SEXUAL ASSAULTS ON CAMPUS: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT TITLE IX

As an attorney who represents colleges, universities, and school districts, I am often asked about Title IX. “What’s the big deal with Title IX these days? I thought it just dealt with women’s sports.”

Title IX is applied much more broadly these days than it was when it was enacted in 1972. It prohibits educational entities that receive federal funding from discriminating against individuals on the basis of sex. This means not only striving to provide equal athletic opportunities for women, but also working to eliminate sexual harassment and sexual violence, both of which can significantly disrupt an individual’s educational environment.

Title IX makes the news for sexual assaults on college campuses, but it’s not just an issue for college students. All children should be receiving age-appropriate information on good touching and bad touching, how to behave appropriately in personal relationships and how to foster mutual respect as they begin to experiment with romantic partners. Understanding this information can help them exit a problematic situation before it escalates, assist someone else in getting help and help them make good choices about how they treat others.

“So,” I am often asked, “what would you tell my daughter when she goes to college?” Well, I would tell her the same thing I would tell your son, or any other student. They need to know four things:

1. Where to find the Title IX Policy: The policy provides a grievance procedure for handling complaints of prohibited conduct. Look for it in the student handbook, the policy manual, or a dedicated Title IX publication. If you can’t find it, ask an administrator.

2. What is prohibited: In order to know the limits of their own behavior, and when to make a report, all students should review the definitions of prohibited conduct and make sure they understand what is permissible and what is not.

3. What constitutes consent: All schools generally require consent for sexual activity to be knowing and voluntary, but what that means at a particular institution can vary widely.

4. Who to tell: The Title IX Coordinator handles formal complaints, but confidential resources like rape crisis centers and counseling centers can also be helpful. Not everyone is ready to report sexual misconduct immediately, but if and when they are ready, they should know who to call.

The best thing you can do is to keep the lines of communication open with your student and be ready to connect them to resources when they need help.

For more information on Title IX, visit the U.S. Department of Education’s website at www.ed.gov/ocr.

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