

# Men Can Stop Rape

WHY SHOULD MEN CARE ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

*rape: a men's issue*

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## **WHY SHOULD MEN CARE ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE?**

### **Men rape**

The great majority of all sexually violent crimes are committed by males. Even when men are sexually victimized, other men are most often the perpetrators.

### **Men ARE raped**

We don't like to think about it, and we don't like to talk about it, but the fact is that men can also be sexually victimized. Studies show that a staggering 10-20% of all males are sexually violated at some point in their lifetimes. Men are not immune to the epidemic of sexual violence, nor are male survivors safe from the stigma that society attaches to victims of rape. Male survivors are often disbelieved, accused of being gay, or blamed for their own victimization when they report an incident of sexual assault. Frequently, they respond, as do many female survivors, by remaining silent and suffering alone.

### **Rape confines men**

When some men rape, and when 80% of those who are raped know the man who attacked them, it becomes virtually impossible to distinguish men who are safe from men who are dangerous, men who can be trusted from men who can't, men who will rape from men who won't. The result is a society with its guard up, where relationships with men are approached with fear and mistrust, where intimacy is limited by the constant threat of violence, and where all men are labeled "potential rapists."

### **Men know survivors**

At some point in every man's life, someone close to him will likely disclose that they are a survivor of sexual violence and ask for help. Men must be prepared to respond with care, sensitivity, compassion, and understanding. Ignorance on the part of men about the situation of rape and its impact can only hinder the healing process and may even contribute to the survivor's feeling further victimized. A supportive male presence during a survivor's recovery, however, can be invaluable.

### **Men can stop rape!**

Rape is a choice men make to use sex as a weapon for power and control. For rape to stop, men who are violent must be empowered to make different choices. All men can play a vital role in this process by challenging rape supporting attitudes and behaviors and raising awareness about the damaging impact of sexual violence. Every time a man's voice joins those of women in speaking out against rape, the world becomes safer for us all.



**WHEN SOMEONE SAYS, "I WAS RAPED"...**

**BELIEVE them.** It is not your role to question whether a rape occurred but to be there to ease the pain. The fact is that false rape reports are no more nor less common than false reports for other violent crimes.

**HELP them explore their options.** Don't take charge of the situation and pressure the rape survivor to do what you think they should. That's what the rapist did. Give them the freedom to choose a path of recovery that is comfortable for them, even if you'd do it differently. Remember, there is no one right way for a survivor to respond after being assaulted.

**LISTEN to them.** It is crucial that you let survivors in your lives know that they can talk to you about their experience when they are ready. Some may not wish to speak with you immediately, but at some point during the healing process, it is likely that the survivor will come to you for support. When that happens, don't interrupt, or yell, or inject your feelings. Just open your ears to the pain of being raped. Your caring but silent attention will be invaluable.

**NEVER BLAME them for being assaulted.** No one ever deserves to be raped. No matter what they wore, how many times they had sex before, whether they were walking alone at night, whether they got drunk, if they were married, or whether they went up to the perpetrator's room. Even if the survivor feels responsible, say clearly and caringly that being raped wasn't their fault.

**ASK before you touch.** Don't assume that physical contact, even in the form of a gentle touch or hug, will be comforting to a survivor. Many survivors, especially within the first weeks after an assault, prefer to avoid sex or simple touching even by those they love and trust. Be patient, give them the space they need, and try your best not to take it personally. One way to signal to the survivor that you are open to giving physical comfort is to sit with an open posture and a hand palm up nearby.

**RECOGNIZE that you've been assaulted too.** We can't help but be hurt when someone we love is made to suffer. Don't blame yourself for the many feelings you will likely have in response to learning that someone close to you has been raped. Sadness, confusion, anger, helplessness, fear, guilt, disappointment, shock, anxiety, desperation, and compassion are all common reactions for survivors and their significant others. Being aware of these emotions may ultimately help you better understand the survivor's experience and support them more effectively.

**GET HELP for yourself.** Whether you reach out to a friend, family member, counselor, religious official, etc..., make sure you don't go through this experience alone. Most rape crisis centers offer counseling for significant others and family members because they realize that the impact of rape extends far beyond the survivor. Keeping all your feelings inside will only make you less able to be there for the survivor. Remember, getting help when needed is a sign of strength, not weakness.

## **STOPPING RAPE: WHAT MEN CAN DO**

**Be aware of language.** Words are very powerful, especially when spoken by people with power over others. We live in a society in which words are often used to put women down, where calling a girl or woman a "bitch," "freak," "whore," "baby," or "dog" is common. Such language sends a message that females are less than fully human. When we see women as inferior, it becomes easier to treat them with less respect, disregard their rights, and ignore their well-being.

