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American Indian & Alaska Native Sexual Assault Awareness

What is Sexual Assault?

There is no single definition or form of sexual assault. Sexual assault can happen to anybody and is any type of unwanted touching or sexual action.¹ Sexual assault occurs when an individual is forced, coerced, or tricked into any form of sexual activity or contact.¹ Sexual assault can occur by a stranger, an acquaintance, or one's partner, and may take a variety of forms — from rape to a stranger sexually harassing someone in public.² It is any form of sexual activity or contact that a person does not consent to and is often used to assert power and control.² Sexual assault is one form of harassment or sexual violence that a person may experience.¹

Forms of sexual violence may include:¹

- Rape or sexual assault
- Incest, or sexual touching/activity between related individuals, often a child and adult
- Sexual assault by a person's partner
- Unwanted sexual touching
- Sexual harassment or teasing
- Sexual exploitation or trafficking
- Exposing oneself to other(s) without consent
- Sending revealing photos without consent
- Masturbating in public
- Watching someone engage in sexual activity without consent
- Sharing photos of another person without their consent



AI/AN Sexual Assault Awareness

Prior to contact with Europeans, Native communities tended to act in equality and hold views in which women actively participated and performed a vital role in the survival of the community.³ However, Europeans violently forced AI/AN peoples from their homelands, forced them to assimilate to European culture, and threatened physical and cultural erasure.⁴ Violence against Native peoples is rooted in European colonization and oppression.⁵ Sexual assault is one tactic used by Europeans to take control over AI/AN women, who currently face the highest rates of sexual assault across the United States.⁴

- AI/AN peoples are **2.5 times more likely** to experience rape or sexual assault than any other race/ethnicity.⁶
- **56%** of AI/AN women have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime.⁵
- **28%** of AI/AN men have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime.⁵
- According to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, **65%** of those who identify as American Indian and transgender have been sexually assaulted.⁷
- AI/AN women are **2.5 times more likely** to lack access to crucial sexual violence services.⁸



What is Consent?

Sex or inappropriate touching without consent is sexual assault.⁹ Consent is a mutual, ongoing, and enthusiastic agreement between partners to engage in any form of sexual activity or touching.¹⁰ It is OK not to want to engage in some or all sexual activities, and it is important to have open and honest communication with your partner about it. You get to choose what you want and what happens with your body. To participate in consensual sexual activity, all partners must explicitly and freely give consent, meaning that they are enthusiastic and not coerced or under the influence of drugs or alcohol in any way.¹¹ As opposed to affirmative consent, "implied consent" is based on behavior or past actions or words and is not appropriate consent.¹¹ Additionally, consent can be withdrawn at any point and for any reason.¹¹

What May Consent Look Like?¹²

- Confirming that there is reciprocal interest and excitement before initiating any physical touch.
- Letting your partner know that you can stop at any time.
- Asking permission before changing type of or degree of sexual activity. You might use a phrase like, "Is this OK?"
- Checking in throughout the activity by asking your partner, "Is this still OK?"
- Explicitly agreeing to certain activities by saying, "Yes."

What Does Consent NOT Look Like?¹²

- Anyone under the legal age of consent cannot give consent (age of consent varies by state).
- A person who is unresponsive or under the influence of drugs or alcohol cannot give consent.
- Consent elicited through persuasion or coerced by pressure, fear, or intimidation.
- Assumption of consent based on activities you have done or consent you have received in the past
- "No" or "Stop"
- "Maybe later"
- No response or silence

*Please note these are examples and do not necessarily depict all ways consent may be given or not given

Signs for Teens to Know

More than 40% of AI/AN youth experience two or more acts of violence by the time they are 18 years old.¹³ Sexual assault is not a tradition in American Indian culture and was a practice introduced by colonization. Some common phrases teens may hear or behaviors you may see include, but are not limited to:¹⁴

- "But we have to have sex; we are dating, aren't we?"
- "You snagged me last time, why is it different now?"
- "But condoms don't feel right."
- Trends at schools, like grabbing each other, are common and they cross boundaries. Even if people think it is funny, it does not mean it is OK.
- Someone giving you drugs or alcohol.
- Unknown friends on social media harassing you, asking you to send photos, sending photos, etc.

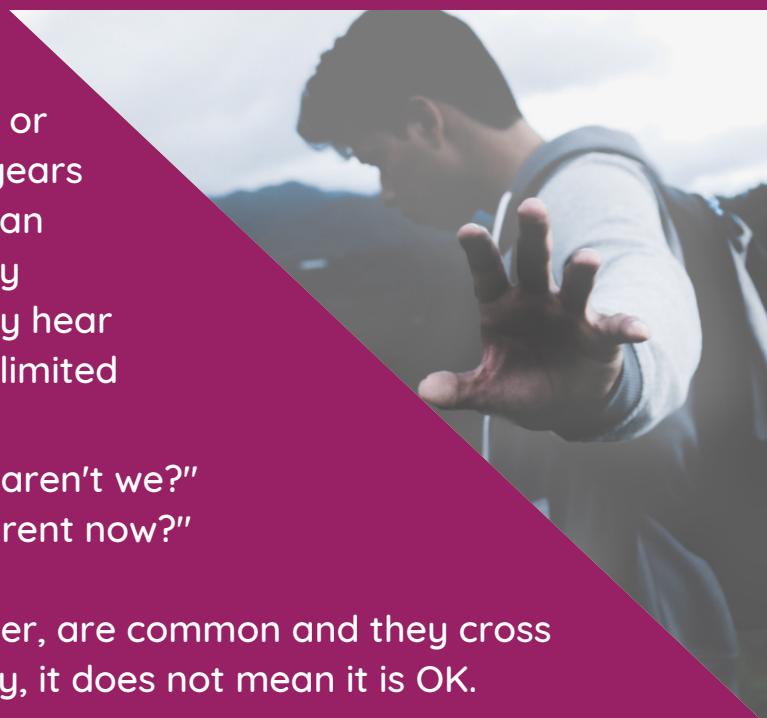
If you have experienced sexual assault or feel unsafe, reach out for support from a trusted adult, school counselor, or call one of the hotlines listed on page 6.

