

# Sexual Harassment and Students of Color

Learn and act with this presentation by the National Women's Law Center  
Created for Stop Sexual Assault in Schools

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# Acknowledgement

Special thanks to Sarah Wing and Elizabeth Tang at the National Women's Law Center for creating this presentation.





# Content Warning

**SASH Club Power Topics may include sensitive content that may be difficult to present and may possibly be triggering to some participants.**

**You may want to seek the support of an ally during this presentation, especially if you're a survivor of sexual violence.**

# What's Ahead

- What is sexual harassment?
- How does it affect students?
- Students of color are uniquely impacted
- Why don't they just report?
- Why is it hard to get help sometimes?
- How can schools better prevent and respond to sexual harassment of students of color?
- Seven ways to prevent sexual harassment
- Five ways to respond to sexual harassment
- Resources

# What is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment is any **unwanted** sexual conduct, such as:

- “Jokes,” slurs, rumors, or “catcalling”
- Sexual messages, pictures, or videos
- Kissing or touching of private body parts, including rape
- Insults, threats, violence, or stalking from someone you are dating or used to date
- Any romantic or sexual contact between a child and an adult, even if the child likes the adult or doesn’t reject the relationship



# How does it affect students?

- 56% of girls and 40% of boys in grades 7-12 are sexually harassed in a given school year.
- More than one in five girls ages 14 to 18 are kissed or touched without their consent.
- 58% of LGBTQ youth ages 13-21 are sexually harassed.



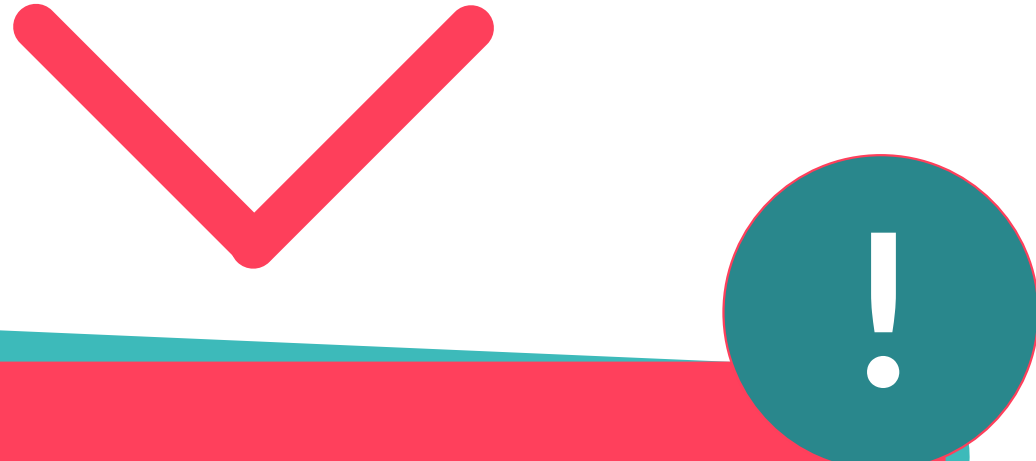
# Students of color are uniquely impacted

- Girls of color are more likely to be sexually harassed or assaulted because of their gender AND their race.
- 6% of girls overall reported being forced to have sex when they did not want to, and these rates were higher for Indigenous (11%), Black (9%), and Latina (7%) girls.
- This is due to harmful race- and sex-based stereotypes that label them as “promiscuous” and less deserving of protection and care.



# Why don't they just report?

- Fear of backlash or retaliation
- Believe abuse was not important enough
- Feel embarrassed, ashamed, or that it's emotionally difficult
- Think no one would do anything to help
- Fear reporting would make the situation even worse

