

Sexual Violence Prevention and Intervention for Youth: A Guide for Teachers, Caregivers & Support Workers

Produced by the Saskatoon Sexual Assault & Information Centre



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The Saskatoon Sexual Assault & Information Centre is a non-profit, charitable organization dedicated to taking a leadership role in responding to sexualized violence in our community. As part of our vision and philosophy our services are available to those affected by all forms of sexualized violence, their families, the general public, and other support or service providers. We offer counselling for survivors, support for those close to survivors, and education to the public. You are encouraged to reach out to us, or to access our website (<https://ssaic.ca/>), for resources to help you support survivors of sexualized violence.

We offer this guide as a means to help you feel more confident addressing issues related to sexual violence. It is comprehensive and will be updated with best practices as research becomes available. The information in this guide is not meant to act as a substitute for trauma-informed therapy; if a young person close to you has experienced sexual victimization, encourage them to reach out for help from a specialized professional.

We will begin this guide by defining sexual violence and providing the foundations of a trauma-informed approach. We will explore some crucial concepts that we can discuss with young people to create a culture of respect and inclusion, and we will take a look at the impacts of trauma and recovery. At the end you will find resources for handling disclosures about sexualized violence.

WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Sexual violence is an umbrella term, meaning it encompasses all forms of sexual misconduct including abuse, assault, and harassment. The presence of the word 'violence' does not necessarily mean that physical harm is an element; in this case 'violence' pertains to emotional and psychological harm, but physical harm can also be an element in sexual violence.

Sexual abuse refers to any sexual misconduct that is committed against a child, adolescent, or vulnerable adult by someone in a position of power or perceived authority. Grooming often takes place before the act of abuse. Grooming is a process of manipulation and trust building that a perpetrator will use to create an atmosphere where they can exploit a person, e.g. keeping secrets, isolating, turning someone against their support system, gift giving, etc.

In Canada there are laws regarding the **age of consent**:

- **16 years** of age is the minimum for consent; 15 years or younger cannot legally consent to sexual activity, unless:
- **14 & 15 year-olds** can consent to sexual activity with someone who is no more than 5 years older (peer group exception)
- **12 & 13 year-olds** can consent to sexual activity with someone who is no more than 2 years older (close in age exception)
- **Under 12 years** of age cannot consent to sexual activity under any circumstance

Sexual assault is an assault of a sexual nature that violates the survivor's sexual integrity, and where consent is not obtained or maintained. The Canadian Criminal Code (sections 153-159) specifies that consent cannot be obtained in the following instances where:

- the agreement is expressed by the words or conduct of a person other than the complainant
- the complainant is incapable of consenting to the activity
- the accused counsels or incites the complainant to engage in the activity by abusing a position of trust, power, or authority
- the complainant expresses, by words or conduct, a lack of agreement to engage in the activity
- the complainant having consented to engage in the sexual activity, expresses, by words or conduct, a lack of agreement to continue to engage in the activity¹

Sexual assault is another umbrella term that encompasses many sexually inappropriate acts, including but not limited to coerced sexual activity, non-consensual kissing or touch, and rape. Other acts that are considered to be sexually inappropriate, such as the non-consensual sharing of nude pictures and voyeurism, are also illegal but are classified under section 162.1 of the Canadian Criminal Code.

Sexual harassment is any unwarranted sexual conduct that interferes with a person's rights, as per the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code. Sexual harassment can be verbal, physical, or visual; it can occur as a single incident or a series of incidents. Sexual harassment is not allowed in the workplace, at schools, colleges or universities, or in the provision of a public service. It is unsolicited and unwelcomed behaviour, which can take place in many forms and can lead to more severe acts over time:

- sexual remarks, "jokes", advances, or invitations
- displaying offensive pictures or photos
- threats
- leering
- physical contact, such as touching, patting, pinching, or brushing against
- sexual and physical assault²



Quick tip: Contacting the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission is the first step in addressing a complaint about sexual harassment (find their contact information in the Resources section).

