



Working together to end sexual & domestic violence

# What you need to know about sexual violence...

**Q How can communities of faith prevent sexual violence?**

**A** There are many ways communities of faith can help prevent sexual violence. The first step is to acknowledge that the problem exists and make a commitment to address it. Faith communities can learn about the underlying causes of sexual violence as a social problem. We can work toward building a community free of sexual violence that seeks the safety and well-being of all. Many resources are available to help communities along the way. From youth and adult curricula to sample policies that protect children, our community can do several things to begin preventing sexual violence. This brochure provides some basic information on sexual violence as well as awareness and prevention ideas to help get started.

**Q What is sexual violence?**

**A** Sexual violence refers to harmful behaviors that use sex or sexuality to control, intimidate or violate

others. Behaviors can include harassing jokes and comments, inappropriate touching, rape, incest, assault, date rape, sexual exploitation, misconduct, and abuse. Sexual violence occurs in public and private places: in homes, workplaces, schools, and religious communities. Sexual violence is not about sex—it is about violence that misuses sex and sexuality to exert power over others.

**Q Who are victims of sexual violence?**

**A** Victims of sexual violence can be of any age, gender, race, culture, sexual orientation, economic status, ability or faith tradition. Studies show that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be sexually abused by age 18.<sup>1</sup> About 10-14% of married women in the U.S. are raped by their husbands<sup>2</sup>, a form of domestic violence accounting for 25% of all rapes.<sup>3</sup>

**Q Why is sexual violence so prevalent in our society?**

**A** Studies showed that women were sexually assaulted 14 times more often than men and of the sexual assaults reported to police, 67% were 17 years of age and younger.<sup>4</sup> Because women and children make up most of the sexual assault victims, we must look at the underlying beliefs within our cultures about women and children. Our world has witnessed a tremendous wave of social change improving conditions and establishing rights for women and children around the world. However, as we learn more about the sexual abuse and exploitation of women and children in this society and many others, we know there is much more work to be done.

It is helpful to understand sexual violence in relation to attitudes about race, physical and mental ability, ethnicity, gender and gender identity, class, religion and age. Sexual violence is often used to

harass or terrorize persons or groups who experience racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. For example, a U.S. government study<sup>5</sup> revealed that Native Americans were sexually assaulted more than any other racial group in the U.S. Nine out of ten times, the perpetrator was non-Native. When we understand the past and present racial and economic oppression of American Indians in the U.S., we can see how this study reflects deeply ingrained patterns of violence against Native Americans, rather than just isolated incidents.

Many societies do not extend civil and human rights to gay and lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons. Because of underlying beliefs within a society that allow such violations of rights, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered persons may be targets of physical and sexual violence.

<sup>4</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics, July 1999, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics, February, 1999

<sup>1</sup> Finkelhor and Yllo, 1990

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Randall & Haskall, 1995; Resnick, Kilpatrick, Walsh, & Vernon, 1991

## FaithTrust Institute Recommended Resources [www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org)

### Books

*Creating Partnerships with Faith Communities to End Sexual Violence*  
(FaithTrust Institute, 2003)

*Love Does No Harm: Sexual Ethics for the Rest of Us*  
Rev. Marie M. Fortune  
(New York: The Continuum Publishing Group, 1995)

*Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*  
Rev. Marie M. Fortune  
(Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005)

### DVDs

*The Healing Years: A Documentary About Surviving Incest and Child Sexual Abuse*  
Directed by Kathy Barbini  
52 minutes, 2001

*Hear Their Cries: Religious Responses to Child Abuse*  
FaithTrust Institute  
48 minutes, 1992

*Love: All That and More – A curriculum on healthy teen relationships*  
FaithTrust Institute  
64 minutes, 2000



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*What should I do if I am or have been a victim of sexual assault?*

- ◆ Remember that any sexual abuse you have experienced is not your fault.
- ◆ Talk with someone you are comfortable with, such as a trusted religious leader, a friend or family member, who will keep your discussions confidential (except when required by law to report).
- ◆ Contact a sexual assault program. Many programs offer confidential hotlines, therapy and advocacy to help survivors make informed choices after an assault. See the list of organizations in this brochure.
- ◆ If your intimate partner is sexually abusive, contact a domestic violence program to discuss options available to you, such as creating a safety plan. In the U.S., the toll-free national domestic violence hotline number is 800-799-7233 (TDD: 800-787-3224).

*How do I know if I contribute to sexual violence?*

- ◆ If you offend others by telling stories, comments or jokes about sex.
- ◆ If you make unwanted sexual advances that others find harassing and you refuse to stop when someone says “no.”
- ◆ If you have sexual relationships that take advantage of your status or position.
- ◆ If you engage in any kind of sexual behavior with children or youth – such as teasing, touching or making them listen to or look at sexually explicit material.
- ◆ If you believe that sex is your intimate partner’s duty and coerce your partner into sex against her or his wishes.

