



Breaking the Silence
Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness Training
Scenario 1-Response

WHISPERINGTEACHER (EL)

INITIAL ACTIONS

The safety and well-being of every student must be the first and foremost priority for all educators. Immediate action should be taken to bring the matter to the attention of the site administrator to protect any student from any situation which threatens the student's safety or well-being. For example, the school may initiate employee consequences, class changes, student safety plans, etc.

This scenario may not involve "grooming" or adult sexual misconduct, but it may involve Code of Conduct with Students violation. Also, this scenario may violate the District's Acceptable Use Policy regarding electronic devices or the teacher's conduct may be unprofessional or immoral.

CONSIDERATIONS

1. CODE OF CONDUCT WITH STUDENTS

This scenario may be an example of a Code of Conduct with Students violation regardless of gender or job title. The *Code of Conduct with Students policy* prohibits any behaviors in the presence of students that are unprofessional or immoral, such as looking at inappropriate sexual images in the classroom. Also, this policy prohibits physical conduct with a student not within the scope of the employee's duties.

Though the conduct of this nature may be seemingly innocuous on its face, it can, in some cases also be considered a form of boundary invasion that some adults use to get closer to young persons, build trust, and potentially engage in other increasingly more inappropriate boundary invasions leading up to and including sexual misconduct. If left unaddressed, this behavior could escalate and even result in reasonable suspicion of child abuse and discipline for the employee. In general, when allegations of unprofessional or immoral conduct or behavior are made, the relevant District administrator is obligated to:

- (1) Stop the misconduct, if any;
- (2) Investigate the misconduct, if any; and
- (3) Take appropriate administrative and/or disciplinary action, if warranted.

In general, if you have reasonable suspicion of child abuse based on the scenario, you must file a SCAR without further questioning. If you, however, do not have reasonable suspicion of child abuse, you may ask clarifying questions to determine whether suspected abuse exists. Thus, you may ask clarifying questions of the student or colleague if the information provided raises any concerns for you. Depending on the context and any additional overtures that may become known or suspected, you may develop concerns about possible other violations leading to suspicion of child abuse and required mandated reporting.

2. GROOMING OR ADULT SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

As described above, this inappropriate conduct violates the Code of Conduct with Students policy, and it may, in some circumstances, also rise to the level of suspected child abuse. For example, in an attempt to gain trust and confidence, a perpetrator may engage in "grooming" or adult sexual misconduct, that is, physical or non-physical activity directed to the student, the student's parents, or other adults with the purpose of developing a sexual or romantic relationship with the minor. Grooming activities vary but generally methodically increase over time and allow a groomer to test their targets as to gauging acceptance and silence at each step. Children who are victims of adult misconduct may feel conflicted



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about the situation, especially if people they trust, such as school staff or other adults working with students (teacher/volunteer/classroom assistant/employee of school), are implicated.

These grooming activities may be done privately or publicly and gradually progress to sexualized behaviors. Signs that may signify grooming include, but are not limited to:

- (1) Touching that is intimate or sexual in nature;
- (2) Personal or social media interaction with a student without others' knowledge or supervision;
- (3) Meeting a student away from school grounds or hours;
- (4) Giving gifts or spending extra time with a student in nonsexual ways; and
- (5) Sexual or personal oral or written comments made to a student.

Also, adults who engage in grooming may exhibit some of the following behaviors: Testing boundaries of students to determine whom to target or who is a vulnerable student; trying to build a more personal relationship with the student, such as telling the student personal stories and involving student personal matters (e.g., favors/errands); discouraging the student from sharing with others; acting in a manner to manipulate student's affection; engaging in intimidation and threats to silence and isolate a student.

Based on the above, an employee with reasonable suspicion of child abuse must file a SCAR without further questioning. Also, pursuant to District policy, an employee must inform their site administrator of these allegations of inappropriate conduct because the District administrator is obligated to:

- (1) Stop the misconduct, if any;
- (2) Investigate the misconduct, if any; and
- (3) Take appropriate administrative and/or disciplinary action, if warranted.

In general, if you, however, do not have reasonable suspicion of child abuse, you may ask clarifying questions to determine whether or not suspected abuse exists. Also, if based upon the initial information you receive, you do not have reasonable suspicion of child abuse, you may call and consult with the CPA and inform your site administrator of the inappropriate employee (or adult working with student) conduct. Although some grooming types of conduct may not be criminal, they often violate other laws and professional codes of conduct in the educational setting.

3. RESPONSIBLE USE POLICY (RUP)

District equipment and data systems must only be used in a responsible, efficient, ethical, and legal manner, and such use may only be in support of the District's business and educational objectives. The District's *Responsible Use Policy* (BUL-999.13) includes anyone using telephones, cell phones, computers, internet, email, text messages, and other forms of electronic communication or equipment provided by the District (the "network") regardless of the physical location of the user. Misuse may lead to disciplinary and/or legal action, including dismissal from employment, or criminal prosecution.