Safe Place to Learn

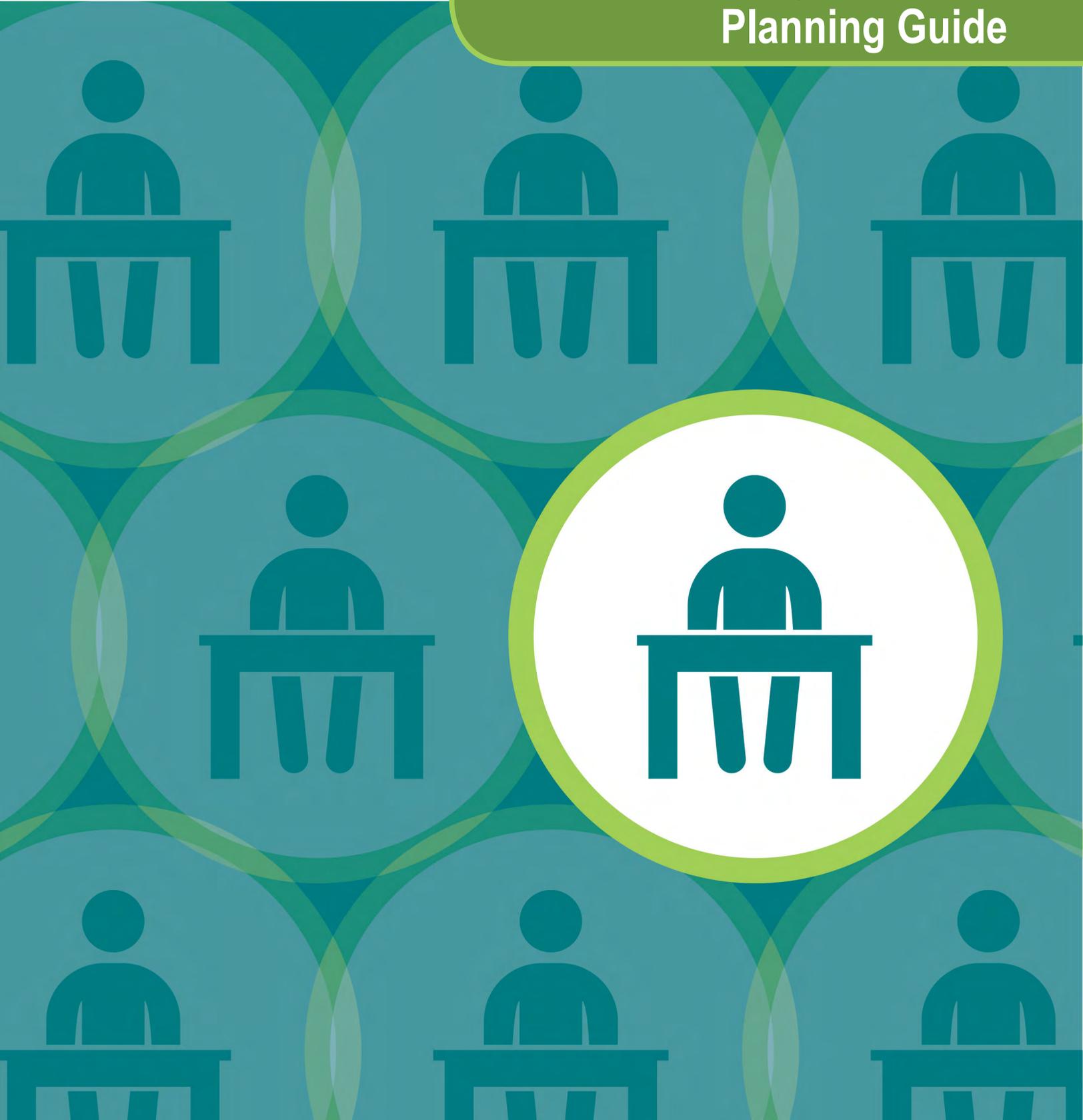**Prevent • Intercede • Respond**
to Sexual Harassment of K–12 Students

Coordinated Response Team
Planning Guide

Contents

Introduction

Providing a safe, supportive learning environment while working to prevent and eliminate bullying, sexual harassment, and violence requires that all the adults in the school work together. Although everyone in a school needs to know how to respond to incidents, certain staff members have special roles to play in situations that call for someone to intercede and respond. Along with administrators and Title IX coordinators, key staff within a school who may be part of a coordinated response include classroom teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, school resource officers (SROs), and various specialized instructional support personnel.