Now that we have a shared understanding of the language to use when talking about sexual violence, let's review some tips for creating a trauma-sensitive space.

HOW TO RESPOND TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE: A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

You can take a **trauma-informed approach** by first understanding the widespread impact of trauma and the paths to recovery (see page 11, Impacts/Recovery from Sexual Violence for more information); recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, family, staff, and anyone involved with the system; integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and actively resisting re-traumatization³. If you work with children/youth, you may have heard of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study⁴, so you already have an understanding of the impacts of trauma.



Quick tip: The reference section is full of useful articles, including an ACE quiz that you can take to learn your own ACE score. Just follow the footnotes throughout this document to find the corresponding web links at the end in the references section.

There are three key elements to a **trauma-informed approach**: safety, connection, and emotional regulation. You don't have to be a therapist to address these crucial elements of healing. You can create a safer environment for both physical and emotional development/expression; promote healthy, age-appropriate relationships; and teach/model self-management and coping skills⁵. You don't have to wait to find out if a young person has been traumatized before implementing this approach. In fact, maintaining a safe environment and a healthy relationship with a young person might even be the factor that encourages them to disclose and address any trauma they may have experienced. Further, creating a safer environment encourages a culture where sexual violence is less likely to flourish. Knowing that *1 in 3 girls* and *1 in 6 boys* will be sexually victimized before the age of 18⁶, it is ethical to use this approach in any setting where you will be working with a group of young people.

Creating a safer space doesn't mean that you can guarantee safety for everyone because everyone experiences safety differently and lapses in fulfilling the guidelines of the space can occur. A safer space is an environment that is non-threatening and supportive; it encourages learning, open-mindedness, respect; and physical/mental/emotional/spiritual safety. As a leader in a safer space you are encouraged to be critical of the power dynamics that impact others and yourself, and to be mindful of how your own behavior affects others. Most importantly, teach those who enter to be responsible for upholding the values of the space⁷. Teach youth to understand the concepts of respect, inclusion, consent, and an understanding of privilege. As well, teach about racism, sexism, ableism, etc. Make classrooms accessible for students with all kinds of physical and mental abilities, including trauma. As well, teach young people strategies for intervening when they see something wrong. We will dig deeper into some of these concepts in the next section.

Promote healthy, age-appropriate relationships with young people. Do this by first understanding your role in the young person's life and setting appropriate boundaries according to your role. Be open and transparent with young people about your boundaries and discuss boundaries in other types of relationships. Help them to identify healthy and unhealthy relationship traits, and to understand how emotional abuse and grooming are forms of abuse that can lead to physical and sexual abuse. Understand the age of consent guidelines in Canada and educate youth about why those guidelines have been put in place.



Teaching tool: A great way to generate conversation about age-appropriate relationships is to reverse the roles, e.g. if 15-year-old teens claim it is okay for them to date 22-year-old adults, ask them if they think they would date a 15-year-old when they are 22.

Teaching and modeling self-management and coping skills will help young people to more successfully regulate their own emotions. Make room for yourself and for the young people you work with to practice self-care. Mindfulness is a proven tool to help with emotional-regulation and stress reduction, and it can

be helpful for trauma survivors. Meditation and grounding exercises are great ways to implement mindfulness in a classroom or group setting⁸. Be available to support youth when they reach out to you, and if you don't know how to help them, work with them to find the right person who can. Offer them choices so they can practice their decision-making skills.

CREATING A CULTURE OF RESPECT AND INCLUSION

Traditional methods of sexual assault awareness and prevention focused on how women/girls could avoid potentially risky situations. This method is outdated and fails to acknowledge sexual violence that happens to people who are trans and non-binary, as well as to men. It also put the onus on women/girls to prevent being sexually assaulted, instead of putting the onus on perpetrators who choose to sexually assault. Keep this in mind as you approach these topics because some young people may have absorbed this harmful information. You might have to help them unlearn this misinformation as they learn more about respect and inclusion. Research shows that the best way to prevent sexual violence is through ongoing awareness and training that address root causes of sexual violence, such as sexism, gender stereotypes, and privilege. Revisiting this material continuously will help to reinforce the important lessons within it⁹.