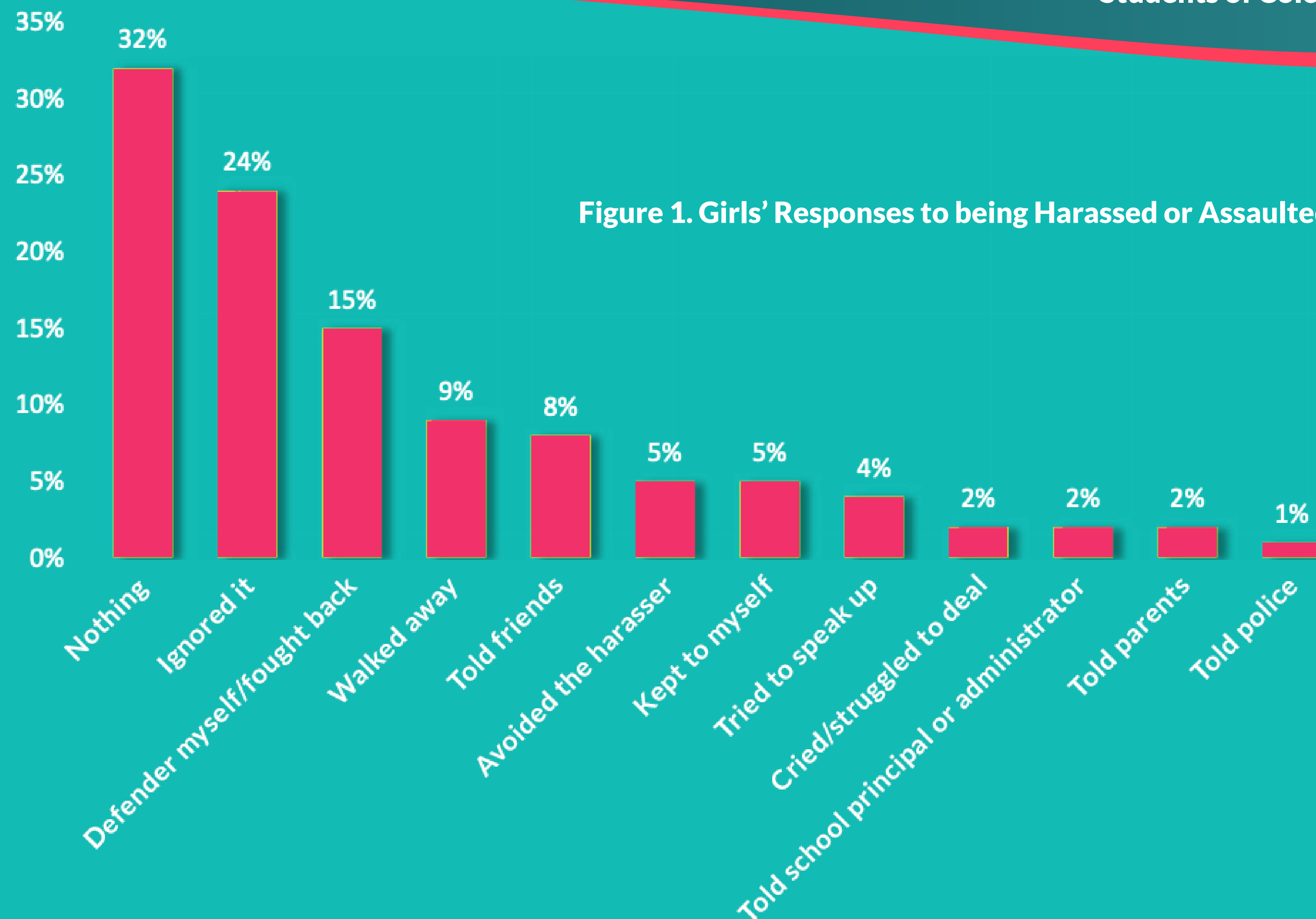


Only 2 percent of girls ages 14 to 18 who are kissed or touched without their consent report the incident to their school.



# What did you do in response to being harassed or assaulted?

Source: National Women's Law  
Center, Let Her Learn Survey,  
Conducted by Lake Research  
Partners (2017).



# Discussion

**Why do you think so few students report sexual harassment, especially students of color?**

1. Schools are more likely to ignore, blame, and punish Black and brown girls who report due to racist and sexist stereotypes.
2. They are perceived as “older” and more knowledgeable about sex, so therefore they must have consented. For example, Black girls are “adultified.”
3. They are perceived as less worthy of support and care.
4. They may not want to report to the police if their assailant is non-white to avoid the overcriminalization of men and boys of color.

# Scenarios

**Instructions: Break into two teams to discuss the following scenarios and questions.**

## **Questions to think about:**

How is race a factor in these incidents?

If you knew about these incidents, how would you respond?

What barriers do you think these students experience in reporting?



