

Talking with Your Student About Campus Sexual Violence

If your student is headed off to college, whether for the first time or as a returning student, they will almost certainly be exposed to conversations about campus sexual violence. Whether those conversations happen through federally required prevention programming or awareness campaigns, student-led activism, or popular culture, discussions about campus sexual violence are pervasive. However, it is not solely up to the college to shape your student's understanding of sexual violence: it is imperative that you take an active role by talking to your student before college and throughout their years there. Sexual violence is not an easy topic to discuss, but the following points can be helpful in starting the conversations that will help shift our culture to a Culture of Respect.

- **Every person deserves a life free from sexual violence.** Healthy sexual encounters are not a happy accident: they require building social-emotional skills such as empathy and communication; healthy dating and relationship skills; and an understanding of healthy sexuality, including consent, sexual respect, and comprehensive sex education. These skills can help reduce both perpetration of and victimization from sexual violence. Talk with your student about these skills and openly address any gaps in their knowledge. Learn more about the connection between these life skills and the prevention of violence. There are many programs that engage parents in teaching these skills: <https://advocatesforyouth.org/resources/fact-sheets/parent-child-communication-programs/>
- **Tragically, sexual violence on campus is a reality.** Research data consistently indicate that one in five female students and one in 20 male students experience sexual violence while living on or near campus at a four-year institution. At these rates, it is likely that sexual violence will touch your student's life, whether they realize it or not. It is important that your student understand the realities of sexual violence: for example, contrary to the "stranger jumping out of the bushes" depiction, the vast majority of survivors know their perpetrator. Understanding these realities can help dispel rape myths. Read up on what we know about sexual violence, perpetration, and social norms that perpetuate violence: <https://cultureofrespect.org/sexual-violence/research-inventory/>

- **But students are an essential part of the solution.** Much of the ground that has been gained in addressing campus sexual violence has come about as the result of student-led activism. This activism impacted federal and state laws, and along with movements like #MeToo, prompted national conversations about shifting our culture of violence. On individual campuses, students can promote positive social norms and can serve as active bystanders, calling out words and actions that perpetuate oppression, and safely intervening when they see potential harms. Get students involved on their campus with *Six Steps to Preventing Sexual Violence*: https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/Six_Steps_final.pdf

- **They're not in this alone.** Colleges and universities have an ethical and legal obligation to create a safe environment for students. Title IX is a landmark federal civil right law that protects all students from sex discrimination in education, including sexual violence and harassment. Every institution must have a procedure for addressing sexual violence, as well as a Title IX Coordinator for managing the process. Should a student experience sexual violence, there are many people on and off campus who can support them, including but not limited to, the Title IX Coordinator; confidential resources like counselors and clergy; survivor advocates; on campus health care providers; local community rape crisis centers, and more. In addition to campus-based resources, remind students that parents, families, and friends can also offer support. *Supporting a Sexual Violence Survivor: Do's and Don'ts* provides practical tips for friends and families of a survivor: https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/Do_and_Dont_final.pdf