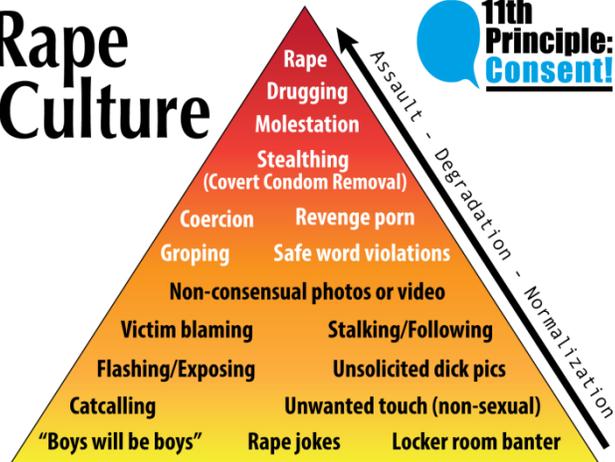
Language is an important tool for helping us communicate about our experiences and our needs. We have to know how to communicate what the problem is in order to begin working on it. Being mindful about the language you use is an important aspect of the trauma-informed approach; the language used to talk about sexual violence can either help or hinder the healing process of a person who has experienced trauma. When focusing on prevention, it is important to use language young people will understand and relate to. Youth often use language that is considered derogatory; as an adult it might feel uncomfortable referring to terms, such as “slut-shaming”. However, it is important to familiarize with such language because you might have to reference it when providing education or support to young people.

The culture of an environment, such as a classroom, is not set by rules and regulations; it's set by its leadership. As a leader it's important to continuously check-in with yourself to update your knowledge base, understand your own biases and triggers, and strengthen your existing skills. In this section we will explore some key concepts that contribute to the prevalence of sexual violence, and provide lots of practical tools to help teach youth about these concepts.

Rape culture is a concept that refers to a setting where sexual violence is pervasive and normalized due to societal attitudes toward gender and sexuality. It is further entrenched by attitudes around racism, classism, ableism, etc. Behaviours commonly associated with rape culture include: slut-shaming, victim blaming, objectification, denying the pervasiveness of sexual violence or its impacts, and denying historical events where people were harmed when others used rape culture to their advantage¹⁰.

This diagram can help young people understand the continuum of sexual violence; where the more commonly occurring acts of sexual violence are often normalized, and only a small number of acts are considered severe in nature, yet they all can contribute to trauma.

Rape Culture



Tolerance of the behaviors at the bottom supports or excuses those higher up. To change outcomes, we must change the culture.

If you see something, say something!
Start the conversation today.

www.11thPrincipleConsent.org

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Teaching tool: Here is a guide by Beatrix Lockwood (2019) to help you fight rape culture:

<https://www.thoughtco.com/fight-rape-culture-712274>



Teaching tool: Rape myths contribute to rape culture. Here are some rape myths that have been fact-checked by the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault (2019):

http://www.icasa.org/docs/rapemyths_fact_sheet.pdf

It's important to understand and teach about **privilege and oppression** when working to prevent sexual violence. We know that sexual violence is not motivated by sexual attraction, instead it is a crime of power and control. We also know that in our society privilege provides power. The term privilege refers to social structures that benefit certain people and disadvantage others. For example, racism advantages people who are white, while it disadvantages people of colour; heterosexism advantages straight people and disadvantages people who are LGBTQ2S (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirit, etc.); and cissexism advantages people who identify with the sex they were assigned at birth, while disadvantaging people who don't¹². Sometimes people who have power and authority abuse it, other times they may have the ability to intervene to interrupt sexual violence. It's important that young people learn how to identify the ways privilege and oppression affect their lives and the lives of those around them so they can be mindful of using their power for positive, prosocial purposes.



