



## Talking Points on Safe Routes to School and Street Harassment for Community Partners

Street harassment occurs when someone experiences inappropriate and unwanted comments or actions that are sexual, homophobic, or gender-related in public spaces, such as streets, parks or mass transit. Street harassment often also involves other aspects of the harassee's identity, such as race or disability.

### **Street harassment is very common, especially for women, and it often starts young.<sup>1</sup>**

- A 2014 national survey found that 65 percent of all women and 25 percent of all men reported experiencing street harassment. The most common form of street harassment was verbal harassment, but 41 percent of women reported physically aggressive harassment, including unwanted sexual touching, being followed, and being sexually assaulted.
- Other surveys have shown even higher percentages of women and girls having experienced street harassment. A survey of young women in Chicago showed that 86 percent reported having been catcalled on the street, 36 percent said men harassed them daily, and 60 percent said they felt unsafe walking in their neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup>
- Girls and young women are often the targets of street harassment; 50 percent of those harassed reported that such harassment had begun by age 17.
- Youth and adults of color, as well as LGBTQ identified individuals, experience higher levels of street harassment than their peers. Street harassment of boys and men often involves homophobic slurs.

### **Street harassment can have serious effects on students and can affect the trip to school.<sup>3</sup>**

- Ten percent of girls reported that sexual harassment caused them to change the way they went to or from school.<sup>4</sup>
- Harassment can have major effects, leading kids to not want to walk, bicycle, or use public transportation, to change their routes to ones that are more dangerous or inconvenient, and even to avoid going to school or participating in after-school activities.
- Harassment can have negative effects on students' mental health, causing them to feel ashamed, alone, and threatened.
- Academic performance can suffer when students experience street harassment on the way to and from school.



### **Schools and communities have a role in helping students deal with street harassment and in decreasing its prevalence.<sup>5</sup>**

- It can be important for students, teachers, and other adults to understand that street harassment is not a compliment, that it can often feel scary or offensive, and that it is not the fault of or caused by the person being harassed.
- Schools can help by making it clear that sexual harassment is impermissible at school (where school personnel have clear authority), with clear steps for addressing it, and that street harassment is unacceptable on the way to and from school.
- Providing a convenient and potentially anonymous way for students to report street harassment experienced on the way to or from school, as well as at other times, can help school and city officials to understand the scope of the problem, as well as helping students to understand that harassment is not their fault and to recover from the experience.
- Awareness campaigns at schools can help students experiencing harassment to understand and address their experiences; can prepare students and protect them against internalizing the harassment; can encourage bystanders to help; and can educate and dissuade potential harassers.
- Students can educate themselves and each other about street harassment by holding forums; discussing harassment in clubs, classes, and other settings; and engaging in art projects or poster campaigns.

### **References**

1. Stop Street Harassment, "Unsafe and Harassed in Public Spaces: A National Report on Street Harassment," June 3, 2014, <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/our-work/nationalstudy/>
2. Amaya N. Roberson, "Anti-Street Harassment," *Off Our Backs*, May-June 2005, page 48.
3. Catherine Hill & Holly Kearl, "Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School," American Association of University Women, 2011, <http://www.aauw.org/research/crossing-the-line/>.
4. Id.
5. Catherine Hill & Holly Kearl, "Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School," American Association of University Women, 2011, <http://www.aauw.org/research/crossing-the-line/>.