

## Responding to Sexual Assault Allegations and Supporting Students

*Trigger Warning: please note that the information below discusses sexual assault.*

**With respect to questions and commentary about how disclosures of sexual assault are treated in the Sooke School District, it is important to share factual information about our process of responding to disclosures.**

All incidents disclosed to school district staff, including principals and vice-principals, are treated seriously with the safety of students as our top priority. School district staff are expected to respond to disclosures in a non-judgmental and supportive way. When incidents, including those that allegedly involve sexual assault, are brought forward to school district staff, the nature and context of the disclosed incident dictates the next steps of any investigation. We also consider whether the disclosure engages the jurisdiction of another entity such as the Ministry of Child and Family Development or law enforcement. Investigations that may potentially lead to criminal charges are the primary responsibility of law enforcement.

All members of our school community are bound by our District Policies and our Student Codes of Conduct. As a school district, our work is defined by the scope of the School Act, the Youth Criminal Justice Act (ages 12-17), and the Criminal Code. District investigations must not impede or interfere with criminal investigations and at the same time, we must uphold our legal duty to protect the safety and welfare of students, and protect the privacy of persons involved in allegations or investigation; therefore we are unable to comment on criminal investigations or share disciplinary outcomes.

Student acts of abuse and/or violence are contrary to the Student Code of Conduct in place at each school. Acts of abuse and/or violence fall under our Student Code of Conduct as well as several District policies:

- Policy B-129: Safe and Healthy Schools
- Policy C-309: District and Schools Codes of Conduct
- Policy C-310: Student Behaviour
- Policy E-155: Sexual Harassment
- Policy C-317: Police Requests for Interviews

These policies can be found at <https://www.sd62.bc.ca/board-education/policies-and-procedures>.



Our processes require us to have evidence that a student is in contravention of the Code of Conduct, or other related Board Policy. If that is determined, they are subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the nature of the infraction and may also face criminal charges.

We are unequivocally cooperative in all law enforcement investigations. If a criminal investigation occurs, we review circumstances on a case by case basis to ensure student safety and provide support to those affected through a trauma-informed lens. Regardless of the outcome of internal and/or law enforcement investigations, the District will continue to offer counselling supports to students and will work with families and students to foster a learning environment where they feel safe and are best positioned to succeed. With the permission of families, school and district staff will also work collaboratively with other resources in the community, such as Child and Youth Mental Health and other counselling services.

As educators, we are always learning and evolving to better serve our students and families as the world around us is in a continual state of change. We have engaged in important work to assist our students, staff and families as it relates to receiving reports of sexual assault, harassment and exploitation. Last year, the District committed to annual training for middle and secondary principals and vice principals on responding when an allegation comes in, communicating through a trauma-informed lens, and developing a supportive response plan.

The District employs a full-time sexual health coordinator who works directly with students and staff from kindergarten to grade 12 as part of the Physical Health and Education curriculum. Consent education weaves throughout the curriculum at all grade levels. Middle school students receive education on healthy relationships including consent. As students progress through their learning journey to secondary, the curriculum topics expand to include sexting, sextortion as well as intimate partner violence.

It takes courage for victims of sexual violence to come forward and share their stories. We support victims and their families, and we are united in wanting to build healthy communities where all children feel physically and emotionally safe.