**Communicate.** Sexual violence often goes hand in hand with poor communication. Our discomfort with talking honestly and openly about sex dramatically raises the risk of rape. By learning effective sexual communication -- stating your desires clearly, listening to your partner, and asking when the situation is unclear -- men make sex safer for themselves and others.

**Speak up.** You will probably never see a rape in progress, but you will see and hear attitudes and behaviors that degrade women and promote rape. When your best friend tells a joke about rape, say you don't find it funny. When you read an article that blames a rape survivor for being assaulted, write a letter to the editor. When laws are proposed that limit women's rights, let politicians know that you won't support them. Do anything but remain silent.

**Support survivors of rape.** Rape will not be taken seriously until everyone knows how common it is. In the U.S. alone, more than one million women and girls are raped each year (Rape in America, 1992). By learning to sensitively support survivors in their lives, men can help both women and other men feel safer to speak out about being raped and let the world know how serious a problem rape is.

**Contribute your time and money.** Join or donate to an organization working to prevent violence against women. Rape crisis centers, domestic violence agencies, and men's anti-rape groups count on donations for their survival and always need volunteers to share the workload.

**Talk with women...** about how the risk of being raped affects their daily lives; about how they want to be supported if it has happened to them; about what they think men can do to prevent sexual violence. If you're willing to listen, you can learn a lot from women about the impact of rape and how to stop it.

**Talk with men...** about how it feels to be seen as a potential rapist; about the fact that 10-20% of all males will be sexually abused in their lifetimes; about whether they know someone who's been raped. Learn about how sexual violence touches the lives of men and what we can do to stop it.

**Organize.** Form your own organization of men focused on stopping sexual violence. Men's anti-rape groups are becoming more and more common around the country, especially on college campuses. If you have the time and the drive, it is a wonderful way to make a difference in your community.

**Work against other oppressions.** Rape feeds off many other forms of prejudice -- including racism, homophobia, and religious discrimination. By speaking out against any beliefs and behaviors, including rape, that promote one group of people as superior to another and deny other groups their full humanity, you support everyone's equality.

**Don't ever have sex with anyone against their will!** No matter what. Although statistics show most men never rape, the overwhelming majority of rapists are male. Make a promise to yourself to be a different kind of man -- one who values equality and whose strength is not used for hurting.

rape: a men's issue



## **RACISM AND RAPE: HOW ARE THEY CONNECTED?**

### **BOTH USE WORDS AS WEAPONS**

Rape and racism are grounded in language with a common purpose ? to degrade, dehumanize, and make violence more acceptable. From the time of slavery to the present day, white people have used words ? "nigger," "coon," "spook," "spade" ? to put down black people and undercut their value as human beings. Men, similarly, employ language ? "bitch," "whore," "freak," "baby," "honey," "dog" ? which sends the same demeaning messages to women. Ultimately, hearing these words negatively shapes our view of the people to whom they refer, and when we view others as less than fully human, it becomes easier to hurt and even destroy them. We must recognize the power of our words.

### **BOTH OPPRESS WITH THEIR POWER**

Rape and racism are forms of domination. Rape, through coercion, violation, and violence, forces women and some men to feel intimidated, frightened, and helpless. It makes them think twice about going to the corner store at night and can make them hesitate to trust a lover or friend. Racism also narrows people's worlds and limits people's freedom. It makes a black man avoid browsing in a store for fear of being seen as a thief, or dread that a traffic stop will end in a beating. It makes "us" see a Latino in a white neighborhood as a maid or a gardener. We must open our eyes to the constraining impact of oppression.

### **BOTH FORM THE FABRIC OF OUR NATION**

The United States was built upon racist and sexually violent practices. One need look no further than the founding of our nation as an illustration of both:

A time when Africans were enslaved and forced from their homelands by the millions, when Native Americans were driven west and massacred, and when black women were routinely sexually assaulted by white slave owners. People of color played a vital role in the birth of our country and were rewarded with violation and humiliation. We must know where we come from.

### **BOTH PROMOTE MYTH, NOT FACT**

Our attitudes about race and rape are built upon myth and misinformation. Destructive and inaccurate racial/cultural stereotypes are all too common ? "Latinos are short-tempered," "Asian women are passive," "black men are rapists," "Jews are stingy," "black women are insatiable." Similarly, so are myths about sexual violence and its survivors ? "rape is just rough sex;" "only women are raped;" "if her skirt wasn't so short, she wouldn't have been raped." Sometimes, the myths intertwine ? "most rapes involve a black man violating a white woman" ? reinforcing distorted images of both race and rape. If we are to stop racism and rape, we must learn and speak the truth about them.

