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PASSAGES, INC

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Edited by Tia Marie DeShong



Education and Sexual Violence Response

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By Tia Marie DeShong

When most people think about preventing sexual violence, they imagine rape whistles, mace, and self-defense training. These are the tools we use to equip ourselves against sexual violence and they are tools that are primarily marketed toward women. Conventional advice from average citizens regarding preventing sexual violence focuses on the actions of the would be victim -- don't go home at night, don't walk home alone, don't drink too much, don't wear this or that, don't lead him on, don't send mixed signals, don't go to this part of town or to that party, don't look weak, don't let him make you a victim. *Don't. Don't. Don't.*

Unsurprisingly, that conventional wisdom about preventing sexual violence doesn't work too well. And, what's more, it puts the onus on preventing sexual violence on the victim with the added implication that if something happens to you, it is your fault. Short skirts don't cause rape. Drinking too much doesn't cause rape. Walking home alone at night doesn't cause rape. Rapist cause rape and they do so regardless of whether the victim is young or old, poor or rich, black or white, female or male. Victim blaming -- holding a victim of a crime either partially or fully responsible for the crime committed against them -- is a logic that is pervasive yet toxic, and it isn't difficult to see how fallacious it is when we consider that most victims of sexual violence are

children. Most female victims of rape were first raped before the age of 25, almost half before the age of 18. 30% were raped when they were between 11 and 17 years old. 27.8% of men were first raped when they were under 10. Most would consider it grossly unfair and traumatizing to ask an 8 year-old-girl what she did to provoke the sexual violence against her; to ask a 30 year-old-woman the same question is equally as cruel.

So, if conventional prevention strategies not only do not do a good job of preventing crime, but also unfairly shifts responsibility from the perpetrator to victim, what can we do to prevent sexual violence? Enter: PASSAGES prevention educators.

Our prevention education programs are designed to introduce age-appropriate topics regarding sexual violence to students ranging from pre-school up through the university level and to community members at large. Part of our aim is awareness - you can't help solve a problem whose specific realization you do not fully understand -- and part of our aim is practical; we offer honest information to students about an array of issues ranging from boundaries, bystander intervention, bullying, internet safety, dating violence, drug-facilitated sexual assault, healthy relationships, etc. We have found that teaching a young man about consent is a much more useful way to prevent sexual assault than telling a young women

how to fend off an attacker.

Whereas the old advice was a series of *don't, don't, don'ts*, our prevention education programs offer, instead, some *dos*: do get consent, do respect boundaries, do make your intentions clear, do intervene when you worry that someone may be in trouble. *Do, do, do.* An added bonus is that our programs are totally free for community members, making them much cheaper and more practical than a rape whistle.

Within the pages of our autumn 2017 newsletter, you will find more information about the importance of teaching personal safety at school to children, a personal account from a university student about how campuses could do more to inform and educate students, some bystander intervention tips, and some closing thoughts on the inanity of our fear of "false accusations" of rape. Our hope in this, our back-to-school issue, is that we can make you begin to think seriously about what our schools are doing to protect our students and, if they can do more, to encourage you to demand better. Children don't stay children forever; they grow up into adults. How we talk to them now about bodily autonomy, respect, and consent can positively (or negatively) transform their views on the matter for years to come. If nothing else -- men and women under the age of 25 are at the highest risk for sexual violence. If you thought there was something -- *anything* -- you could tell your child to protect them, you would, wouldn't you?

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Teaching Personal Safety to Children At School

By Marlene Austin

A child should know that when they go to school, they will learn. A child should also know that when they go to school, they will be kept safe. Children are taught about many different types of "safety." They learn about fire safety, bicycle safety, stranger safety, etc. Just like all of these, we should be teaching our children about personal safety.

Personal safety is teaching children how to keep their bodies safe against sexual abuse. As parents, we can begin teaching children about boundaries at a very young age. We can teach children that their bodies belong to only them. We can teach children "The Touching Rule" where

no one should ever touch private parts of their bodies, unless it is to keep them clean or healthy. If someone would break that rule, they need to tell a grown-up they trust.

Between 85%-90% of the time, our children are sexually abused by someone known to them and about one-half of these times the perpetrator is of relation to the family. Sometimes children are so afraid to tell a parent because of this. This is why we feel it is vitally important to not only teach our children at home, but also reinforce this to them in schools.

PASSAGES, Inc. educators provide an outstanding platform for children to be able to disclose sexual abuse to them or another

adult at school or at home. Children can feel safe to provide the information to us or someone at school. We reinforce to the children that if this happens it is not their fault and they *are* believed. We explain to children that it is not ever okay to keep secrets about this "unsafe" touching.

It is vital for all children to be taught about personal safety with their bodies, and we here at PASSAGES, Inc. can help. If you would like to schedule programs at your school, organization, or day care facility, please call us at (814)226-7273 or (814)371-9677 and ask to speak to one of our prevention educators.



