

Bridging the Gap for Male Survivors of Sexual Violence

NSAC 2019 Workshop – Notes

Introductions

- Presenters Louie Marven and Karla Vierthaler introduced themselves, NSVRC, Bridging the Gap for Male Survivors TA Project, and the project's summer 2018 roundtable
- Welcome activity: Turn to a partner; share how you interact with male survivors in your work.
 - Some pairs shared with the larger group, including these reflections:
 - Working with male survivors through PREA work
 - Working with male survivors of childhood sexual abuse in county corrections
 - Working with male survivors who are Native American
 - Working with male survivors in the military, reflecting on how masculinity functions in military systems
- Community agreements: Participate, Pass, Respect, Privacy, Have fun

Our framework:

- Sexual assault centers provide services to any survivor
- We'll talk about men and transmasculine adults (including adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse), not children/boys.
- We can simultaneously recognize that sexual violence is a gendered issue, and that male survivors deserve the opportunity to find healing. We don't have to ignore that people who commit acts of sexual violence are predominantly male.
- The social norms that say that men have to be tough and powerful are harmful to women and non-binary people. They are also harmful to men who have had unwanted sexual experiences.
- The category of "men" encompasses a wide, diverse range of people, with various life experiences, identities, and needs.
- We should look for "win/win" scenarios: shifting to reach more male survivors is something that can boost all of our work.

ACTIVITY: Discuss in small groups (3-4 people) the barriers male survivors face to services in your local community. Report back to large group.

Socialization and stigma

- Socialized to suppress emotional response
- Conditioned for violence
- Seeing victimhood as feminine, feeling shame
- Sexual identity questions

Perception of sexual assault centers (and the movement)

- Perception that services are for women, not seeing other men going there
- Outreach language from center doesn't reflect men's experiences, perceptions of what happened

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- Talking in the community about men as perpetrators and bystanders only
- Not communicating about bullying, initiation, ritual, hazing as sexual violence

Staff readiness to work with male survivors

- Serving men seen as “distraction” or “extra”
- Fear of how men respond to trauma

Barriers shared by participants:

- Male gender norms – sports teams
- Perception that RCCs are only for women
- Parental/media ideas of masculinity
- Male victims and female perpetrators not taken seriously
- Military: idea that rape is only penis to vagina
- Legal definitions haven't included men as survivors
- Having all female staff
- Our office being inviting to everyone, people feel welcome coming in to talk about anything
- Name of facilities – family crisis services, YWCA
- Reaching out to men after the ER being proactive in reaching out
- Expectation of different messages for male and female groups in community education
- Prevention work – describe as “human to human” not “male to female”
- Males don't feel invited into our spaces
- Male presence in RCCs can be “scary” for staff/survivors
- Presentations using binary language
- Male staff at RCCs feeling unwelcome – survivors not wanting a male advocate
- The healing power of men working in this movement

Framing partnerships

- Going to where men are in your community
- If men aren't coming to your center, where are they going for help? (corrections, D&A, therapy)
- Trauma from sexual violence may not be the presenting issue

ACTIVITY: Discuss in small groups (3-4 people) who you could be reaching out to in order to connect with male survivors? What organizations/systems in your own community men use for support, and how to create partnerships that support the healing of male survivors who use those supports. Report back to large group.

Community partnerships shared by participants:

- “Men Can Stop Rape” programming helping to empower campus to work with men
- Local radio show – male disclosed an incident of SA and reached out to media

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- Probation and parole relationships – referrals
- D&A/corrections referrals – better to connect folks directly right away
- Homeless shelter – mindfulness coloring/activities leads to disclosures
- Community only offers shelter to women
- Doing ACEs in D&A recovery and hope score
- Office hours at university
- “It’s On Us” at a fraternity
- Where men end up getting support: corrections, gang culture (feeling of belonging)
- Faith-based support (men’s Bible study groups)
- Suicide prevention
- Look how men engage in help-seeking behavior

Focus on the facts, not the myths

- People already know the myths. When we say them out loud or put them on our websites, we inadvertently reinforce them. Instead, practice saying the facts.
- Men can be victims. Men can be victimized by someone of any gender. Unwanted sexual contact causes harm to men and boys who experience it.

Don’t limit your discussion of men to bystanders and perpetrators

- Engaging men and boys in preventing sexual violence is an important part of our collective work.
- We can still acknowledge that sexual violence is a gendered issue, and that most people who commit acts of sexual violence are men.
- Remember that many audiences you’re communicating with will likely include male survivors and their loved ones. Include messages that men experience unwanted sexual contact to help reach those men, in addition to what you share about men as bystanders and perpetrators.

Be gender neutral sometimes, and be gender specific sometimes

- Gender neutral language is a good practice for many reasons. It helps us to be inclusive in our communication, as when we shift from “men and women” to “people of all genders” or to addressing “everyone” instead of “guys.” It may be the most precise options in many circumstances, as in, “our program offers counseling to victims of all genders.”
- Gender specific language can also be helpful sometimes. Some programs may be gender specific, for example, as in the case of a support group for survivors who are non-binary.
- In trying to reach men in your communities, it can be useful to mix in gender specific and gender neutral language. It’s true that you serve all victims, and you should tell that to your community. But it can also help to offer targeted outreach to male survivors, given that many people in your community likely do not know that men are able to receive services at your center.
- This strategy of creating specific messages to reach people in your community should not be limited to reaching male survivors! Use this strategy to reach anyone who you find is not accessing your center’s services.