

It's time ... to work together. Here are tips for parents and caregivers.

Sexual violence is a widespread issue that affects everyone in a community. This two-page fact sheet provides information about sexual assault and how parents and caregivers can play a role in responding to victims, as well as, contribute to a community working to prevent sexual assault.

What is sexual violence?

Sexual violence occurs when someone is forced or coerced/manipulated into unwanted sexual activity without agreeing or consenting. Reasons someone might not be able to consent include fear, being underage, having an illness or disability, or being incapacitated due to alcohol or other drugs. Consent can be initially given and later withdrawn.

Sexual violence is a crime that comes in many forms, including forced intercourse, sexual contact or touching, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, and exposure or voyeurism.

It is important point to keep in mind that sexual violence is never the victim's fault, regardless of what she or he is wearing or doing, including if the victim has been drinking or is in a relationship with the perpetrator.

Sexual violence at a glance

- Males can also be victims of sexual violence and may be even less likely to report (Hart & Rennison, 2003).
- Among college women, nine in 10

victims of rape and sexual assault knew their offender (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000).

- Almost 12.8% of completed rapes, 35% of attempted rapes, and 22.9% of threatened rapes happened during a date (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000).
- Rape is far more extensive than reported in official statistics, and the large majority of rapists are never apprehended (Carr & VanDeusen, 2004).

Your role in prevention

Because you are a visible and respected member of the community, you can play a role in changing the underlying norms and culture that perpetuate sexual violence, such as traditional gender roles, power imbalances, victim-blaming, and oppression. Here are some ways you can help:

- Model respectful behavior to those around you.
- Talk with your children about their bodies and personal boundaries.
- Intervene when you see inappropriate behavior. Speak up, when you hear someone make a sexist comment or joke about rape.

Speak up, when you witness someone on the street being sexually harassed, if it is safe. To better equip yourself in these situations, practice what you might say.

- Talk to someone from your local rape crisis center for more information. Invite their educators to speak in your schools, faith-based communities or workplaces.
- Talk with other parents and establish easy ways to share information.

How you can help

Parents and caregivers are uniquely positioned to assist individuals experiencing sexual violence, as they often see the warning signs – decreased productivity, lower grades, social withdrawal – before others. In addition, children and teens may turn to you and disclose that they have been victims of sexual violence. You may be one of the first people a child confides in, so it is important to know how to handle it. Here are some tips (University of Wisconsin, 2009):

- Listen and don't judge. No one deserves to be the victim of violence, regardless of the surrounding circumstances. Avoid victim-blaming and asking questions that could imply fault, such as "Why didn't you call 911?" Instead, offer your support with a statement such as, "I'm sorry that this happened to you. Thank you for telling me." Let the victim know that he or she is not to blame for what happened.
- Tell the victim that you believe them. Victims of sexual violence are often met with disbelief when they decide to tell someone. In most cases, their trust in someone they know has been broken. They may be hesitant to trust others with their story. Remember, you are not an investigator; you are someone the victim has decided to

confide in. Let them know that you believe and will support them.

- Be helpful. Refer the victim to resources in the community to talk with individuals who are trained on these issues.
- Be flexible. Survivors of sexual violence may need to miss class/work to seek treatment or participate in the judicial process.

Resources

- **National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC)** www.nsvrc.org
- **Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN)** www.rainn.org
- **Higher Education Center** www.higheredcenter.org/services/pubs/116

References

- Carr, J., & VanDeusen, K. (2004). Risk factors for male sexual aggression on college campuses. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 19(5), 279-289.
- Fisher, B., Cullen, I., & Turner, M. (2000). *National Institute of Justice Research Report: Sexual Victimization of College Women*. Retrieved July 30, 2009 from www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/182369.pdf
- Hart, T., & Rennison, C. (2003). *Reporting Crime to the Police, 1992-2000*. (NCJ Publication No. 195710). Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved July 30, 2009 from <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/rcp00.pdf>
- University Health Services. (2009). *Faculty and Staff Resource Guide*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin. Available upon request from NSVRC.