

What Men Can Do To Help

By Paul Richards

Every guy, including you, has girls and women in his life he cares deeply about: daughters, sisters, moms, wives, girlfriends, friends. If you truly care about the women in YOUR life, then you should also care about the threat of sexual abuse and sexual assault that faces them every single day.

Stopping sexual assault has generally been focused on getting girls and women to change the way they conduct their daily lives in order to reduce risk: not walking alone, watching how they dress, even carrying pepper spray. But real, long-term change won't happen until guys stand up and challenge the attitudes and behaviors that put down and degrade women.

Most guys will never commit sexual abuse, yet men are responsible for the huge majority of sexual abuse and sexual assault. The women you care about -- and your kids -- should live and grow up in a society where male violence against women is not acceptable. Not legally, not morally, not socially.

Guys need to become part of the solution instead of just being the problem. It's time for men to show they can join women as allies in the struggle to end sexual assault, simply by doing things that will change the way guys act.

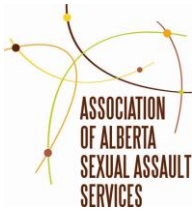
The next step involves "paying it forward" and encouraging other guys -- your sons, brothers, nephews, buddies, classmates, teammates -- to do the same thing, every day. Whatever you do, you'll be making a difference and helping to stop sexual abuse and sexual assault:

Define your own manhood. Real strength is all about character and commitment to yourself and others. Decide for yourself what kind of man you want to be.

Walk the walk. Be a role model to other guys who look up to you. When you're with them, always behave in ways that reflect your own values. You can mentor the boys and teens in your life about how to become men of strong morals and character in healthy, positive ways that don't involve degrading or abusing girls and women.

Watch your language. Guys often use words that put women down: calling a woman a "bitch," "bag," "ho" or "baby" is common. That kind of language tells both men and women that women are inferior. Eventually, it becomes easier for men to treat women with less respect and to ignore their rights as human beings.

Talk it over with guys. Most men don't think of sexual assault as their issue, so get them talking about it. Ask: how would they feel if their sister, girlfriend or female friend was sexually assaulted? Tell your



buddies that when women are walking down the street, entering their car, their home or some other building alone and they encounter a man or several men, they often perceive those men as potential sexual abusers. Ask them how it feels to be perceived that way. And ask them about whether they know someone who's experienced sexual assault at some point in their life. The chances are high that they do.

Take note of pop culture's messages. You're surrounded by movies, television, music, magazines and video games that sometimes communicate harmful or stereotypical messages about relationships and what it takes to be a "real man." These messages can degrade women and blur the line between sex and violence. Be critical of these images and messages; challenge yourself to resist them. Don't let them influence your own behavior.

Speak up! You'll probably never see a sexual assault in progress, but you'll definitely see and hear men display attitudes and behaviors that are disrespectful to women and support the culture of sexual abuse. When your buddy, brother, classmate or teammate tells a joke that degrades women, don't be passive or remain silent. Say that you don't find it funny.

Look out for friends. When you're at a party or pub, be aware of how your male friends are interacting with the women around them. It's a myth that alcohol use and intoxication, either by the perpetrator or the victim, causes sexual assault, but it's true that drinking is used as an excuse for it. So, watch for indicators of sexually predatory behaviour in your buddies, and intervene if it's necessary.

Get educated. Talk to women about sexual assault. Most women can tell you how the constant threat of sexual assault affects the way they go about their daily lives. A woman in your life may also tell you about how she'd want to be supported if sexual assault ever happened to her. If you're willing to listen, you can learn a lot! Most women in your life will seriously appreciate your interest in this topic, and your willingness to get involved.

Make every day Father's Day. If you're a dad, you can be a role model of positive masculinity for your son by treating everyone with respect and dignity. You and he can talk about what caring, respectful relationships with women look like, and what "consent" means when it comes to sex. As a dad, you can support your son's involvement in programs that help them develop healthy masculinity.

Communicate! Poor communication can contribute to sexual violence. When you state your desires clearly, listen to your partner and ask whenever the situation is unclear, you're making sex better and safer for yourself and for her. If your partner is drunk or high, she can't consent to having sex, so back off and WAIT until you're both ready to say 'yes' with enthusiasm.

Show your strength. Make a promise to yourself to be a man who defines his own masculinity by respecting women and valuing equality. Use your strength to build others up, not tear them down. Lead by example. You'll be noticed!