

## **“Let’s Talk About Sex, Baby”**

*Written by Katie Cody, Tabor Academy Panel Member  
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When thinking of a rebellious rule breaker on campus, one often thinks of the student who drinks and does drugs—not the pair of students who have been dating for months “hooking up”. However, according to Life at Tabor, the school rulebook, “Students who are discovered engaged in sexual contact or whose physical situation strongly implies sexual contact (i.e. unclothed together in a room or bed) can expect to be suspended off-campus and placed on probation.” Also, “excessive PDA” is strongly discouraged for students. Compared to, for instance, Putney School’s and Saint Paul’s school’s more liberal policies, Tabor’s policy on both relationships and sexual contact is considered to be both restrictive and medieval. Several students as of recent months have been dealt strict punishment, including both expulsion and Dean’s warning, for being caught in a variety of sexual acts. I personally don’t believe that the treatment of the cases has been either fair, nor reasonable.

However, even schools with liberal policies such as Saint Paul’s and Putney leave some students feeling that “having endless official conversations about why I feel like hooking up with someone as a teenager are stupid and pointless and just make me feel like they want me to think hooking up is wrong or sinful or some bullshit”, or that while “I personally have never been caught hooking up by a teacher, I know friends who have and depends on how far they were, the school might make them call their parents, which—while “chill” comparing to other schools—seems pretty unfair to me. Many students, myself included, do not share personal stories with our family, so it just seems uncomfortable that my parents might find out about my sex life (which I’m sure they don’t even know I have). I think that as long as students are having consensual, safe, and legal sex, as long as everybody involved feels respected and comfortable, the school really shouldn’t “punish” kids for participating in such normal and, in fact, healthy activities. Once you start punishing students is when they start doing it “sneakily” and when “sneaky” is involved, that’s when it’s not good anymore.” There is a point at which both the administration and students need to come together to create a consensus on a policy that suits both parties. It provokes the question—are schools ready to undertake the liability, and are students ready to be open about their activity to faculty?

For this article, I sent out a survey to a variety of students, both current and past, to hear various stories. While I personally have only been caught once, many students who took the survey had similar views on the case. One Tabor student revealed that while she had solely been caught cuddling with her boyfriend at the time in a common room, the pair were split up and she was made to feel as if she had done something wrong for being in proximity with someone of the opposite sex. She, among many, felt that many schools treating sexual contact as a suspendable and expellable offense was unrealistic; “Obviously schools shouldn’t encourage sex, but they shouldn’t punish you and make you feel like a whore for wanting to have sex with someone you really like.” This sentiment was mimicked from students who attended schools from Governors

to Middlesex, where students stated they felt the schools should “be less harsh about it because they know everyone does it” and asked the school to “Give us some privacy. I'm a senior in high school, and if I'm over (at) my girlfriend's dorm room, I don't think the teacher, nor me and my girlfriend, want to have that inevitable awkward encounter.” While not “everyone” necessarily “does it”, the survey sent out gained thirty something responses from students all over who had similar sentiments. One response suggested that policies should be worked out with the student body and parents, so that the school may permit sexual activities so long as the parents know, both students are of legal age, and consent. This seems reasonable, as the decision making process being not solely limited to the faculty, could foster both a sense of the maturity and consideration that the decision to being sexually active should provoke anyway. Hopefully schools will be able to come to a consensus with students to prevent expulsions and suspensions for sexual activity, while also making sure that the activity is safe.