



Teach, But Don't Touch

- Whenever possible, never be alone with a student. A student's allegations made when there are no other witnesses hinge on credibility, and authorities often tend to favor the alleged victim in these circumstances. So, don't be alone with a student in a house or a car, and never give a student a ride home. To the extent possible, avoid being alone with a student in a classroom.

Risky situations include: one-on-one tutoring, counseling, after-school or recess detention, and make-up tests. If you can't avoid being alone with a student at school, keep the door open and stay in plain sight.

- Always maintain a professional demeanor and distance. That means: no flirting, teasing, or joking about sex. Don't socialize with students or treat them as "pals" or "friends." Never give gifts, unless you give one to every student, and don't single out any one student for constant special attention or flattery.

- Never send emails, text messages, or cards to students unrelated to schoolwork. Don't ask students about their social lives or comment on their personal appearance, and avoid discussing intimate details of your own private life. Don't hire students to babysit or allow them to visit your home. Be the adult and maintain boundaries.

- Avoid physical contact with students. This is a particularly difficult area. Younger children often seek and need physical

comfort from their teachers who, sadly, may be the only source of compassion and love that some students have. In the early elementary grades, an occasional hug is probably OK. But as a general rule, it's best to avoid most forms of physical contact, especially kissing, hair stroking, tickling, and frontal hugging. And use common sense: a "high five" to acknowledge a job well done is fine; a slap on the bottom is not.

- Male teachers have to be especially careful when it comes to physical contact of any sort. While a female teacher's touch may be perceived as comforting, a male teacher's may be viewed as sexually suggestive and male employees are far more likely to be accused of inappropriate contact with students than female employees. According to one expert, accusations involving female teachers and male students make up less than five percent of the cases.
- Avoid using physical force to enforce discipline. When students are misbehaving or out of control, avoid touching or grabbing them to get their attention. Instead, use verbal commands and other disciplinary methods. There may be a rare occasion when you will have to use physical force in self-defense or to prevent injury to others. If that happens, use the minimum force necessary to prevent harm and immediately call for help. Also, if this is a persistent problem, you may want to ask your district for special training.
- Never allow a student to obsess over you. While a crush can be flattering, it also can be fatal, so always nip it in the bud. An unfulfilled fantasy can result in a student acting out to gain attention or retaliating for being ignored. If a student expresses a love interest, respond with an unambiguous "no." Don't equivocate and certainly don't encourage the student by acting pleased by the attention. It's also advisable to share this

information with another adult and your Association Representative. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to tell your supervisor and ask that the student be transferred.

- Be particularly wary of “troubled” students. This is a tough one. Some students come to school with a host of emotional needs and chronic problems, and they may confide in their classroom teacher and ask for support and guidance. Particularly for a student with emotional problems, a teacher’s efforts to help unfortunately can be misconstrued as something more and may lead to an infatuation or dependence. Plus, you don’t have the skills or training needed to assist.
- While you can and should express concern and compassion, don’t take on the role of confidant or counselor. Instead, refer the student to the school counselor, a trained professional who has both the expertise to assess what services the student may need and the experience to know how to arrange for the delivery of those services to the student.
- Be especially vigilant if you hold certain teaching positions. Anecdotal evidence suggests that employees who perform certain jobs are at increased risk of false allegations. These include athletic coaches and performing arts teachers—drama, band, chorus, and debate as well as publications advisers. This trend may be the product of the intense nature of such activities, which may weaken teacher/student boundaries, coupled with a substantial amount of after-school, weekend, and off-campus interactions.