



confi Research

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR KID ABOUT SEXUAL ASSAULT

Conversation Guide

*Printable Format

Why?

College is a HUGE transition. You're living on your own for the first time, and many people start experimenting with sex and alcohol.

Unfortunately, sexual assault affects everyone, and you have a role to play in reducing the risk of your kid becoming a perpetrator or victim of sexual violence, as well as helping them support classmates.

Kids trust you and want to have an open conversation before leaving for college (even if they may resist at first—we get it, our team is all aged 19-27). Peer data is a wonderful tool to talk about charged topics without them getting defensive. This guide will empower you with research-based information to start the conversation.

FYI Confi is a digital health content social venture that creates engaging, expert-approved information on sensitive health topics. We've seen an urgent need for more research and programming on sexual assault prevention, so we conducted a nationwide study of 1,200 students this summer, focused on expectations and beliefs. This guide is to get the findings out there and to start sparking meaningful dialogue and change.

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1) Familiarize yourself with quick stats

Knowledge = power

You've probably seen a lot of different numbers related to sexual assault, and we're here to help decipher.

FYI Much of the public confusion around prevalence stats appears to be around definition differences:

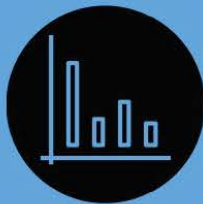
- Experience "in the current school year" vs "since entering college" vs "lifetime"
- Forced "sexual contact" vs forced "penetration"
- Whether or not it includes scenarios of "coercion and absence of affirmative consent" vs only "physical force or incapacitation"



Prevalence

Unwanted sexual contact

26% of college senior women, 6% of men, and 30% of TGQN people have experienced unwanted sexual contact since entering college.



Unwanted penetration

For penetration in particular, the stats are 11% for college senior women, 2% for men, and 13% for TGQN students.

Perpetrators

Not strangers

Most student victims identified the offender as being a classmate in addition to being their friend or acquaintance.



Characteristics

Most (nearly 98%) rape perpetrators are male, including every gender victim. Male victims of other sexual violence often report female perpetrators.



Situation

Mostly residential

~80% of incidences occurred in residential locations, like dorms or apartments.



Most involve alcohol, not drugging

More than half involved alcohol for the perpetrator and/or victim. ~15% of victims were certain or suspected that they were drugged without knowledge.



Reporting & Legal

Reporting

<30% of even the most serious incidents are reported to an organization or agency. The #1 reason for not reporting is because they do not consider it "serious enough."



Legal

Laws vary state-by-state and school policies vary too. 0.6% of perpetrators will spend a day in jail.



(1)TGQN = Transgender or gender nonconforming person

(2)Penetration was defined as when one person puts a penis, finger, or object inside someone else's vagina or anus; when someone's mouth or tongue makes contact with someone else's genitals

2) Help them develop a POV on these topics

Let them think before telling them what to think

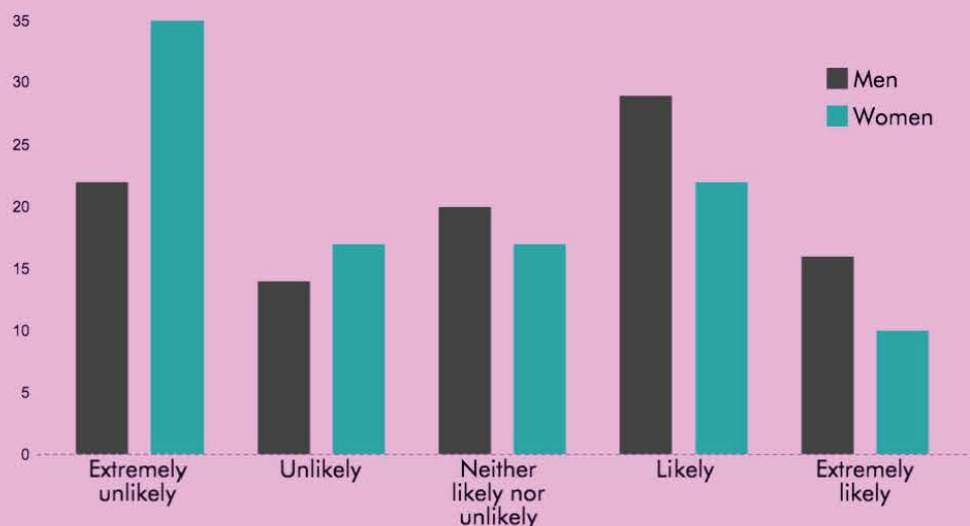
Kids really do not like being condescended to and they have their own beliefs and perspectives to share. Show that their opinion matters, and meet them where they are first. It's already obvious to most people that it is wrong to rape someone or that if someone is unconscious or tells you "no", you should not have sex with them. Focus more of the conversation around scenarios that may come up that seem more confusing. Studies show that there is a connection between believing rape myths and acceptance of the use of force or coercion, so help dispel these myths and explain why it matters. Getting them to talk about it is also great to help them develop key communication skills. Here are some example conversation starters:



ASK: If two people meet at a party and end up going home together, what do you think will happen next sexually?

