

# Shifting Boundaries



## Type of intervention



*Classroom setting*



*Group Work*

## Target group/s, level/s of prevention and sub-group/s:

Additional  
Resource

Classroom Setting, Group Work | English

## Target population

Adolescents aged 11 to 13-years old at school, as research suggests that sexual harassment prevalence rates increase throughout middle school in the US.

## Delivery organisation

Shifting Boundaries was created by Nan Stein, alongside colleagues Kelly Mennemeier, Natalie Russ and Bruce Taylor, Ph.D, with contributions from the New York City Department of Education.

## Mode and context of delivery

To be implemented within middle schools as an opportunity for early intervention against peer-to-peer sexual harassment and violence. Implementation is flexible and can fit around pre-existing student schedules.

## Level/Nature of staff expertise required

Although lessons are taught by trained substance abuse prevention and intervention specialists, the curriculum and supporting documents are all available for free online. Included in this are lesson plans with handouts for students, awareness posters, a webinar recording, and evidence for the effectiveness of the Shifting Boundaries curriculum.

## **Intensity/extent of engagement with target group(s)**

Adolescents will participate in six classroom sessions. These are taught over six to 10 weeks, but can be flexible in order to fit them into school schedules. The school-wide intervention (the second part of the programme) is conducted on the same schedule as the classroom curricula. Whilst adolescents are required to create 'hot spot' maps of unsafe areas in the school, much of the school-wide intervention is reliant upon staff engagement, e.g. to revise school protocol and to increase awareness of related issues through the use of posters.

## **Description of intervention**

Shifting Boundaries is an evidence-based, two-part intervention (classroom curricula and schoolwide) designed to reduce dating violence and sexual harassment among middle school students by highlighting the consequences of this behavior for perpetrators and by increasing faculty surveillance of unsafe areas within the school. This primary prevention program aims to:

- Increase knowledge and awareness of sexual abuse and harassment
- Promote prosocial attitudes and a negative view of dating violence and sexual harassment
- Promote nonviolent behavioral intentions in bystanders
- Reduce the occurrence of dating and peer violence
- Reduce the occurrence of sexual harassment

The classroom curriculum covers: (1) the construction of gender roles, (2) the setting and communicating of boundaries in interpersonal relationships, (3) healthy relationships, (4) the role of bystander as intervener, (5) the consequences of perpetrating, and (6) the State and Federal laws related to dating violence and sexual harassment.

These six lessons use both concrete/applied materials and abstract thinking components. Two of the activities consist of students measuring their own personal space and creating 'hot spot' maps of their school that highlight safe and unsafe spaces in regard to dating violence and sexual harassment. The curriculum includes a fact-based component based on the idea that increased knowledge about facts and consequences of one's behaviors are appropriate and useful primary prevention tools. Facts and statistics about sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, and the legal definitions of all of these terms are part of this fact-based component. Students explore the concepts of laws and boundaries, consider laws as they apply by gender, plot the shifting nature of personal space, learn how to help a friend in need, and learn about other sources of help. One of the last activities dictates that students sign the Respecting Boundaries Agreement, which is tied to prohibited behaviors in the school rules.

The second component of Shifting Boundaries is a school-level intervention. This intervention affects the entire school building and consists of revising school protocols for identifying and responding to dating violence and sexual harassment, the introduction of temporary school-based restraining orders, and the installation of posters in the school to increase awareness and reporting of dating violence/harassment. The classroom curricula and the schoolwide intervention are linked, as the student 'hot spot' maps of unsafe areas in school are used to determine the placement of faculty or school security for greater surveillance of these areas.

## **Evaluation**

Taylor, Stein and Woods (2011) randomly assigned Shifting Boundaries to 30 public middle schools in New York City, and identified 117 sixth and seventh grade classes to randomly receive additional classroom interventions. Quantitative surveys were implemented at baseline, immediately after the intervention, and 6 months post-intervention, and included measures of knowledge, attitudes, behavioral intentions, intentions to intervene as a bystander, peer and dating partner physical and sexual violence, sexual harassment, and other background items. Qualitative focus groups were conducted with interventionists and students to provide rich contextual to assess intervention implementation and student change associated with the interventions. Participating students ranged in age from 10 to 15 with 53 percent being female, 40 percent having prior experience with a violence prevention educational program, 50 percent reporting being in at least one dating relationship, 20 percent reporting having been the victim of dating violence, and 66 percent victims of peer violence. The combination of the classroom and building interventions, and the "building only" intervention led to 32-47% lower peer sexual violence victimization and perpetration up to six months after the intervention. The success of the "building only" intervention is particularly important because it can be implemented with very few extra costs to schools. It also appears that the most important classroom activity was the 'hot spot' mapping of unsafe areas within the school that informed the schoolwide-level intervention. Unfortunately, the classroom curriculum, itself, had no significant effect on any of the outcome measures, therefore the schoolwide-level intervention is an important component. Focus groups confirmed that the interventions were implemented as planned, teachers liked and were supportive of the interventions, and the positive survey results related to the interventions effectiveness were confirmed.

## **References**

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