



RESPECT FOR YOU AND ME

*Sexual Assault Prevention
Strategies for Students*

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*Sexual Assault Prevention
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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.

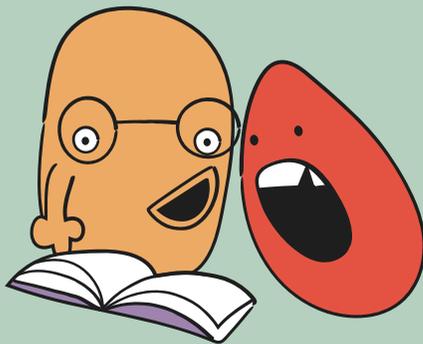
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INTRODUCTION

To create and sustain healthy school environments, it is essential that every voice is heard. This guide shares tools and ideas to help us challenge the myths of sexual assault and promote the principle of consent. As students, we can act as agents of change by discussing these ideas with peers, school staff and families. **This work cannot be done without us.**

The first step is to become aware of our own role in sexual assault prevention by better understanding the impacts of marginalization. Marginalization means the treatment of a person or a group of people as less important. Learning can be done through reflection on our biases, behaviours and ways of thinking. We can then better identify sexual assault and offer our support to friends who may disclose sexual assault. **A three step process will allow us to develop our own empowerment, while understanding how to help friends and peers find support and resources within the school and community.**

1

PERSONAL: Think about your own relationships and ideas, and those you see around you. Do they enable sexual assault?

2

PEERS: Share your skills and knowledge with friends and fellow students to help recognize and prevent sexual assault.

3

COMMUNITY: Collaborate with trusted adults and find resources to help you and your peers.

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 others.**

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

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

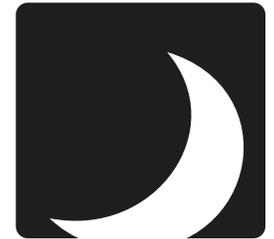
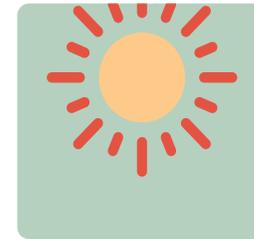
TYPES OF FORCE

- 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

To be clear, marginalized people are not more vulnerable to sexual violence because of inherent vulnerability, but because of structural and individual marginalization and exploitation. 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. Someone you know 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.

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 successful 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.**¹



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.

WHEEL OF CONSENT

All three must be a “yes”
for consent to be given.

A FREE YES

Did I give the person a choice? Do they have the capacity to say yes or no? Can they say no without feeling afraid or pressured?

A REAL YES

Did I hear “yes”? Is it a real yes? Did I verify that the person wanted the same thing I did? Did I observe their facial expression, their body language, the tone of voice and the look in their eyes?

AN INFORMED YES

Did I express my expectations and intentions? Do I truly believe that the person understands their choice? Did I give them all the information they needed? Am I certain that they have the full capacity to understand what I am telling them?

SELF-REFLECTION

What we hear around us can shape our own ideas about the world, but those ideas can sometimes express outdated and stereotypical views of gender and sexuality. Reflecting on those accepted attitudes and beliefs we’ve noticed at home, at school and the community can help us prevent sexual assault and promote consent.

A necessary step is to recognize that sexual assault is common in a rape culture that upholds the oppression of all marginalized people. **Sexual violence emerges out of collective conditions that maintain power with some groups of people while marginalizing others.** A cycle of violence is created and then continued, when negative ideas and values are passed from one generation to the next.

We might find ourselves helping a friend or fellow student who has been sexually assaulted and wants our support. **Spending some time reflecting before, during and after a difficult interaction can help us gain a clear understanding of the facts rather than being overwhelmed by the emotions.**²

1 BEFORE: Think critically about sexual assault. Consider how you would discuss it with others.

2 DURING: Listen. Be supportive. What is the other person saying? What do they want?

3 AFTER: Evaluate how it went. Would you act differently next time? Keep following-up.

Obviously, we aren’t always given the time to properly prepare for something as challenging and emotionally complex as a discussion on sexual assault. Having a better understanding of our own beliefs can help us feel prepared for whatever may come our way.

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

The positive connections and friendships we have with both our peers and the adults in our life can help create an atmosphere of safety and well-being. **The following elements are essential to a healthy relationship.** Are they present in our own relationships and the relationships we see around us?³



TRUTH AND NEGOTIATION: Look for solutions to conflicts that will satisfy everyone concerned. Accept change and make compromises.



TRUST AND SUPPORT: Support the goals of others. Respect their right to have their own feelings, activities, friends and opinions.



NON-THREATENING BEHAVIOUR: Act and speak in ways that allows others to feel safe and free to speak themselves.



RESPECT: Listen without judging. Try to understand others and value their opinions.



SHARED RESPONSIBILITY: Agree on equitable sharing. Make decisions together.



HONESTY AND RESPONSIBILITY: Accept responsibility for your actions. Admit when you're wrong. Communicate openly.

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

PHYSICAL

- Caresses
- Kisses
- Holding hands
- Sexual intimacy

(WITH CONSENT)

EMOTIONAL

- Emotional support
- Equality
- Independence
- Intimate and pleasant moments
- Joy
- Positive mental health
- Respect
- Trust

VERBAL

- Affection
- Compliments
- Humour
- Positive and open communication

UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

PHYSICAL

- Hitting
- Pushing
- Restraining
- Sexual assault
- Shoving

(WITHOUT CONSENT)

EMOTIONAL

- Jealousy
- Manipulation
- Bullying
- Dependency
- Anger
- Lack of communication
- Distrust
- Abuse of power

VERBAL

- Blaming
- Demeaning in private or in public
- Insulting
- Screaming
- Threatening

SUPPORTIVE FRIENDSHIPS

We develop important friendships with our peers at school that contribute to our personal and academic development. We can be allies in the fight against sexual assault by acting in an emotionally supportive role. We can facilitate our friends' empowerment as we help them express their feelings and make their own decisions. If someone reveals a difficult experience, we can listen and give them support by connecting them to resources and trusted adults. **Use these strategies when a peer tells you about an assault.**



LISTEN: Believe someone when they reveal a difficult experience and respect their way of expressing themselves. Tell them that it is natural to feel as they are feeling, that they are not responsible and that you admire their courage in talking openly with you.



