

Prevention and Response

Recommendations for Independent School Leaders from the Independent School Task Force on Educator Sexual Misconduct

Some schools have responded to incidents of educator sexual misconduct in ways that have further harmed survivors and failed to protect future students from abuse. In some cases, independent schools did not respond promptly and effectively to incidents of educator sexual misconduct because the school had not developed proper response and training protocols. In others, administrators failed to recognize warning signs, set appropriate professional boundaries, or act on information that may have led to more immediate and effective responses. In still other cases, misguided concern about community disruption; the reputation of the school, the abuser, or the abused; or personal loyalties — among other considerations — took precedence over caring for victims, protecting students, and preventing future misconduct.

Other schools, by responding promptly, equitably, and transparently when incidents of misconduct came to their attention, were able to help victims find restitution and healing and strengthen the long-term health and resilience of the school.....Schools must not confuse institutional integrity with institutional reputation.

The recommendations argue for schools to deepen their understanding of the dynamics of abuse and the laws surrounding response to abuse. The recommendations advise that schools prepare for the possibility of misconduct in advance through training and scenario planning.

Developing a culture of student safety

A school's culture is the product of attitudes, perspectives, values, mission, priorities, and practices. It is vital that each school develop an environment and mindset that prioritize student safety with zero tolerance for educator sexual misconduct

Prevention

Delineate Responsibility for Overseeing Child Protection and Risk Assessment

Establish and Update Written Student Safety Protocols

Establish Policies for Clear and Appropriate Professional Boundaries Between Students and Adults Interactions

In general, schools should strive to keep student interactions with adults readily interruptible and observable.

Situations Requiring Privacy

Situations requiring a high degree of confidentiality or privacy may require special accommodation or adaptation. Counseling situations, medical examinations, and similar scenarios may require different policies, but schools should establish protocols to ensure proper behavior during such encounters. Similarly, different or amended policies may be needed to ensure full protection for students with disabilities.

Physical Contact

Technology

Create and Maintain an Internal Reporting and Evaluation System

[Staff appraisal] reviews should address behavioral issues as well as job performance.

Particularly for new or inexperienced teachers, the opportunity to address concerning conduct can provide meaningful professional development and career growth.

Conduct Rigorous Screening for Potential New Hires

Criminal background checks alone are often insufficient to identify abusers or individuals likely to violate boundary standards.

Provide Regular Training About Preventing Sexual Abuse

[In addition to staff training] Students need age-appropriate training about recognizing and preventing sexual misconduct.

Students must understand how to report any issues they experience or that they suspect are happening to other students, both inside and outside the school community

Establish Procedures to Respond to, Report, Record, and Track Reported or Suspected Cases of Sexual Misconduct

Identify a Team to Respond to Allegations of Misconduct and Abuse

The school's response protocol should identify which members within the school community may be called together in the event of a report of student abuse.

Evaluate the School's Insurance Policies Regarding Educator Sexual Misconduct

The time to evaluate the school's insurance coverage regarding educator sexual misconduct is well in advance of any incident that might require using that coverage

Response

Effective response goes beyond legal compliance. An effective response includes empathy and support in working with survivors, courage to seek the truth, honest and thoughtful communication with stakeholders, and a commitment to helping the school community heal after misconduct is reported and addressed. The overarching imperative is that schools act deliberately and decisively to keep students safe

Know and Follow the Law, Without Exception

Respond Quickly and Compassionately

How schools address the initial notifications received from current students or alumni can alter the course of the entire interaction between the school, the affected parties, and the community at large.

Listen and Respond With Empathy to the Person Reporting Abuse

Follow School Procedure to Deal Promptly and Equitably With a Person Accused of Abuse or Misconduct

Conduct an Appropriate, Prompt, Equitable, and Thorough Investigation [UK schools are reminded of the requirement NOT to investigate unless/until authorised by the relevant authorities]

Plan How Information Will Be Shared With the Community

Communicate With Transparency

Help Survivors Heal

It is imperative to discern what further help survivors want and to address requests for counseling, restorative justice, restitution, and other forms of redress.

Support the Community After an Allegation

Comments and quotations from within the report

- Fixated child sexual predators need to "groom" three audiences to gain the trust of school colleagues, parents, and the child: • The child's environment: • The child: . • The adult's environment in the school:
- It is a common misconception that children lie about being sexually abused. Researchers have found that false reports are statistically uncommon, and estimates range from less than 1 percent to 10 percent of cases
- Fixated abusers work hard to be likable. Popularity and likability are often confused with trustworthiness. When a fixated abuser is accused, victims protect them, parents refuse to believe the accusations, authorities discount the reports, communities support the predator, and juries acquit.