### **BOTH FEED ON OUR SILENCE**

Every time we hear a racist joke and say nothing, every time we listen to someone blame a victim of rape and do nothing, every time we pretend that racism and rape are not our problems, they grow stronger. We must speak up and speak out in the face of oppression. It is not easy, but it is essential. Racism and sexism do not have to be passed from generation to generation. Our voices can make the world safer for us all.

## **WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW...**

about men who have been sexually assaulted

Rape is a men's issue for many reasons. One we don't often talk about is the fact that men are sexually assaulted. We need to start recognizing the presence of male survivors and acknowledging their unique experience. The following questions and answers can help us all learn about male survivors so that we stop treating them as invisible and start helping them heal:

### **How often are men sexually assaulted?**

While the numbers vary from study to study, most research suggests that 10-20 percent of all males will be sexually violated at some point in their lifetimes. That translates into tens of thousands of boys and men assaulted each year alongside hundreds of thousands of girls and women.

### **If there are so many male survivors, why don't I know any?**

Like female survivors, most male survivors never report being assaulted, even to people they know and trust. They fear being ignored, laughed at, disbelieved, shamed, accused of weakness, or questioned about being gay. Perhaps worst of all, men fear being blamed for the assault because they were not "man enough" to protect themselves in the face of an attack. For all these reasons, many male survivors remain silent and alone rather than risk further violation by those around them.

### **Can a woman sexually assault a man?**

Yes, but it's not nearly as common as male-on-male assault. A recent study shows that more than 86% of male survivors are sexually abused by another male. That is not to say, however, that we should overlook boys or men who are victimized by females. It may be tempting to dismiss such experiences as wanted sexual initiation (especially in the case of an older female assaulting a younger male), but the reality is that the impact of female-on-male assault can be just as damaging.

### **Don't only men in prison get raped?**

While prison rape is a serious problem and a serious crime, many male survivors are assaulted in everyday environments (at parties, at home, at church, at school, on the playground), often by people they know -- friends, teammates, relatives, teachers, clergy, bosses, partners. As with female survivors, men are also sometimes raped by strangers. These situations tend to be more violent and more often involve a group of attackers rather than a single offender.

### **How does rape affect men differently from women?**

Rape affects men in many ways similar to women. Anxiety, anger, sadness, confusion, fear, numbness, self-blame, helplessness, hopelessness, suicidal feelings and shame are common reactions of both male and female survivors. In some ways, though, men react uniquely to being sexually assaulted. Immediately after an assault, men may show more hostility and aggression rather than tearfulness and fear. Over time, they may also question their sexual identity, act out in a sexually aggressive manner, and even downplay the impact of the assault.



**Don't men who get raped become rapists?**

NO! This is a destructive myth that often adds to the anxiety a male survivor feels after being assaulted. Because of this misinformation, it is common for a male survivor to fear that he is now destined to do to others what was done to him. While many convicted sex offenders have a history of being sexually abused, most male survivors do not become offenders. The truth is that the great majority of male survivors have never and will never sexually assault anyone.

**If a man is raped by another man, does it mean he's gay?**

NO, again! While gay men can be raped (often by straight men), a man getting raped by another man says nothing about his sexual orientation before the assault, nor does it change his sexual orientation afterwards. Rape is primarily prompted by anger or a desire to harm, intimidate or dominate, rather than by sexual attraction or a rapist's assumption about his intended victim's sexual preference. Because of society's confusion about the role that attraction plays in sexual assault and about whether victims are responsible for provoking an assault, even heterosexual male survivors may worry that they somehow gave off "gay vibes" that the rapist picked up and acted upon. For a gay man, especially one who is not yet out of the closet, the possibility that he is broadcasting his "secret sexual identity" to others without even knowing it can be particularly upsetting.

**How should I respond if a man I know tells me he has been assaulted?**

While there may be some differences in how rape impacts a male versus a female survivor of sexual assault, the basics of supporting survivors are the same for men as for women. Believe him. Know what your community's resources are and help him explore his options. Don't push and don't blame. Ask him what he wants and listen. Be cautious about physical contact until he's ready. Get help for yourself.

**Where can male survivors go for help?**

Every community has its own services for survivors of sexual violence, including local or campus-based rape crisis centers. Most of these places have on-site counselors trained in working with male survivors or can refer men who have been assaulted to professionals in the area who can help. Know the resources in your area so you will be prepared to help male survivors heal.

SOURCE: [www.MenCanStopRape.org](http://www.MenCanStopRape.org)

## would you like to join KU's "Men Can Stop Rape"?

- Visit: [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/mcsr\\_ku/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/mcsr_ku/)
- Email: [mencanstoprape@yahoo.com](mailto:mencanstoprape@yahoo.com)
- Come to one of our Thursday meetings in the Kansas Union:

### Spring Semester, 2003

March 13:	International Room
March 27:	International Room
April 10:	Alcove C
April 24:	International Room
May 8:	International Room

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