Concerned Persons
Of
Sexual Assault or Relationship Violence Victims

The Aurora Center for Advocacy & Education
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The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.
What is Sexual Assault?

The University of Minnesota defines sexual assault and consent as follows:

(University of Minnesota Policy 2.6.3.1):

**Sexual assault**

Sexual assault is actual, attempted, or threatened sexual contact with another person without that person's consent. Sexual assault is a criminal act that can be prosecuted under Minnesota state law, as well as under the University of Minnesota Student Conduct Code and employee discipline procedures.

**Consent**

Consent is informed, freely and actively given, and mutually understood. If physical force, coercion, intimidation, and/or threats are used, there is no consent. If the survivor is mentally or physically incapacitated or impaired so that the survivor cannot understand the fact, nature or extent of the sexual situation, and the condition was or would be known to a reasonable person, there is no consent. This includes conditions due to alcohol or drug consumption, or being asleep or unconscious.

What is Relationship Violence?

**Relationship violence**

Relationship violence is a pattern of behaviors that includes physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, economic, and/or psychological abuse used by adults or adolescents against (current or former) intimate partners, and sometimes against other family members and friends. Violence in relationships often occurs in private and not always easy for friends, family, and co-workers to detect. In some cases the only evidence a concerned person will have is the survivor telling you about the abuse. It is important for you to believe the survivor and listen.
Options Available if You Experience Sexual Assault/Dating Violence

24-Hour Help Line
612-626-9111
- Leave message, name, and number and you will receive an immediate callback
- Access to our on-call advocates
- We provide support referrals
- If needed, we will accompany you to needed medical facilities
- Coordinate transportation to and from residence halls to hospital
- Inform you about The Aurora Center’s Support Group

Walk-in Services
Boytton 407
M-F 8:00a.m.-4:30p.m.
- Advocate will discuss options with you
- Provide you Crisis intervention
- Offer you support/referrals
- ACADEMIC ADVOCACY
  We can contact academic faculty/staff on your behalf.

Medical Services
- Hospital would treat injuries
- Treat STD’s
- Test and provide treatment options for pregnancy
- Transportation to and from ER available by UMPD
- Note: In Minnesota, all evidentiary exam costs are covered by the state

Police Advocacy
- We can accompany/support you if you file a police report
- Advocacy/support meeting with prosecutor/victim witness coordinator
- Keep you informed of case if forwarded to prosecutor
- Accompany/support you during trial/testifying
- Accompany/support you during criminal trial
- Accompany you to prosecutor for verdict
- Coordinate safe housing and provide moving service with police assistance

Housing Advocacy
- We can request change in your housing needs on/off campus
- Civil trial option
- Accompany/support you when outcome is determined
- Provide advocacy through plea-bargaining process

University/Student Conduct Advocacy
- Accompany you to University Student Conduct to report or other University reporting processes
- Case may be mediated. We can accompany you through the process.
- Accompany you through hearing
- Help you file a report with Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action

Relationship Violence
- 24-Hour Crisis Intervention
- Develop safety plan and support systems with victim/survivor
- Write on-site Order for Protection/ Harassment Restraining Order
- Accompny/support you to prosecutor for verdict
- Follow-up as necessary

Medical Services
- A University Hospital can collect evidence if an assault happened within 72 hours
- Hospital would treat injuries
- Treat STD’s
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Common Feelings of Concerned Persons

Concerned Persons may feel responsible for taking care of a survivor or helping the survivor make decisions. Concerned Persons may want to give the survivor support but don't know how or know what to do or say. It's important to be aware that Concerned Persons will also go through their own range of emotions.

