September 2016 Newsletter: Sexual Assault

Hello! Hopefully everyone got off to a great start to the year! This month, I will talk about sexual assault as it is a problem on campuses, as well as throughout society. In comparisons between the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR’s) collected by the FBI which only include reports made to police, and Crime Victimization Survey data (all crimes according to general population surveys) sexual assaults appear to be grossly under-reported. There are many reasons for this discrepancy including but not limited to embarrassment, guilt, inconvenience, fear, and confusion as to what is a crime. If anyone is interested in looking up sexual assault offenses, here is a list of the Washington criminal laws pertaining to sexual offenses obtained from <http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=9A.44>:

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| 9A.44.040 Rape in the first degree. | 9A.44.086 Child molestation in the second degree. |
| 9A.44.050 Rape in the second degree. | 9A.44.089 Child molestation in the third degree. |
| 9A.44.060 Rape in the third degree. | 9A.44.093 Sexual misconduct with a minor in the first degree. |
| 9A.44.073 Rape of a child in the first degree. | 9A.44.096 Sexual misconduct with a minor in the second degree. |
| 9A.44.076 Rape of a child in the second degree. | 9A.44.100 Indecent liberties. |
| 9A.44.079 Rape of a child in the third degree. | 9A.44.105 Sexually violating human remains. |
| 9A.44.083 Child molestation in the first degree. | 9A.44.115 Voyeurism. |

On college campuses, date rape is the most prevalent form of sexual assault and is reported even less frequently than other forms of sexual assault. Date rape is generally understood as forcible sexual intercourse during a voluntary social engagement in which one party did not intend to submit to the sexual advances and resisted the acts by verbal refusals, denials or pleas to stop, and/or physical resistance. It is not a defense to any of the above crimes that the victim was incapacitated due to being intoxicated or unconscious.

**Here are some tips to keep in mind to help prevent sexual assault:**

You can’t always avoid date rape. However, there are things you can do to minimize the risk of sexual assault.

1) Rape is a crime of power and control. Be aware of controlling behavior in your date or relationship. Most rape survivors recall feeling “uncomfortable” about some of their partner’s behaviors including:

-- Intimidating stares, degrading jokes or language, refusal to respond to stated physical limits, refusal to accept “no” as an answer, whether in a sexual context or otherwise, insistence on making all of the “important” decisions about the relationship or date, unwillingness to interact with you as a person rather than a sexual object, extreme jealousy, possessiveness, strong belief in sex role stereotypes, a history of violent behavior.

2) Define yourself and your sexual limits. Your sexual limits are yours alone to define. The first step in preventing abuse is to define your limits clearly to yourself and then to act quickly when a date or partner intentionally or unintentionally crosses your stated boundaries.

3) Set clear limits and be firm. It is your body, and no one has the right to force you to do anything you don’t want to do. If you do not want to be touched, you can say, “Don’t touch me,” or “Stop it, I’m not enjoying this.”

4) Do not give mixed messages. Say “yes” when you mean “yes” and “no” when you mean “no.” Be sure that your words do not conflict with other signals such as eye contact, voice tone, posture or gestures.

5) Be independent and aware on dates and other times. Do not be totally passive. Have opinions about where to go. Think about appropriate places to meet, (not necessarily your room or your date’s.

6) Avoid secluded places where could be vulnerable. If you are unsure of a new person in your life or if this person has exhibited some of the controlling behaviors listed above, suggest a group or double date.

7) Trust your gut feelings. If you feel you are in a dangerous situation, or that you are being pressured, you’re probably right, and you need to respond. Many rape survivors report having had a “bad feeling” about the situation that led to their victimization. If a situation feels bad or you start to get nervous about your date’s behavior, confront the person immediately or leave as soon as possible.

8) If you feel pressured, coerced or fearful: protest loudly, leave and, go for help. Make a scene! Your best defense is to attract attention to the situation if you feel you are in trouble. In an attempt to be nice or avoid embarrassment, you may be reluctant to yell or run away to escape being attacked.

9) Be aware that alcohol and drugs are often related to acquaintance rape. They compromise your ability (and your partner’s ability) to make responsible decisions.

10) Practice self-defense. Knowing in advance how you would respond to a physical threat greatly increases your chances of escape. Anyone can learn self-defense and classes are often available free or at a low cost through schools and community context.

Feel free to contact me with questions as well!

Be safe!

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