

Assignment Discovery Online Curriculum

Lesson title:

Sexual Harassment

Grade level:

9-12

Subject Area:

Health

Duration:

Two class periods

Objectives:

Students will do the following:

1. Define the term *sexual harassment*
2. Identify examples of sexual harassment
3. Consider appropriate responses to sexual harassment

Materials:

- Paper and pencils
- Newsprint and markers
- Computer with Internet access (optional but very helpful)

Procedures:

1. Write “sexual harassment” on the board or on a piece of newsprint. Ask students if they know what it means. Write down their ideas. Help them understand that sexual harassment is any unwanted physical or verbal advances that have sexual overtones.
2. Then share with students the kind of behavior that is usually considered a form of sexual harassment:
 - Sexual jokes
 - Touching in an inappropriate way
 - Inappropriate gestures
 - Spreading rumors about another person's sexual behavior

Tell students that in 1999 the Supreme Court heard a case about sexual harassment. The high court ruled that schools can be sued if they fail to stop sexual harassment. The court further ruled that schools must take action, such as an education program, to prevent sexual harassment from taking place. If they do not do so, schools are vulnerable if they get sued. For more information on this issue, students can look on the following Web sites:

<<http://www.thesunlink.com/news/may99/daily/0525ala.html>>
<<http://www.apa.org/monitor/oct99/cf9.html>>
<<http://supct.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/97-843.ZS.html>>

3. Tell students that sexual harassment is very common in schools. Incidents at every level, even elementary school, have been reported. To better understand what sexual harassment is and what students can do about it, tell students that they are going to work in small groups to brainstorm examples of sexual harassment. Then they will write a script for a scenario dramatizing the incident, how the students responded to it, and what they can do to prevent such an incident from happening again.

Divide students into small groups and have them begin brainstorming their ideas. If they are having trouble getting started, you may want to suggest a few of the following incidents as examples of sexual harassment:

- Touching a student's private parts
- Drawing sexually explicit pictures and passing them around
- Rubbing up against someone in a provocative way
- Telling sexual jokes
- Spreading rumors about a person's sexual behavior
- Calling other students names with sexual connotations

4. Before students begin writing, direct them to the following Web sites to learn about what is being done about sexual harassment in different schools nationwide, and what legal recourse people have if they are subjected to sexual harassment. Students can incorporate this research into their scenarios.

<<http://www.soroptimist.org/novdec99.htm>>
<<http://www.straussconsult.com/article2.htm>>
<<http://www.apa.org/monitor/oct99/cf9.html>>
<<http://www.gcsd.k12.sc.us/safety/newsletter.htm>>

5. Give students time to work on their scenarios in class. Tell them to be prepared to hand in a complete, written script. During the next class period, ask if any groups would like to present their scenario to the class. Give as many groups as are interested an opportunity to present their scenarios. All students must turn in a complete, written script.
6. To conclude the lesson, give students time to write down their personal responses to having worked on this activity. Were they familiar with sexual harassment beforehand? Have they ever experienced sexual harassment? If so, were they aware of it at the time? Tell students that they do not have to share their thoughts with

anyone. Writing them down is simply a way to bring closure to any personal experiences the lesson may have brought up.

Discussion Questions:

1. Imagine that a friend confides in you that he or she has been a victim of sexual harassment. What would you say to your friend? What would you tell your friend to do about the harassment?
2. Suppose a boy repeatedly tells a girl, in public, that she has a great figure. While at first the girl is flattered, when he keeps talking about her figure publicly, she becomes increasingly uncomfortable. Do you think she has reason to feel uncomfortable? Is this an example of sexual harassment or positive attention? In our culture, do you think it is easy to confuse the two? Give reasons to support your ideas.
3. Do you think there is a relationship between self-esteem and sexual harassment? Do you think people with low self-esteem would be more likely to be the harasser, the victim, or both? Give facts to support your ideas.

Evaluation:

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' ability to discuss sensitive topics with maturity and insight, find out additional information through research, and write a scenario that portrays an incident of sexual harassment and give clear recommendations for how to respond to it:

Three points: showed an above-average level of maturity and insight in discussing sensitive topics; completed the research accurately and thoroughly; wrote a dramatic scenario that covered all the main points.

Two points: showed an average level of maturity and insight in discussing sensitive topics; completed most of the research accurately and thoroughly; wrote an on-grade-level scenario that covered most of the main points.

One point: had difficulty discussing sensitive topics with maturity and insight; completed only a small amount of the research; did not complete the scenario, which did not cover all the main points.

Extension:

Your Day in Court

Turn your classroom into a courtroom. Tell students to imagine that a sexual harassment case has been brought to the attention of the class, and it is about to go to trial. The case involves a male high school student who is accused of making unwanted advances

toward a female student. His advances might include jostling her in inappropriate ways, calling her names with sexual connotations, or spreading rumors about her sexual behavior.

Have students first choose the young man's offense. Then have them determine who will play the following roles: defense attorney, prosecutor, judge, witnesses, and jury members. Then have students prepare for the case. For example, the prosecutor and the defense attorney must prepare their arguments. Suggest that the students playing these roles select a few classmates to help with the research. Other students may play the roles of reporters covering the case for a newspaper, administrators and teachers from the school, and concerned citizens.

After students have prepared, have them present the case. Allow at least two class periods to hear both sides of the argument, call witnesses, and have the jury deliberate. The Web sites listed in the lesson will be helpful in preparing for the trial.

Suggested Reading:

Changing Bodies, Changing Lives: A Book for Teens on Sex and Relationships (3rd ed.)

Ruth Bell Times Books, 1998.

This terrific, encyclopedic book for teens covers absolutely everything about sexuality. It begins with the physical and emotional changes that happen as teens mature; other topics of interest to teens are covered, such as eating disorders, substance abuse, living with violence, sexually transmitted diseases, safe sex and birth control, pregnancy, and how to make changes locally and globally. Lots of clear, frank information is conveyed through the voices of real teens.

Sexual Harassment (Current Controversies series)

Louise Gerdes, editor. Greenhaven Press, 1999.

In another excellent book from Greenhaven Press, sexual harassment is examined from all sides. The book answers questions through essays written by a range of professionals. Some of the questions raised include the following: Is sexual harassment a serious problem? What causes sexual harassment? How can sexual harassment be reduced? Are legal definitions of sexual harassment useful?

Vocabulary:

provocative

Definition: Serving or tending to provoke, excite, or stimulate.

Context: Looking at someone in a suggestive way or making an obscene gesture can be **provocative** and hurtful.

sexual

Definition: Relating to or associated with sex or the relationship between the sexes.
Context: During the teen years, young people become more aware of behavior that is **sexual** in nature.

sexual harassment

Definition: Unwanted advances of a sexual nature.

Context: Touching someone in an inappropriate way is an example of **sexual harassment**.

suggestive

Definition: Tending to suggest something improper or indecent.

Context: Parents often object to songs with **suggestive** lyrics.

Academic Standards:

The following standard is from the American Association for Health Education for students in grades nine through twelve.:

1. Students will demonstrate the ability to access valid health information and health-promoting products and services.

This lesson plan adheres to the standards set forth in the *National Science Education Standards*, in particular the category Science in Personal and Social Perspectives.

Credit: Marilyn Fenichel, freelance writer and curriculum developer.

This lesson was prepared in consultation with Shauna Felton, middle school health teacher.

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