



## TALKING POINTS

# Impact of the Cosby hearing: 5 critical points

### 1. SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS A WIDESPREAD PROBLEM

- **What we do and say about the issue of sexual violence matters:** By increasing understanding of the issue, we can more effectively respond to survivors, enhance community safety, and ultimately prevent sexual violence. The way misinformed communities often respond to victims inflicts shame, fear, and silence.
- **Believe survivors when they disclose:** Victims are never to blame. Delayed disclosures of sexual violence are normal, common, and should be expected. Many people who have been sexually violated wait months or years before discussing what was done to them with anyone, let alone making a formal report.
- **Rape is the most underreported crime:** 63 percent of sexual assaults are never reported to police. People do not report sexual assault for a variety of reasons. Those who do come forward often face scrutiny and are met with disbelief — even more so when a person of influence has committed sexual violence.

SOURCE: Rennison, C. A. (2002). Rape and sexual assault: *Reporting to police and medical attention, 1992-2000* [NCJ 194530]. Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/rsarp00.pdf>

- **People we know and trust commit sexual violence:** The majority of sexual violence is committed by people survivors know and trust. People who commit acts of sexual violence sometimes abuse celebrity or authority status and the illusion of trust that comes with it.

### 2. INTOXICANTS ARE USED STRATEGICALLY

- **To increase vulnerability:** People who commit acts of sexual violence know that someone who is intoxicated will have less control of their body and surroundings. Victims may even lose consciousness, which makes consent impossible.
- **To decrease the likelihood of coming forward:** A person who is intoxicated will likely have gaps in memory, which may increase doubts about their own memory and make it more difficult to accurately report what happened to them.
- **To lower their own inhibition:** People who commit sexual violence sometimes use intoxicants to get up the nerve to carry out their actions. The saying “take another shot of courage” is rooted in truth.
- **As a social insurance policy to ensure others excuse their actions:** People who commit sexual violence know that allegations of sexual assault are less likely to be taken seriously when drugs, including alcohol, are involved. People who have been sexually assaulted after voluntarily consuming intoxicants frequently have their behaviors scrutinized. The focus should be on the behavior of the person who caused the harm.

### 3. PREVENTION IS POSSIBLE

- **Prevention is everyone's responsibility:** Everyone can create and promote safe environments. As individuals, we can intervene to stop concerning behavior; promote and model healthy attitudes and relationships; and believe survivors and assist them in finding resources.
- **Involvement of communities and organizations is key:** Roles for organizations involve creating and strengthening policies to promote safety; assessing the risks in the environment; and promoting respect for all. Communities must hold those who harm others accountable and ensure that they get appropriate help.

### 4. PROMOTING PUBLIC SAFETY AND JUSTICE

- **Statute of limitations reform promotes public safety:** In many states, civil and criminal statutes of limitations in sexual assault cases are a barrier to public safety. Research indicates that adults who commit rape tend to commit multiple rapes, and many commit other sexual crimes as well.
- **There are multiple avenues to justice:** Changes in technology may mean that evidence can be preserved, making prosecution or civil actions possible. By eliminating the statutes of limitations for sexual assault, we promote avenues to justice for victims and make our communities safer.
- **Survivors of sexual violence need time:** Traumatic experiences often bring about neurobiological changes that impact memory — many survivors of sexual violence cannot remember or communicate all the details of a sexual assault initially. Survivors need to gather the strength, courage, and support needed to report the sexual assault and to participate fully in civil or criminal justice process.

### 5. RAPE CRISIS CENTERS ARE ESSENTIAL

- **Support is available for victims of sexual assault and loved ones:** Community rape crisis centers have someone available to speak with 24/7, no matter when the sexual violence occurred. Staff and volunteers are trained to accompany victims to medical facilities, police stations, and legal proceedings and advocate for their needs.
- **Invest in prevention:** Rape crisis centers provide age-appropriate awareness and prevention programs to children and adults of all ages. These programs include teaching adults to recognize warning signs of abuse and how to report suspicions; working with student groups to promote prevention; and helping people of all ages learn how to speak up or intervene when they observe troubling behaviors.

### ABOUT NSVRC

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center leads the U.S. in providing professional support to local and state anti-sexual violence organizations. NSVRC collaborates with partners nationwide to create research-based resources that focus on how to prevent and respond to sexual violence. The organization has the nation's largest library of resources on sexual violence and prevention. To learn more, go to [www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org).