ENCOURAGE: Let them make their own decisions. If they want, help them explore their options and accompany them through the process (as best you can and when appropriate). But remember, this process can be different for everyone—how they feel like handling the situation may be different than how you would want it handled, if the situation were reversed.



BE OPEN: Don't tell them what to do (for example, "If I were you...," "If you don't do anything, they won't do it again...," etc.). They need you to listen and support their unique process of healing.



IDENTIFY: Help them determine who they can trust. Remember that it is not your place to reveal to others what happened to someone else.

BE AN ADVOCATE

An advocate is an active witness—someone who sees unacceptable behaviour and intervenes. Bullying has been shown to stop within 10 seconds when a skilled peer steps in to intervene.⁴ **We can show solidarity with the person who has experienced violence and cultivate the following five values.⁵**

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.

With these values, we can disrupt ideas and action that trivialize and normalize sexual violence. **The Four Rs provide additional ideas to ensure positive emotional support.⁶**

R

- Recognize violence.
- Resist violence.
- Report violence.
- Reassure those are hurt by it.

It's not always easy to do this. Speaking up and drawing attention to ourselves can feel scary, awkward and upsetting. We can reach out a trusted and caring adult to find support if we want to report a situation we've witnessed but weren't able to directly intervene in.

DEVELOPING RESILIENCE

Resilience is the ability to get through life's challenges and find ways to bounce back and thrive.⁷ This isn't always easy as life can be stressful for all of us. So finding ways to steer past the obstacles and not feel overwhelmed can allow us to be healthier and happier, while being strong enough to help others. There are many ways we can reinforce this for ourselves and our peers.⁸ **Here are a few ideas.**

Look at the positive side of things.

Take time for yourself.

Learn to manage stressful situations.

Nurture your self-esteem and self-confidence.

Strengthen your ability to problem-solve.

Ask for help and support when needed.

Stand up for yourself and your personal boundaries.

We're all different and we all manage stress and complex situations differently. Learning what we need to handle these situations allows us to meet life's challenges with a set of helpful tools.

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

It can be extremely helpful to reach out to adults and other community supports. **Finding an adult who you trust and who wants to help is an important step when dealing with sexual assault.** Whether it's a family member, family friend, teacher, school staff member or other community leader, adults have a position of power based upon their age and experience, and can listen, discuss and offer support with a unique perspective.

Additionally, there are countless resources that can help us and our peers find new ways of approaching sexual assault prevention. **Here are a few you can access online and by phone.**

DRAW THE LINE: An interactive campaign that aims to engage Ontarians in a dialogue about sexual violence. The campaign challenges common myths about sexual violence and equips bystanders with information on how to intervene safely and effectively.

draw-the-line.ca

KIDS HELP PHONE : Canada's only 24/7, national support service. Kids Help Phone offers professional counselling, information and referrals and volunteer-led support for young people in both English and French.

kidshelpphone.ca

COPA: School-based educational programs teach students, staff and the entire-school community sexual assault prevention tools and techniques. At COPA, we offer a wide collection of interactive programs that help foster a *safe, strong and free* community.

infocopa.com

A COMMUNITY APPROACH

Sexual assault prevention is a shared responsibility. We all have a role to play in establishing *safe, strong and free* schools and community environments, no matter our age or position of power. Whether we've been assaulted, been a witness or assaulted someone ourselves, we can recover, repair and heal. And help others do the same.

This can be done in ways both big and small. It can be scary or awkward to be an advocate, but sometimes it can be easy as a smile from across the room when we know a friend or fellow student is feeling unhappy. At times, just being present is enough.

As we've touched upon earlier, rape culture normalizes and minimizes sexual assault and is deeply embedded in our society. **It will take all of us together—knowing our rights, creating networks of support and standing up for one another—to create a world free from this cycle of violence.**⁹

I CAN BE
AN ADVOCATE.

I CAN
LISTEN.

I CAN
LEARN.

I CAN ASSERT
MY RIGHTS.

I CAN BREAK
THE SILENCE.

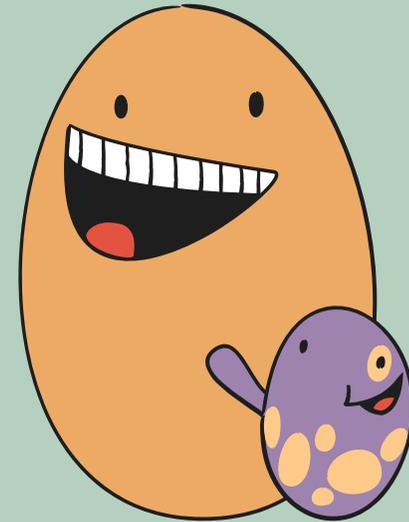
I CAN REACH
OUT FOR HELP.

I CAN NAME
THE PROBLEM.

I CAN IDENTIFY
SEXUAL ASSAULT.

I CAN MAKE
CHANGE.

This guide is only a starting point. We can take what we've read here, keep learning and apply our knowledge in our everyday life. We can stand up for our rights and the rights of others. We can make everyone feel safe and included.



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.

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This guide for students 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

