

## Understanding sexual violence: Tips for parents & caregivers of children

Sexual violence is a widespread issue that impacts everyone. This fact sheet provides information about how parents and caregivers can play a role in preventing sexual violence and supporting survivors. Together we can create safe and respectful communities.

### What is sexual violence?

Sexual violence is a broad term and includes rape, incest, child sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, unwanted sexual contact, sexual harassment, exposure, and voyeurism.

Sexual violence occurs when someone is forced or manipulated into unwanted sexual activity without their consent. Reasons someone might not consent include fear, age, illness, disability, and/or influence of alcohol or other drugs. Anyone can experience sexual violence, including children, teens, adults, and elders.

These crimes are widespread and occur daily in our communities, schools, and workplaces, but sexual violence can be prevented. Community members can work to prevent sexual violence by establishing healthy and positive relationships that are based on respect, safety, and equality.

### Sexual violence at a glance

- One in six boys and one in four girls will experience a sexual assault before the age 18 (Dube et al., 2005).
- One in five women and one in 71 men will be raped at some point in their lives (Black et al., 2011).
- A majority of women who reported being raped at some point in their life (79.6%) experienced

their first rape before the age of 25, and 42.2% experienced their first completed rape before the age of 18 years (Black et al., 2011).

- More than 25% of male victims in a national sample reported their first rape was when they were 10 years of age or younger (Black et al., 2011).
- Rape is far more extensive than reported in official statistics, and the majority of rapists are never apprehended (Carr & VanDeusen, 2004).

### Your role in prevention

You can play a role in changing the attitudes and culture that promote sexual violence. Traditional gender roles, power imbalances, and victim-blaming all contribute to sexual violence. Be a part of the solution:

- Be a role model for respectful behavior to those around you.
- Talk with your children about healthy sexual development and personal boundaries.
- Intervene and speak up when you see inappropriate behavior. To better equip yourself in these situations, practice what you might say or do.
- Talk to someone from your local sexual assault center for more information. Invite them to speak in your schools, faith communities or workplaces.

- Learn more about sexual violence and share information with others.
- Know how to report suspected child abuse. Take action if you or someone you know suspects a child may be being abused.

## How you can help

Parents and caregivers are uniquely positioned to assist children and teens experiencing sexual violence, as they often see the warning signs – sudden changes in behavior or mood, lower grades, social withdrawal – before others.

Children and teens may turn to you to discuss what is happening. All adults are responsible for keeping children safe and protecting them from harm.

If you suspect a child is being abused, contact the police or your local child protective services agency, the ChildHelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453), or a local sexual violence program.

## How to offer support

Survivors of sexual violence have experienced trauma, and each person reacts differently to trauma. Some disclose immediately, but many never talk about what happened to them, or wait years to talk about it.

When someone discloses sexual abuse, appreciate their resilience, strength, and bravery. Be mindful of your own response:

- Create a safe place for the child or teen to talk and share. Allow them control over the environment as much as possible.
- Listen and allow them to share the information that they are comfortable sharing. If a survivor wants to share with you, allow them to do so in their own way, words time frame.

- Believe them. Survivors often struggle with disclosing abuse because they fear they won't be believed. It takes immense bravery for them to trust you and share the details of what happened.
- Be open and honest about your responsibilities. Children and teens have a right to be safe, valued and respected. Connect them with community resources or trained professionals to provide continued support.

## Resources

- **ChildHelp National Child Abuse Hotline:** 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453) [www.childhelp.org](http://www.childhelp.org)
- **National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC):** [www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org)
- **Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN):** [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)
- **Stop It Now!:** [www.stopitnow.org](http://www.stopitnow.org)

## References

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