

Youth Protection Meeting Guide Personal Safety Awareness

Introduction

We are pleased to present these materials that were developed to address personal safety concerns of our nation's teenagers. The intended audience is young men and women 14 through 20 years of age. This age group represents the transition period between childhood and adulthood, during which youth learn how to fulfill their adult roles. The learning process often creates perilous situations that teens need to recognize and react appropriately to avoid harm.

This video contains three dramatizations of incidents typical of those encountered by many teenagers. The dramatizations serve as catalysts for discussion by teen audiences.

When planning to use this video, you should allow between 20 and 30 minutes for each topic. Each topic is composed of three parts: viewing the vignette (four to five minutes), engaging the group in a discussion of the issues presented in the vignette (15 to 25 minutes), and closing the discussion with a video summary of the more important points (one to two minutes). Separate sessions for each topic are recommended to permit more comprehensive coverage of each.

The three topics are

- Sexual Harassment
- Date Rape
- Internet Safety and Stalking

We recommend that the person facilitating the discussion become familiar with the vignettes by viewing each vignette, reviewing the material in the relevant section of this meeting guide, and then viewing the videotaped summary. Then, to present each vignette, the facilitator should

- Introduce the topic.
- Show the appropriate video.
- Lead the group's discussion.
- Show the video summary.

Discussion guides of each vignette follow.

Vignette 1: Sexual Harassment

A. Introduction

Most of us have experienced teasing just as a part of our life experiences. The question is, when does teasing cross the line and become harassment? This is an important question, because unlike teasing, harassment can have significant negative effects on the individuals who are subjected to it—humiliating and degrading them or causing them to feel threatened.

Sexual harassment by definition is unwelcome sexual conduct that either creates a hostile environment or is presented as a demand in exchange for getting something in the workplace or school. It is illegal both in workplaces and in schools.

Sexual harassment may be by equal co-workers or students, or it may be a misuse of power, such as by an employer to an employee or stronger individuals harassing weaker ones.

No specific behaviors are associated with sexual harassment. Instead, it encompasses a broad spectrum of behaviors, including the following. (NOTE: You might want to list the bold-faced words on the chalkboard or a flip chart.)

Visual—Ogling, staring, posters or pictures, magazines, and fliers

Verbal—Repeated requests for dates, questions about personal life, lewd comments/jokes, and whistling

Written—Love letters, obscene letters, bumper stickers, and cards

Touching—Violating space, patting/grabbing, pinching, caressing, and kissing

Power—Relationships: using one's position to request dates, sex, etc.

Threats—Quid pro quo demands (if you sleep with me, I'll give you that promotion), loss of job, selection process

Force—Rape or physical assault

In the video, several forms of sexual harassment are depicted. Ask the youth who will be viewing the vignette to see how many forms they can identify.

B. Watch the vignette.

C. Discussion

What was different about this situation than you might have expected?

The target for the sexual harassment was male. In most depictions of sexual harassment, females are the targets. The role reversal depicted in this vignette may not be typical of most sexual harassment, but it is hoped that it makes males more sensitive to sexual harassment situations.

Does the fact that the target is male make a difference whether it is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment is not gender specific. The issues in sexual harassment are: Is a hostile environment created? Is there a sexually related demand in exchange for a reward? In the vignette, it is fairly apparent that the attention Lance received was unwelcome and the owner's niece, Kimberly, threatened him with a cutback in hours or even the loss of his job if he was not more responsive to her demands.

How many forms of sexual harassment behavior did you notice when watching the vignette?

Visual—There were definitely ogling and staring.

Verbal—There were repeated requests for dates, questions about personal life, lewd comments/jokes, and whistling.

Written—We didn't see any written forms of sexual harassment.

Touching—There were several touching situations, including violating space, patting/grabbing, and caressing.

Power—There were power-related forms of harassment.

Threats—Kimberly threatened to cut back on Lance's hours or have him fired.

Force—Rape or physical assault would be unlikely in this vignette.

