

RESPECT FOR YOU AND ME

*Sexual Assault Prevention
Strategies for Educators*

A solid orange vertical bar runs along the left side of the page.

RESPECT FOR YOU AND ME

*Sexual Assault Prevention
Strategies for Educators*



Le Centre ontarien de prévention des agressions (COPA) is a not-for-profit agency with a long-standing and recognized commitment to fostering *safe, strong and free schools* in Ontario. COPA's wide range of practical, innovative and inspiring programs and multi-media resources are designed to reach out to all members of the school community: students of all ages, teachers, administrators and support staff, associated professionals, parents and guardians, community members and community workers.

These programs and resources are based on a coherent analysis and approach, recognizing that the principles of anti-oppression are fundamental to social change. COPA strives for the recognition and upholding of human rights—in particular, the rights of children and those who are marginalized.

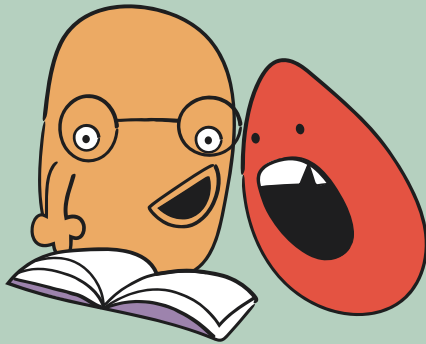
Published by COPA
and the Ministry of Education of Ontario

ISBN 978-1-7771714-2-1

Copyright © COPA, 2020

All rights reserved. No part of this publication
may be reproduced without consent.

Printed in Canada, 2020



INTRODUCTION

Reported sexual assaults have risen in Canada and there has been a dramatic increase in the number of sexual assault complaints in schools.¹ As educators, we play a critical role in our students development. We can enhance this role by embracing a reflective and community-based approach to assault prevention that promotes safe, healthy and empowered students and schools. **Empowerment is based on the following five values.**²

1 COMPASSION: Show empathy for others.

2 COURAGE: Encourage the strength of others.

3 PRESENCE: Listen with undivided attention.

4 RESPECT: Appreciate the qualities of others.

5 POWER: Share your power with others.

The ideas and techniques in this guide can help us provide tools to students who are experiencing or who have experienced sexual assault—creating space for their healing, while promoting resilience, community support and the concept of consent.

In order to carry out this important work, we need to better understand the nature of gender-based violence and the vulnerability of our students. A culture of self-reflection can help us all to be more aware of our biases and attitudes. We are then in a stronger position to support young people and prevent sexual assault.

Some of us have experienced sexual violence ourselves. We may have unhealed trauma and pain as a result. It is important to honour this part of our history and seek help as needed. **This will support us as we support our students.**

WHAT IS SEXUAL ASSAULT?

A sexual assault is not committed in one single way, following a specific pattern or in one set of circumstances. For example, the victim may or may not know the aggressor and the assault can be committed by one or more people.

COMMON FORMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

- Catcalling
- Cyberharassment and exploitation
- Drug-facilitated sex
- Exhibitionism
- Incest
- Rape
- Sex with a minor
- Stalking
- Uninvited touching and sexual advances
- Voyeurism

Furthermore, the aggressor uses a combination of their physical, psychological and social power. **This imbalance of power is the common element linking all sexual assault.**

ELEMENTS PRESENT

- Forced
- Power imbalance (gender, race, age, size, ability, etc.)
- Secretive
- Unwanted

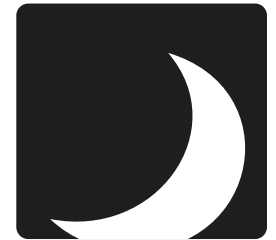
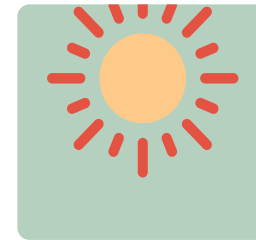
TYPES OF FORCE

- Gestures and body language
- Implicit and explicit threats
- Implicit and explicit pressure
- Physical force
- Words

SOCIALLY MARGINALIZED PEOPLES

- Black and racialized people
- Boys
- First Nations, Inuit and Métis people
- Girls and women
- Immigrant, refugee and undocumented people
- LGBTQ2S
- People with disabilities

Socially marginalized people are more vulnerable to sexual violence not because of inherent vulnerability, but because of structural and individual marginalization. People with multiple socially marginalized identities are at increased risk of violence and will experience violence at greater levels.