# Scenario 1

Aaliyah is a Black high school student who is being constantly touched by the boys in her class without her consent. They often make comments about her body and how she looks “experienced.”

Aaliyah goes to a teacher she trusts and expresses her discomfort. The teacher replies that she should dress more conservatively and that the boys likely made those comments because “girls like you are fast and get pregnant young.”

> Aaliyah confides in you about what happened and how the teacher responded.





## Scenario 2

Tim is a Korean American middle school student. His classmates often make racist remarks and purposely mix up his nationality because “all Asians look the same.”

One day, a girl in his class grabbed his crotch because she “wanted to know if the size rumor was true.”



You're in Tim's class and saw/  
heard what the girl did/said.



# Why is it hard to get help sometimes?

- Students are ignored and disbelieved based on school administrators' conclusions that they engaged in "consensual" sexual activity or premarital sex, or that they made a false accusation.
- They are punished for acting out in age-appropriate ways after the harassment due to trauma, for missing school to avoid their harasser, or for merely talking about their harassment with other students.

# Why is it hard to get help sometimes?

- Students of color are especially likely to be ignored, punished, or retaliated against due to dangerous racist and/or sexist narratives.
- Black girls are seen as more “aggressive” when that can often be an age-appropriate response to trauma.
- Other students who experience sexual harassment are punished for physically defending themselves against their harassers, which reinforces this “aggressive” racial stereotype.



How can schools better prevent and respond to sexual harassment of students of color?

Check out this student toolkit at  
<https://nwlc.org/100schooldistricts>

These policies can help all students and can be especially helpful for students of color.



# Seven ways to prevent sexual harassment

1. Provide sex education for all K-12 students.
2. Train all staff on sexual harassment.
3. Remove police from schools.
4. Invest in non-police adult helpers.
5. Abolish dress codes.
6. Respect transgender and nonbinary students.
7. Collect climate survey data.



# Seven ways to prevent sexual harassment

## 1. Provide sex education for all K-12 students.

Research shows students who receive effective sex education are less likely to become a sexual harasser or a sexual harassment victim.

Your school district can help prevent sexual harassment by giving all K-12 students age-appropriate sex education.

The **lessons** should cover topics like consent, sexual harassment, healthy dating relationships, bystander intervention, reproductive health, and LGBTQ identity.



# Seven ways to prevent sexual harassment

## 2. Train all staff on sexual harassment.

Your teachers, counselors, principals, and other school staff should know how to recognize sexual harassment, including signs of child sexual abuse.

They should also know about civil rights laws, like Title IX. School staff should also be trained on how to reach out to the Title IX Coordinator and how to help students who report sexual harassment instead of ignoring them or victim-blaming them.

