



IT'S TIME ... TO TALK ABOUT IT!
Talk early, talk often. Prevent sexual violence.

A Call to Action: Ending Sexual Violence in Our Community

Consider this: in the United States, one in six women will be the victim of attempted or completed rape in their lifetime. One in three globally. Next time you're at the movie theater or at church, in a restaurant or at a school function, at a meeting or a conference – look around you. Survivors of sexual violence are everywhere. They are our mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, friends, and neighbors. And so are perpetrators of sexual violence. Because the truth is, while stranger rape DOES happen, more often the offender is a family member, friend or acquaintance – someone the victim trusts.

Does that make you uncomfortable? As a mother, it makes me uncomfortable. But ending sexual violence is not a “comfortable” effort. It means breaking the silence that makes it so easy for perpetrators to victimize and re-victimize the people we love. It means allowing survivors to have a voice and listening to their stories, no matter how hard it is to hear. Believe me, it was harder for them to live through it than it is for us to listen to it. Most victims of sexual assault will never tell their story. They feel ashamed and scared. They don't think anyone will believe them because, in many cases, it's hard for them to believe. For instance, consider a little girl raped by her uncle. How confusing it must be to struggle with violence at the hands of someone you love? How often has a survivor said “I couldn't believe this was happening to me?”

And sexual predators know that their victims won't be believed. They count on it. Consider this: sexual predators CHOOSE victims. They seek out victims who they know will lack credibility and who are vulnerable. Imagine a criminal who assaults a child or a nursing home resident or a person who is physically or mentally disabled? Does that make you angry? And yet, victim blaming is rampant in cases of sexual assault. We, as a community, are horrified when we hear about a grandmother who was brutally raped. But we question a college student who'd had a few drinks or was wearing a short skirt. The crime is the same. What makes our attitude so different?

Today, now, consider that the first step to ending sexual violence in our community is to ACCEPT that sexual violence is happening every day and to HEAR the voices of its victims. ACCEPT that the stories you hear will make you uncomfortable. They will make you cry. They will make you angry. But in hearing them, you will open your eyes to what is real and really happening. And when you see signs or sexual violence, you will be able to take action.

Amy Rivers

Program Coordinator for the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners of Otero & Lincoln County

Mother, Daughter, Sister, Friend