

INTERSECTING GROUNDS of violence
DISCRIMINATION ABUSE OF POWER
gender based BULLYING
Sexism
employment sexual harassment

Poisoned environment
POLICY ON
Preventing
sexual and gender-based harassment

Sexual harassment and your education

Sexual harassment is a type of discrimination that can interfere with a person's education, make them feel unsafe and stop them from reaching their full potential in life. Sexual harassment can include:

- asking for sex in exchange for something, like offering to improve a test score
- repeatedly asking for dates, and not taking “no” for an answer
- demanding hugs
- making unnecessary physical contact, including unwanted touching
- using rude or insulting language or making comments that stereotype girls, women, boys and men
- calling people unkind names that relate to their sex
- making sex-related comments about a person's physical appearance or actions
- saying or doing something because you think a person does not fit sex-role stereotypes
- posting or sharing pornography, sexual pictures, cartoons, graffiti or other sexual images (including online)
- making sexual jokes
- bragging about sexual ability
- bullying based on sex or gender
- spreading sexual rumours or gossip (including online).

Sometimes when a person experiences these things, they don't realize it is sexual harassment, or don't realize the impact it is having on them. Students might back off from school work or school activities, skip or drop classes, or drop out of school completely.

If you are being sexually harassed you might find yourself feeling:

- isolated and alone
- embarrassed or ashamed
- depressed, anxious and uncertain about yourself or your future
- angry
- unsafe at school or in your community.



Some people who are sexually harassed also lose their appetite, get stomach aches and find it hard to concentrate. In some cases, students have reported using drugs or drinking to cope. In extreme cases, they might think about or even try suicide.

All adults who are in contact with students must make sure schools are safe, secure environments for students, and are free from sexual harassment.

Sexually harassing or bullying someone because of their sexual orientation or gender is not acceptable. It is against the law.

Know your rights

As a student, you have the right to an education where you are not sexually harassed. This includes primary, secondary and post-secondary education, and school activities such as sports, arts and cultural activities, field trips and tutoring.

Sexual harassment, and harassment because of sexual orientation, can also occur as part of school rituals, like initiations.

Sexual advances or comments might come from teachers or staff:

Example: The Ontario College of Teachers withdrew a 29-year-old teacher's license because he sexually harassed a female student through e-mail. The teacher used a false name and sent messages to the student that included information about what she had been wearing that day, what route she took to school, and sexual suggestions.

Or it can take the form of bullying from other students:

Example: To hurt a rival, a girl starts a rumour that another girl is sexually promiscuous and performs sex acts on boys behind the school.

Students who are seen as not fitting into gender norms can be left open to gender-based harassment.

Example: A grade 9 male student has many female friends and is more interested in the arts than athletics. A group of boys at his school repeatedly call him "fag," "homo," "queer" and other names.

What is homophobic and gender-based bullying?

At all levels of school, sexual harassment can be used to bully people because of their gender, sexuality or sexual orientation. It can include name-calling, jokes, and isolating a person because they do not fit what other people want them to be. It is different from other kinds of bullying because the harassment focuses on a person's sexuality, sexual characteristics, sexual reputation, or gender and sexual stereotypes.

Homophobic bullying can affect anyone. In many cases, targets are people who:

- say they are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender
- are thought by others to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender
- don't conform to male and female stereotypes
- have same-sex parents or caregivers
- have friends that are, or are thought to be, gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

Anti-gay and homophobic comments and behaviour are discrimination, even if the target does not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT). Some cases of homophobic bullying are considered hate crimes.

What you can do

If you or someone you know is being harassed, you can ask the person to stop and you can ask someone in authority at your school to take steps to stop it from happening.

Schools, including colleges and universities, have a legal duty to act to prevent and respond to sexual harassment—and they must make sure they offer environments that respect human rights.

The Ontario Ministry of Education requires Ontario school boards to respond to homophobia, gender-based violence, sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour. To read more about these policies visit:

www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/bullying

If the harassment continues or is not being dealt with appropriately, you can file a human rights claim.

If you feel the harassing behaviour is getting worse, or that your safety is threatened, you can contact the police.

For more information:

To find out more about what you can do to prevent and address sexual and gender-based harassment in education, see the Ontario Human Rights Commission's *Policy on preventing sexual and gender-based harassment* at www.ohrc.on.ca

For more information on the human rights system in Ontario, visit:
www.ontario.ca/humanrights

The Human Rights System can also be accessed by telephone at:

Local: 416-326-9511

Toll Free: 1-800-387-9080

TTY (Local): 416-326 0603

TTY (Toll Free) 1-800-308-5561

To file a human rights claim (called an application), contact the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario at:

Toll Free: 1-866-598-0322

TTY: 416-326-2027 or Toll Free: 1-866-607-1240

Website: www.hrto.ca

To talk about your rights or if you need legal help with a human rights application, contact the Human Rights Legal Support Centre at:

Toll Free: 1-866-625-5179

TTY: 416-314-6651 or Toll Free: 1-866-612-8627

Website: www.hrlsc.on.ca

For human rights policies, guidelines and other information, visit the Ontario Human Rights Commission at www.ohrc.on.ca

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