Unsuitable Actions is a documentary/drama that explores issues surrounding appropriate and inappropriate behaviour for junior high school students, with a focus on sexual harassment.

In the drama, Heather becomes the target of sexual harassment initiated and continued by a boy in her computer class. The harassment escalates as other students join in. With each other’s support, Heather, her friends and their principal take steps to address the situation. In a parallel conversation, students discuss sexual harassment from their diverse points of view, grappling with definitions and recounting their experiences.

Unsuitable Actions helps to identify inappropriate behaviour by revealing some of the forms sexual harassment can take, and the frustration, pain and academic interference it can cause. Considering the question of accountability, and modelling several courses of action, the video provides a sense of empowerment for those attempting to create positive solutions to the problem.

Director: Theresa Wynn
Producers: Jerry Krepakevitch, Bonnie Thompson
26 minutes 30 seconds
Order number: C9197 118

IN CANADA, CALL
1-800-267-7710
IN THE US, CALL
1-800-542-2164

Closed captioned.
A decoder is required.

©1997 National Film Board of Canada. All rights reserved. A license is required for any reproduction, broadcast, sale, rental or public screening. Only educational institutions or non-profit organizations that have obtained this video from the NFB or an authorized distributor have the right to show this material free of charge to the public.

National Film Board of Canada
P.O. Box 6100, Station Centre-Ville
Montreal, Quebec H3C 3H5

Printed in Canada

www.nfb.ca

"This powerful video provides a poignant account of the debilitating impact of student-to-student sexual harassment and offers strategies for dealing with this pervasive problem...a must for teachers, parents and students..."

— June Larkin, author of SEXUAL HARASSMENT: HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS SPEAK OUT
Suggested Guidelines

Unsuitable Actions will facilitate educators and youth interested in addressing sexual harassment at school and beyond by providing a springboard for discussion and action. It is appropriate for use in Health, Guidance and Social Studies curricula.

After viewing the video, students will inevitably examine their own feelings and behaviour with regard to sexual harassment. Educators can prepare for the vital learning process that ensues by becoming familiar with the topic beforehand, having resources available for students, and establishing ground rules for group discussion.

Consider team-teaching this topic with other educators or students. See the Related Resources section of this videojacket for guides to educating students about sexual harassment.

Become Familiar with the Topic

- Learn the language, concepts, definitions and examples of sexual harassment.
- Inform yourself about school and board policies on sexual harassment, as well as relevant human rights codes and laws. Are you legally obliged to act if you become aware of a case of sexual harassment involving a student?
- Sexual harassment among peers is related to other issues, including racism, homophobia, classism, harassment by adults and discrimination on the basis of physical disability. Be prepared for a broad discussion of the matter.

Have Resources Available for Students

- Have school or board policies and counsellors' names, as well as crisis line numbers, on hand for students who want to take action on current or previous experiences of sexual harassment.

Ground Rules for Group Discussion

When students consider issues of sexual harassment, sexism, racism, and homophobia, comments and blaming can surface. But little is gained if we allow ourselves to retreat to positions of defensiveness or denial when addressing oppressive behaviour. Establishing the following ground rules can provide a safer environment to articulate experiences and will lead to a more efficient learning process.

- Respect each other. Be careful about verbally jumping on someone because of a comment he or she has made. Is there a less hostile way to make your point – one that will allow the person to hear you and understand your position rather than feel attacked?
- Don't make assumptions. Just because you don't think anyone in your class or group has been sexually harassed doesn't make it so.
- Speak from your own experience. Try not to speak for others. A good way to do this is to say “I think” or “I feel” instead of “women think” or “gay people say.”
- Be mindful of your anger, fear or sadness. This discussion might not be the best place for you to express extreme emotions. Ask for a time-out to examine your feelings.

Ask students or group members to suggest other acceptable ground rules. Someone will probably suggest confidentiality and a “no laughing at” or “no interrupting” agreement.

You may wish to consider some single-gender groupings during the initial stages of discussion.

Director
Theresa Wynnyk

Writer
Bonnie Bishop

Editor
Marke Slipp

Producers
Jerry Krepakevich
Bonnie Thompson

Executive
Producers
Svend-Erik Eriksen
Graydon McCrea
Activities and Questions for Viewers

Before viewing the video

- In this video, a girl in junior high is sexually harassed by a fellow student. What do you think this means?

- How do you think people feel when they are the target of harassment?

- Does your school have a policy on sexual harassment? Do you know what it is?

- Talk about the different forms of harassment that exist.

After viewing the video

- What are some of the forms of inappropriate sexual behaviour shown in the video? When is flirting or paying someone a compliment appropriate behaviour and when does it become sexual harassment? Make a list of other examples (eg. boy to boy, girl to girl, racism, homophobia).

- What is the effect of sexual harassment on Heather? On her brother and friends? On other girls in the school? Make a list of other possible effects of sexual harassment.

- What do you think about the way the principal deals with Heather’s complaint? Discuss the legal and moral responsibilities of the school (principals, teachers, students) in creating a safe and healthy environment.

- Research shows that both boys and girls may be sexually harassed, but that boys are most often the harassers. Why do you think this is? What are some common “excuses” for sexual harassment? (eg. “boys will be boys,” “she deserves it,” “it’s just a joke.”)

- How can harassers learn to behave differently? Use positive role models as examples.
Related Resources


Related Videos from the NFB

Appropriate Actions, The companion video for Unsuitable Actions. A documentary for teachers on how to best address issues of sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour among high school students. 26 minutes.
Order number: C9197 155

Taking Charge, High school activists challenge their peers to get involved in educating each other about issues that matter, through discussion and role-plays about sexual harassment, homophobia, racism and urban violence. 26 minutes.
Order number: C9196 020

Love Taps, A powerful drama about teens, relationships and dating violence, explored through the stories of two young couples. The videojacket contains a user’s guide. Previewing before use is recommended. 23 minutes.
Order number: C9196 088

School’s Out! TEACH (Teens Educating and Confronting Homophobia) members visit classrooms to discuss sexuality, sexual orientation, homophobia and heterosexism. Acclaimed author and activist Jane Rule also contributes wisdom and insight about sexuality, situating today’s young activists in a historical context. 24 minutes.
Order number: C9196 128

Out: Stories of Lesbian and Gay Youth, An intimate exploration of the struggles and victories of gay and lesbian youth in Canada. Delves into the emotional, social and family conflicts they face, and breaks the damaging silence surrounding sexual orientation. 39 minutes.
Order number: C9193 125