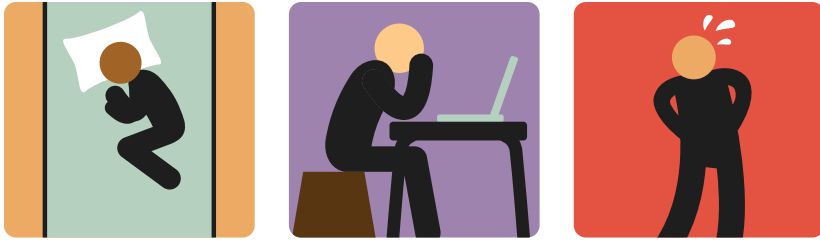
A sexual assault can happen anytime. Day or night.



A sexual assault can happen anywhere. In a familiar or unfamiliar home, at school, in a public space or even online. It can happen in all communities where there is oppression and inequity.



A sexual assault can be committed by anybody. A known aggressor such as a friend, acquaintance or caregiver, a teacher or coach; a person who has power from their social identity or identities; a person of any gender.



Sexual assaults have serious consequences for the people who experience them. The reaction to an assault is different from one person to another. **There is not one “normal” reaction to sexual assault.** The effects can be psychological, emotional, spiritual and/or physical. They can also be short- or long-term.

IMPACT

- Anxiety or panic attacks, post-traumatic stress syndrome and other mental health issues
- Change in academic performance
- Change in behaviour or personality (such as social isolation, aggression, avoidance or passiveness)
- Fear, shame, guilt, self-blame, anger
- Intense emotions or lack of emotions, confusion, denial, disorientation
- Intrusive and unsettling memories and nightmares
- Physical injuries
- Problematic use of drugs or alcohol
- Sudden relationship problems
- Suicide, suicide attempt or suicidal ideation
- Stomachaches, headaches, eating disorders
- Trouble concentrating, sleeping problems
- Unexpected pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections

Responsibility for sexual assault prevention too often rests on those who are most likely to experience it. The single most effective prevention strategy is to readjust power imbalances. A society that considers everyone equal, regardless of sex, gender, race, age and ability, reduces vulnerability and prevents sexual assault.

RAPE CULTURE

Sexual assault prevention is a community and societal responsibility. **Everyone has a role to play in prevention and intervention.** Sexual violence emerges out of collective conditions and beliefs that maintain power with certain social groups and marginalize others. A cycle of violence is created and then perpetuated, when negative beliefs, values and norms are passed from one generation to the next.

Sexist, misogynist, racist, homophobic and other discriminatory ideas, words and behaviours perpetuate rape culture that normalizes and minimizes sexual assault and violence. Establishing a culture of consent in our schools and societies is a critical step in breaking this cycle of violence and silence. **A community approach involves the following three principles.³**

1

We can work with community members to **ADVOCATE** for the rights of students, and to fight against all forms of injustice. As school staff, we witness aspects of young peoples' lives that their families aren't always able to see. Our involvement is vital to their success.

2

We support our students' autonomy when we create opportunities to enhance their independence. The principal of **CHILD EMPOWERMENT** is critical to disrupting the beliefs and norms inherent in rape culture and helping students stand up for their own rights.

3

Our students realize that they are not alone when they reach out to us or another trusted adult. We can continue to encourage this by letting them see us connect with their families, friends and community professionals to form a **NETWORK OF SUPPORT.**

WHAT IS CONSENT?

Consent is at the foundation of all healthy relationships—especially those of a sexual or romantic nature. The principle of consent is the backbone of a flourishing society where sexual assault or any other form of violence is not tolerated.

Sexual assault includes all sexual contact or attention without consent. In a sexual assault, a person with more power than another uses that power to impose sexual contact or attention. In a healthy relationship, consent is an informed, non-coercive, explicit and authentic choice that is ongoing and can change as the activity, context or circumstances evolve. **Consent can also be taken back at any time.**⁴



Consent cannot be given if the aggressor abuses a position of trust, power or authority.



It cannot be given under pressure.



It cannot be taken from silence or the absence of refusal.



