

THE JOKE'S OVER — STUDENT TO STUDENT SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

OVERVIEW

Purpose of This Package

Sexual harassment is a serious problem in our communities and our schools. It is a form of violence that seriously impairs the right of students to learn and interact in a safe, affirming environment. And yet over 80 per cent of female students involved in a confidential survey of representative Ontario high schools reported that they had been sexually harassed in a school setting (see Change Project, Phase 1, 1994). Sexual harassment affected their school work, their safety, and their self-esteem.

This package contains resource materials for supervisory officers, principals and vice-principals; teachers and staff; families; and students. It was prepared as Phase 2 of a Change Agent Project involving the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF); the Ontario Women's Directorate (OWD); and the Violence Prevention Secretariat, Ministry of Education and Training. The materials were developed in response to concerns raised in focus groups of students, teachers, parents, and administrators. Student materials were co-written with a group of Grade 10 and 11 students.

Working through these resources will help all members of the school community understand what sexual harassment is and how to put in place strategies to eliminate it. Most important of all—everyone will understand that sexual harassment is not a joke. It hurts and it is illegal.

The Ministry of Education and Training's *Violence-Free Schools Policy* (1994) states that the school environment "is both physical and social. It includes the school building, its surroundings, the people in it and the way they interact." The *Ontario Human Rights Code* and the *Violence-Free Schools Policy* make it clear that school officials have legal obligations to take sexual harassment seriously and deal with it effectively. They are required by law to take decisive measures in order to prevent or prohibit sexual harassment and other forms of unequal treatment.

By using the materials provided in this package, everyone can start to understand the seriousness of sexual harassment and work to stop it. Schools are now responding to all forms of discrimination, including sexual harassment, and are starting to take proactive measures to address it. Poster campaigns, teacher and student workshops, clear policies with serious consequences for harassment—all these are actions to prevent sexual harassment and to ensure that schools are safe, affirming places.

