

CONVERSATION GUIDE:

CONSENT & BOUNDARIES

Teaching college-aged young adults how to protect themselves and others from sexual harassment, assault, coercion, and misconduct – and how to make a report in case of an unsafe situation.

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AS PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS, WE STRIVE TO KEEP OUR CHILDREN SAFE.

When our children get ready to go to college, we talk to them about setting up dorm rooms, studying, eating healthy food, choosing the right coursework, locking doors, and so much more. We talk about the easy and comfortable topics. However, we often avoid the topics that are difficult and uncomfortable. While it may be difficult to talk about, sexual abuse, harassment, coercion, and assault are very real problems on college campuses. It is estimated that **1 in 5 women** and **1 in 16 men** will be sexually assaulted while at college, and a recent study has revealed that even authority figures can and do perpetrate sexual assault and coercion. It may help to start this important conversation by emphasizing the importance of safety, paving the way for an open and honest discussions about the real dangers of sexual misconduct on college campuses.



DID YOU KNOW?

One in five women and one in 16 men are sexually assaulted while in college, and nearly two-thirds of college students experience sexual harassment.

Source: National Sexual Violence Resource Center

IT IS IMPORTANT TO EMPOWER YOUR CHILD WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS, PERSONAL BOUNDARIES, AND THE MEANING OF CONSENT.

Discuss these important concepts with your child. Emphasize that they have the personal power to make decisions about their bodies and they have the right to have these decisions be respected.

Healthy Relationship: In a healthy relationship there is balance of power where healthy boundaries are protected. The relationship is positive, rational, productive, and supportive.

Unhealthy Relationship: In an unhealthy relationship there is an imbalance of power that results in one person being controlled and manipulated by another person. Personal boundaries are not respected which results in a destructive and negative relationship.

Personal Boundaries: Personal boundaries are the guidelines or limits you create to protect yourself and to stay safe. In healthy relationships, personal boundaries are respected.

Understanding the concept of consent is critically important. Consent is a concept we deal with every day. You may give consent to meet for

lunch or to provide a ride to class. Consent is intentional, mutual, and respected. Your child needs to fully understand the meaning of consent as it relates to relationships and sex.

Consent: Consent is when an affirmative answer is given and received. There is a mutual understanding of what is being agreed upon. It cannot be the result of force, coercion, or intimidation. You may have heard the saying “No means No”. But when you think about consent it is actually “**Yes means Yes**”. A person must willingly and freely give consent to the sexual act. If a person is under the influence of drugs or alcohol they cannot give consent. Consent can be withdrawn at any time. Past consent does not provide current or future consent. It is very important to fully understand all elements of consent.

Drugs and Alcohol: Drugs and alcohol can significantly impact making healthy and safe choices. When someone is intoxicated and/or incapacitated their ability to protect themselves and their personal boundaries is diminished. A person cannot give an affirmative answer when under the influence. They cannot give consent.

When students arrive on campus, they often begin to develop friendships. Forming healthy relationships is very important. However, students must proceed with caution. There can be a false sense of security that all of your new acquaintances will lead to positive friendships. In fact, most sexual assaults on college campuses are perpetrated by acquaintances of the victim. Help your child remember to take the time for these new friends to earn their trust.

Having a safety plan is essential. Your child may find themselves in an unsafe or uncomfortable situation with a peer or authority figure. Discuss safety strategies for personal protection in advance. Encourage your child to discuss safety plans with their college friends.

- Have a plan before you go out. Make sure someone knows where you are, who you are with, where you are going, and how to contact you.
- If you go to a party, go with people you know and trust. Make a plan to watch out for each other and to leave together. Never leave anyone in an unsafe or unfamiliar location.
- Be prepared. Memorize important phone numbers in case your phone dies. Have some emergency cash with you in case you can't use a credit card.
- Stay in groups. There is safety in numbers. Friends need to look out for each other. If you are worried that a friend might make an unsafe decision or is impaired and unable to make safe decisions, intervene! Do not stand by – speak up.

- Trust your instincts. If something doesn't seem or feel right, it probably isn't.
- Stay in public places with people you know and trust.
- If going to meet with an authority figure alone – a professor, TA, coach, mentor, advisor, internship supervisor, etc. – be sure to meet on campus and in a public place.
- Practice ways to say “no” in situations that may make you feel uncomfortable. “My roommate is expecting me, I've got to get going;” “I don't feel comfortable doing that;” “That's crossing a line for me, I'm going to leave now;” “I would like to keep our relationship professional.”

Play the “What if” game with your child to help them think what they may do in various situations that begin to cross boundaries or feel unsafe. This way, you can help coach them to make safe decisions and they already have a plan in mind of what they can do to stay safe and maintain their boundaries.

Healthy relationships are important both in person and digitally. It can be very tempting to freely give others access to our social media platforms. However, it is important to remember the same precautions you would take in person, need to be taken digitally.

- Check privacy settings
- Avoid posting times and locations of your activities
- Be cautious about the pictures you post

DID YOU KNOW?

Athletes are 2.5x likely to suffer abuse by a campus authority figure – and more than 1 in 4 current and former college athletes say they endured inappropriate sexual contact from an authority figure, most often a male professor or coach.

Source: K. Cyphers, 2021, *Campus Sex Abuse by Authority Figures*





EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO BE SAFE AND HAVE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS.

Unfortunately, unhealthy relationships, sexual assaults, and sexual harassment happen. It is so important to seek help if it happens to you or someone you know. Be aware of the resources available on your child's campus. Most campuses have medical resources, law enforcement, a Health and Wellness Center, and information on community resources. It is estimated that more than 90% of sexual assaults go unreported. Emphasize to your child that it is not their fault if they become a victim. They have the power to seek help.

TITLE IX

All colleges have a responsibility to promptly and effectively respond to issues of sexual abuse and sexual harassment. Your child's school is required to publish and distribute their Title IX policies and how to file a complaint. Students can also contact the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, at (800) 421-3481 or ocr@ed.gov.

Every School Must Have And Distribute A Policy Against Sex Discrimination

- Title IX requires that each school publish a policy that it does not discriminate on the basis of sex in its education programs and activities. This notice must be widely distributed and available on an on-going basis.
- The policy must state that inquiries concerning Title IX may be referred to the school's Title IX coordinator or to U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights.

Every School Must Have a Title IX Coordinator

- Every school must designate at least one employee who is responsible for coordinating the school's compliance with Title IX. This person is sometimes referred to as the Title IX coordinator. Schools must notify all students and employees of the name or title and contact information of the Title IX coordinator.
- The coordinator's responsibilities include overseeing all complaints of sex discrimination and identifying and addressing any patterns or systemic problems that arise during the review of such complaints.

If your child's school is not complying with Title IX rules, contact the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights.

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