# Seven ways to prevent sexual harassment

## 3. Remove police from schools.

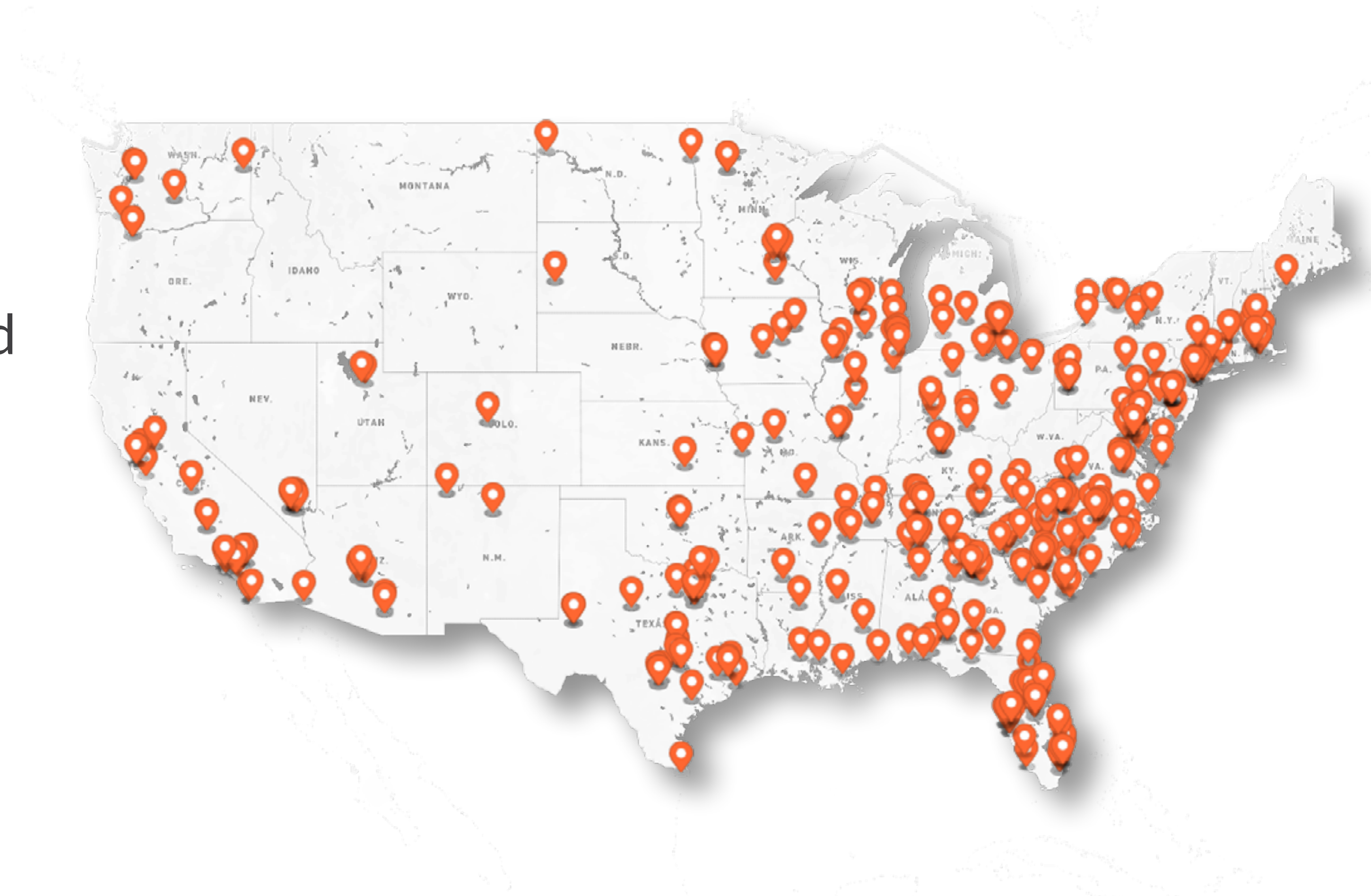
Some students don't want to report sexual harassment to their school if they think the police will get involved. And school police officers sometimes physically assault and sexually assault students, especially girls and students of color.

In recent years, **many school districts** have decided to get rid of school police. Your school district can too!



“This #AssaultAt map chronicles over 300 acts of school police violence against students since 2007, including violence perpetrated by school resource officers (SROs), police officers on school property and at school-related events, and school security guards, as part of the school policing infrastructure.”

-- [policefreeschools.org](https://policefreeschools.org)





## Learn more about the movement for police free schools:

- **Police Free Schools**
- **Interrupting Criminalization**
- **In Our Names Network**



# Seven ways to prevent sexual harassment

## 4. Invest in non-police adult helpers.

Millions of students go to schools with police... but **no counselors**, nurses, psychologists, or social workers!

Your school district can prevent sexual harassment by removing school police and investing in non-police staff. Non-police staff can help students build healthy relationships with each other and respond more effectively to sexual harassment.

# Seven ways to prevent sexual harassment

## 5. Abolish dress codes.

Dress codes promote unfair stereotypes about gender, race, and size that can encourage sexual harassment. When schools punish girls for dress code violations, they teach students that girls are at fault when boys are “distracted” by what girls wear or when boys harass girls.

Schools often apply dress codes unfairly against girls, students of color, LGBTQ students, and curvier students. Your school district should **get rid of its dress code** (or at least make it apply the same to all students regardless of their gender).



# Seven ways to prevent sexual harassment

## 6. Respect transgender and nonbinary students.

Research shows that trans and nonbinary students are more likely to be sexually assaulted when they aren't allowed to be in single-sex spaces that match their gender identity.

Your school district can help prevent sexual assault of trans and nonbinary students by allowing all students to use restrooms and locker rooms and **play on sports teams** that match their gender identity. Your school district should also **respect** the gender identity of trans and nonbinary students, which includes their names and pronouns (e.g., they, she, he).