Specialized instructional support personnel provide education, assessment, counseling, and health care services to students who may be experiencing problems or having issues that interfere with learning. Such personnel often include school counselors, school psychologists, social workers, and school nurses.

Take a Team Approach

To address the complex issues contributing to the matrix in which bullying and sexual harassment and violence develop, the optimal approach is to work as a team. Forming a skilled and diverse team that can actively represent all voices and viewpoints in the process will strengthen the school's response in many ways. With careful planning, a team can build and guide a coordinated response within the school to ensure that methods are applied judiciously and incidents are dealt with appropriately, providing the right supports to sustain all involved.

Rather than assemble a brand-new team to address the issues outlined in this resource package, it is recommended that schools include the Title IX coordinator and build on the work of existing teams. Many schools already have teams working on planning, addressing school climate, promoting academic improvements, and addressing student wellness or school discipline reform. The designated team would need to be willing to integrate coordinated response efforts into its current work. With some forethought and conversation, the integration of efforts has the potential not only to save time and money but also to strengthen and enhance everyone's efforts.

A school may want to consider involving other stakeholders as part of the team. This group could include community professionals such as mental health counselors, youth-serving organizations, health providers, sexual assault coalitions, legal advocates, those with specialized training skills, juvenile justice representatives, or child welfare professionals.

Teams can include or consult with students, families, and other community stakeholders to ensure that a coordinated response meets the needs of students. In higher grades, student leaders as well as student survivors should be considered for inclusion on the team. Student survivors in particular will have a unique perspective on ways to improve a school's response measures.

Develop a Coordinated Response

1. **Develop the team.** School administrators working with their Title IX coordinators should engage school staff in conversations about the best approach for building on an existing team or developing a team within a school.

2. **Review current policies and procedures.** Start by assessing the current level and effectiveness of the school's response. This assessment may include evaluating an existing emergency operations plan or safety plans that describe how staff members should investigate, report, and follow up on incidents, including those that occur within a school, during a school-related activity, and those that are reported to adults by students.

3. **Assess needs and incorporate changes.** In addition to seeking staff input about needed changes, the team should consider talking with students and families about their perceptions of responses to incidents and how the application of current policies and procedures has affected them, and ask for recommendations they may have for improvements.

4. **Identify training needs.** All school staff as well as the coordinated response staff team will benefit from ongoing trainings and refreshers. Topics may include, but not be limited to, the following:

   - Developmentally appropriate techniques for prevention, intercession, and response to bullying and sexual harassment and violence

   - Building positive school climate

   - Obligations under Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 and Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act for public schools

   - De-escalation techniques

   - Bystander intervention

   - Trauma sensitivity (an introductory training is included as an e-learning module with this part of the resource package; see the Trauma Sensitivity Training section)

   - Updated referral protocols and sources, including information about mandated reporter requirements, privacy limits, and the importance of making appropriate referrals

5. **Implement trainings to meet identified needs.** Provide a range of training options that accommodate staff schedules on in-service days, during discussion groups, and as part of staff meetings or provide trainings online. Follow up to ensure all staff are participating in training and offer posttraining activities to help all staff incorporate what they are learning into their work (e.g., provide discussion time at staff-level meetings or through professional learning communities). Seek ideas about adjustments that may be needed to make trainings more effective.

6. **Communicate regularly with staff and stakeholders.** Staff, students, families, and other stakeholders need to know what changes have been made and how things are going. Continue to seek feedback on adjustments that may be needed to make responses and application of policies and procedures more effective.

7. **Meet regularly to monitor responses.** The team should regularly discuss its work, especially if any incidents have occurred. The team should debrief the school's response to any incidents. Responses should be assessed for what worked and what was not effective to inform future actions. The team should consider communicating with staff and other stakeholders about its ongoing work, including assessments, to provide transparency and build trust.

Explore Planning Resources

Resources covering a variety of topics are provided throughout the Safe Place to Learn materials. The following are suitable resources from which the response team can select those it will use for planning and training. All resource documents provided here were downloaded from their original websites during August 2016.

