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Human rights
education resources
for teachers

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Tackling
sexual harassment

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Subjects: Civics and Citizenship,
Personal Development/Health/Physical Education
Level: Year 9 and up (14 years and up)
Time needed: 1–4 lessons

Introduction

Sexual harassment is a significant issue in the Australian community. Despite there being laws against it for the past 25 years, it continues to occur in workplaces and schools.

Sexual harassment in the workplace often includes a significant physical element, such as unwanted touching. In schools, a lot of sexual harassment is based on verbal taunts and teasing.

Addressing sexual harassment is, therefore, an important human rights issue. Each person has basic human rights, including the right to be free from harassment. If these rights are not respected then a person can feel degraded.

While everyone has the right to be free from harassment and intimidation, we also have a responsibility to ensure that we treat others in a way that we would expect to be treated. This idea of mutual respect is central to maintaining strong, healthy communities.

Each state and territory education department has strong policies on sexual harassment, as well as other forms of harassment and bullying.

This resource is designed to support these policies and to engage students in an active examination of sexual harassment; its causes, effects and strategies to address it.

By understanding their rights and responsibilities, students can work together to identify and address sexual harassment in their school – whether it happens to them or if they see it happening to another student.

Aim

The activities in this resource will help students to:

- raise their awareness of human rights issues
- develop their decision making skills
- enable them to find informed and practicable solutions to the issues raised
- apply their knowledge and understanding of this issue to their school community.

They can be photocopied for class use and used individually or as an entire resource.

Learning outcomes

Through this resource, it is hoped that students will:

- discuss issues of gender and stereotypes and how this can lead to harassment
- understand key aspects of the law about sexual harassment
- identify a range of rights and responsibilities within a school setting
- apply human rights principles to their own life experiences
- develop cooperative learning skills and decision-making skills.

Activities/resources

- Activity sheet: Sexual harassment – true or false?
- Activity sheet: Comments in the schoolyard
- Resource sheet: What is sexual harassment?
- Activity sheet: What is sexual harassment?
- Resource sheet: What's so wrong about sexual harassment?
- Script: Tackling sexual harassment
- DVD: Tackling sexual harassment (8 minutes)
- Activity sheet: DVD discussion guide
- Activity sheet: Character cards
- Activity sheet: Thinking about your own school
- Resource sheet: Developing a sexual harassment policy for your school

Teaching strategies

1. Introducing the concept

- Activity sheet: Sexual harassment – true or false?

Ask students to work individually and complete the quiz included on the activity sheet *Sexual harassment – true or false?* Teachers may also wish to ask students to work in small groups to brainstorm what sexual harassment means. Note that answers are available on the following page – teachers may wish to wait until later in the lesson to discuss the answers.

A classroom discussion should be used to follow-up on the issues raised in the quiz. The discussion should focus around the following four key questions:

- What is sexual harassment?
- Why do some people behave in this way?
- Why is it a problem?
- How can it be addressed?

2. Hypothesising about sexual harassment

- Activity sheet: Comments in the schoolyard

Students are given a series of hypothetical scenarios to examine, which could occur at their school. Students have to decide whether each of the scenarios is an example of sexual harassment and why/why not. In answering each question, ensure that students discuss further the concept of sexual harassment and begin to develop a more detailed definition. Discussion should also continue to focus on why some people behave the way they do.

3. Defining and understanding sexual harassment

- Resource sheet: What is sexual harassment?
- Activity sheet: What is sexual harassment?
- Resource sheet: What's so wrong about sexual harassment?

Students now look at the legal definition of sexual harassment using resource and *activity sheet What is sexual harassment?* to examine the scenarios.

Organise the class into small groups and then ask each group to apply the sexual harassment definition and flow chart to one of the scenarios in the activity sheet. Each small group reports back to the class about why their scenario was/was not an example of sexual harassment.

Ask students to re-consider the answers to the *activity sheet Sexual harassment – true or false?* after reading through the legal definition of sexual harassment.

