

FINAL PART OF 3-PART SERIES: PENN STATE SEXUAL ABUSE CASE

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) presents this three-part series on bystander intervention as a continuation of our support of and focus on this approach to sexual violence prevention. Join the NSVRC throughout December for a conversation with Jackson Katz, Ph.D., as he shares lessons from the PSU sexual abuse case. Read about more resources on [engaging bystanders in sexual violence prevention](#).

Moving Beyond Penn State: Bystander training as leadership training

By Jackson Katz, Ph.D.
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Bystander training can actually be understood as a kind of entry-level leadership training, because bystanders who assess a situation, consider their options, and take action are doing what leaders do. Near the beginning of extended *Mentors in Violence Prevention* (MVP) trainings, we do a simple exercise where participants are asked to define leadership. What qualities do good leaders possess? We write the answers on a flip chart, and use those definitions throughout the training to reinforce the idea that "empowered bystanders" who interrupt abusive behaviors are better described as "leaders."

This exercise is especially effective with groups -- such as sports teams and military units -- whose members are already invested in the idea of becoming leaders. Long-time MVP trainer Daryl Fort says he can often feel a palpable sense of relief in the air when men (and women) figure out that pressure on them to conform to stereotypical gender norms is sometimes in conflict with the ideas of leadership and courage to which they aspire. "It can be liberating for them," he says, "when these contradictions are confronted and lifted in the group, freeing individuals to behave in ways they identify internally as more positive for the team/unit, as well

as self-affirming. Sometimes participants will approach us after a relatively brief 90-minute session and say things like, 'We really needed to hear/talk about that as a team. Thank you.' "

Bystander training helps individual men think about how their actions or inactions -- even well-intentioned -- sometimes contribute to a cultural climate that encourages, or at the very least tolerates, relationship abuse, sexual assault, and the sexual abuse of children. But while individual bystanders play a critical role, most solutions to social problems of the magnitude of sexual violence have to be of a social and institutional nature. For example, there is no excuse for any college or university that has an athletic program NOT to have mandated sexual assault and relationship abuse prevention education for all student-athletes, coaches and athletic administrators. If a college or university does not have this kind of programming -- and hundreds do not -- it represents a failure of leadership at the level of the athletic director or university administration.

Sexual assault prevention education should be part of the student-athlete experience -- for men and women -- from the first moment a young student-athlete steps onto campus. It should also be part of routine professional training required of coaches and athletic administrators. From the beginning of MVP we have insisted that athletic staffs need bystander training as much as the student-athletes. They need the opportunity to think through their responsibilities as leaders and mentors, but also their responsibilities as members of their own peer cultures. Too often, powerful coaches and administrators skip their part in the trainings. If asked, they typically say it's the students who really "need to hear the message," as if men and women in their thirties, forties, fifties and older in powerful leadership roles have all these issues figured out, and have better things to do than to learn -- and engage in dialogue -- about how to notice and interrupt rape and abuse-supportive attitudes and behaviors.

As the Penn State situation clearly demonstrates, it is time for a shift in our expectations about the role of campus leaders -- university officials, athletic administrators, and coaches. Even before Penn State there had already been movement underway on the risk-management side of things. Now campus officials are even more concerned about their legal liabilities in sexual assault cases, and new federal regulations and Title IX investigations are prompting schools to make sure their policies and procedures are comprehensive and up-to-date.

But aside from any legal requirements, athletic directors who do not offer or require prevention programs, and participate in them themselves, are in a sense being passive bystanders who are complicit in sexually abusive behaviors. This same logic about institutional responsibility in higher education applies to administrators in charge of Greek affairs, housing, health services, and other college and university systems. The best possible outcome of the sad events at Penn State and Syracuse University will be for institutions to see that taking a proactive approach to

sexual assault and abuse prevention is infinitely preferable to picking up the pieces once the damage has been done.

To learn more, visit www.facebook.com/mvpngational and www.jacksonkatz.com.

*Jackson Katz, Ph.D., is an educator, author, filmmaker, and cultural theorist who is internationally recognized for his groundbreaking work in the field of gender violence prevention education and critical media literacy. He is the author of the book, *The Macho Paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help*, and creator of the film, *Tough Guise: Violence, Media, and the Crisis in Masculinity*. He has lectured on hundreds of college and high school campuses and has conducted hundreds of professional trainings, seminars, and workshops in the U.S., Canada, Europe, Australia and Japan. He is co-founder of the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) program, the leading gender violence prevention initiative in college and professional athletics.*

THIS CONCLUDES THE 3-PART SERIES: SEE PARTS 1 AND 2

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