Building a Team

Decisions in Motion: IS3 Toolkit 2 Addressing Discipline, American Institutes for Research (AIR) and National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE)

Bystander Strategies

Engaging Bystanders in Sexual Violence Prevention, National Sexual Violence Resource Center

Stop Sexual Violence, a sexual violence bystander intervention toolkit, New York State Department of Health

Techniques to prevent bullying at stopbullying.gov

Cultural Competence

Using candid conversations and cultural and linguistic competence to address implicit bias, *Addressing the Root Cause of Disparities in School Discipline*, AIR and NCSSLE

Discovering your own implicit biases, the Implicit Association Test, Harvard University

Recognizing gender bias, *Identifying and Preventing Gender Bias in Law Enforcement Response to Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence*, U.S. Department of Justice

Healthy Relationships

Peer-to-peer relationships, *Enhancing Peer-to-Peer Relationships to Strengthen School Climate*, AIR and NCSSLE

Supportive relationships, *Establishing Supportive Relationships Between Teachers, Staff, Students, and Families*, AIR and NCSSLE

Teen dating abuse prevention, *Get Smart, Get Help, Get Safe*, AIR and NCSSLE, and *Dating Matters*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Healthy relationships, relationship materials, Office of Adolescent Health

Sexual violence prevention and prevention strategies, including effective and promising programs, CDC

Starting a conversation between advocates and students to talk about healthy relationships and dating abuse, Break the Cycle *Activity Guides*

Involving Students

Working With Youth, Advocates for Youth

Policy Development

Developing comprehensive policies addressing healthy relationships and abuse prevention, the *Framework for Developing School Policies to Address Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking*, Break the Cycle

Developing sexual misconduct policies, the *Considerations for School District Sexual Misconduct Policies*, White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault

Safety Planning

Developing emergency operations plans, *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans*, U.S. Department of Education

Addressing teen dating violence, including safety planning, *Building Safe Schools*, Break the Cycle

Model school policies, including safety accommodations, *Safe Schools Model Policy*, Break the Cycle

School-Based Mental Health Supports

The effect of trauma on learning, *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*, Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative

Supporting students who are bullied, *Support the Kids Involved*, stopbullying.gov

Positive behavioral interventions and supports at the PBIS website

Social and emotional learning, the CASEL website

Mental health in a school setting, *School-Based Supports*, youth.gov

School Climate

See school climate information, AIR and NCSSLE

Making school climate improvements, *Quick Guide on Making School Climate Improvements*, AIR and NCSSLE

The school climate survey platform by the U.S. Department of Education, School Climate Surveys

School Discipline Reform

ED-DOJ School Discipline Guidance Package, U.S. Departments of Education and Justice (multiple bulleted items starting midway down the webpage)

Federal guidance on addressing disparities in discipline, *Addressing the Root Causes of Disparities in School Discipline*, AIR and NCSSLE

Developing responsive, fair, and equitable discipline policies, the *Framework for Developing School Policies to Address Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking*, Break the Cycle

Title IX Resources

Sexual Harassment: It's Not Academic and *Revised Sexual Harassment Guidance*, U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR)

Dear Colleague Letter: Sexual Violence and *Questions and Answers* on Title IX and Sexual Violence, OCR

Bullying and harassment, *Dear Colleague Letter: Harassment and Bullying*, OCR

Transgender students, *Dear Colleague Letter: Transgender Students*, OCR

Trauma Sensitivity Training

Staff members responding to incidents need to keep in mind that some students are affected by trauma, which can intensify their reactions to the simplest encounters and greatly complicate those involving stress or conflict. A trauma-sensitive environment considers the likelihood that staff will not be aware of which people in their environment have been affected by trauma. Staff members who understand the effects of trauma know that it can impair the ability to learn, participate academically, and develop socially. Trauma sensitivity therefore encourages a sense of physical and emotional safety for everyone.

The training module titled *Trauma Sensitivity* provides a concise introduction to the presence of trauma in everyday life. From an overview of the effects, causes, and incidence of trauma, the e-learning module proceeds through the effects of traumatic stress on the brain and behavior to management issues for those who encounter persons affected by trauma. The training concludes by considering self-care issues for staff members who work with students, colleagues, and others affected by trauma.

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