Arnie (the restaurant owner) told Lance that as far as the owner was concerned, Lance didn't have a problem. Was his attitude legal?

Legally, employers must intervene if an employee lodges a complaint that others' behavior creates a hostile environment. The legal issue is this: Was Lance being reasonable when he sought Arnie's help?

What should you do in a situation in which you were being harassed? Why is it important to act?

Anyone who believes he or she has been sexually harassed should first make it clear to the offender and/or to a person in authority that such action is unwanted.

If the behavior persists, you should report it to your school counselor or principal (if the harassment occurs at school) or to your employer (if the harassment occurs in your place of employment).

You should not blame yourself for the harassment. This is not something you deserve or ask for. The harasser is the one who deserves blame.

Your actions should be quick. Trying to outwait the problem will only allow the harasser to continue and make it more difficult for you to take action.

Should there be a different standard when men are targeted for sexual harassment than when women are targeted?

The response for this question is the opinion of the respondents. Proponents of one side or the other should defend their views.

D. Watch the video summary.

Vignette 2: Acquaintance Rape

A. Introduction

A common misconception is that most rape and sexual assaults are perpetrated by individuals who are unknown to their victims. According to a recent study by the U.S. Department of Justice, more than half of the rape victims in the United States were under 18 years of age at the time of their rape. Most were assaulted by someone they knew, such as family members or people they dated.

The fact that the perpetrator of a sexual assault is known to his victim does not make the incident less traumatic. Often, victims of this kind of crime are more affected because of the violation of trust that the sexual assault represents.

Rape is the sexual expression of power. Rapists dominate their victims. In a dating situation, even when both partners seem to agree to sexual activities, once one of the partners resists or says “no,” the use of force or coercion to consummate sexual intercourse is rape regardless of the nature of the relationship or of prior sexual activity. Rape is a crime!

The risk of acquaintance or “date” rape is greater when behavioral boundaries are not clearly established. As you will see in this vignette, expectations can change. What may have initially been fantasized as a desired outcome may not be desirable when actually happening. Either party should be able to say at any time, “No, I am sorry, this is not what I want to do.” Once one person makes that statement, the other person should not attempt to persuade or force the first person to have sex.

B. Watch the vignette.

C. Discussion

What were some of the warning signs that this relationship might have an undesirable outcome?

Both Travis and Amber were focused on the prospects of a sexual encounter. Neither expressed any interest in the other’s personal characteristics beyond good looks and sexiness. Amber violated her parents’ trust in order to go to the party at Travis’ house while his parents were out of town. The use of drugs and alcohol helped lower inhibitions and affect both Travis’ and Amber’s judgment.

What are the legal ramifications for anyone who commits “date rape”?

Any kind of rape is a crime. Anyone who commits date rape may be prosecuted for rape. Perhaps by reporting the rape, a rapist would be held accountable for his actions and might not respond the same way in the future. If he were found guilty, he would have to register as a sex offender for at least 10 years. He could even go to prison.

What can victims of date rape do to help decide the best course of action?

Most communities have rape crisis centers or telephone hotlines. The counselors who staff these programs are trained to help sexual assault victims identify options and decide upon the best course of action. If a victim decides to file a complaint with the police department, many rape crisis centers will assign an advocate to give emotional support while the case is being processed. A rape crisis center would also make a referral to a medical doctor.

What should the rapist do?

There is very little information offered for appropriate after-the-fact behavior by a rapist. Individuals in this situation, however, often do not see themselves as rapists; therein lies some of the problem. If it is the first reported offense, he (or his attorney) may be able to negotiate participation in a counseling program to increase awareness of the need to respect personal boundaries and to respond appropriately when they change.

Some might suggest talking to the victim. The choice is the victim’s whether to talk to the rapist or not. Anything a rapist could say at this point would not change the facts of what has already happened. If, for example, Travis were to initiate contact with Amber, he should not try to manipulate her to avoid his responsibility. A sincere apology could be appropriate, along with an inquiry about what he could do to help Amber.

How could incidents similar to this be avoided?

