



What is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment is when bullying focuses on someone's body, appearance or sexual orientation (either real or perceived). It can include touching someone inappropriately, calling someone a sexually derogatory name or sending texts, photos or videos of a sexual nature.

Sexual harassment can be done by boys and girls and involves targets of the opposite sex as well as the same sex. It can also involve an adult harassing a younger person. Examples may include:

- Telling inappropriate jokes of a sexual nature
- Spreading sexual rumors
- Writing sexual messages on bathroom stalls or elsewhere
- Posting sexual comments, photos or videos on social media sites
- Sending unwanted texts of a sexual nature
- Pulling or grabbing at someone's clothing
- Making comments about someone's developing body

When is a comment flirting or joking and when does it cross the line?

No means no. If someone asks another person to stop making sexual comments and the commenter does not stop, that is sexual harassment. If something is making your teen feel uncomfortable, let your teen know that he or she needs to tell the person to stop or get help from a trusted adult.

Teens may believe that some of the examples listed above are harmless flirting, especially if the behaviors are aimed at someone that they have a crush on. It is important to remind your teen that any sort of sexual communication can have serious consequences and may not seem harmless to the other person.

Sexual harassment can easily escalate into sexual assault when any sort of touching is involved, from unwanted grabbing or slapping of body parts, to unwanted rubbing, unwanted sexual contact or rape. When someone forces another person to engage in a sex act, it is considered sexual assault or rape—both of which are criminal acts.

If your child is being sexually harassed at school:

- Find out what the school's sexual harassment policy is and ask for help.
- Keep a record of incidents, including dates, times and specific details.
- Save any photos or other evidence.

If the harassment continues after getting the school involved, you may need to take legal action.