Teaching tool: Here is a great video by As/Is (2015) to share with youth about what privilege is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hD5f8GuNuGQ>

Understanding how **gender stereotypes** and **harmful masculinity** (more controversially known as toxic masculinity) are connected to violence is another important aspect of creating a culture of respect and

inclusion. Ideas that are perpetuated through society and media, such as men/boys are sexual aggressors and women/girls are sexually submissive; slut-shaming girls while encouraging boys to pursue sexual activity; boys will be boys; girls play hard-to-get; etc. contribute to a culture where sexual violence is more likely to take place. On top of that, they create an environment that makes it harder for male victims of sexual violence to come forward and seek help due to stigmas bred through stereotypes. Understanding that these ideas are constructed by society and do not reflect the biology of women/girls, men/boys, and people who are non-binary is key to unlearning sexist biases.

The American Psychological Association has recently released research that points to gender stereotypes about masculinity that are harmful and contribute to the perpetration of violence¹³. Data confirms that most people who perpetrate sexual violence are male¹⁴. Ignoring the ways stereotypes about masculinity harm people of all genders and refusing to address harmful masculinity contribute to an environment that perpetuates sexual violence.



Teaching tool: This guide by Media Smarts (2016) has lots of tips for talking to young people about gender stereotypes: <http://mediasmarts.ca/tipsheet/talking-kids-about-gender-stereotypes-tip-sheet>

CONSENT

Con•sent /kən'sent/

1. (*noun*) permission for something to happen or agreement to do something
2. (*verb*) give permission for something to happen or to agree to do something¹⁵

Consent isn't necessarily about sex, but we know that it is a necessary element of sex. A person's autonomy and consent should be respected in every relationship, not just in intimate relationships. Consent is just another way to say permission to cross someone else's boundary, it can be taught without always talking about sex. However, when the goal is sexual violence prevention it is important to also talk about consent specifically in terms of sex. This guide offers teaching tools for both.



Teaching tool: Teaching Consent Doesn't Have to Be Hard by Beth Hover (2018) offers tips and tools for talking to youth about consent and boundaries without talking about sex:

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/teaching-consent-doesnt-have-to-be-hard>



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Teaching tool: Myths and facts about consent

Myth: Consent is all about saying “no”.

Fact: Consent is about *agreement and permission*. Ultimately consent is about saying “yes”. It’s about making sure that your partner is a willing participant in whatever sexual activity you take part in.

Myth: It’s a man’s job to get consent from a woman.

Fact: It is the responsibility of *the person who is seeking to engage in a specific sexual activity* to obtain consent before moving on to that activity, regardless of their sex or gender. Consent isn’t a heteronormative concept; it applies to all people, all genders, all sexualities.

Myth: You only have to ask once.

Fact: Consent is an ongoing conversation. Permission is required before moving to a different sexual act, whether that’s kissing, feeling, penetration, or otherwise. Permission is also required each time you want to engage in that act again. Permission once isn’t permission forever. Consent can be revoked at any time.

Myth: Asking for consent might ruin the ‘mood’.

Fact: Sexual assault will definitely ruin the ‘mood’.



Teaching tool: Here are some tips for teaching about the consent conversation:

Obtaining Enthusiastic Consent

Establish mutual interest before even considering sexual activity

- If you’re flirting with someone, are they giving you eye contact, leaning in, expressing excitement?
- Are you on the same page? Are you looking for a relationship? Are they looking for a casual hook-up?
- ***Negotiate consent verbally***
 - Be explicit in asking for what you want
 - Yes, this might feel vulnerable but consider how vulnerable you might leave someone feeling if you act without asking
- ***Learn to negotiate consent non-verbally***
 - Practice reading your partner’s body language in non-sexual settings and check in with them to make sure you are reading them correctly
 - Understand that non-verbal cues can indicate “no” or a withdrawal of consent. e.g. pulling away, turning away, stiffening up
- ***Encourage your sexual partner to communicate with you***
 - Check in with your partner during sex; remind them that they can say “no”. Ask, “Can I _____?”; “Is this okay?”