Do not place yourself in situations where you know that adequate supervision will not be present to help protect you (e.g., don't go to parties when you know parents are not going to be there).

Remember that alcohol and other drugs compromise your ability to make decisions. When you say "no," make your message clear. Don't be embarrassed to yell, make a scene, or run away. Don't worry about offending your partner; remember, you are being humiliated.

If you are uncomfortable with a date, you can choose to end it. Take your own vehicle or meet at the destination. Carry money for a phone call or fare home. Avoid parties where men greatly outnumber women. Don't accept rides from new acquaintances.

Trust your INSTINCTS—believe your inner feelings when you get uncomfortable about a person or situation. Respond as soon as you feel uncomfortable!

D. Watch the video summary.

Vignette 3: Internet Safety and Stalking

A. Introduction

Cyberspace is a large online community, and like any community, there are places that can be dangerous for teenagers to visit. By understanding the dangers and avoiding them, teens can take advantage of the good the Internet offers while avoiding the pitfalls.

One of the fun things on the Internet is visiting "chat rooms." Chat rooms are places on the Internet that allow people with common interests to interact with each other—carry on discussions using the computer. Most chat rooms are harmless when you follow some simple guidelines.

Guidelines include (Note: You may want to write these on a flip chart or chalkboard.)

- Instantly removing yourself from any area where you feel you should not be.
- Never entering any information about yourself or your family without first checking with your parents. Beware of anyone who presses you for personal information.
- Remembering that people may not be who they seem to be. The Internet provides an opportunity for anonymity.
- Keeping your identity private. Don't give out your full name, address, telephone number, or anything else that would allow someone to determine your identity.
- If you feel it's appropriate to meet in person with someone you "meet" online, discussing it with your parents and never going to the meeting alone or in a private location. Ask your parents to talk to the parents of the other person.
- Not responding to inappropriate messages.

Stalking can be a sign of pending danger and can change a victim's way of life. A stalker can target anyone! Stalkers target public figures or celebrities, children, and sometimes even complete strangers. But in most cases, a stalker is someone you know and with whom you have had a relationship.

Typically, a stalker is an obsessive person who attempts to threaten or harm you, force attentions on you, or create or maintain relationships with you that you do not desire. Often, stalkers are former spouses or partners. Stalkers usually begin with persistent and annoying behavior that is not criminal, but progress to behavior that can be punished under criminal laws.

In the vignette you are about to watch, Laura has violated several Internet safety guidelines and has become a target for a stalker. After the video, we will come back and discuss which guidelines Laura violated and what actions she should take to discourage the stalker.

B. Watch the vignette.

C. Discussion

Which of the Internet safety guidelines did Laura violate?

- Never enter any information about yourself or your family without first checking with your parents. Beware of anyone who presses you for personal information.
- Remember that people may not be who they seem to be. The Internet provides an opportunity for anonymity.
- Keep your identity private. Don't give out your full name, address, telephone number, or anything else that would allow someone to determine your identity.

Do you think Laura is overreacting to the threat posed by Luke?

In cases like this it is better to be safe than sorry. Many stalkers are not dangerous, but some do attack and sexually assault their targets. It is impossible to know, before a tragedy occurs, whether the person poses a real threat.

What should Laura do now that Luke has initiated contact?

One thing Laura could try is to go to her parents and tell them what has happened and seek their help. If she has sound reasons for not seeking help from her parents, she should talk to a counselor at school or some other trusted adult. She could also contact the police department for guidance. She needs to make it clear to Luke that she is not interested in any further contact with him.

Once Laura has notified Luke that she does not want him to contact her in the future, she needs to document any attempts he makes and report these to a law enforcement agency. Installing a caller ID device could help with this documentation. Any threats made by the stalker should be reported to the police immediately.

Laura should consider changing her daily routine so she leaves for school at a different time and goes by an alternate route. She should try to travel with several friends or with her parents so Luke will not have a chance to contact her when she is isolated and away from possible help.

If Luke persists, she should ask for a protective court order that would set boundaries to prevent Luke from having contact with her.

D. Watch the video summary.