It cannot be given if the victim is unconscious or under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

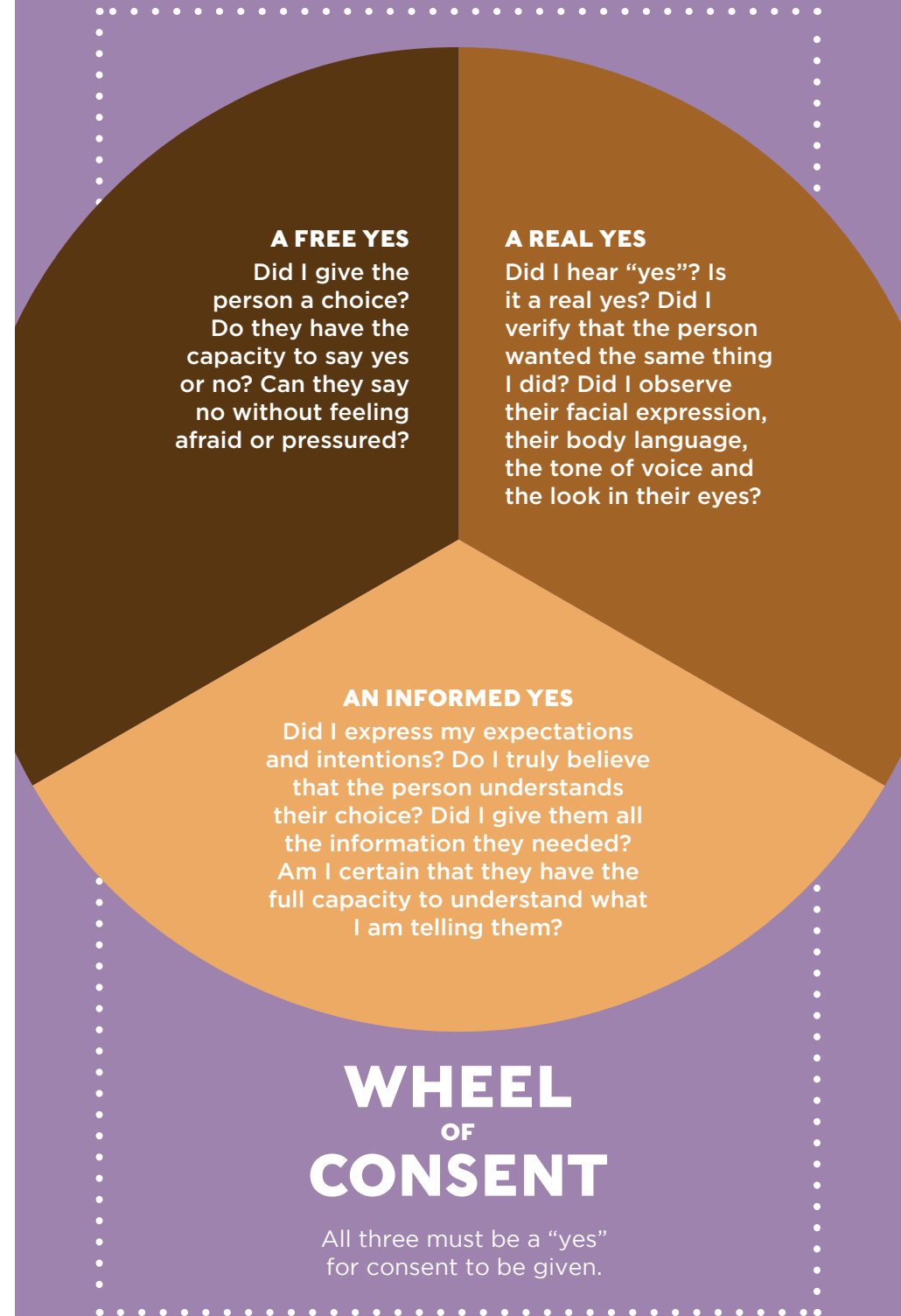


It cannot be assumed or implied.



It cannot be given if the child is under 16.*

*Consent can only be given under 16-years-old with close-in-age exceptions and if there is no preexisting relationship of power.



