>

Also see our Center's online clearinghouse Quick Find on *Abuse Prevention* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/sexassault.html>

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