- Check-in with your partner after sex. Ask, “How are you doing?”; “Would you want to do that again?”; “How was that for you?”; “I would like to try ____ next time, what do you think?”
- ***Be aware of what makes your sexual partner vulnerable***
- Do not engage with partners who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs, they can’t legally consent; don’t exploit their vulnerabilities
- If your partner has a history of sexualized trauma, make it comfortable for them to talk about any relevant triggers and what helps them ground when they react to a trigger
- ***Err on the side of caution***
- You won’t ruin the mood by checking in, but you will absolutely ruin any mood if you cross someone’s boundaries!

Providing Enthusiastic Consent

- ***Communicate your intentions and limitations***
- Let your partner know what you are looking for; discuss your boundaries.
- Don’t assume that you and your partner are on the same page
- ***Discuss the kind of consent that works for you***
- Do you want your partner to explicitly ask you before an escalation in intimacy or change in sexual activity? Maybe you use another approach to consent
- ***Learn how to say “no” and get comfortable doing it***
- Practice saying “no” and setting boundaries in situations that aren’t sexual
- Get to know yourself. Are you a people pleaser? Do you find it hard to say “no”? Consider working with a counsellor to address these tendencies
- ***Provide continuous feedback to your sexual partner***
- Say “no” if you want/need to
- Give your partner positive feedback. Let them know when you are into the things they are doing
- Use verbal cues and non-verbal cues; reciprocate with your partner if you like what is going on
- ***Err on the side of caution***
- If you are unsure, it’s best to say “no” for now. Talk about it further before deciding whether or not to try it

BYSTANDER INTERVENTION

A bystander approach to sexual violence prevention assumes that people aren’t just potential victims or perpetrators. Each person is seen as a possible bystander, having potential to be in a situation where they have an opportunity to interrupt and prevent sexual violence before it escalates, or even begins. A bystander can be apathetic or helpful; we want young people to be the latter.

There are five stages to bystander intervention:

1. **Notice potentially problematic situations.** Understanding the range of behaviours that contribute to rape culture helps youth recognize the importance of interrupting things like rape jokes, as well as sexual assault.
2. **Identify when it is appropriate to intervene.** Teach young people to use critical thinking to assess situations, as well as tools to check-in with their observations by asking others what they've seen or by checking in with the person they believe is at risk.
3. **Recognize personal responsibility for intervention.** People are more likely to intervene when there is no one else around and when they can relate to the victim on a personal level. Even when you might think a situation is “none of your business”, consider this: if someone does something wrong in front of you, they have made it your business.
4. **Know how to intervene.** Give young people opportunities to build strategies and skills that lead to effective interventions. Knowing how to safely intervene increases a person's ability to do so.
5. **Take action to intervene.** Decide what to do and have the confidence to act¹⁷.



Teaching tool: Princeton University (2019) has some comprehensive resources for developing skills to intervene (<https://umatter.princeton.edu/action/developing-skills>) and overcoming obstacles to bystander intervention (<https://umatter.princeton.edu/action/overcoming-obstacles>)

By using a trauma-informed approach and teaching youth about bystander intervention, consent, respect, and inclusion you can influence the young people you work with to become more socially conscious. It requires a combination of efforts, such as these, to get to the root causes of sexual violence¹⁸.

IMPACTS / RECOVERY FROM SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The potential effects of sexual violence are extensive and varied among survivors. Sexual violence is not limited to a quick period of pain, grief, and healing. Some survivors may take months or even years to disclose, let alone recover. The symptoms of sexual violence can result in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but do not always. Symptoms of trauma include reacting strongly to triggers that may seem innocuous to others, dissociation, flashbacks, depression, low self-esteem, disordered eating, etc. Some survivors may express their feelings openly, while others may hide how they feel. Some may engage in unhealthy coping, such as self-harm, substance use, or sudden outbursts, while others may become perfectionists, withdrawn, or anxious. These are all typical ways to react and can all be treated by accessing the right kind of help. Be patient with survivors and those who have experienced trauma. Healing from trauma does not always happen in a linear fashion. It often occurs cyclically; this can be confusing and frustrating for survivors, let alone those caring for them.



