

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 or girls and involve 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 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 child feel uncomfortable, let your child know that he or she needs to tell the person to stop or get help from a trusted adult.

Older children 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 child 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 you have any questions or concerns, contact your child's physician, school counselor, or school psychologist.

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.