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## **Guidance on Sexual Assault: Support for Talking with Adolescents Watching 13 Reasons Why**

**If you or someone is in need of support, they can call the RAINN Support Hotline to speak with someone: 800-656 HOPE (4673)**

The 2nd season of the Netflix series *Thirteen Reasons Why* was released May 2018. This season will continue to discuss the multiple acts of sexual violence that occurred between two characters on the show during season one. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) (2016) indicates that millions of individuals are impacted by sexual violence. Sexual violence is defined by a “range of acts including attempted, completely forced, or alcohol/drug facilitated penetration (i.e. rape), being made to penetrate someone else, verbal (non-physical) pressure that results in unwanted penetration (i.e., sexual coercion), unwanted sexual contact (e.g., fondling), and non-contact unwanted sexual experiences (e.g., verbal harassment, voyeurism).” Approximately 1 in 5 women and 1 in 15 men have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. With women who reported a history of completed rape, 40% experience this before age 18 with 28% reporting being first raped between ages 11-17. Twenty-three percent of men who were forced to penetrate someone experienced this before age 18 (CDC 2016). According to the 2012 national intimate partner and sexual violence survey, perpetrators of sexual violence to youth predominantly are acquaintances to the victim (Girls: 43.6%, Boys: 53.1%).

According to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN), a person experiences sexual assault every 98 seconds. They also report that only 6 out of every 1,000 rapist will end of in prison (RAINN, 2018). Sexual violence can have psychological, emotional, and physical effects on a survivor. Due to the stigma of sexual violence, many individuals do not report sexual violence to the police or others. RAINN (2018) reports that there are multiple types of sexual violence including, but not limited to:

- Sexual Assault
- Child Sexual Abuse
- Intimate Partner Sexual Violence
- Incest
- Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault

### Understanding Consent

There are various legal definitions of consent that vary across each state. In general, RAINN (2018) defines consent as “an agreement between participants to engage in sexual activity.” This website (<https://apps.rainn.org/policy/compare/consent-laws.cfm>) provides information on the different consent laws in each state. It is important for individuals to understand that consent involves communication between two people. Consent can change and be withdrawn when engaging in intimate acts. It is especially important for those engaging in intimate acts that giving consent for one activity does not mean that the person has consent to increase sexual contact or for repeated sexual contact. Any party has the right to change their mind at any time. For example, if a person gives consent to hug or kiss, that does not mean that the

person has consented to being touched under the clothes or to kiss again in the future. RAINN (2018) suggests that the best way to determine if you have consent to engage in intimate acts is to talk about it and receiving clear and affirming statements to engage in the intimate act.

### Warning Signs of Sexual Violence in Teens

Signs that a teenage may have been sexually assaulted or abuse may not be noticed since many of the symptoms appear to be signals of other mental health conditions and puberty. Below are some of the signs to be aware of. Remember that it's important to talk with the teen about your concerns and demonstrate that you are worried about them. If the teen experienced sexual violence, reassure them that it is not their fault. It is also important to understand how technology can impact sexual violence as well. Individuals can experience sexual harassment or other unwanted behaviors through their cell phone, email, social media, and their computer. (RAINN, 2018).

- Unusual weight loss or gain
- Loss of appetite or excessive eating
- Signs of physical abuse
- Sexually transmitted infections (STI's)
- Signs of Depression (e.g. persistent sadness for two weeks or more, lack of energy, changes in mood, withdrawal)
- Anxiety or worry
- Failing grades
- Changes in personal hygiene
- Self-harming
- Expressing thoughts about suicide or suicidal behavior
- Drinking and/or drug use.

### Warning Signs of a Potential Abusive Relationship (RAINN, 2018)

- A partner who tries to get the other partner to engage in sexual activity the partner is not ready to engage in
- Sexually assaulting the partner or coerces them into unwanted sexual activity
- Refusal to use contraception or protection against STI's during sexual activity
- Physically harms the partner.
- Makes threats to control the partner's actions
- Uses alcohol and/or drugs to impair their partner's judgement and ability to consent

### Consequences of Sexual Violence

An individual who is victimized by sexual violence can experience both physical and psychological trauma. This trauma can have long-term consequences for the individual. The CDC (2016) describes some of the consequences in the list below.