Learning How to Set Boundaries

Being an AI/AN teen is exciting. You are likely finding out who you are and beginning your journey of who you want to be. To fully embrace this, it is important to begin learning how to set boundaries in any relationship. Healthy relationships of all kinds have boundaries, whether they be with friends, colleagues, family, romantic partners, or sexual partners.

It is often intimidating to set boundaries due to fears of rejection or appearing 'selfish'. By knowing what you want and how to set boundaries, you are putting yourself in a position to be safe and successful in your relationships.¹⁵

There are many types of boundaries you can build: physical, emotional, material, time, energy, and mental boundaries. You have the power to decide what your boundaries are.¹⁶ Click to visit [StrongHearts](#) or [Love is Respect](#) for more information and ways to practice building boundaries.¹⁷





Are you a survivor of Sexual Assault?

Emotional responses will vary from survivor to survivor. Experiencing sexual assault is traumatic and can be life changing. It is important to know that you are not alone and that your reactions and responses are normal.

Sexual assault is NEVER your fault!

Common reactions and feelings that you may be having, have had, or may have in the future include, but are not limited to:¹⁸

- Fear
- Guilt
- Disruption of your daily life
- Shame
- Self-Blame
- Anger
- Sexual health concerns
- Isolation
- Anxiety
- Nightmares
- Concern for the assailant
- Loss of control
- PTSD
- Shock and numbness

You are not alone. These experiences do not define who you are and you can heal from them.

Self-Care

There is no one way to heal. You are in charge of your healing journey and have complete autonomy over what decisions you make and the direction the process goes. While on this journey, remember to seek support from friends, family, and spiritual, physical, and mental health professionals. When talking with others, you can set boundaries for yourself and only discuss and disclose information that you feel safe and comfortable sharing.

Throughout your healing journey, remember that it is important to engage in self-care practices. Find ways to express yourself and your feelings. This could be in the form of song, dance, art, poetry, journaling, therapy, etc. You may also take part in other activities that you find joy in, such as crafting. Find time to practice grounding exercises and breathe.

Supporting a Loved One

56% of AI/AN women and 28% of AI/AN men have experienced sexual violence.⁵ It is important that you support your loved one by believing them and giving them resources to help them rebuild their power and personal sovereignty.¹⁹ Also, understand that they are in a very complicated and dangerous situation. Trust that they are doing what is best, and care, love, and support them as you are able, while allowing them to decide what they need.²⁰ It is important to remember that there is no "right" way to respond to or support someone following a sexual assault. The most important thing is that you

do not blame them, you help them feel safe, you continue to be there for them as they want and need, and you allow them to make their own decisions. A few things you may do to support include:¹⁸

Offer shelter - If your loved one would like and it is possible, stay with them at a safe and comfortable location.

Be an active listener - Your loved one may not be ready to talk about it at first, may want to talk a lot, or may want to talk in private, in new locations, or at any hour of the day. They will likely express a variety of feelings, which is very normal and healthy. Listen and validate these feelings. Be there as much as you can for them and encourage them to talk to a mental health professional if they are ready to do so.

Care for yourself - The things that your loved one may want to talk about might be heavy, and there is no time frame on the healing process. It is important to support yourself through this process as well. Seek care as you need to and remember to continue to take part in activities that bring you joy and are good for your own mental health and well-being.

Be patient - Understand and recognize that everyone heals differently and over different periods of time. Stay present in the life of your loved one and be there as they need varying support. Continue to see them as a strong individual who is reclaiming their own life.

Respect their privacy - It is not your choice to tell anyone. It is up to your loved one if and when they want to tell anyone about the situation.

Educate yourself - If you have an understanding of what your loved one is going through, the process of healing, and the resources that are available, it will help both you and them through this process. This guide is a great place to start, but seek additional resources such as those listed on page 6.



Resources



StrongHearts Native Helpline (1-844-7NATIVE (1-844-762-8483) is a 24/7 confidential and anonymous culturally appropriate domestic, dating, and sexual violence helpline for Natives. Visit <http://strongheartshelpline.org> for more info.

National Sexual Assault Hotline is available free 24/7, and provides confidential support to talk through what happened and your options, provide information on the law, and provide local resources and care facilities. Call **1-800-656-HOPE(4673)**.

Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) National Sexual Assault Hotline is confidential and available for free 24/7. Call **1-800-656-HOPE(4673)** or chat at rainn.org.

National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC) provides leadership, training, advocacy, and resources to end violence against Indigenous women. Visit <https://www.niwrc.org/> to learn more.

Women'sLaw.org provides easy to understand information about laws in each area as well as shelters and organizations that are able to provide support. Visit <https://www.womenslaw.org/laws> for more information.



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