

# What Parents Need to Know About Sexual Harassment

## Definition

Sexual harassment is defined to be “unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors or verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature which is sufficiently severe, persistent or pervasive to limit a student’s ability to participate in or benefit from the educational program or which creates a sexually hostile environment.” Although the list is inexhaustible, some student behaviors that could lead to a sexually hostile environment are bra strap snapping, sexual jokes, sexual graffiti, rating of girls and “cat” calls. The definition of sexual harassment is gender neutral. Most instances of sexual harassment are males to females; however, females are capable of harassing males, males can sexually harass other males and females can sexually harass other females. Sexual harassment is against the law. Any student who believes that he or she is being sexually harassed should inform the Principal, Assistant Principal or any other employee of the district. Parents will be contacted and appropriate actions will be taken.

## The Role of the Parent

The best defense against sexual harassment is a good offense. That is, it is better to be proactive than reactive. Parents can help school administrators by teaching their children to respect others, at all times. Most incidents of sexual harassment occur in the hallways, the lavatories, on the playground or on the buses. Elementary schools are not immune from student to student harassment. However, elementary administrators review the situation and age of the students as part of their investigation.

Students in Bernards Township Public Schools are expected to treat one another and staff members with respect regardless of gender, color, race, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation. Remind your children that inappropriate behaviors such as touching of a sexual nature, gender based or sexual comments, jokes or name calling of any kind by students are not permitted on the way to or from school or on school property.

It is also very important that your children communicate with you. Encourage them to tell you about any problems that they might be having and then you can help them to determine an appropriate course of action.

### Who Investigates?

The Affirmative Action Officer, in conjunction with the building administration, investigates the alleged sexual harassment. The Affirmative Action Officer is designated as the compliance officer who coordinates and oversees all affirmative action policies dealing with equality in education. Students, parents, and residents of the district or staff members who have concerns about affirmative action or any other matter dealing with equality in education, including allegations of sexual harassment, should contact Mrs. Regina Rudolph, Assistant Superintendent and Affirmative Action Officer at 908-204-2600 ext. 104.

### The Role of the Teacher

Teachers are vigilant in this area. They work to reinforce the message of respect at all times. If you have questions about problems that your child might be experiencing at school, please contact his or her teacher, guidance counselor, or the Principal or Assistant Principal. Any of these individuals will work quickly to help you and your child.