

# Protecting Students, Believing Survivors

## *Responding to campus sexual assault*

*Sexual assault has lasting effects on individuals and communities. When someone is assaulted or harassed it can affect their ability to concentrate on schoolwork, their job, and their relationships. Sexual assault can also damage a campus community's sense of safety and togetherness. It is the responsibility of institutions and campus communities to address the problem of sexual assault in a proactive and intentional way. This fact sheet offers background and resources for campus activists and caring professionals.*

### WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Sexual violence is any type of unwanted sexual interaction, ranging from personal attitudes and comments to sexual assault. A person may use force, threats, manipulation, or coercion to commit sexual violence. Social patterns like using power over others, traditional gender roles, and silence contribute to ongoing abuse. Sexual assault can happen to anyone regardless of age, race, ethnicity, religion, geography, ability, appearance, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

### SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON CAMPUSES

It is estimated that between **20-25% of college women experience a completed or attempted rape over the course of a college career**; a majority of women (9 in 10) know the person who assaulted them (Fisher et al, 2000). People who sexually assault others build trust and then use manipulation, alcohol, or drugs to commit an assault.

#### ***Begin by believing***

Survivors are often more willing and able to tell a trusted friend about the experience. Less than 5% of completed or attempted rapes against college women were reported to law enforcement; victims usually told a close friend, even before going to family (Fisher et al, 2000).

You can create a supportive space for survivors by:

- Believing that the victim is **never** to blame for an assault.
- Saying “**I believe you**” when a survivor shares the experience with you.
- Believing that **we each have a role** in creating safer communities.

**You have the power to create change and support a survivor of sexual violence.**

### CREATING SAFER CAMPUS COMMUNITIES

Reducing rates and eventually preventing perpetration of sexual violence means changing attitudes and social patterns. This is a long-term process that includes, but goes beyond, education and awareness. **Campus communities have strengths and insights that can effectively address campus sexual assault.**

Lasting campus change is a multifaceted effort that includes:

**Survivor-centered responses** make sure reporting procedures, investigation, and judicial affairs take into account the realities of sexual assault. Taking a “one size fits all” approach is not effective.





### **Comprehensive prevention strategies**

encourage full campus community participation in changing norms, behaviors, and expectations. For example, having interested students sign up for a peer leadership training when they attend Take Back the Night or a Sexual Assault Awareness Month event. This way efforts continue beyond a night or month.

**Meaningful collaboration** between campus administration, staff, and local community-based organizations promotes sharing of expertise and resources and provides a network of support for survivors, their family and friends, and the campus community as a whole (California Campus Sexual Assault Task Force, 2004; White House Task Force, 2014).

### **Learn more, Create change**

Students are powerful activists and agents of change when it comes to campus policies and practices. There are many online organizations and efforts looking to end sexual assault on campuses.

**Know Your IX** is a campaign that aims to educate all college students in the U.S. about their rights under Title IX. Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, including sexual violence.

[www.knowyourix.org](http://www.knowyourix.org)

### **Students Active for Ending Rape (SAFER)**

supports student-led campaigns to reform college sexual assault policies.

[www.safercampus.org](http://www.safercampus.org)

**New Jersey College Consortium** is a group of committed representatives from colleges across the state trying to identify best practices, respond to emerging issues, and support necessary services for survivors. To learn more about the Campus Consortium, contact the New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault at [info@njcasa.org](mailto:info@njcasa.org).

### **REFERENCES**

California Campus Sexual Assault Task Force. (2004). California Campus Blueprint to Address Sexual Assault: Report to Governor Schwarzenegger and the California Legislature. Sacramento, CA: California Coalition Against Sexual Assault. Retrieved from <http://www.calcasa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/OES-2004-CA-Campus-Blueprint.pdf>

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White House Task Force to Protect Students From Sexual Assault. (2014). *Not Alone: The first report of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault*. Washington DC: White