In order to clarify why sexual harassment is an important issue, students work in groups to examine the *resource sheet What's so wrong about sexual harassment?*, which includes useful information on how sexual harassment and bullying can affect individuals.

To conclude this activity, ask each group to report back to the class on their discussion, identifying one main idea statement that summarises their conclusions about 'what is so wrong about sexual harassment'.

Teaching strategies

4. Applying knowledge and understanding

- Script: Tackling sexual harassment
- Activity sheet: DVD discussion guide
- Multimedia resource: DVD (8 minutes)

The DVD, *Tackling sexual harassment*, is set in a 'typical' high school and follows a student making a video project about whether or not sexual harassment exists in her school. She records a range of different scenarios. The final scenario features a variety of possible strategies to respond to an incident of sexual harassment.

A text version of the script may be used as an additional resource, or where the *Tackling sexual harassment* DVD is unavailable. Teachers may also wish to use this resource as a starting point for some role-playing activities.

As students watch the DVD, they complete the activity sheet *DVD discussion guide*, which helps them to identify and explore the issues being raised.

5. Evaluating strategies to address sexual harassment

- Activity sheet: DVD discussion guide
- Activity sheet: Character cards
- Script: Tackling sexual harassment

Organise students into small groups. The task of each group is to select one of the situations that they have seen in the *Tackling sexual harassment* DVD and agree on the best strategies to deal with that situation.

Provide each group with a set of character cards, cut so they can be shuffled like a deck of cards. The script may also be useful here to assist students to clearly identify the issues in each of the scenes they have watched.

Students consider each of the scenes they watched in the DVD and design a strategy to address the issues involved using the notes they made.

After discussing the different options, each student in the group draws one of the character cards from the pack and decides if this strategy would be appropriate for this person. They replace their character cards and draw a new one for each new strategy that they discuss.

This process helps students to see beyond their own reactions and to demonstrate that different strategies will suit different people. When the group has examined each scene, they could select a scene to prepare for presentation to their classmates in the following role-play activity.

6. Presenting conclusions

Time permitting; each group role plays the situation they have chosen to reflect the solution they think would be most appropriate.

Students should be given time to work with their groups to prepare their performance. Teachers should encourage students to be creative, using minimal props and basic furniture as their setting.

After each presentation, the whole class should discuss the solution proposed by each group.

During this activity, teachers may need to provide some guidance to students on the boundaries that they should respect when creating their performance. It may be helpful to identify the types of action that is appropriate, making clear that while the presentations can be light-hearted and entertaining, they should not 'cross the line' and engage in actual sexual harassment or any other form of discrimination.

7. Thinking about your own school

- Activity sheet: Thinking about your own school

Students work in small groups to undertake a survey to see whether or not any problems with sexual harassment exist in their school

A collection of survey questions are included in the activity sheet *Thinking about sexual harassment at your own school* to assist students in making a useful assessment of the kinds of behaviour that is common within their own school community.

If students do identify potential problems or examples, discuss with them the avenues that are available for students to resolve the problem. For instance, does the school have a policy about sexual harassment? What is in that policy? How is the policy implemented? Are there other strategies that might help?

Teachers should encourage students to discuss the results of their survey in the context of the information they have gathered about the law and sexual harassment in previous stages.

8. Applying your findings

- Resource sheet: Developing a sexual harassment policy for your school

Following on from the discussion in the previous stage, students could develop strategies that could be implemented in their school to improve understanding within the rest of the school about sexual harassment and effective strategies for dealing with it.

This could include:

- developing or updating and revising the school's sexual harassment policy
- publicising the issue (or the policy) through a poster campaign in the school or via the school newsletter
- raising the issue at a school assembly
- involving the Student Representative Council (SRC) in running a peer education program on the issue for younger students.

The resource sheet *Developing a sexual harassment policy for your school* provides useful information on school sexual harassment policies which can be used as a starting point for students in developing their own policies.