SELF-REFLECTION

As we've touched upon earlier, rape culture normalizes and minimizes sexual assault and is deeply embedded in our society. We begin to better understand how to strengthen our students' confidence and values when we reflect on their learning and living conditions, as well as the norms that shape our perception of sexuality and violence. **Taking part in self-reflection before, during and after a difficult interaction can help us develop our approach.**⁵

BEFORE

- Reflect on your sexual assault beliefs and unlearn societal biases and stereotypes.
- Evaluate the traditional approach to sexual assault prevention (i.e., women and girls should not wear revealing clothes or be out alone at night).
- Consider ways to model healthy gender roles.

DURING

- Explore and refine how you talk about sexual assault with your students.
- Support your student's emotional well-being, while boosting their self-esteem.
- Consider carefully the message you're sending.

AFTER

- Examine how it went and re-approach if necessary.
- How can you use your power to further support?
- Were you proposing more rules than tools?

We aren't always given the time to properly prepare for something as challenging and emotionally complex as a discussion on sexual assault. But having a more complete understanding of your own beliefs can help you feel better prepared for whatever may come your way.

EMPOWERMENT

We can use the knowledge we've gathered from our self-reflection to establish open and trusting relationships with our students. Making it clear that we care and are available to them during difficult times can provide a protective factor against sexual assault. **It's not unusual to find ourselves reacting to situations rather than acting, here are several ways we can be proactive with our students.**

Encourage students to exercise their agency and ability to make decisions for themselves.

Empowerment is the process of becoming stronger, more confident and claiming your own rights while respecting those of others. We foster this when we challenge gender and sexuality stereotypes and help our students better understand their bodies, their boundaries and the ideas of respect and consent.

We can nurture empowerment by adopting an approach that strikes a balance between personal and collective power. When we find ourselves in a position of power (as teachers, for example) we can try to share this power by ensuring our students have opportunities to make their own decisions (when possible and appropriate).

Reinforce a culture of consent in the environments you are responsible for (classrooms, schools, etc.).

We can provide tools (such as information, skills, support, resources, etc.) that help young people regain their power and prevent all forms injustice. Visit infocopa.com to discover a wide array of violence prevention education resources and programs.

Provide learning opportunities and resources relating to sexual assault.

MODELLING RESILIENCE

We can be role models for our students. Modelling healthy gender relationships, disrupting oppressive behaviour, believing sexual assault disclosures and using inclusive language contributes greatly to the resilience of all young people. **Resilience is defined as follows.**

The capacity to **HEAL AND RE-BUILD** after experiencing a traumatic or destabilizing event.

The capacity to **ADAPT** after experiencing a traumatic or destabilizing event.

The capacity to **CONTINUE DEVELOPING** after experiencing a traumatic or destabilizing event.

It is important for us to maintain an atmosphere that takes into account the social, emotional and cognitive needs of our students. Clear yet adaptable support helps young people establish healthy relationships that will carry them through life. **Here are a handful of elements that can help build their resilience.**

A A network of family support

B Positive home environment

C Positive adult role models

D Positive self-esteem

E Sense of belonging

F Ability to problem-solve

G Trustworthy friendships

H Community involvement

SEXUAL ASSAULT DISCLOSURE

Being aware of the tone of our voice, the words we use, and the approach we take—especially when discussing sexual assault—can help build resilience and healthy relationships with our students. This leads to thoughtful and effective intervention. **Here are some techniques that can help us better support our students.**⁶

LISTEN without judgment. Let them speak at their own pace.

BELIEVE THEM. Try not to undermine their perception of the situation.

BE ATTENTIVE without trivializing or dramatizing the events, emotions or effects.

ACKNOWLEDGE the immense courage it took to talk.

OFFER YOUR SUPPORT calmly. If you are unavailable at that moment, find someone else who can be there.

REMOVE THE GUILT by helping them understand that they are not responsible.

ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENCE by helping them regain their power at their own pace.

VALIDATE FEELINGS by normalizing their emotional reactions.

REFER them to appropriate resources.

WORK TOGETHER so that they have a choice of strategies and resources.

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

It can be difficult and sometimes emotional to intervene in a situation of sexual assault. **Here are ways of speaking to and behaving with students responsible for an assault.**

Speak in sentences that begin with “I” instead of “you” (“I saw”, “I heard...” instead of “you said, you did...”).

Describe what you witnessed. (both what you saw and heard) and the conclusion you drew from it.

Name the problem, while linking it to what you witnessed (i.e., sexist or misogynist remarks).

Question the student(s) responsible for the assault.

