

# **Risk Reduction for Intimate Partner Violence, Sexual Harassment, and Sexual Violence**

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Victim-blaming is never appropriate, and Napa Valley College fully recognizes that only those who commit sexual misconduct are responsible for their actions. The following suggestions are being provided, as a proactive measure, to help individuals reduce their risk of being victimized, and their risk of committing acts of sexual misconduct.

## **Reducing the Risk of Victimization**

- Make any limits/boundaries you may have known as early as possible.
- Clearly and firmly articulate consent or lack of consent.
- Remove yourself, if possible, from an aggressor's physical presence.
- Reach out for help, either from someone who is physically nearby or by calling someone. People around you may be waiting for a signal that you need help.
- Take affirmative responsibility for your alcohol and/or drug consumption. Alcohol and drugs can increase your vulnerability to sexual victimization.
- Look out for your friends, and ask them to look out for you. Respect them, and ask them to respect you, but be willing to challenge each other about high-risk choices.

## **Reducing the Risk of Being Accused of Sexual Misconduct**

- Show your potential partner respect if you are in a position of initiating sexual behavior.
- If a potential partner says "no," accept it and don't push. If you want a "yes," ask for it, and don't proceed without clear permission.

- Clearly communicate your intentions to your potential sexual partners, and give them a chance to share their intentions and/or boundaries with you.
- Respect personal boundaries. If you are unsure what's OK in any interaction, ask.
- Avoid ambiguity. Don't make assumptions about consent, about whether someone is attracted to you, how far you can go with that person, or if the individual is physically and mentally able to consent. If you have questions or are unclear, you don't have consent.
- Don't take advantage of the fact that someone may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, even if that person chose to become that way. Others' loss of control does not put you in control.
- Be on the lookout for mixed messages. That should be a clear indication to stop and talk about what your potential partner wants or doesn't want to happen. That person may be undecided about how far to go with you, or you may have misread a previous signal.
- Respect the timeline for sexual behaviors with which others are comfortable, and understand that they are entitled to change their minds.
- Recognize that even if you don't think you are intimidating in any way, your potential partner may be intimidated by or fearful of you, perhaps because of your sex, physical size, or a position of power or authority you may hold.
- Do not assume that someone's silence or passivity is an indication of consent. Pay attention to verbal and non-verbal signals to avoid misreading intentions.
- Understand that consent to one type of sexual behavior does not automatically grant consent to other types of sexual behaviors. If you are unsure, stop and ask.
- Understand that exerting power and control over another through sex is unacceptable conduct.

## Common Myths and Facts about the Causes of Sexual Violence

- **Myth:** Victims provoke sexual assaults when they dress provocatively or act in a promiscuous manner.  
**Fact:** Rape and sexual assault are crimes of violence and control that stem from a person's determination to exercise power over another. Neither provocative dress nor promiscuous behaviors are invitations for unwanted sexual activity. Forcing someone to engage in non- consensual sexual activity is sexual assault, regardless of the way that person dresses or acts.
- **Myth:** If a person goes to someone's room or house or goes to a bar, s/he assumes the risk of sexual assault. If something happens later, s/he can't claim that s/he was raped or sexually assaulted because s/he should have known not to go to those places.  
**Fact:** This "assumption of risk" wrongfully places the responsibility of the offender's action with the victim. Even if a person went voluntarily to someone's home or room and consented to engage in some sexual activity, it does not serve as blanket consent for all sexual activity. When in doubt if the person is comfortable with an elevated level of sexual activity, stop and ask. When someone says "no" or "stop," that means "STOP!" Sexual activity forced upon another without valid consent is sexual assault.
- **Myth:** It is not sexual assault if it happens after drinking or taking drugs.  
**Fact:** Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs is not an invitation for sexual activity. A person under the influence does not cause others to assault her/him; others choose to take advantage of the situation and sexually assault her/him because s/he is in a vulnerable position. A person who is incapacitated due to the influence of alcohol or drugs is not able to consent to sexual activity.
- **Myth:** Most sexual assaults are committed by strangers. It's not rape if the people involved know each other.  
**Fact:** Most sexual assaults and rape are committed by someone the victim knows. A study of sexual victimization of college women showed that about 90% of victims

knew the person who sexually victimized them. Most often, a boyfriend, ex-boyfriend, classmate, friend, acquaintance or co-worker sexually victimized the person. It is important to remember that sexual assault can occur in both heterosexual and same-gender relationships.

- **Myth:** Rape can be avoided if women avoid dark alleys or other “dangerous” places where strangers might be hiding or lurking.

**Fact:** Rape and sexual assault can occur at any time, in many places, and to anyone.

- **Myth:** A person who has really been sexually assaulted will be hysterical.

**Fact:** Victims of sexual violence exhibit a spectrum of responses to the assault which can include: calm, hysteria, withdrawal, anxiety, anger, apathy, denial, and shock. Being sexually assaulted is a very traumatic experience. Reaction to the assault, and the length of time needed to process through the experience vary with each person. There is no “right way” to react to being sexually assaulted. Assumptions about the way a victim “should act” may be detrimental to the victim because each victim copes in different ways.

- **Myth:** All sexual assault victims will report the crime immediately to the police. If they do not report it or delay in reporting it, then they must have changed their minds after it happened, wanted revenge, or didn’t want to look like they were sexually active.

**Fact:** There are many reasons why a sexual assault victim may not report the assault to the police or campus officials. It is not easy to talk about being sexually assaulted, and can feel very shameful. The experience of retelling what happened may cause the person to relive the trauma. Another reason for delaying a report, or not making a report, is the fear of retaliation by the offender. There is also the fear of being blamed, not being believed, and being required to go through judicial proceedings. Just because a person does not report the sexual assault does not mean it did not happen.

- **Myth:** Only young, pretty women are assaulted.

**Fact:** The belief that only young, pretty women are sexually assaulted stems from the myth that sexual assault is based on sex and physical attraction. Sexual assault is a crime of power and control. Offenders often choose people whom they perceive

as most vulnerable to attack or over whom they believe they can assert power. Men and boys are also sexually assaulted, as well as persons with disabilities.

Assumptions about the “typical” victim might lead others not to report the assault because they do not fit the stereotypical victim.

- **Myth:** It’s only rape if the victim puts up a fight and resists.

**Fact:** Many states do not require the victim to resist in order to charge the offender with rape or sexual assault. Those who do not resist may feel if they do so, they will anger their attacker, resulting in more severe injury. Many assault experts say that victims should trust their instincts and intuition, and do what they believe will most likely keep them alive. Not fighting or resisting an attack does not equal consent.

- **Myth:** Someone can only be sexually assaulted if a weapon was involved.

- **Fact:** In many cases of sexual assault, a weapon is not involved. The offender often uses physical strength, physical violence, intimidation, threats, or a combination of these tactics to overpower the victim. Although the presence of a weapon while committing the assault may result in a higher penalty or criminal charge, the absence of a weapon does not mean that the offender cannot be held criminally responsible for a sexual assault.