- Physical Injuries (e.g. bruising, genital trauma)
- Psychological Injuries (e.g. depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts)
- Chronic gynecological, gastrointestinal, and sexual health concerns

- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Substance Use Risk Behaviors (smoking, excessive alcohol use)
- Decreased self-esteem
- Difficulties with personal relationships, daily routines, returning to work or school, and retaining a sense of normalcy

### Individual Steps a Teen can take to Prevent Sexual Assault

RAINN (2018) has developed four steps that teens can take to keep their friends safe when there is an immediate concern and a friend needs help.

**C-** Create a Distraction (Disrupt the situation. Give the person a chance to get to a safe place.)

**A-** Ask directly (Ask if the person is in trouble)

**R-** Refer to an authority (Talk to someone about your concerns. Call 911 if you are concerned about someone's safety)

**E-** Enlist others (Get others to help you support your friend)

### Considerations for School District Policies on Sexual Violence

Schools play an important role in helping create safe learning environments for all students. Below are some steps from the 2016 White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault ([https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/2016-12/considerations\\_for\\_school\\_district\\_sexual\\_misconduct\\_policies.pdf](https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/2016-12/considerations_for_school_district_sexual_misconduct_policies.pdf)):

- Ensure proper student supervision in all areas of the building. Identify areas where sexual assaults can take place and then monitor them regularly during all times of the day including before and after school.
- Complete an annual/biannual assessment that reviews student engagement, school safety, and the learning environment.
- Address the school norms in relation to sexual violence and having healthy relationships. Areas to promote include:
  - Addressing Victim-Blaming, Violence, and/or Bullying Behavior
  - Encourage Respectful Behavior
  - Promote the strengths of women and girls
  - Teach that sexual violence is preventable
- Build relationships with local sexual violence centers. They may come out to provide guidance and professional development to school staff members.
- Implement age-appropriate education on healthy sexuality, consent, social, and relationship boundaries. See guidance from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) and the National Sexuality Education Standards (<http://futureofsexed.org/documents/josh-fose-standards-web.pdf>) for additional information.
- Create a trauma-informed learning environment for all students that promotes safety, prevents further victimization and other abused behaviors.

### System-Wide Steps to Prevent Sexual Violence

The CDC (2016) developed a technical assistance package (STOP SV: A Technical Package to Prevent Sexual Violence: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/SV-Prevention-Technical-Package.pdf>) to provide information on different types of programs to prevent sexual violence from occurring. The following model is used to review programs that approach prevention with the following strategies:

STOP SV		
Strategy		Approach
S	Promote Social Norms that Protect Against Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bystander approaches</li> <li>• Mobilizing men and boys as allies</li> </ul>
T	Teach Skills to Prevent Sexual Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socio-emotional learning</li> <li>• Teaching healthy, safe dating and intimate relationship skills to adolescents</li> <li>• Promoting healthy sexuality</li> <li>• Empowerment-based training</li> </ul>
O	Provide Opportunities to Empower and Support Girls and Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening economic supports for women and families</li> <li>• Strengthening leadership and opportunities for girls</li> </ul>
P	Create Protective Environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving safety and monitoring in schools</li> <li>• Establishing and consistently applying workplace policies</li> <li>• Addressing community-level risks through environmental approaches</li> </ul>
SV	Support Victims/Survivors to Lessen Harms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victim-centered services</li> <li>• Treatment for victims of SV</li> <li>• Treatment for at-risk children and families to prevent problem behavior including sex offending</li> </ul>

## References

Basile, K.C., DeGue, S., Jones, K., Freire, K., Dills, J., Smith, S.G., Raiford, J.L. (2016). *STOP SV: A Technical Package to Prevent Sexual Violence*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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Centers for Disease Control (n.d.). Sexual Violence in youth: Findings from the 2012 national intimate partner and sexual violence survey.

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National Sexual Violence Resource Center (2016). Considerations for school district sexual misconduct policies. [https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/2016-12/considerations\\_for\\_school\\_district\\_sexual\\_misconduct\\_policies.pdf](https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/2016-12/considerations_for_school_district_sexual_misconduct_policies.pdf)

<https://www.rainn.org>

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