PASSAGES, Inc. staff and volunteers get together to paint inspiring rocks to hide in the community.

Disappearing Childhood

By Robin McMillen

Flying kites, roller skating, catching fireflies, building clubhouses, and horseback riding were all activities I enjoyed when I was younger. Times have changed. Flying kites have been replaced by video games and pick-up games of baseball in neighborhoods are on the endangered list. Although interests have changed over the past decades, the innocence of childhood should never be jeopardized. Children should be able to dream, play, explore, and experience a healthy childhood -- a childhood from which they should not have to recover for years to come.

It seems to be a rarity to listen to the news without a reference to some sort of child abuse. A baby may have been neglected, a toddler physically abused or a teenager sexually assaulted by a neighbor. These are all exam-

ples of Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACEs. A study conducted between the years of 1995 and 1997, involving over 17,000 participants, revealed a startling and unsettling fact: ACEs are *very* common. Nearly 60% of individuals studied experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse as children. Almost 25% experienced emotional or physical neglect. ACEs are associated with risky health behaviors in childhood and adolescence. Unaddressed trauma is associated with a wide range of health and social problems that can carry into adulthood. ACEs accounted for a 20-70% increase in the likelihood of alcohol use in mid-adolescence (15-17). People with ACEs were 7 to 10 fold more likely to report illicit drug use problems, addiction to illicit drugs, and intravenous drug use. Physical and verbal abuse were found to be

associated with body weight and obesity and exposure to ACEs is associated with an increased risk of depressive disorders for up to decades after their occurrence. We see the impact of ACEs in our communities and the social problems that plague us, including in the methamphetamine and heroine crises as well as in our growing need for mental healthcare. Childhood trauma is not just detrimental to the child; it is dangerous for society at large.

The problem can seem overwhelming and it is easy to feel defeated in the battle before we even enter. The good news is we can all make a difference. The first step in helping abused or neglected children is learning the signs of abuse. Look for extreme and unexplainable changes in a child's behavior. Are they unusually quiet or withdrawn? Are they experiencing changes in sleeping patterns or school performance? Is a usually well-behaved child

suddenly acting out or engaging in risk-taking behavior? While the indicators of physical abuse may seem obvious, there are a whole host of other signs to become aware of in an effort to help protect our children. As always, if you suspect child abuse, you should make a report to the PA ChildLine by calling **1-800-932-0313** or by going online to <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis>.

Our children owe it to us to keep them safe and help them feel supported and loved. Don't just watch for the signs of child abuse, help behave as a positive role model for children in your community. Be the one to toss the baseball or fix a bicycle flat tire. Listen to children when they tell their stories and answer their questions -- even if they have many. Helping children is being there for children and it takes a whole community to make that possible.

The Truth About Sexual Violence on Campus

By Amy Couslin, PASSAGES Intern

Four years ago when I got dropped off in front of my campus housing, I was given the usual "freshmen talk" by my mom. Don't talk to strangers, don't walk around at night time, if you do make sure you are always with someone, and whatever you do don't leave your drink unattended. Then I had a similar talk with campus administration on the weekend before classes, during orientation weekend -- except this time, the talk was very brief. University officials' main focus seemed to be how getting an underage can ruin your career later in life and how our campus was a dry campus. They never mentioned that I was a statistic, that, as an incoming freshman, I was now entering the "red zone," a period of time in the freshmen's life where they are at heightened risk for experiencing sexual violence. Because of this, I never knew the right precautions to take and I also never knew what the campus or judicial system steps were if I was raped. I was, however, well-informed

on each step of the process if I were caught at a party with a beer.

Although I am fortunate enough to never have been raped, it is very common. I wish I could say the high rate of sexual assault on campuses shocks me, but I would be lying if I did. Many campus administrators tell incoming freshmen lies and many parents of those students are misinformed on what a sexual assault on campus actually looks like. When we think of rape we may imagine a girl walking late at night and being grabbed aggressively into bushes where she is assaulted and then left there to never see her assailant again. This situation may in fact happen but, it is actually more common for the survivor to know their assailant. In fact, because of the lack of judicial progress with sexual assaults, a survivor could possibly have to sit next to her assailant in class for the rest of the semester or see him/her down the hall for the rest of the year. It is actually more common for the assault to happen in campus housing than it is

walking home alone at night. Victim's are not always female, either.