Talk about why they expect that and whether they think everyone else expects that too. What factors could change their expectations? Then share:

In our study of 1200 college students, we asked, "YOU are at a party and meet someone you are attracted to. You dance with each other, and end up going home together. What do you expect to happen next?" For vaginal sex, people had vastly diverse expectations, especially with a gap between men and women:



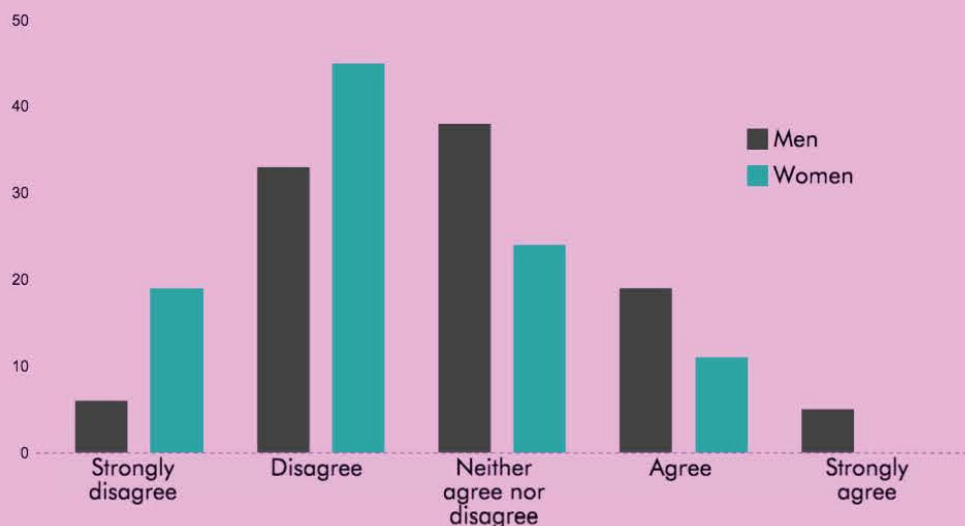
The implication is: why verbally ask for consent if you think sex is expected? Talk about how sex is never expected, and how it is important to verbally find out what the other person wants. You can also bring up Sexual Overperception research. Essentially, men are more likely to misread cues as indicating sexual interest (e.g. smiling). Alcohol has been shown to increase these biases. Help your kid understand natural biases so they will be extra sensitive if they find themselves in these situations. Two people may be perceiving cues completely differently—we all need to actively ask.



ASK: Do you think most women need to be convinced to have sex?

Talk about why yes or no, and what "convinced" means to them (e.g. maybe they think women want to have sex but have inhibitions because of not wanting to come across a certain way, or maybe they think women generally want to have sex less than men, etc.; get to the root beliefs). Then share:

In our study of 1200 college students, we asked how much people agree or disagree with the statement, "Women usually have to be convinced to have sex." 25% of men agree:



Our study asked, "Have you ever had sex when you really DID NOT want to for the following reasons?":

32% of women have had unwanted sex because the other person persistently tried to make moves even after they said "no".

19% of women have had unwanted sex because they wanted to have manual or oral sex and were pressured into vaginal or anal sex.

These situations were more common than "physically forced."

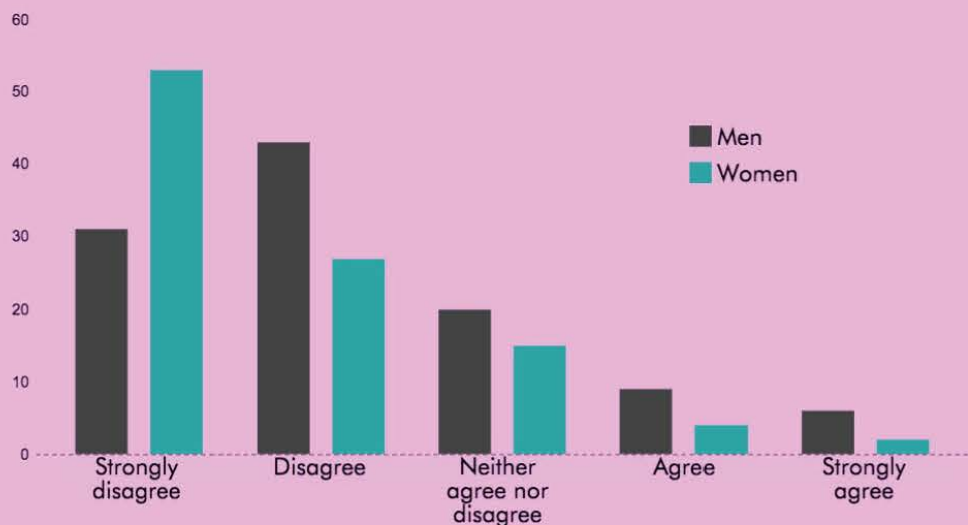
Talk about how even if both parties have good intentions, people may pressure each other without realizing. This is why it is important to check in and not make assumptions about what the other person wants. Persistently trying to get someone to have sex with you when they do not want to IS sexual assault.



