

Sexual Harassment on the School Bus:
Identifying and Taking Action
Reference Guide and Test

Produced by Video Communications

Introduction

I School bus drivers are constantly having to adapt and enforce rules on their school bus. Intervening with students, disciplinary action, and a healthy line of communication between the driver and students are critical in maintaining safety and structure. However, there is an important and unsettling issue that takes place on school buses across the country. That issue is sexual harassment.

II Ask yourself these questions. Do you know what sexual harassment consists of? Do you know how to react if it takes place on your bus? How can you rely on the school team to help, if harassment takes place on your bus? And how could you have prevented it from happening?

III It's critical for school bus drivers to **observe** and **identify** offensive sexual behavior. Drivers can then adopt techniques to effectively intervene. Such techniques can be applied when taking on sexual harassment issues on the bus. Also, make sure to follow your district's policies on sexual harassment.

What is Sexual Harassment?

1) School bus drivers need to be on top of their game in order to identify and react to behavioral issues that take place on their bus. The school bus is an extension of the classroom. Bus drivers do not only have to operate the bus, they must also be a teacher. Sexual harassment is an ongoing issue for school bus drivers to contend with.

2) Bullying and violence pose enormous threats to the safety of students. Unfortunately, sexual harassment is a close cousin to these behavioral issues. That is why sexual harassment must be observed and identified correctly.

3) Since the school bus is an extension of the classroom, it is important to recognize that sexual harassment can easily take place on any school bus. A student being sexually harassed is stuck. They can't get away from the onslaught of harassment aimed at them. Harassment takes place in all types of shapes and forms.

4) SEXUAL HARASSMENT is defined as:

- a) unwelcome sexual advances
- b) requests for sexual favors
- c) any sex-based verbal or physical conduct

4a) Such conduct has the affect of unreasonably interfering with the students education by creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment.

5) Bus drivers need to know how to respond to sexual harassment. Most importantly, they must not ignore sexual harassment encounters. Do not tell students it was “just a joke” or “no big deal.” **Drivers must reiterate to students that sexual harassment, just like bullying, will not be tolerated.** The school bus driver’s job is to protect ALL students who board and ride your bus.

Sexual harassment is considered to be illegal discrimination and must be dealt with efficiently. The goal is to stop this kind the behavior.

6) The video shows an example of a female student who takes a male students phone and places it in her bra. The hesitant male student was being egged on by the female harasser as well as his own friend to attempt to grab the phone. The male student tries to retrieve his phone. The bus driver sees this and calls him to the front of the bus to find out what happened.

7) It is important to remind yourself that it’s not just male students who are responsible for sexual harassment. Male students can be a victim of sexual harassment, as well as female students. And keep in mind there are many shades of gray when when it comes to assigning blame in a case of sexual harassment. What appears obvious, sometimes is the wrong answer. Deal with these issues with an open mind.

8) Another thing to keep in mind, is how other students on the bus are affected by witnessing sexual harassment. Students should feel safe and comfortable while riding the bus. If harassment is not recognized and addressed by the driver, it

gives students a false sense of security. Students know that at any point the harassment can turn on them.

9) Also, students don't want to be what is considered a "snitch" on the bus. Then the harassment turns into a whole new situation to deal with and students can become uncomfortable and actually dread getting on the bus.

10) If harassment is not recognized and addressed by the driver, students sense of security will be threatened. Students may think that at any point the harassment can be directed at them. Also, keep in mind that students can provide valuable information about behavioral issues that are occurring on the bus. But always protect the identity of the student that is providing the information. Being labeled as a "snitch" can carry terrible consequences.

Identification and Prevention

11) For a school bus driver to successfully address sexual harassment on their bus, they will first have to identify it. Sexual harassment comes in many shapes and forms. Here are some examples of **sexual harassment in physical form**:

- a) Any unwelcome touching, pinching, or restraining of students by another student - regardless of age.
- b) Flipping up skirts or snapping bras.
- c) ANY type of threatening, unwanted sexual activity.

12) Verbal harassment is more common but every bit as harmful. Verbal harassment is also more difficult to identify because of the many forms that it takes on. **Here are some examples of verbal sexual harassment**:

- a) Conveying rumors or making suggestive comments about a person's sexual activity.
- b) Calling names of a sexual nature.
- c) Obscene gestures, such as someone grabbing themselves in an obscene manner. Off color jokes that contain sexual innuendos.

12a) Keep in mind that if sexual harassment makes other students on the bus feel uncomfortable or unsafe, that becomes an issue that school bus drivers must take into consideration. Remember, bad behavior on a school bus has multiple consequences.