FEELINGS of Concerned Persons may include:

- **Concern** for the survivor.
- **Confusion** about how to deal with the trauma.
- **Difficulty understanding** why the assault/abuse happened.
- **Helplessness** – wishing you could have protected the survivor or prevented the assault/abuse, and wanting to “fix” the situation so life can “get back to normal.”
- **Guilt** over “buying into” some of the myths surrounding sexual assault/relationship violence.
- **Shame** regarding the reaction of family members, acquaintances, and the community, should the sexual assault become common knowledge.
- **Feeling out of control**. Someone has intruded on the survivor’s personal life, and nothing feels the same. Feeling out of control is a natural response to sexual assault; a sense of control will return with time and healing.
- **Wanting to harm the perpetrator**. Although it is a natural reaction, striking out at the assailant may create further crisis and force the survivor to protect the concerned person, rather than focusing on their individual healing.
- **Frustration** with the legal and law enforcement system.
- **Anger** is a healthy response to sexual assault and can be aimed at the assailant or the systems that don’t work. Although anger is expected and justified, acting out violently will not solve anything. Concerned Persons need to understand that venting anger on the survivor will further feelings of guilt and self-blame. Sexual assault is never the survivor’s fault.
- **Difficulty expressing feelings** or asking for help. Concerned Persons feel that because they aren’t the primary survivor, they shouldn’t be in survivor support systems or that they should be able to handle it. It’s also true that a Concerned Person may find a lack of support systems (significant others/family/friends).
- **Temporary loss of intimacy** with the survivor. It may be difficult for a significant other/partner to not take this loss personally. A survivor has been forced to recognize personal vulnerability, and as a result may find it difficult to trust enough to be sexual, even when the relationship is strong and nurturing. Being sexual, even in a healthy relationship, brings back memories of the assault. Intimacy will return with the help of a nurturing, patient partner.

*Adapted from information from the Sexual Violence Center of Hennepin County*

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How Can I Help a Sexual Assault Survivor?

- **Listen**
- **Believe**
- **Ensure safety** from immediate physical danger. Help create a safety plan (if needed) in case of an emergency. The Aurora Center can also assist in this

- **Recommend** the survivor seek medical attention to ensure physical health

- **Empower** a survivor. Don’t make decisions for the survivor. A sense of control was taken away as a result of the sexual assault. You can express concern for decisions you disagree with, but be sure to support the survivor’s decision in the end

- **Be Patient**. People can heal from traumatic events, but the process and time varies for each person

- **Be supportive** and try not to give up

- **Get support** for yourself. Seek help from The Aurora Center if you have questions or concerns

- **Start conversations**, not interrogations. Open doors for communication with comments like “You look upset.” You might not get a response right away, but keep asking. Your persistence will let the survivor know that you notice and care about what happens to them

- **Trust your judgment**. It’s fine to say, “I’m concerned for you. I think you need assistance.”

- **Offer options** and support but do not force a survivor to do anything they do not want to do. Loss of power and control is a common aspect of violent assaults/relationships so it is important to let the survivor make their own decisions at their own pace

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**UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA**

*Office for Student Affairs*
What to Say to a Traumatized Person

First, prepare a comfortable environment that is:

- **Safe**—away from people who resemble the perpetrator, with companion if desired, physical comfort is addressed (offer water, comfortable chair, tissues), exit path is clear

- **Quiet**—turn off radio, TV, office machines

- **Private**—shut the door (or leave slightly ajar), talk to the victim/survivor alone (BUT don’t separate the victim/survivor from support: “I’d like just the two of us to talk briefly. Is it ok if your friend waits in the hall for a few minutes?” When alone ask if they would prefer to have the friend be present).

**Things you could try:**

- Thanks for coming in (or telling me or calling).
- Take your time.
- Tell me about it. or “What happened?”
- You are safe here.
- It’s not your fault.
- Thank you for trusting me with this information.
- When something painful happens, it often helps if you don’t try to carry it alone.
- You have a right to all of your feelings.
- Maybe you made some choices you wish you hadn’t. That’s for you to decide. But you didn’t ask to be violated.
- Whatever you did to get through it was the right thing to do.
- You have already survived.
- What else is would you like me to know?
- I’m glad you told me.
- There is no right way to respond to this.

