



## Sexual Assault Awareness Month Action Toolkit

*April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM). This month provides an opportunity to raise awareness about sexual assault in our communities, educate ourselves on preventing and responding to cases, advocate for survivors' rights and support people who have experienced sexual assault. The following are ideas for programs, as well as advocacy tips and resources. This toolkit is by no means comprehensive; if you would like more information, please contact RAC Legislative Assistant [Maya Weinstein](#).*

### HELPFUL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

- ***Sexual assault***: Any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient. Falling under the definition of sexual assault are sexual activities as forced sexual intercourse, child molestation, incest, forcible or unwanted touching or fondling and attempted rape.
- ***Domestic Violence***: A pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner.
- ***Consent***: An agreement between participants to engage in sexual activity. Consent must be affirmative, freely given, conversational, can be withdrawn at any time and does not apply to all activities or all future activity.
- ***Victim-blaming***: Holding the victim responsible in some way for the crime that occurred, or implying the victim could have prevented it had they acted differently. This shifts blame to the victim rather than the person who committed the crime. An example of victim-blaming is saying the individual would not have been assaulted had they not been dressed a certain way.
- ***Survivor***: Another way to refer to a victim of an assault, but places more strength and ability to move forward with the individual, as opposed to just viewing them as someone that something happened to. Different people who have experienced assault prefer different terminology, sometimes at different points in the healing process.
- ***Self-care***: Putting yourself first, taking proper care of yourself, engaging in healthy activities that promote well-being.

### ACTION ITEMS

#### *Congregation*

- As a call to action for education and awareness, incorporate sexual violence from a Jewish perspective into a *d'var Torah*. This would help to draw connections between faith and the issue, and bring the conversation into the open in the community. Clergy or lay leaders could give the *d'var Torah*.

- Donate canned food (or *chametz*, in preparing for Passover) to local domestic violence shelters.
- Invite a survivor of sexual assault to speak to the congregation about their experience.
- [Run an assessment](#) of your congregation's ability to prevent and respond to sexual assault. Create victim-centered [policy](#) to address instances of sexual assault between members of the congregation.
- Place resources for survivors in all restrooms. These should be inclusive and contain hotline numbers as well as local resources.

#### *Sisterhood, Women's Group, Brotherhood or Men's Group*

- Run a session for your own group or open to the congregation with a representative from a local rape crisis center that focuses on addressing and responding to sexual assault.
- If your group sends care packages to college students, include resources and information on healthy relationships, like information sheets from [RAINN's Safety for Students](#) page.

#### *Youth Group and Religious School*

- Facilitate provision of training to all youth group advisors and religious school teachers on responding to reports and identifying signs of sexual assault.
- Include consent education and healthy relationships in curricula (many students will not receive this in their schools).
- Ensure all youth group advisors and religious school teachers have access to resources for children and teens.

#### *Individual*

- Volunteer with a hotline or local crisis center.
- Educate yourself on the issue using the resources listed at the end of the toolkit.
- Follow and advocate for federal and state legislation that address sexual assault. Legislation that supports survivors can include tracking and testing rape kits, affirmative consent laws, and establishing a bill of rights for survivors, among others. Mandatory law enforcement reporting for universities and statutes of limitations can be harmful for survivors.

#### **JEWISH VALUES**

- Jewish tradition teaches all people were created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of the divine, and that our health and our bodies are gifts from God that we are to protect and nurture (Genesis 1:27).
- We are taught that we must not "stand idly by the blood of a neighbor" (Leviticus 19:16).
- Rami b. Hama said in the name of R. Assi: "It is forbidden for a man to compel his wife to fulfill the mitzvah [to have sexual relations], as it is said 'and he that hastens with his feet sins' (Proverbs 19:2)."
- If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am not for others, what am I? And if not now, when? – Rabbi Hillel

## ADVOCACY TIPS

- **Support survivors.** If someone discloses their experience to you, believe them. Assure them that they are not alone. Let them know it was not their fault. Do not pressure them to take a certain path to healing or moving forward.
- **Foster resilience.** Sexual assault, and specifically rape, may remove a survivor's feelings of control over their own being. Encourage self-care. Small steps to maintain routine life are big steps for someone who has experienced sexual violence.
- **Don't victim-blame in the name of prevention.** Prioritize teaching people not to rape over teaching people not to get raped. While there are certainly ways to reduce risk, the onus ultimately falls on the perpetrator. If a survivor believes they should have acted or dressed differently, they may internalize shame and self-blame.
- **Be inclusive.** Sexual violence affects women, men, children, people who identify as LGBTQ, people with disabilities, people of color, and people of all faiths.
- **Acknowledge the reality of who is in the room.** Sexual violence affects millions of people. Be sure not to ignore the fact that many attendees in the program or conversation have been affected by, or have experienced, sexual assault.

## RESOURCES

[RAC's Issue Page](#)

[Amnesty International](#)

[End Rape on Campus](#)

[Human Rights Campaign: LGBTQ](#)

[Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse](#)

[Love is Respect: Teen Dating Violence](#)

[Men Can Stop Rape](#)

[National Center for Victims of Crime: Children](#)

[National Domestic Violence Hotline](#)

[National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#)

[Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network](#)

[U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women](#)

[World Health Organization: International](#)

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