# Seven ways to prevent sexual harassment

## 7. Collect climate survey data.

A “climate survey” is an anonymous survey that asks students about how safe and supported they feel at school.

Your school district should ask you and your classmates to fill out a **climate survey** about sexual harassment every one to two years. And it should share the results of the survey with all students and families, without sharing names or any identifying information of the students. That way, you can learn how often students experience harassment at school and your school can figure out what policies are needed to create a safer school.



# Five ways to respond to sexual harassment

1. Make it easy to report sexual harassment.
2. Support students who report sexual harassment.
3. Don't punish students who report sexual harassment.
4. Conduct fair and timely investigations.
5. Offer a restorative process as an option.



# Five ways to respond to sexual harassment

## 1. Make it easy to report sexual harassment.

Your school district's sexual harassment policies should be easy for you and your classmates—including English learners and students with disabilities—to **understand and find online**. Each school in your school district should have at least one adult “Title IX Coordinator” to whom you can report sexual harassment.

Students should be able to make **anonymous** reports, meaning you can report without identifying yourself. Students should be able to make **confidential** reports to someone who is not a “mandatory reporter” so that the school can help you without telling your harasser, starting an investigation, or involving the police.

# Five ways to respond to sexual harassment

## 2. Support students who report sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment can cause anxiety, depression, or other mental health effects, making it harder for students to study, keep up their grades, stay in school clubs, or even go to school.

If a student doesn't feel safe at school because of sexual harassment, their school should make a safety plan to keep the harasser away from the victim during classes, in the hallways, during lunch, in school activities, and on the way to/from school. If a student has trouble learning because of sexual harassment, their school should offer free counseling, tutoring, excused absences, extra time for homework or tests, and/or a chance to redo homework or retake a test.

# Five ways to respond to sexual harassment

## 3. Don't punish students who report sexual harassment.

Too often, schools punish students who report sexual harassment instead of protecting them. For example, many survivors are suspended by their schools because their school thinks a sexual assault was consensual or because the survivor previously had consensual sex with their assailant. Other survivors are suspended for being drunk or violating a COVID rule during their assault, for fighting back against a harasser, or for just talking about what happened. And many students who ask their schools for help are forced to transfer to another school away from their friends and teachers. Students are less likely to ask for help for sexual harassment if they're afraid they'll be punished. Your school district should have policies that make sure students who report sexual harassment are not punished!



# Five ways to respond to sexual harassment

## 4. Conduct fair and timely investigations.

Your school district should investigate all reports of sexual harassment right away. The victim should have the same rights as the reported harasser to participate in the investigation, and students shouldn't be blamed or doubted just because they don't look or act the way the school district expects a victim to look or act.

At the end of each investigation, your school district should tell both sides about its decision and should also tell the victim what it will do to keep them safe.