Find someone you trust to help you get the treatment you need to stop abusing others. There is help available. Whether you need education, therapy or sex offender treatment, if you think you need help, seek it. One resource is the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA) at: [www.atsa.com](http://www.atsa.com), or call: (503) 643-1023.

**Q How does religious doctrine address sexual violence?**

**A** Religious teaching can serve as a resource or a roadblock in addressing sexual violence. Sexual violence is not discussed often in religious settings. The silence contributes to misunderstandings and myths that blame the victims. A lack of understanding can also lead to the misuse of sacred texts to justify sexually abusive behavior.

For victims and survivors, religious questions often overshadow other concerns: Why did God let this happen to me? Am I being punished by God for my sins? Do I have to forgive the person who did this to me?

For perpetrators, religious teaching can be used to justify their behavior and avoid accountability, particularly in the family: “Wives be submissive to your husbands” or for children, “Honor your father and mother.”

Many religious communities struggle to understand religious doctrines about women, children, lesbians and gays. Both in the past and today, religious doctrine has been used to justify cultural oppression of these groups. People of all faiths must

recognize when religion is used to oppress or harm any community. We can examine our tradition in light of those who experience such violence, and find ways to promote justice and safety for all.

No matter what our faith tradition, committing violence using sex or sexuality against another person or community is wrong. It harms the victim, the perpetrator and the community. Faith traditions affirm truth-telling, protecting the vulnerable, and holding those who cause harm accountable. These values and teachings are resources in addressing sexual violence in our midst.

*The believers in God, men and women, are protectors, and guides, one of another.*

QU’RAN, 9:71

*God has told you. O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

MICAH 6:8

*Respect means listening until everyone has been heard and understood, only then is there a possibility of “Balance and Harmony,” the goal of Indian Spirituality.*

DAVE CHIEF,  
OGLALA LAKOTA (SIOUX)  
ELDER

*Jesus said to his disciples, “Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come! It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble.”*

LUKE 17:1-2

*Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I vow to cultivate responsibility and learn ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. . . I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct.*

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Questions to consider when addressing sexual violence within our traditions:

*What does my religious teaching say about the sacredness of each human being?*

*What does my tradition say about moral behavior in interpersonal and family relationships?*

*What does my faith teach about working to promote justice for all?*

*What does my faith teach about suffering and how does that relate to the suffering caused by sexual violence?*

**Q What can faith communities do to raise awareness and support survivors?**

**A** Our faith communities can provide information and awareness about sexual violence and can help survivors on the healing journey. Here are a few suggestions:

- ◆ Designate a week or month to raise awareness about sexual violence through worship, adult and youth education, newsletters and special events.
- ◆ Invite a guest speaker from a local sexual assault program.
- ◆ Display information (such as this brochure), posters and other materials where meetings and worship take place.
- ◆ Require training for community leaders on issues of sexual harassment and sexual abuse, including laws on mandatory reporting of suspected child sexual abuse.
- ◆ Establish a policy that has a clear statement about our community’s understanding of and intolerance for sexual violence.
- ◆ Use education curricula for all ages in classes and youth groups that teach how to identify and prevent sexual abuse.
- ◆ Donate money and volunteer at local sexual assault programs.

*Sexual Assault and the Law*

Encourage your faith community to learn the laws about the mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse, which vary by region. Report suspected child abuse of any kind, whether or not you are legally required to do so. Clergy have a moral and pastoral duty to report knowledge of child abuse to protect that child (and others) from possible harm.

Legal definitions of rape and sexual assault vary by state and country. To learn the laws in your area, contact your local sexual assault program or law enforcement agency.

**Q Where can I find resources in my community or more information on sexual violence?**

**A** To locate services in your area, check your phone book for community services or contact one of the national organizations listed here for assistance.

**National Resources**

**UNITED STATES: National Sexual Violence Resource Center**

123 North Enola Drive,  
Enola, PA 17025  
Toll Free: 877-739-3895  
Phone: 717-909-0710  
Fax: 717-909-0714  
TTY: 717-909-0715  
[www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org)

**Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN)**

2000 L Street NW, Ste 406  
Washington DC 20036  
24-Hour Confidential Hotline:  
800-656-HOPE  
Phone: 202-544-3064 or  
800-656-4673 ext. 3  
Fax: 202-544-3556  
[www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)

**CANADA: Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres**

77 East 20th Avenue  
Vancouver, British Columbia,  
V5V 1L7  
Canada  
Telephone: 604-876-2622  
Fax: 604-876-8450  
[www.casac.ca](http://www.casac.ca)

*For information on sexual violence and religious issues:*

FaithTrust Institute  
Phone: 206-634-1903  
Fax: 206-634-0115  
[www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org)