**Things to do:**

- Open your posture: uncross arms, put hands in lap, uncross knees, keep legs close together, make eye contact without staring. Avoid talking across a desk.
- Give options, not advice. Explain advantages and disadvantages of each option.
- Focus on choices that must be made first. It can be overwhelming to consider the implications all at once: police intervention, medical care, whom to tell, work and school arrangements, counseling support, effects on personal relationships, support groups, changing living arrangements, determining where the perpetrator is now, what he or she might do next, etc. Some things can wait. **Immediate threats to health and safety come first.**
- Give written information and referrals. The person may be too much in shock to remember the conversation.
- Take care of yourself: meditate, exercise, journal, talk confidentially with a member of The Aurora Center

**Things not to do:**

- Do not suggest that the victim/survivor have any future contact with the perpetrator. If possible, strategize about how to minimize contact. (If the victim/survivor files a formal report, removing the alleged perpetrator from shared courses and other activities would happen while case is pending.)
- Avoid saying anything judgmental, such as “Why didn’t you call me to give you a ride home?” Or “how could you let him get away with that?” Such statements tend to intensify self-doubt and self-blame.
- Don’t press for details of what happened. Let our friend initiate the topic or ask, “Would you like to talk about what happened?” and listen carefully to the answer.
- Do not contact parents. If the victim/survivor wants parents contacted this is something The Aurora Center can do.
- Do not insist that the victim/survivor utilize any particular option, such as police notification, no matter how strongly you think it would be the right thing to do.
- Do not threaten violence or other retaliation or consequences against the perpetrator.
- Do not touch the victim/survivor without the victim/survivor’s permission, not even to give the student a hug or reassuring pat.
- Don’t let the conversation go on indefinitely. Work patiently toward determining the next steps.
- Do not offer shower, fresh clothes, or food (in case of oral assault or possible need for surgery) if the victim/survivor is going to have a medical examination within the next few hours.
- Do not provide health care, even Advil or a Band-Aid, unless you are a medical professional.
- Do not disclose your own history of being victimized. There is a time and place to speak out, but right now the focus is on the person you are assisting. When a person is in crisis, she or he often tries to take care of others, which deflects attention from the immediate problem.
- Do not make decisions that the student can make on their own.

**Common Reactions to Trauma**

Immediately following the trauma
- Guilt, often presented as ethical self-criticism (I should have left with everyone else; I shouldn’t have had that much to drink.); rather than as feeling (I feel betrayed, embarrassed that I drank that much.)
- Dazed, shut-down look; staring at objects or body, lack of eye contact
- Inward posture (hold arms & legs close to body)
- Fluctuations in physical presentation such as posture, facial expression, eye contact
- Difficulty recalling events, changes in the story of the incident
- Displaced feelings (angry at friend, submissive toward health care provider)
- Protecting perpetrator (I don’t want to get my friend in trouble. I was beating on his chest and saying no, but I guess he didn’t hear me.)
- Denial of impact of the event (I’m fine, It wasn’t that bad)
- Jumpy, easily startled
- Confusion about what happened, what to do or a feeling like the victim/survivor can’t make any decisions

**What to Say When You Don’t Know What to Say**

**Phrases that encourage self-expression:**
- Tell me about it.
- I see... o.k. ...Uh huh...
- I’m sensing that there may be more to your statement than I understand. Can you tell me that in a different way?
- Let me see if I understand fully what the facts are and how you’re feeling about it (then paraphrase what the victim/survivor said).
- Let me summarize what you’ve said so far and you can tell me if I got it right.
- You’ve experienced something traumatic and it seems like it is affecting you in some negative ways. Have you discussed this with someone before? Do you ever think about talking to a counselor?

**Be comfortable with silence:**
- Try not to fill up too much space with talking or overwhelming the person with information to fill the silence.
- Often there are long periods of silence in this type of conversation, so don’t be surprised if you are quiet for a few moments.
- I am happy to just listen, or I can answer questions, or I can help you sort through some things. It’s up to you.
- Take your time, I’m not in a hurry.

**Helping in decision making:**
- What do YOU want to do?
- How do you feel about that?
- What do you think would happen if you did that?
- What have you tried/thought of so far?
- What does that mean to you?
- Do you want to _____?
- It seems to me that you have several ideas about what would help.
- It sounds as though you’re having trouble deciding whether or not to report the incident. What are your thoughts?