Teaching tool: The Saskatoon Sexual Assault & Information Centre has resources that go more in depth about the impacts of sexual violence and recovery: <https://ssaic.ca/learn/resources/> and <https://ssaic.ca/learn>

WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE DISCLOSES TO YOU?

If a person ever discloses to you that they have been sexually victimized, it is imperative that you always believe the survivor and take action to ensure they are safe. Every person has a duty to report according to the Child and Family Service Act¹⁹; if a child is under 16 and the perpetrator might potentially have access to victimize them again it is imperative that you report. As well, each workplace has its own policies and procedures that should be followed. Re-familiarize yourself with these policies if you have not had to refer to them recently and ensure that you follow them accordingly.

After reassuring the survivor that you believe them, offer them options to help them feel more in control. Do they want to sit or stand? Do they want to tell you anything else? Do they want help telling their parents (assess whether it is safe to contact their parents right away)? Do they want to talk to the school counsellor or social worker? Do they want/need to go to the hospital? Do they want to talk to the police? Do they want to reach out to their local sexual assault centre?

Refer to what you have learned throughout this guide about using a trauma-informed approach, understanding rape culture and rape myths, and understanding how privilege and oppression might impact your interactions; this will help you to support a survivor. Remain calm and check in with the young person to find out what they need right now.



Quick tip: When someone discloses to you that they have been sexually victimized you should:

- Ensure the survivors knows that you believe them and want to support them
- Validate the effects of what they've experienced; don't minimize their experience or feelings
- Remind them that whatever happened is not their fault
- Ensure they are safe, help them to create a safety plan if needed (this may include reporting to Social Services or police)
- Offer them choices in their options for assistance, provide them with information about supports and ensure that they understand they are in charge of deciding what to pursue, if anything at all (e.g. sexual assault counselling, crisis supports, medical assistance, having a forensic exam or rape kit completed, legal assistance)
- Maintain a healthy relationship with the young person; if possible continue to be open to supporting them, but don't pressure them to talk about what happened unless they want to
- Ask the survivor what they need, and offer help in the ways they specify

RESOURCES

In Saskatoon, SK there are support services that can help people who have been sexually victimized:

<p>To report sexual abuse, as per the Duty to Report:</p> <p>Social Services – Child and Family Services 306-933-6077</p> <p>Mobile Crisis 103-506 25th St W Saskatoon, SK, S7K 4A7 306-933-6200</p> <p>For assistance with sexual harassment:</p> <p>Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission 816-122 3rd Ave N Saskatoon, SK, S7K 2H6 306-933-5952</p> <p>For medical care:</p> <p>City Hospital Emergency Room (open 9am-8:30pm) 701 Queen St W Saskatoon, SK, S7K 0M7 306-655-8000</p> <p>Royal University Hospital Emergency Room (pediatrics and afterhours, 8:30pm-9am) 103 Hospital Dr Saskatoon, SK, S7N 0W8 306-655-1000</p>	<p>To make a criminal complaint:</p> <p>Saskatoon Police Service Emergency: 911 Non-Emergency: 306-975-8300</p> <p>For more information about the legal process:</p> <p>The Listen Project Call: 306-974-3333 or 1-855-258-9415 Text: 306-500-6430 Email: listen@plea.org Website: listen.plea.org</p> <p>For counselling and support:</p> <p>Saskatoon Sexual Assault & Information Centre 201-506 25th St W Saskatoon, SK, S7K 4A7 Office: 306-244-2294 Crisis Line: 206-244-2224</p>
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