

# Sexual Assault

## Topic Brief

Sexual assault is any sexual contact or behaviour towards an individual that occurs without their consent. Consent is open communication; it is a clear, verbal, unambiguous, affirming yes from all participating parties. Consent is invalid under circumstances, including but not limited to, silence, passiveness, lack of resistance, immobility, coercion, pressure, intimidation, or incapacitation due to drugs or alcohol. Consent cannot be simply assumed because of one's clothing or flirting and it must be given every time. If no consent is given, any interaction that ensues is sexual assault, or rape. Approximately 1 out of 5 women and 1 out of 71 men will be raped in their lives. The aftermath of sexual assault for victims are disastrous, including the development of mental health problems, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression and suicidal thoughts, and many victims are unable to maintain healthy functional relationships with family and friends. These social effects on individuals are long-term and does not simply end after the sexual assault. Recently, a global movement targeting sexual harassment and assault has spread virally throughout the world with the rise of the hashtag #MeToo. This was popularized by celebrities who began to share their experiences about sexual harassment and abuse on social media in October 2017. The movement's mission is to give a voice to survivors and end sexual harassment and violence. Emerged in September 2018 in response to Dr. Christine Blasey-Ford's accusations against Associate Justice of the Supreme Court Brett Kavanaugh that he had sexually assaulted her in 1982 is the hashtag #BelieveSurvivors. #BelieveSurvivors attempts to element "rape culture" - an environment where rape and sexual violence are normalized and excused in the media and popular culture. Victim blaming is extremely common and often makes it difficult for the victim to report the abuse as it marginalizes them. In order to eliminate sexual assault and harassment, it is important that we educate ourselves about consent and treat everyone with respect and compassion.

## Discussion Questions

1. Victims of sexual assault tend to dislike discussing their experiences due to victim blaming and shame. What is one way we can approach and support them without causing them to feel emotional disturbance?
2. How can children starting from a young age be taught consent?
3. Realistically, what preventative measures can you take to protect yourself to avoid a potentially dangerous situation?

### Activities: "What are you wearing?" campaign

[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/powerful-art-exhibit-powerfully-answers-the-question-what-were-you-wearing\\_us\\_59baddd2e4bo2da0e1405d2a](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/powerful-art-exhibit-powerfully-answers-the-question-what-were-you-wearing_us_59baddd2e4bo2da0e1405d2a)

<https://www.scarymommy.com/victim-blaming-what-were-you-wearing-exhibit/>

Some people believe that sexual assault has to do with clothing and can simply be prevented if victims had dressed in a more conservative manner (showing less skin/wearing less revealing clothing).

What do you think? Is it the victim's fault for choosing what they want to wear? Does sexual assault even have to do with clothing?