**Other things to say when you don’t know what to say:** [taken in context of what the student may have said]
- Sounds like you really had a tough time.
- Although I cannot exactly understand your feelings, I can understand how upset/angry you must be.
- It would be really hard to sleep after something like that.
- What else would you like me to know about what happened?
- It can take a long time to work through such difficult feelings.
- You really handled the situation well – calling the police, coming to me, talking to a friend, going to the hospital, etc.
- Is your family member/roommate/partner able to support you? (If not) It must be hard for you to be upset and then for him/her/them to be upset too.
- It must be really hard when your family/friends/partner doesn’t seem to understand how you feel.
- It’s really courageous for you to be willing to share this with me. I can only imagine how difficult it must be to tell someone about it.

Adapted from the manual of the Peer Advocates for Sexual Respect, Amherst College, Amherst, MA, 1998.
Helping Male Victim/Survivors

Sexual assault can be very disruptive to a man’s sense of safety, well being, and personal confidence. A male survivor will heal from this event to the extent that he receives support and understanding. You can help him in the following ways:

- **Take care of yourself.** Survivors are often very aware of the pain of their friends and loved ones. If you are falling apart, he will have to be strong and delay his healing. Get support for yourself. Choose healthy coping strategies like planning fun events, eating well, exercising, watching funny movies, being out in nature, listening to relaxing music, talking to good friends, etc.

- **Help him realize there is nothing about him that brought this on** – men do get raped. Scientific studies show that men are just as likely as women not to fight back when faced with a sexual assault. There was nothing he could have done to prevent this. Most men who rape men and boys are heterosexual. This act was not about sexual preference; it was about power, domination, and violence.

- **Reassure him it was not his fault.** No matter what, he didn’t deserve to be assaulted. It is rare for a survivor of sexual assault not to be overwhelmed by self-blame and shame.

- **Exaggerate your expressions of love and support.** He will probably experience mood swings over the next few weeks. He may lose his appetite or have trouble sleeping. He may also be very sensitive. A sexual assault creates a circus mirror image that blows up negatives and makes positives seem very small. Your negative messages will sound very loud to him and your positive messages will be faint.

- **Resist strong urges to become involved in the work of the police.** You are his support person, let the police do the police work. He needs you to be there to love and support him. Your involvement in the legal outcome may cause undue anxiety for him.

- **Help him regain his sense of control.** Sexual assault is an out of control experience; give him the power to make important and not so important choices (from what to have for dinner to whether he contacts the police). He should be in control of who is going to be told about what happened and how to tell them.

- **He may need some special accommodations over the next few weeks at school.** Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after an assault include general numbness, being very anxious, and being consumed with what happened. These symptoms go away with time, but can feel pretty overwhelming and crazy when present. Subjects like foreign language and math that involved a lot of memorization will be most difficult. The Aurora Center can help work with teachers. Coping with a sexual assault takes a lot of energy; it’s exhausting.

- **He may need a few days away from school and/or work to regain his physical and emotional strength.** If other people at the school/dorm/workplace know what happened or the assailant was someone in that environment, meet with a counselor/manager/principal to develop a plan of support. He should have a designated support person to go to if he needs to leave his school or work environment.

Adapted from:
Maggie Dexheimer Pharris, Ph.D., MPH, RN
Sexual Assault Resource Service
Signs of Relationship Violence

Emotional Abuse
Verbal put-downs, name calling like “ugly”, “fat”, “stupid”, and “bitch”; playing “mind games”, humiliation, blame, neglect, invalidation or denial of a partner’s pains and fears.

Manipulation and Control
Obsessively controlling where the partner goes, what partner does or wears, who partner sees, not allowing the relationship to end, controlling access to a phone, gaining and abusing access to emails. For example, the abuser can also gain power over partner by hiding or blocking access to medical or ability needs, forced abortions, preventing partner from getting an abortion, not allowing contraception, etc.

Isolation
Controlling and restricting what a partner does and reads, who the partner sees and talks to, where partner goes, setting guidelines for family contact or travel, keeping partner from learning English or getting a job.