13) And of course in today's digital age, nearly everyone has a cell phone or some type of mobile device. Sexting is another type of sexual harassment. **Sexting is the act of sending sexually explicit messages or photographs with a mobile device, more commonly with cell phones.** When someone takes and sends pictures of an indecent nature, that becomes a form of sexual harassment.

14) It's also important to recognize that a student who is sexting - revealing pictures of another student with the sole intent to embarrass or hurt that student, is engaging in sexual harassment. We cover this example in the video.

15) As a school bus driver, you must be aware of what is taking place on your bus. You have to know the key signs to look out for. If a student appears to be withdrawn, or is avoiding certain students, it may be a sign that this student is being harassed. Students aren't going to be conspicuous while they are harassing another student. A harasser knows that if what they are doing is not appropriate, there will be consequences. So, it is going to be your attention to detail and awareness that will allow you to recognize that a sexual harassment incident is happening.

16) If strict guidelines and consequences are not set in place, or if a driver chooses to ignore sexual harassment issues, it tells the harasser that there will be no consequences for their actions. Thus, the inappropriate behavior may continue and can even be transferred into adulthood.

17) You should clearly convey the rules at the beginning of the year. Let students know what the expectations are for behavior on the bus. Let them know that there should be no inappropriate conduct on the bus. Be sure to always follow through with the consequences that have been presented. Preventing something before it

happens is always the best route to take.

Investigating and Taking Action

18) In the video we showed a couple of demonstrations of sexual harassment taking place on the bus. In these instances, we show the importance of identifying sexual harassment, at the time it occurs. And as also mentioned, the bus driver must take the time to investigate the incident.

19) When investigating, you should talk to both students separately. **Keep in mind that students accounts of the situation may differ. Not every situation is going to be in black and white.**

20) Be sure to **get the names of ANYONE who comes up in the discussion of the incident.** Also, many school buses today have on board camera systems that can pick up inappropriate actions that take place on the bus. These cameras are another tool for drivers to use, in the event that sexual harassment takes place. We use examples of this in the video.

21) It is important when receiving information or intervening with students to stay calm and professional. Even if you have witnessed the harassment taking place, you need to always remember to keep your cool at all times. Your attitude and professionalism should let students know that you mean business and are in control of the bus. **If you let your students think they have got the best of you - you have lost control of the bus.**

22) When sexual harassment HAS been identified, it is necessary to accurately document what has happened and to immediately report the incident to the appropriate district administrator. **Don't forget the importance of relying on the school team.** Your eye witness account is important information for the school to attain and proceed with the appropriate actions.

25) When reporting incidents to the appropriate administrators you should provide the age of the victim and harasser. You should include any details of the conduct you observed or were told by both victim and harasser. Also, try to find out and report how long the particular incident lasted either by observance or

what is told to you. You should also report whether or not other students joined in the harassing.

23) Once all the appropriate steps have been taken, you should have a sit down with students, their parents and transportation management or school administration. Let the student AND the parent know that this type of behavior will not be tolerated on the bus. In worse circumstances than this example displayed, they may be suspended from bus riding privileges and even expelled from school.

24) Follow up by continuing to monitor the situation. If efforts to end harassment are not working, report the incidents to the appropriate administrator.

Remember that the bottom line is to stop the harassment.

CLOSING

The video has given several demonstrations to give a clear idea of what sexual harassment consists of. It has also covered the importance of understanding different types of sexual harassment, whether physical, verbal or both. In addition, we went over the critical information that should be passed on to the appropriate administrators. Remember, “ignorance is not bliss.” Acts of sexual harassment, if unchecked, can negatively impact the school climate and feed into more severe acts of violence. The students look to you for protection if harassment is taking place. Stay pro active in providing that safe experience for the students you transport.

TEST QUESTIONS

1) SEXUAL HARASSMENT is defined as:

- a) unwelcome sexual advances
- b) requests for sexual favors
- c) any sex-based verbal or physical conduct
- d) all of the above

2) Verbal harassment is more difficult to identify than physical harassment.

TRUE or FALSE

3) You should not discipline a student if they are just “joking around” about sexual innuendoes. **TRUE or FALSE**

4) Verbal harassment is more common than physical harassment.

TRUE or FALSE

5) Sexting is the act of sending sexually explicit messages with a mobile device.

TRUE or FALSE

6) Male students are the only ones responsible for sexual harassment.

TRUE or FALSE

7) When investigating, you should talk to students separately.

TRUE or FALSE

8) Cameras can aid a driver in helping to investigate harassment instances.

TRUE or FALSE

9) Harassment can negatively impact the school climate.

TRUE or FALSE

10) You should not report whether or not other students joined in the harassing.

TRUE or FALSE

ANSWER KEY

1) d

2) TRUE

3) FALSE

4) TRUE

5) TRUE

6) FALSE

7) TRUE

8) TRUE

9) TRUE

10) FALSE