



Sexual Violence is No Joke

Introduction

Our conversation today will focus on recognizing the spectrum of sexual misconduct and intervention strategies. Note some content may be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Should this conversation be triggering in any way, please feel free to step out of the room for however long you need.

54% of people who are sexual assault victims are ages 18-34¹, making this the most at-risk age demographic. On college campuses, 11% of undergraduate and graduate students experience sexual assault through physical force, violence, or incapacitation¹.

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

As we start our conversation, let us review a 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.

Q: How does this definition align or differ from your previous understanding of what constitutes sexual violence?

Member may have not previously considered tricking or coercing someone into sexual activity as a form of sexual violence.

Sexual Violence Continuum

Let us review the Sexual Violence Continuum adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Sexual Violence Continuum is a way to explain how our social norms can create a fundamental belief system connected to aggression. When discussing sexual violence, these social norms can show up in a person or group of people who have power over another. We are socialized to these different belief systems and behaviors based on numerous factors including where we went to school, the neighborhood we grew up in, and the media we consume.

Q: What are examples of how friends, family, or the media can influence our approach to relationships?

*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*; viewing content or individuals' appearances on Instagram; scrolling through Twitter and seeing posts and videos celebrating certain behaviors; engaging with online dating or with dating apps (and not being aware of expectations of those you meet on the apps); regularly attending church throughout childhood.*

Belief systems can sometimes be harmful and perceived to allow an individual to justify aggression. Examples include if someone buys another individual dinner, the other person "owes" them a sexual favor, or that the man should initiate sexual activity based on a power dynamic between masculinity and femininity.

Let's review how these beliefs can manifest into different portions of the sexual violence continuum.

Invasion of Space

This type of sexual violence can happen when someone violates a person's sense of safety in a sexual context. Invading someone's personal space doesn't always have to involve touching.

Q: What are examples of invading someone's personal space?

Examples may include catcalling at someone walking by the chapter house, asking someone to send lewd pictures over text, following people to different parties or bars (stalker behavior), and writing on someone's body when they are sleeping.

Unwanted Sexual Touch

This type of sexual violence includes obvious or implied touching in a sexual manner. This includes 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 includes coercing another to do or behave in a way the harasser wants.

Q: Has anyone heard of sexual coercion?

If members say they have, ask them to share 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 includes using one's social standing or power to get sexual favors from another.

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

Rape is engaging in sexual penetration without the full and clear consent of all involved parties.

Student Safety

Sexual violence across the continuum can happen to anyone on a college campus. We need to look out for our friends, speak up about sexual violence, and take steps to help our friends, and our community, be safe. Let's take a look at some practical ways we can step in to help address a potentially problematic situation. These tips were developed by RAINN (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network).

Create a Distraction

Do what you can to interrupt the situation. A distraction can provide a vulnerable person a chance to get to a safe place.

Q: What are some other ways you can create a distraction?

Examples may include:

- *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.*

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 is 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 situation.
- Ask someone to intervene in your place. For example, you could ask someone who knows the involved vulnerable person to escort them to a safe place. Find who they came with or a friend who can help intervene.

Your Actions Matter

Stepping up and intervening in a potentially problematic situation helps not only the situation at-hand but helps reset the social norms, or belief system, we discussed earlier by showing others that we each should feel compelled to step up and help out when a situation appears to be heading in a bad direction.

To seek additional guidance on how to effectively provide support, 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, consider the following resources:

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

Thank you for supporting efforts to help our community understand and prevent sexual misconduct.

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).