

HOW EDUCATORS CAN TRY TO PREVENT FALSE ACCUSATIONS

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False accusations of child abuse directed at educators are increasing at an alarming rate. These accusations involve false claims of physical and sexual abuse. Educators are not alone in this phenomenon. Medical professionals, therapists, and the clergy also face this problem. Male educators face greater risk, but there are also reported cases of false accusations against female educators.

Educators can take certain precautions to minimize the risk of being faced with a false accusation. The following are suggestions, which have been compiled by the American Federation of Teachers, together with attorneys specializing in abuse cases. You may not be able to follow all of these suggestions all of the time. Use your best judgment when you are faced with situations that could result in a false accusation...such as when you are alone with a student.

How To Try To Prevent False Accusations:

1. Try to avoid being alone with a student.
2. Whenever you teach, tutor or supervise students, try to keep doors open, and try to stay in public areas. Never lock the door! Avoid secluded and out-of-the-way areas. Try to have someone else present if possible, try to schedule two or more students at the same time.
3. Try to avoid physical contact with students. There are an increasing number of experts who believe that educators should never touch children under any circumstances. But this philosophy may not be practical for all educators in all situations. Know the student! Know the parent! Know your school board's policy! If you know either the student or the parent to be the type who presents problems, avoid being alone with them, and avoid any type of physical touching.
4. Try to discourage students from hugging you and being too familiar with you.
5. Don't tell "off color" jokes or any stories which may be misconstrued. Avoid teasing students in ways which may be interpreted as being too familiar.

6. Don't talk about your personal life with students and don't talk about their personal life..
7. Don't socialize with students outside of school related events.
8. Don't transport students in your personal vehicle.
9. Don't ask students to your home or ask them to babysit for you.
10. Be careful if a student speaks with you about inappropriate topics. You may want to consider associating a social worker to immediately participate in this process. Be careful when a student says "If I tell you something, will you promise not to tell anyone?" In some situations (such as where child abuse is involved), you may be required to immediately disclose what the student tells you.
11. Be cautious when giving or receiving anything more than token items from students. Don't loan money to students, and don't ask students to loan you money.
12. Preview films and videos for unacceptable language and sexual content before showing them in class. The name of the film should appear on your lesson plan. Ask the administration if the film is acceptable.
13. Keep a journal or log of incidents and conversations with students who you feel may present a problem. If you feel the problem is getting out of hand, ask the principal for assistance - in writing! Keep a copy of the request and the log.
14. If you must use physical restraint with a student, try to have adult witnesses present, and use extreme caution.
15. Think twice before using physical contact to physically break up a fight. Try other methods. SHOUT for the students to stop fighting. Contact the office. YELL for help in the hallway. If you physically intervene, you run the risk of being accused of using excessive force, and being arrested for Felony Cruelty of a Juvenile. You also run the risk of being sued, for money and being disciplined and even dismissed. And...you run the risk of being injured. Think twice before using physical contact to physically break up a fight.

What To Do If An Accusation Is Made Against You.

1. Immediately contact your the Federation for assistance.
2. Do not submit a written statement without the Federation office reviewing it first.
3. Do not speak with anyone until you contact the Federation.
4. Do not attempt to contact the accuser or the parents.
5. Avoid conversations and confrontations with the student and parents.
6. Don't give any verbal or written statements to the Sheriff or anyone. You should give your name, address, and date of birth to the Sheriff if requested. If the Deputy wants to speak with you, request the presence of an attorney, and immediately contact the Federation.