

THANK YOU FOR CHOOSING UNDERSTANDING

Sexual assault is a difficult and uncomfortable topic. Choosing to understand sexual assault by educating yourself takes courage and leads the way to creating a safer world with reduced victimization and where justice prevails. Thank you for doing your part.

This document is a guide to help you understand how to start a conversation about the realities of sexual assault. Understanding this issue requires a mindset of compassion. It can also take a mental toll on you. Take care of your mind and health with compassion toward yourself so you can offer that same kindness to others.

AN UNCOMFORTABLE REALITY

There's no formula for predicting who is capable of committing sexual assault. Sometimes the offender is unknown to the victim, but most often sexual assault is inflicted by someone who is familiar to and trusted by the victim.

Though an offender can be anyone—rich or poor, any skin tone, any religion, any gender identity, and any sexual orientation—they often share key characteristics.

Offenders possess an underlying sense of entitlement. They believe they should be able to have what they want, even at the expense of others. They use power, control, and manipulation to take advantage of a person who is vulnerable in some way.

**EVERY 73 SECONDS
SOMEONE IN THE
UNITED STATES IS
SEXUALLY ASSAULTED.¹**

HARMFUL RIPPLE EFFECTS

Sexual assault is a crime perpetrated by offenders who are motivated by their own entitlement, often inflicting serious trauma on the victim. Left untreated, trauma unconsciously produces countless, unpredictable negative effects in a victim's life.

Anyone can be a victim of sexual assault. You might have experienced the consequence of someone else's trauma without even realizing it, because trauma not only affects the victims of these crimes, it affects their parents, siblings, classmates, and many others. The brain and

body react to traumatic events in unpredictable ways ranging from fear, fight, flight, or freezing. Trauma often manifests in symptoms such as substance abuse, withdrawal, depression, and anger, among others. There is no universal response to trauma, so its effects can be misinterpreted.

Even though the harmful ripple effects of sexual assault reverberate everywhere, the good news is that people like you can fight against them by creating your own ripple effects of awareness, compassion, and understanding.

HOW TO TALK ABOUT SEXUAL ASSAULT

EDUCATE YOURSELF

In Kansas, it is a crime to have intercourse with someone who does not consent or who is incapable of giving consent. Arm yourself with information to be able to speak confidently. Understand that the reality of sexual assault is difficult and the problem won't be solved overnight, but by incremental shifts in thinking. Use your own journey of understanding as a starting point to share with others.

Example: "I learned that, 1 in 5 people are likely to experience sexual assault in their lifetime. One of the most important things to remember is that it's never the victim's fault. I've changed my thinking to hold offenders responsible for their choices and not place blame on victims."

LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES

Use opportunities like news stories, cultural movements, and interpersonal interactions to bring up the topic naturally. Start a conversation by asking the other person what their viewpoint about the situation is, then share your own.

Situation: News breaks about a celebrity accused of assault; #metoo; someone makes a comment that blames a victim instead of placing responsibility with the offender's choices.

Response: "I used to think that sexual assault could be avoided if someone did 'all the right things.' Now my perspective has shifted to putting responsibility on the offender's choices instead of the victim's."

SPEAK EARNESTLY

Gently educate others without shame or judgment. Share what you know and encourage

them to examine it for themselves. Even if the conversation ends without agreement, you may have planted a seed of change that they will continue to think about.

Situation: Statement: "That girl deserved it because she was wearing hardly any clothes and got wasted at that party."

Response: "It doesn't matter what she was wearing or how much she had to drink, no one deserves to be raped. To think otherwise is the same as if you were mugged simply because you were out walking and happened to have your wallet with you."

BE COURAGEOUS

People don't like talking about sexual assault. Even more, they may push back if the assumptions that keep them comfortable are challenged. Know what you believe and stand by it even when it makes someone uncomfortable. Speak with kindness to them

even if they're wrong, but don't back down from what you know is true.

Example: "What do you think about [well-liked public figure's] guilty verdict? It's really unfortunate that he made those choices, but it goes to show that even popular people make bad decisions and should be held accountable."

IF SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS HARMED BY SEXUAL ASSAULT

DO

- Do provide support, compassion, and assistance. Show your support by saying, “I’m sorry this happened to you.” Look for ways to help restore dignity, trust, and justice in their life. Listen to them with patience and empathy when they share their experience with you, and let them speak without interruption. Affirm that they do not deserve the suffering they’re experiencing.
- Do validate that sexual assault is a crime and encourage the victim that crimes should be reported to the police.
- If the assault was recent, do encourage the victim to seek medical treatment from a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE). If the victim does not have access to SANE resources nearby and if seeking those resources at a distance will deter them from following through with the collection of forensic evidence, emergency rooms statewide are equipped with Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kits and instructions for timely collection.
- Do remember that the best way to offer support is by helping the victim feel emotionally, mentally, and physically safe. The specifics of that will vary from person to person, so follow the victim’s lead to help them find safety in all ways.
- Do begin to empower the victim to regain confidence and trust in themselves by letting them make choices about how to meet their needs and receive services. Allow them to choose their next steps and resources.
- Do expect complexity. Trauma impacts individuals differently, which means there’s no standard list of reactions a victim may experience in response to the to the assault. Rational thought is impaired, so their reaction may not make sense to you.
- Do be aware that offenders are often charming, successful, and powerful in some way. They may even be well known and cared about by the victim. Understand that this factor can lead to fear and confusion about them making a report or pressing charges.
- Do recognize the need for self-care. Remain aware of the impact of this work on you and don’t let that negatively affect your ability to help the victim. Seek support from colleagues and people you trust.

DON'T

IF SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS HARMED BY SEXUAL ASSAULT

- Don't place blame upon the victim. Don't ask questions or use statements that imply the assault was their fault. Don't ask "why did you...?" or "why didn't you...?" Don't use statements such as "you should have..." or "you shouldn't have..." Most likely they are already blaming themselves and further blame only compounds their trauma.
- Don't minimize the assault by ignoring the disclosure or failing to refer the victim to services. You do not need specialized training to make a referral and arm the victim with resources.
- Don't assume that you can't help if you haven't received extensive training. The ability to act with genuine kindness and empathy is the only qualification you need to make a difference to someone who is hurting.
- Don't apply your own interpretation of the event to the victim or their situation. The significance of the assault is determined by the victim, not by our viewpoint. Remember, it is the meaning of the event to the person that is important.
- Don't discourage the victim from reporting the assault to the police because the offender is well-liked, has a good reputation, or is cared for by the victim.
- Don't make the victim talk to you about their experience. Allow them the choice to share at their own discretion.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Kansas Sexual Assault Hotline: [1-888-363-2287](tel:1-888-363-2287)

Kansas Attorney General Victim Services Hotline: [1-\(800\)-828-9745](tel:1-800-828-9745)

National Sexual Assault Hotline: [1-800-656-4673](tel:1-800-656-4673)

Kansas victim advocacy programs: KCSDV.ORG

Kansas Child Advocacy Centers: KSCAC.ORG

Nationwide anti-sexual violence organization: RAINN.ORG