

Engaging New Voices in Ending Sexual Violence

By Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR)

Spring is often the start to new beginnings. New life to our flowers which sat dormant through the cold months and renewed devotion to our New Year's resolutions that we created in good faith at the beginning of the calendar year. I encourage you today that it also carries a renewed—or reenergized commitment to actively help in rooting out sexual violence—and the darkness that allows it to thrive.

We know sexual violence is a serious and widespread problem in every community. But the good news is that it is preventable. And everyone can help.

During Sexual Assault Awareness Month in April, leaders at rape crisis centers, college campuses, and other supporters involved in efforts to end sexual violence encourage their communities to learn more about how sexual violence can be prevented.

We know that it takes many voices and roles to prevent sexual violence. April's activities help to build momentum for year-round efforts and bring together a new audience of interested groups and individuals. SAAM's focus on prevention education and community awareness engages individuals who previously may not have considered the widespread impact of sexual assault. Everyone has something to contribute and everyone has the power to make a difference.

All people are members of formal or informal groups. Utilizing our roles within these groups to speak against larger issues is important for sexual assault awareness and prevention. How we speak within our organizations and groups can set the tone for how our communities think about, talk about, and respond to sexual assault.

To make lasting change in the community, a wide range of people, groups and institutions must be actively involved. Groups that may have a particularly great impact on how we talk about violence include coaches and athletic teams, faith leaders, teachers, members of Greek life on campuses, and parents.

These community leaders and role models, among many others, have the ability to set standards for conduct that include treating all people with equality, dignity and respect. Encourage others to recognize and confront hurtful and inappropriate behaviors—things such as hazing, and objectifying others. Address jokes and comments that may seem harmless, but support disrespectful messages.

Parents can demonstrate healthy personal boundaries with their children by teaching and reinforcing respect; respecting their child's right to make decisions; and encouraging respect for the choices of others. Talk openly and frequently about consent, decision-making, and body development. Look for opportunities in pop culture to point out examples of positive relationships.

Ending sexual violence starts with you. No matter what group or organization you are a part of, you have the power to help end sexual violence within your community. Start by having a conversation with a friend, a family member, a loved one, or a colleague. Raise your voice wherever you are and help change the culture of sexual assault. Together, we can end sexual violence.