

SCENARIO 2: DRAMA REHEARSAL

(secondary schools)

(approximate 1 to 2-minute review)

Anabel enrolled in the school’s performing arts program about a month ago. During the first week, she was cast as the lead in an upcoming school play. Ms. B, the drama teacher, often compliments her acting talent, and tells the drama class how lucky they are to have her in the group. Recently, the teacher asked her to stay after school to “go over” some of her lines. During the conversations, the teacher started asking if she had siblings who also aspire to be actors. Anabel appreciates Ms. B’s help, but feels uneasy about the special attention and staying after school with her alone. A couple of days ago, Ms. B told Anabel that many students take advantage of private after-school tutoring, and she could help her if she was ever interested.

District Policy

All employees with reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect *must* report the suspected abuse or neglect to a child protective agency (CPA) pursuant to *Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Requirements*, BUL-1347.4.

Reasonable Suspicion Definition

Reasonable suspicion means it is reasonable for a person, based on the person’s training, education, and experience, to entertain a suspicion of child abuse or neglect.

Clarifying Questions

An employee who does not have reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect may ask clarifying questions to determine whether or not suspected abuse or neglect exists. If an employee, however, does have reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect, the employee *must* file a Suspected Child Abuse Report (SCAR) without further questioning. Also, an employee with reasonable suspicion *must* file SCAR even if the CPA states “handle it administratively.”

Required Steps for Filing a SCAR

Filing a SCAR consists of two steps: (1) Telephone call *must* be made immediately, or as soon as practically possible, to a CPA; and (2) Written report *must* be filed with a CPA within 36 hours of receiving the information. The CPA will either be the Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) or the local law enforcement. Generally, SCARs are filed with DCFS if the alleged perpetrator is in the home, and if the allegations involve an out-of-home perpetrator (e.g., employee), the SCARs are filed with local law enforcement (e.g., LAPD).

(approximate 4 to 5-minute small group discussion)

Discussion Questions

1. Does the school have any immediate responsibilities?
2. Is this information enough for reasonable suspicion of child abuse? If not, what information is required?
3. If you did not have reasonable suspicion, what clarifying questions would you ask?
4. Who can you ask clarifying questions to? Anabel, Anabel’s parent, Ms. B?

5. Is Anabel’s uncomfortableness or comfortableness relevant in your analysis?
6. Would your analysis change if the parents consented to this extra attention or private tutoring?
7. Do you see/notice any indicators for possible grooming behavior by the teacher?
8. What possible concerns arise from this scenario?
9. How could or how does this situation become a violation of law or District policy?
10. Does the teacher’s behavior create a concern regarding preferential treatment of one student over others?
11. What should a teacher do if they think they observe a breach of professional boundaries by another teacher?
12. Would your response change if the teacher was a male?
13. Would your response change if the adult wasn’t a teacher?

(approximate 5 to 10-minute large group discussion)

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 in order to protect any student from any situation which threatens her/his 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 a Student Code of Conduct violation.

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*, BUL-5167.0, states that it is inappropriate to meet individually with a student behind closed doors, regardless of gender. In this case, it is unknown whether they are meeting behind closed doors. Also, this policy prohibits remaining on campus with student(s) after the last administrator leaves the school site. This case, however, may fall under an exception such as, teachers rehearsing with students for a drama activity with prior approval of an administrator. Further, the teacher has spent special attention on one student, which can give an impression of inequity or preferential treatment. Additionally, the teacher should maintain clear boundaries with the student, and discussions should be within the scope of the teacher’s duties. In sum, the teacher should be cautioned to avoid situations of possible or perceived inappropriate conduct.

Also, the law and policy prohibit Ms. B from privately tutoring Anabel after-school, or any other time for pay. Pursuant to the law and the District’s *Employee Code of Ethics*, this is a conflict of interest because the employee is using her position for financial benefit or improper advantage. Also, this situation is prohibited for other reasons such as, the tutored student may be perceived by non-tutored students and their parents as having a unique and advantageous relationship with the school’s teacher and school.

Though conduct of this nature may be seemingly innocuous on their face, they 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 inappropriate 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.

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 or neglect you may ask clarifying questions to determine whether or not 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 other possible violations leading to suspicion of child abuse and required mandated reporting.

2. GROOMING OR ADULT SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

As described above, this conduct may violate the Code of Conduct with Students policy, and any private tutoring for a fee is a conflict of interest and violates the law and the policy. Also, in some circumstances, the above conduct may 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, 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 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 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 student.

Based on the above, an employee with reasonable suspicion of child abuse must file a SCAR without further questioning. Also, pursuant to 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.

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 type of conduct may not be criminal, they often violate other laws and professional codes of conduct in the educational setting.

Emotional Support

Listen

Ask open-ended questions that are not of an accusatory nature and actively listen to their response.

Protect

Even if there is no reasonable suspicion for child abuse, it is still important to monitor the student's overall well-being because it may also indicate if further assistance is needed, or mandated reporting must be followed.

Connect

Convey concern for the student's well-being. Every school site has protocols, systems, and resources to support and address student safety and well-being.

Model

Maintain a professional level of emotion and reaction to help the student achieve balance and a calm environment.

Teach

Teach students to identify supportive adults at home and school. Teach concepts of healthy relationships.