

THANK YOU FOR EDUCATING YOURSELF

Sexual assault is a difficult and uncomfortable topic. Choosing to educate yourself takes courage. Learning about this topic is the first step toward helping create a richer learning environment, safer campus, and a safer world with reduced victimization where justice prevails.

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 kindness toward yourself so you can offer that same compassion to others.

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. Studies have shown that 11.2% of all college students experience rape or sexual assault through physical force, violence, or

incapacitation.¹ 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 deteriorating grades, dropping out of school,

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.

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. You have a unique opportunity to influence your campus by being informed and leading courageous conversations.

HOW TO TALK ABOUT SEXUAL ASSAULT

ACCEPT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

Understand and acknowledge all aspects of what it means to be a human being. This includes affirming not only the presence of the physical dimension (the body), but the mental aspect (the brain), and the emotional element (the heart).

Understand that when harm comes to any of these dimensions, trauma ensues. That means that even though someone may physically be ok, they may be suffering from mental or emotional wounds that undermine their ability to thrive.

EDUCATE YOURSELF AND LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES

In Kansas, it is a crime to have intercourse with

a person who does not give consent or who is incapable of giving consent. Arm yourself with information to be able to speak confidently.

Use opportunities like news stories, cultural movements, and interpersonal interactions to ask what the other person thinks, then share your own viewpoint.

Use your own journey of understanding as a starting point and gently educate them without shame or judgment.

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 AND COURAGEOUSLY

Share what you know and encourage those around you to examine the issue for themselves. People don't like talking about sexual assault. Even more, they may push back if their assumptions 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 on what you know is true. Remember that the reality of sexual assault is difficult and the problem won't be solved overnight, but by incremental shifts in thinking.

Example: "Saying she deserved it because of what she was wearing or drinking is like saying you deserved to get mugged simply because you were walking with your wallet. No one deserves to be victimized."

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 Examine (SANE) or the university health center. SANE nurses are specially trained in performing sexual assault medical forensic exams that address the victim's emotional and medical needs while collecting evidence needed for prosecution of the offender.
- 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 of being disbelieved, which may lead to reluctance about reporting the crime to law enforcement.
- Do realize you may be hurting too. Remain aware of what's going on within you and don't let that negatively affect your ability to help the victim. Seek support from someone 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 take justice into your own hands, minimize the assault or tell the victim to forget it and move on.
- 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 to make a police report even if 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: KCSADV.ORG

Nationwide anti-sexual violence organization: RAINN.ORG