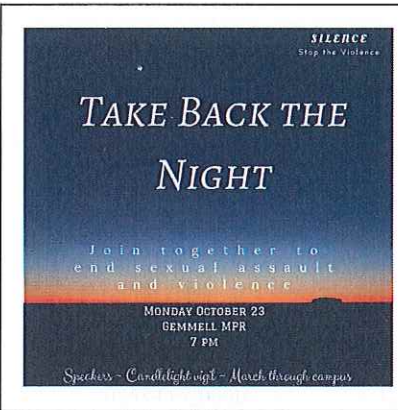
When someone asks me why universities don't tell incoming freshman about these misconceptions and realities surrounding sexual assault, I struggle to find an answer. I don't know if I qualify to answer this. But I do know that what I can do is try my best to educate and prevent sexual assault on campuses in any way I can.

I am happy to say I am able to volunteer with PASSAGES while I am here in Clarion. This organization has opened my eyes to a lot of issues that I personally face while being a college student. I am now able to educate students/parents/family members on issues I was never aware of. It's important that those who know the truth speak up and educate. I can now say for certain I will forever be an advocate for survivors of sexual assault and I can only hope one day college campus administrators decide to do the same.



Thanks, again, to everyone who came out to our 2017 Funny Fundraiser!

Did You Know?
Over 80% of college students do not formally report sexual assault to school authorities.



What's Happening?

- Join us Monday, October 23 at 7pm for Take Back the Night at Clarion University!
- On Friday, October 27, we will be at Penn State Dubois Fall Family Fun Night. There will be activities for kids, safe trick-or-treating, and a movie screening at 7pm. Doors open at 4!

False Accusations

By Tia Marie DeShong



Volunteer training for fall 2017 is under way in Clearfield and Clarion counties! Want to join us in the spring? Contact us today!

Without fail, the largest concern members of the general public have regarding sexual violence is the notion of "false reporting." It is not uncommon, in our line of work, to have to spend a substantial amount of time explaining to someone that, despite their concern, false accusations of rape *are exceedingly rare*. People believe that false accusations of rape are common largely because of uninformed word-of-mouth testimonials that do more harm than good.

Reliable studies put the number of false accusations of rape somewhere between 2% and 8%. Not only is that number low, it is comparable with false accusations of other violent crimes (whose numbers also range between 2-10%). That said, it is hard to come up with a precise estimate on the prevalence of false reporting of rape in the U.S. because those cases are often conflated with non-prosecuted cases and that is not the same thing.

There are many reasons why a sexual assault case may not be prosecuted. Frequently, victims decide not to move forward with the case because they are unwilling to endure the uphill battle that is a sexual assault trial. It is not a fun thing to sit on the witness stand and recount for a room full of strangers what was possibly the most traumatic moment of your life. Add to the mix the fact that there is a defense attorney in the room

whose job is to poke holes in your story and question your testimony. Keep in mind, also, that the decision to prosecute lies with the DA's office and that she, for many reasons, may elect not to move forward with the case as well. In either instance, just because a rape allegation does not move through the court system does not mean, in any uncertain terms, that the assault did not occur. Yet, these instances are usually conflated with false accusations in crime reporting data and those cases drive-up false accusation numbers.

Many people, in an attempt to elucidate the importance of stopping false reports, will use real world examples: *I know a guy who was accused of rape by this girl who was lying. It totally ruined his life.* My question for that person is always a bit personal: how do you know the girl was lying? How do you know your friend is innocent? If you friend has been accused of sexual violence, it is not a good idea to assume that the alleged victim must be lying because you know your friend and *he would never do that*. While we tend to have socially-constructed images of what sexual violence perpetrators look like (and those images are often tied to racism and other forms of oppression), there is no prototypical perpetrator. What's more, perpetrators are often very good at hiding their true identities and adopting good public personas. This is especially true in regards to those

who target children. It is impossible to gain access to a would-be-victim if you look and behave like you may be dangerous. Instead, those who commit crimes are often the ones who friends and family describe as trustworthy and sincere. Just because your friend doesn't look like the creepy stranger lurking in the bushes, doesn't mean that he is innocent-as-charged.

Most rape accusations are delayed, if they are ever reported at all. The problem with rape isn't that it is being over-reported, it is that it is being under-reported, primarily because victims are reluctant to face scrutiny from a public that is disinclined to believe them. Rape culture thrives on the idea that most allegations of rape are false. This idea allows rapists to fly under the radar (and reach more victims) and it prevents those who may be stopped from committing violence crimes from listening to and learning from information regarding boundaries and consent. Overall, a tendency to disbelieve victims makes our communities less safe and terrorizes victims who are worthy of our support. Not only are those who insist on mentioning false rape accusations wrong, they are also preventing others from keeping their communities safe at large.



A big thanks to Clarion MMA for teaching us self-defense techniques at our August 2017 Rape and Abduction Prevention Seminar.



Volunteers-in-training hung signs to challenge rape culture and show support for survivors. Have you spotted any?

If you or someone you know needs to speak
with a counselor,
we are available 24/7.
Call us toll-free at:
1-800-793-3620



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