# Five ways to respond to sexual harassment

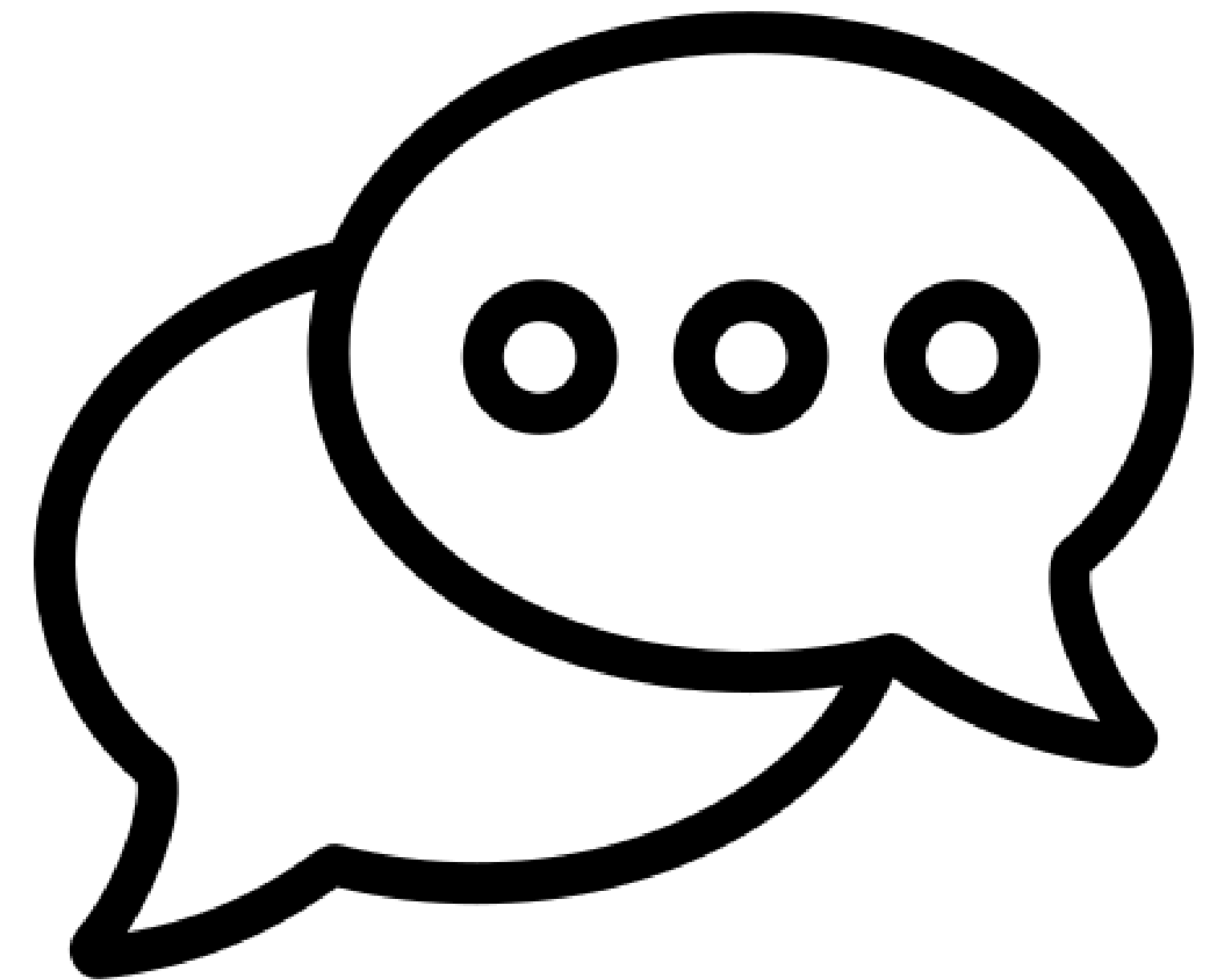
## 5. Offer a restorative process as an option.

In a restorative process, the harasser starts by admitting that they harmed the victim. As the harasser and victim make a plan for the harasser to repair the harm, the victim's needs and goals are centered. The victim and harasser can be in separate rooms or the same room and can also choose to invite family or friends.

Restorative processes can make victims of sexual harm feel safe and respected and can better help sexual harassers learn what they did wrong. Both sides should agree to the process and understand what they are agreeing to. The school should have a well-trained facilitator, and no one should ever be forced to participate.

# Discussion

- Which of the seven **Prevention** policies stood out to you? How would these policies make your school safer?
- Which of the five **Response** policies stood out to you? How would these policies make your school safer?





# Resources

- If you've been sexually harassed:
  - How to get supportive measures from your school to help you feel safe and learn
  - How to speak out about sex-based harassment, and what to know about defamation lawsuits and other retaliation
  - Talk to a lawyer
- If you want to change your school's policies:
  - How schools can prevent and respond to sexual harassment
  - How to stop school pushout for girls of color
  - How to get rid of dress codes at your school
  - How to remove police from your school

# To Do Immediately if Sexually Assaulted

- > Get away from the attacker to a safe place as fast as you can.
- > Call a friend or family member you trust.
- > You can call a crisis center or hotline to talk with a counselor.
- > One 24/7 option, for all genders, is the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800-656-HOPE (4673).
- > RAINN will connect you with a rape crisis center in your area.
- > Visit the [Survivor Support page](#) for more helpline options and details.



# Feedback & Suggestions:

SASH Club welcomes your feedback and suggestions on the content of this presentation. Contact us via:

Web: [www.sashclub.org](http://www.sashclub.org)

Email: [sashclub@ssais.org](mailto:sashclub@ssais.org)

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> Contact an adult advisor with your questions or concerns about local issues.

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