



# Breaking the Silence

## Child Abuse Awareness Training

# A Lone Girl



### The Scenario

While hurrying to your next period, you notice five high school boys surrounding a girl who looks very nervous. You remove the girl from the circle and have her walk with you. She tells you that they were telling her how sexy she is and how big her breasts are, and that they say such things frequently. She is pretty shaken up. What do you do?

### Discussion Begins

#### What do you do?

**Do you report?** If so, to whom? If so, when? If you don't, what might happen to the girl? To other students? To you? To your school? To LAUSD?

Investigate under guidelines of sexual harassment. If your investigation reveals that the harassment was also physical, consult with the Local Law Enforcement Agency for sexual battery. If they tell you...

...to **handle it administratively**, what do you do next?

...**they will investigate**, what do you do next?

### Filing a Report

If an employee does not have reasonable suspicion of child abuse, he/she may ask clarifying questions; however, if an employee has reasonable suspicion, he/she must file a Suspected Child Abuse Report (SCAR) without further questioning.

In order to comply with the mandated reporting requirements, an employee must always file a SCAR if he/she has reasonable suspicion of child abuse, even if the Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) or the Local Law Enforcement Agency indicates to "handle it administratively."

Required steps for filing a SCAR:

1. Phone call immediately or ASAP to a Child Protective Agency (CPA)
2. Written report mailed to the CPA within 36 hours of receiving the information

SCARs must be filed with a CPA – either DCFS or a Local Law Enforcement Agency. Generally, reports are filed with the DCFS if they involve allegations of abuse or neglect by an in-home perpetrator. Generally, reports are filed with a Local Law Enforcement Agency if they involve allegations of abuse by a District employee or an out-of-home perpetrator or allegations of moderate to severe abuse by an in-home perpetrator.

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## Legal Response

If based upon the initial student's statements, you do not have reasonable suspicion of child abuse, you may ask the student clarifying questions such as, "Has this occurred before? What happened? How many times have they said/done this? Have they ever touched you? If so, how?" If there is reasonable suspicion that child abuse occurred, a SCAR must be filed with a CPA.

Since the girl reported that the sexual harassment was chronic and unwelcomed, and made her uncomfortable, you should notify an administrator and the Title IX Complaint Manager. Follow the steps in the Title IX Policy/Complaint Procedures (BUL-2521.1) and Sexual Harassment Policy (BUL-3349.1).

The administrator and Title IX Complaint Manager should take steps to ensure that any inappropriate behavior ceases.

The Educational Equity Compliance Office may provide resources and consultation in the area of sexual harassment for both students and staff.

Even if the behavior was welcomed, it was nevertheless inappropriate and should be addressed accordingly with all parties.

Parents/guardians of all parties involved should be notified at the appropriate time, pending any law enforcement investigation.

### Other Considerations

Is she in the same classes as these male students? If so, consider changing classes.

If the girl reports physical contact of a sexual nature, this may rise to the level of reasonable suspicion for child abuse and you must file a SCAR with a CPA. The administrator should also consult with the Student Discipline and Expulsion Support Unit.

## Emotional Support

### Listen

Observing this type of behavior may elicit a strong emotional reaction. Listen carefully, while conveying your concern and interest for her well-being. Ask open-ended questions as needed and help her feel safe.

When speaking with the alleged perpetrators, be aware that they may not have had strong guidance as to the inappropriateness of such behavior. Educate them about the respectful treatment of all and the expectations the school and District has for appropriate behaviors.

### Protect

The situation must be addressed immediately by following the legal response and if necessary, the mandated child abuse reporting procedures. This is the best way to protect students and promote a safe learning environment.

### Connect

Ask the student what would be most helpful at that time, with whom else she feels comfortable speaking, and let her know that there are staff who can help (e.g., Psychiatric Social Worker, Counselor, School Nurse, Pupil Services and Attendance Counselor, School Psychologist). If the perpetrators have had other similar instances, consider referring these individuals for assistance as well.

### Model

Maintain a professional and calm level of emotions and reactions to help them achieve balance and restore a calm environment. Do not express shock, anger or disbelief at the possible perpetrator or event.

### Teach

Teach her that no one has the right to touch her body. Help her to understand that it is normal to have a confusing range of feelings as a result of experiences like these. Meet with the male students and teach them about standards of appropriate behavior and the negative outcomes of engaging in sexual harassment.