Threatening Behavior
Throwing objects, threatening to cause physical harm by saying things like “I’m gonna get you” or “You’re going to pay for that”, keeping weapons in a visible place, threats of deportation or loss of visa status, threatening to take away children or familial retribution, threatening to commit suicide or end the relationship as a tool to control the survivor’s behavior, abuse or threats of abuse towards loved ones or pets or the use of intimidating looks, gestures, or words.

Physical Violence
Hitting, punching, pushing, kicking, slapping, choking, any sexual activity without consent, or any physical touch that results in fear, pain, or intimidation.

Stalking/Harassment
Incessant emailing, text messaging, and/or calling at home or work that results in fear or a sense of powerlessness. Also includes indications that abuser is watching without the partner knowing, showing up unannounced at partner’s place of work, school, home, etc.

Violence/Abuse Toward Others
The abuser threatening friends, family and other important people in the survivor’s life; abuse or threat of abuse towards children, and threatening to take away the children.

Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence, 2005
What You Can Do to Help Someone Experiencing Relationship Violence?

- **Be Supportive**
  There are many ways to be supportive of an individual who discloses to you that a survivor is in a violent relationship. The first step in supporting the survivor is to BELIEVE and support the survivor’s decision. An advocate from The Aurora Center can talk with you or the survivor about some options, including restraining orders and seeking safe housing. Remember that the abuser took away the survivor’s power and control. It is important that the survivor is allowed to be in control and make her own decisions (even if you do not like the decision she makes). Supporting the wishes of the survivor will help the healing process.

- **Communicate**
  Communicating the following messages with the survivor can increase an openness in disclosing to others in the future: “I believe you”, “It’s not your fault”, “Help is available”, “No one deserves to be treated in that way”.

- **Listen**
  As a friend or family member, it is important that you LISTEN to what the survivor tells you. Be non-judgmental and non-blaming. The abuser will often play the role of a “perfect boyfriend” in public, therefore the abuse can be difficult for others to detect. The survivor is the only one who knows what the relationship is like. Let the survivor tell you what they want at their own pace. It is more important to listen that to talk or give advice.

- **Be Patient**
  Be aware that the recovery from abuse can be slow and that there is not a set period of time for healing. Let the survivor proceed at their own pace and continue to be available for support throughout the process. Also, it may take a significant amount of time before the survivor feels empowered enough to leave the abusive relationship. Ending the relationship prematurely can result in going back to the relationship or starting a relationship with another abusive person. Be patient and let the survivor know that you are there to offer support.

- **Know the Options**
  Assist the survivor in getting the help they want and need. This may mean providing phone numbers, transportation, information, etc. Informing the survivor of the options can be important in recovery. An advocate from The Aurora Center can offer options and help answer any questions during the decision-making process.

- **Be Non-judgmental**
  The manner in which you respond can increase or decrease the likelihood that the survivor will continue to seek assistance. Being judgmental often decreases one’s desire to reach out to others and may hamper the survivor’s healing. Your job as a concerned person is not to judge, or say what you would have done differently, but to be supportive and appropriately attentive to the individual and to validate the survivor’s feelings.

- **Help in Gaining Safety**
  Asking the survivor questions like “What would help you feel safer?” can help reveal options for increasing safety. The survivor may need accompaniment when walking outside, someone to talk to in order to feel emotionally safe, or to leave clothes, toiletries, and important documents at your residence in case of emergency. Advocates at The Aurora Center can also help you create a more specific safety plan for you and the survivor.

- **Self-Care**
  Seek support for yourself. Become aware of your feelings about the trauma and the stress of supporting the survivor. It is best to avoid communicating your biases and negative emotions with the survivor. However, it may become important for you to speak with someone about how you are feeling. Staff and advocates at The Aurora Center are available to talk with you about your experiences in the role of a support person as well as your experiences of being a survivor.

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What is NOT Helpful for Someone Experiencing Relationship Violence?

