

Tips for Talking with Teens About Sexual Assault

The teens years are ones of exploration, boundary-testing, and learning for both teens and parents. As teens form their first romantic relationships, they are often in uncharted territory. They are balancing the values shared by you as a parent with the opinions and actions of friends and the media. Teens are vulnerable – open communication is critical to creating a safe environment where teens can talk about concerns and ask questions.

- Understand and communicate that sexual assault is more than rape. Sexual assault is ANY type of unwanted sexual contact. This includes threats and harassment – sexual assault is not restricted to physical contact.
- Help your teen understand that everyone has the right to decide what they do or don't want to do sexually. Talk with your teen regularly about their rights and personal safety and encourage them to let you know if anyone is doing something that makes him/her feel uncomfortable.
- Most sexual assault victims (75%) know their perpetrator. Talk with your teen about appropriate boundaries. Help your teen understand to trust their “gut” if situation feels uncomfortable or unsafe. Just because someone is a friend, teacher, coach, mentor or other role model does not mean that unwanted behavior is okay.
- Understand the role of social media in your teen’s life – Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc. are all ways teens engage in relationships. Know who your teen considers a friend both at school and online and watch these interactions.
- Sexual assaults often involve alcohol or drugs – by the victim, assailant or both. Talk with your teen about how to recognize and avoid unsafe situations.
- Empower your teen to say “no” to situations that do not feel comfortable – such as an adult wanting to spend unnecessary time alone with them; inviting them to sleepovers; or creating reasons to see the teen. If your teen says no to a situation, support their decision and encourage them to talk about their concerns.
- If your teen suddenly shows changes in behavior, share your concern. Changes could include suddenly missing school, quitting a sport/club/activity, etc.
- Watch for changes in your teen’s use of technology and social media – are they suddenly receiving texts from numbers you don’t know? Are they engaging in online chats more frequently? Is there an increase in posts from Facebook/MySpace friends who are adults?
- If your teen discloses inappropriate behavior by an adult – believe them and support them.

WEAVE’s mission is to bring an end to domestic violence and sexual assault in partnership with our community.

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