Clearly articulate the school and school board codes of conduct and laws against sexual assault.

Clearly assign responsibility to the student(s) responsible and lay out the consequences.

Avoid judging or humiliating those responsible, while still holding them accountable for their actions.

Follow up to make sure that the students responsible take part in both the resolution and reparation process.

A COMMUNITY APPROACH

A community approach encourages prevention and a co-ordinated response to violence when it occurs. It mobilizes not only community leaders and professionals, but also families, neighbours, friends and support groups. This collaboration can create social conditions that reduce the abuse of power and privilege that lead to sexual violence.

It is in such circumstances that we are able create a culture of consent and establish healthy relationships. **We all have the capacity to contribute to cultural change at different levels and in different ways.**

MOBILIZE

- Work with all community members to break the cycle of violence and promote systemic change.
- Share prevention strategies to fight against rape culture and establish a culture of consent.

COLLABORATE

- Create a network of support to ensure continuous care in the school and greater community.
- Ensure those who have experienced violence take part in the creation of their support plan.
- Ensure those who perpetrated the violence are held accountable.

PLAN

- Defend the rights of all people who have been impacted by sexual assault.
- Establish an intervention and support plan that reinforces collective empowerment.

COLLECTIVE SUPPORT

The ideas we have presented in this guide can help establish a culture of coherence and continuity between the home, the school and the broader community. Young people flourish when they understand that they are safe and heard in all corners of their life. **Here are a few final thoughts to help us carry this out.** What are some others we can develop and enact? How can we encourage the full cooperation of all adults in our students' lives?

BREAK THE SILENCE

A

- Name the violence
- Speak out against sexual assault
- Expose myths, overturn stereotypes

UNDERSTAND POWER

B

- Be a role model to your students
- Examine your power and privilege
- Share that power with others

OFFER SUPPORT

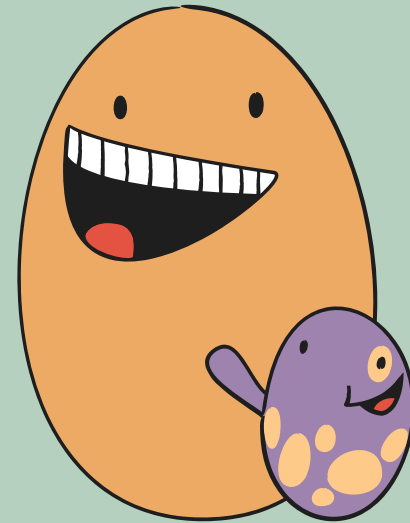
C

- Practice active listening
- Encourage learning
- Keep following-up

ACT

D

- Interrupt sexual assault
- Fight for anti-oppressive schools
- Encourage systemic change



We foster *safe, strong and free* families, schools and communities when we adopt an approach that recognizes trauma and promotes both the individual and collective power of all marginalized people.

REFERENCES

1. Duquette, R., Soubeyrand-Faghel, G., & Paume, J. (2019). *Cultivons la culture du consentement : Vers un changement systémique en matière de harcèlement sexuel dans les écoles (Synthèse)*. Montréal: Prévention CDN-NDG.
2. Tétreault, C. (2019). *En tant que... victime, auteur ou témoin. Guide d'accompagnement pour le personnel scolaire qui œuvre auprès des victimes, auteurs ou témoins de sextos, de sextorsion et de cyberagression sexuelle*. Québec : La Collection de la Chaire. centrecyber-aide.com/pdf/en-tant-que-victime-auteur-ou-temoin.pdf
3. Moreau M. (1987). *Approche structurelle en travail social communautaire*. Service social, 36 (2, 3), Québec, Canada.
4. Ministry of Education of Ontario (2015). *Quick Facts for Parents: Learning about Healthy Relationships and Consent*.
5. Aunola, K., & Nurmi, J. (2005). The Role of Parenting Styles in Children's Problem Behavior. *Child Development*, 76(6).
6. Gruber, J., & Fineran, S. (2015). Sexual Harassment, Bullying, and School Outcomes for High School Girls and Boys. *Violence Against Women*, 22(1), 112-133.

This guide for school staff is part of a provincial sexual assault prevention initiative developed by COPA and funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

For more information about COPA's wide range of violence prevention education resources and programs, visit infocopa.com.



Ontario