- **Don't Blame**
  Do not place blame on the survivor. The abuser is the only one to blame for the abuse. The survivor did not provoke the abuser nor is the survivor to blame for refusing to leave an abuser. It is common for people in abusive relationships to have difficulty ending the relationship due to fear of repercussion, concern for the abuser, and fear of isolation.

- **Don't Make Assumptions**
  This is a good general rule. Allow the survivor to tell you what happened, what the survivor wants, how the survivor is feeling, or what the survivor needs. Do not assume that you can imagine the survivor’s experience. Even if you have survived similar trauma, it is likely that your experience is less similar than you may assume. Also, don’t assume that what was helpful for you will be helpful for her. Ask the survivor.

- **Don't Tell Them What to Do**
  Instead, review options with the survivor and support the survivor’s decisions. Allow the survivor to take control over their own life.

- **Don't Put Yourself in Danger**
  When the abuser finds out that the survivor is reaching out to friends for help, the abuser may turn angry towards them. Although it is very important for the survivor to be supported by family and friends, do not put your physical and emotional safety in jeopardy. If the abuser harms or threatens to harm you, call 911. It may also be possible for you to obtain a restraining order against the abuser if you begin to feel threatened. Please contact The Aurora Center for more information about this option.

- **Don’t Question or Criticize**
  Don't criticize or question the survivor for not telling you sooner about the abuse. The very reason for not telling you was most likely fear of your rejection. Honor the survivor’s timing and thank the survivor for disclosing this information to you. This is not the time to inquire about why the survivor hadn’t spoken with you about this before. It does not mean that the survivor does not trust you or does not care about you.

- **Don’t Gossip**
  Do not break the survivor’s trust by telling others about the abuse without permission. The survivor should have the control over who knows about the situation as well as when and with whom to disclose such information.

- **Don’t Lose Patience**
  Comments such as “Why haven’t you left him/her yet?” or “Why are you putting up with this?” are not helpful. Remember that the empowerment process can be slow and lengthy and will vary with each individual. Such messages will only force the survivor to stuff the survivor’s feelings and cause them to distance themselves from others.
Ways You Can Help End Relationship Violence

1. Cultivate a respectful attitude toward women in your family and at your workplace. Avoid behaviors that demean or control women.

2. Have a representative from The Aurora Center come talk to your class, community, and student groups about the intersection of power and control in abusive relationships. To arrange this, please call our Violence Prevention Education Coordinator at 612-626-2929.

3. When you are angry with your partner or children, respond without hurting or humiliating them. Model a non-violent, respectful response to resolving conflicts in your family. Call a domestic violence or child abuse prevention program for their help if you continue to hurt members of your family.

4. If you have a friend or co-worker who is afraid of her partner or who is being hurt, offer her your support and refer them to The Aurora Center’s 24-hour help line at 612-626-9111 or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE.

5. Learn about domestic violence services in your community. Contribute your time (volunteer!), resources, or money. Call 1-800-END-ABUSE to find out more. To volunteer at The Aurora Center, please call our business line at 612-626-2929.

6. Call the police if you see or hear violence in progress.

7. Talk to your friends and neighbors when they belittle women, make a joke about violence, or ignore a victim of abuse.

8. Ask your local government to collaborate with domestic violence programs to conduct a safety audit of your community.

9. Write to music producers, movie companies, internet businesses, video game producers, and TV stations to speak out about violence against women and stop producing such violent material.

10. Develop a women’s safety campaign in your workplace, neighborhood, school, or house of worship. Build a consensus among your colleagues and neighbors that abusive behavior and language is unacceptable.

11. Bring together you local domestic violence program staff, parents, teachers, students, and school administrators to start a discussion about developing a school-based curriculum on dating and family violence.

12. Ask that physicians and other health care professionals receive training about domestic violence and follow the diagnostic and treatment guidelines about domestic violence, child abuse, and elder abuse developed by the American Medical Association.

13. Co-sponsor a citizens’ monitoring group with you local domestic violence program to ensure that law enforcement officer, judges, and probation and parole personnel receive training about domestic violence and enforce the law.

This information is available in alternative formats by calling The Aurora Center for Advocacy and Education at (612) 626-2929. The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer.

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