

Sexual Violence Is No Joke

CONVERSATION STARTER

Before our conversation today, I want to share that we will be discussing sexual violence and sexual assault prevention. This program will discuss different forms of sexual violence followed by ways to intervene in different situations, should you feel comfortable to do so. Please be aware that some content may be emotionally and intellectually challenging to engage with. Should this conversation be triggering, please note that it is OK to step out for fresh air.

54% of people who are sexual assault victims are ages 18-34 ¹, making this the most at-risk age demographic. On college campuses, 11.2% of undergraduate and graduate students experience sexual assault through physical force, violence or incapacitation.¹

During Sexual Assault Awareness Month, we want to bring attention to the growing need for education on how sexual violence can show up in campus communities and how fraternity and sorority members can be catalysts for change. It is important to remember that sexual violence is no joke.

Show the educational poster to the chapter; you may want to include it in a PowerPoint presentation.

As we start a conversation, let's review a shared definition of sexual violence.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention refers to sexual violence as a sexual activity when consent is not obtained or not given freely. Sexual violence can be any unwanted, forced, tricked or coerced sexual activity.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE CONTINUUM

As we think about sexual violence, it is important to understand how it is defined and what it looks like. We are going to spend some time discussing characteristics of different forms of sexual violence.

Let's review the Sexual Violence Continuum adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and cited by the Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence.² The Sexual Violence Continuum is a way to explain how our social norms and sense of entitlement can create a fundamental belief system connected to aggression. When discussing sexual violence, these social norms can show up as a person or group of people who have power over another. We are socialized to these different belief systems and

behaviors based on where we went to school, the neighborhood we grew up in, the media we consume and conversations we have with family and friends.

What is something you have learned about intimate relationships or sex from friends, family or the media?

Members may cite the following examples: observing dating behaviors on shows and movies like The Bachelor, Mean Girls, No Strings Attached and Fifty Shades of Grey; listening to podcasts about love, relationships and sex; viewing content or individuals' appearances on Instagram; scrolling through Twitter and seeing a video or news article about relationships; engaging with online dating or with dating apps (and not being aware of expectations of those you meet on the apps); learning a definition of what a hookup is and the difference between dating versus talking in college; coming from a religious background or informed values.

These individual belief systems can sometimes be harmful and allow an individual to justify aggression. Systems could include beliefs such as that if someone buys another individual dinner, the other person "owes" them a sexual favor, or that the more masculine person should initiate sexual activity based on a power dynamic between masculinity and femininity.

Let's review how these beliefs can manifest into different types of sexual violence.

INVASION OF SPACE

This type of sexual violence can happen when someone violates a person's sense of safety in a sexual context. This can include sexual jokes directed at someone, catcalling, obscene phone calls or text messages, and leering at or writing on someone's body when they are sleeping.

Have you heard about other things that would invade someone's personal space?

Additional examples may include asking someone to send pictures over social media, making inappropriate comments about another's appearance and following people to different parties or bars.

Remember that even if invading someone's personal space doesn't involve touching, it is still sexual violence and is never a joking matter.

UNWANTED SEXUAL TOUCH

This type of sexual violence includes obvious or implied touching in a sexual manner. This could look like grabbing someone's body, "accidentally" rubbing up against someone and forced/coerced kissing.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

This type of sexual violence is a pattern of unwanted or uninvited sexual attention, including verbal and physical acts. This can look like someone coercing another to do or act in a way the harasser wants.

Has anyone heard of sexual coercion?

If members say they have, ask them to try to share with the group what it means.

Sexual coercion is the act of persuading or coercing another into engaging in unwanted sexual activity through physical force or emotional manipulation.³ This can look like someone using their social standing or power to get sexual favors from others.

Verbal sexual coercion can sound like:

- “You know you want it.”
- “Don’t make me stop now.”
- “Don’t be a prude.”

SEXUAL ASSAULT/ABUSE

Sexual assault refers to sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim. Some forms of sexual assault include:

- Attempted rape
- Fondling or unwanted sexual touching
- Forcing a victim to perform sexual acts, such as oral sex

RAPE

The term “rape” is often used as a legal definition to specifically include sexual penetration without consent. For its Uniform Crime Reports, the FBI defines rape as “penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim.”⁴

Giving consent means giving a clear “yes” to any type of sexual activity.

As fraternity and sorority leaders, we can take an active role in increasing student safety on campus. As we strive to end sexual violence on college/university campuses, a first step is exploring strategies that can help to reduce the risks.

STUDENT SAFETY

Sexual violence can happen to anyone on a college or university campus. We need to look out for our friends, speak up about sexual violence and take steps to make sure members are safe.

When thinking about preventing sexual assault, it is important to remember that everyone has a role. To help keep you and your friends safe, you should learn ways to intervene based on your comfort level. Here are some tips from RAINN (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network):

CREATE A DISTRACTION

Do what you can to interrupt the situation. A distraction can give the person at risk a chance to get to a safe place.

- Cut off the conversation with a diversion like, “Let’s get pizza, I’m starving,” or “This party is lame. Let’s go somewhere else.”
- Start an activity that draws other people in, like a game, taking a group photo or recording a dance on TikTok.

What are some other ways you can create a distraction to interrupt a potentially unsafe situation?

Thank participants for sharing.

ASK DIRECTLY

Talk directly to the person who might be in trouble. Ask questions like:

- “Who did you come here with?”
- “Would you like me to stay with you?”
- “Do you want to go home?”

REFER TO AN AUTHORITY

Sometimes the safest way to intervene is to refer to a neutral party with the authority to change the situation, like a chapter officer, security guard or the local police.

- Talk to a security guard at a venue, a bartender or another employee about your concerns. It’s in their best interest to ensure that their guests are safe, and they will usually be willing to step in.
- Don’t hesitate to call 911 if you are concerned for someone’s safety.

ENLIST OTHERS

It can be intimidating to approach a situation alone. Ask another person to support you.

- Ask someone to come with you to approach the person at risk. When it comes to expressing concern, sometimes there is power in numbers.
- Ask someone to intervene in your place. For example, you could ask someone who knows the person at risk to escort them to a safe place. Find who they came with or a friend who can help intervene.

YOUR ACTIONS MATTER

Regardless of whether you were able to change an outcome, by stepping in and intervening you are helping to change the way people think about their role in preventing sexual assault.

To speak with someone who is trained to help, call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800-656-HOPE (4673) or chat online at [online.rainn.org](https://www.rainn.org).

If you know or suspect that someone you know has been sexually assaulted, here are resources to support that person and show you care:

- [Help Someone You Care About](#)
- [How to Respond to a Survivor](#)

REFERENCES

1. RAINN (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network). About Sexual Assault. <https://www.rainn.org/about-sexual-assault>
2. Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence. Sexual Assault Continuum. <https://www.acesdv.org/about-sexual-domestic-violence/>
3. Indiana Coalition to End Sexual Assault. Information and resources for responding to sexual coercion. <https://indianacesa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/ICESAcoercion-1.pdf>
4. Sharon G. Smith, Ph.D., Behavioral Scientist, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).