

# WHERE CAN I GET HELP IF I'M BEING HARASSED?

Sexual harassment is very common, even in K-12 schools, and can have a significant impact on your life. If you experience harassment, you may be afraid to say something and may not know what to do. But sexual harassment violates your civil rights, and under the law your school is obligated to do something about it. Below you will find a definition of sexual harassment, some suggested next steps, and links to some resources you may find helpful.

## What is sexual harassment?

- **Sexual harassment is unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature.** It can be verbal acts like name-calling, requests for sexual favors, sexual comments, jokes, gestures, images and graphics, graffiti, and other written statements or actions that may be physically threatening, harmful, or humiliating. Sexual assault, including rape, is a very extreme and severe form of sexual harassment.

For the harassment to be prohibited by Title IX, the federal civil rights law prohibiting sex discrimination in education, it must be "on the basis of sex," which includes sexual harassment and gender-based harassment. Gender-based harassment is unwelcome conduct based on a student's failure to conform to gender stereotypes.

- **Sexual harassment can occur in a lot of different ways.** Some examples of harassment that get overlooked or dismissed as "bullying" include: spreading sexual rumors about someone; humiliating someone because they reportedly did - or refused to - engage in sexual conduct; electronic sharing of someone's revealing photo - or pressuring them to share revealing photos of themselves; and taunting someone for failing to dress, talk, or act in ways deemed socially acceptable according to dominant stereotypes about what is appropriately "masculine" or "feminine."

## What can I do if this happens to me?

**First of all, you did nothing to deserve to be harassed or violated. And you are not alone; during this difficult time, there are many people who can help you.** Also, there is no "right way" to deal with trauma. Some people want to share what happened to them with others and seek support or pursue justice; some people only want to speak anonymously with a mental health professional. Depending on what you are comfortable doing, below are some of the steps you can take.

- **Tell a trusted adult:** This can be a parent, teacher, your school's Title IX Coordinator (if you don't know who that is, ask!), your school counselor, or someone else. Tell them exactly what occurred and when. If that adult does nothing about it, tell another adult. If this harassment was done by a school staff member or another student, be sure to report it to a school official like the Title IX Coordinator or the principal, because the school is obligated to stop the harassment and prevent it from happening again. Also, if you need emotional support, ask for it - below is a list of organizations that may be able to help.

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- **Write down everything:** Write down as many details of the harassment as you can remember. No detail is too insignificant. Take screenshots and print relevant emails, text messages, and social media posts. All of these details will be important if and when you decide to file a complaint with your school, the police, or the Department of Education.
- **Consider filing a complaint:** Depending on what happened, you have the right to file a Title IX complaint with your school and/or with the Department of Education, and to report it to your local police department. Do not be afraid to ask questions, and make sure you understand whether confidentiality can be maintained, if that is important to you.
  - **U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights:** the National Women's Law Center has [an informative guide](#) on how to file a complaint with the Department of Education.
- **Seek mental health support:** Trauma affects everyone differently and it's critical that you ask for support if you need it. You might consider reaching out to RAINN's confidential [24-hour chat service](#) or hotline number (800-656-4673) for help, advice, and resources. You might also consider talking with a school counselor.

## Outside of school, where can I find help?

- **National Women's Law Center:** [Legal Help](#)  
NWLC is a national organization that works to ensure Title IX is complied with and represents survivors of sexual harassment/assault in legal proceedings..
- **The Trevor Project:** [Get Help Now](#)  
The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ young people.
- **loveisrespect:** [Get Help For Yourself](#)  
loveisrespect works to educate and empower young people to prevent and end abusive relationships.
- **Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN):** [After Sexual Assault](#)  
RAINN is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization.
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** [Get Help](#)  
The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States.