

As a Matter of fact

What Educators Need to Know About Sexual Misconduct with Students



Educator sexual misconduct.¹ Compromises a wide range of behaviors including, but not limited to, sexual innuendo; inappropriate touching; inappropriate text messaging, email, or social media contact with a student; soliciting sex from a student; or sexual contact with a student.

Who are the Perpetrators?²⁻⁸

- Perpetrators may be classroom teachers, administrators, coaches, counselors, tutors, volunteers, or any others who work in an educational setting.
- Perpetrators may be either male or female.
- Perpetrators may be well-respected and highly regarded by other teachers, administrators, parents, and the community.

Manipulation of Student/Staff/Community^{2, 4, 10, 11, 12}

- Manipulation, also known as “grooming”, is a deliberate and carefully orchestrated process by which sexual offenders target, initiate, and maintain sexually abusive relationships with children and adolescents.
- Manipulation behaviors may, on the surface, appear innocent in nature, and distinguishing between sexually motivated manipulation and normal child/adult interactions can be difficult.
- Successful manipulation involves the student, the student’s family, school staff, and the community, which increases the likelihood that sexual misconduct can be initiated and maintained without detection.

- Offenders often target vulnerable or marginal students who have prior academic, emotional, or behavioral problems, because these students are more likely to keep silent or if they do “tell”, are less likely to be believed.
- Offenders may target students who are facing family challenges or adversities because those students are often susceptible to inappropriate attention from an adult.
- Offenders persuade students to keep silent by manipulating students’ affections, through threats or by exploiting the power differential between themselves and students.

Challenges of Student’s Allegations^{2, 12, 13}

School personnel and the community may not know who or what to believe and may feel confusion, anger, disbelief, fear, and/or the desire to defend the alleged offender.

Because of the power differential, the reputation difference between the educator and the student, or the mindset that children/adolescents are untruthful, many reports by students are ignored or given minimal attention.

(Shakeshaft, 2004, p. 33).

Warning Signs⁴

- Obvious or inappropriate preferential treatment of the student.
- Excessive time spent alone with the student.
- Time spent with the student outside of class or other school functions.
- Repeated time spent in private spaces with the student.
- Driving the student to or from school.
- Befriending parents and making visits to the student's home
- Acting as the student's confidante.
- Inappropriate calls, texts, or emails to the student.
- Overly affectionate behavior with the student.
- Flirtatious behavior or off-color remarks with the student.
- Schoolmates suspect an improper relationship between the educator and student, and make jokes or references about it to other students or adults.

How to Protect Students^{1, 2, 6, 13, 15}

- Perform criminal background checks on all school employees, volunteers, and any person who may be in direct, unsupervised contact with students.
- Ask for and contact all references and prior employers about prospective employees.
- Include in employee handbook the school's "Code of Conduct" which clearly defines
 - sexual misconduct with students,
 - school personnel's obligations and responsibilities toward maintaining appropriate boundaries with students,
 - whom to report if an employee observes violations,
 - specific state statutes regarding mandatory reporting,
 - how the school will respond to situations involving inappropriate behavior with students.
- Provide training that includes a combination of
 - annual workshops for all school personnel, students, and parents focusing specifically on sexual exploitation of students;
 - information on how to recognize and manage

- behavior that could lead to boundary violations
 - written materials in policy books and manuals;
 - posters and flyers that remind students and staff (including department and administrative offices) about appropriate conduct;
 - and legal responsibilities for reporting behavior that may indicate sexual misconduct and the consequences for failing to report.
- Create a response team that works with students and administrators to handle situations of educator
- Work with school counselors to develop a peer helper program that would allow victims to have their peer group to talk to and assist with reporting.

How Educators Should Respond^{1, 12, 14}

Educators are mandated reporters and are legally required to contact law enforcement or child protective services immediately after a disclosure or if there are reasonable suspicions of sexual misconduct. For additional information regarding requirements of mandated reporting, go to the following site: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/educator.pdf>

Do's and Don'ts

- **DO** provide practical and emotional support to the student who discloses sexual misconduct by school personnel, regardless of personal feelings about the alleged offender or the student.
- **DO** convey acceptance and neutrality to the student regarding the allegations.
- **DO** create a safe learning environment for the student after disclosure of sexual misconduct by school personnel.
- **DO** maintain confidentiality.
- **DON'T** investigate or try to prove the truth of an allegation.
- **DON'T** subject the student to detailed questioning.

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