ASK: Do you think it can be considered sexual assault if both people are drunk?

Talk about why yes or no, and how do their beliefs change if one person is more or less drunk than the other. This topic is one the main points of resistance we have seen ("Why is it my fault if both of us are drunk and making worse decisions; I can't consent either," "Does this mean you can never have sex even after a beer? Yeah right"). Then share:

In our study of 1200 college students, we asked how much people agree or disagree with the statement, "If both people are drunk, it can't be sexual assault." 19% of men neither agree nor disagree, and 15% of men agree:



Alcohol policies vary from state to state, but most say that a person cannot consent when incapacitated from alcohol. What counts as incapacitated? It's hard to be sure, especially because alcohol affects each person differently. So if both are incapacitated, does that mean it's both or neither of their faults because neither can consent? Talk about this head on. The person initiating sex is likely to be considered more responsible. You probably don't want to have sex with someone who is really drunk anyways or risk it. Have an open dialogue.

Note: Pretty sure your kid won't drink or have sex in college? This question above is still crucial because there is high likelihood they will have friends who drink, plus your kid can play an important role in dispelling rape myths and supporting survivors by being knowledgeable on this topic.

3) Talk about the complex role of alcohol



Most incidents of sexual assault involve alcohol. Talk about how it is never an excuse for pressuring someone sexually, and how it's also NEVER a victim's fault if they have been drinking. Alcohol does not CAUSE sexual assault; people do. Just as you would talk to your kid about how drinking and driving is unsafe, talk about the impact drinking can have on sexual situations so they can be extra aware not to harm others.

Expectations of alcohol's effects

Perpetrator

Anticipates alcohol making themselves more sexual and powerful (self-fulfilling prophecy / placebo effect)



Victim

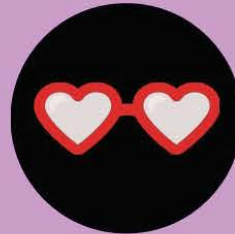
Perpetrator may view victim's drinking as signaling sexual desire (myth that alcohol is an aphrodisiac)



Influences cognition / perceptions of situation

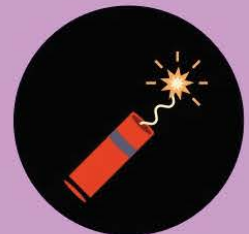
Perpetrator

Exacerbates men's sexual overperception bias (viewing everything as a sign of sexual interest)



Victim

Decreases people's ability to perceive and react to risk (perpetrators use it as a tool to debilitate victims)



Influences behavior

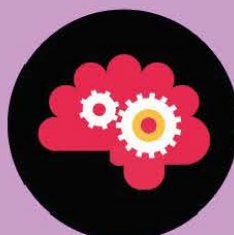
Perpetrator

Alcohol's been shown to make people act more aggressively than normal



Victim

Alcohol can inhibit motor skills that sometimes aid in resisting assault



Perceptions of responsibility / justifiability

Perpetrator

-May blame alcohol for their actions
-May justify it because of stereotypes of drinking women as promiscuous



Victim

May be more likely to blame themselves and not report



4) Help with support network & resources

Help facilitate open conversations with slightly older peers

Does your kid have a cousin or neighbor in college? Or maybe your friend or coworker's kid is in college? Offer to set them up for an ice cream chat to talk about what to expect in college. These older role models can also be a confidant as things come up once your kid gets to college. The more support the better.



Get to know your school's resources and local resources

Show your kid where they can find more information and support if anything comes up for themselves or a friend. Also let them know about specific resources for people who identify as LGBTQ, since sexual violence rates are even higher for these communities.

5) Talk about sex & healthy relationships more broadly

Talking about sex with your kids may help them be more comfortable talking about their wants and limits



Teens are more sexually active than most parents think (by age 19, 70% have had sex). Research shows talking about sex with your kids doesn't make them any more likely to have sex (it actually makes them more likely to delay sex, have fewer partners, and use contraceptives when they do have sex).

Entitlement to pleasure

Many young women report experiencing pain or discomfort during sex, or have difficulties achieving orgasm. Almost half of women do not tell their partners when they experience pain during sex (and there's also a reason faking orgasms is a common practice).

Helping everyone acknowledge that both parties are entitled to feel pleasure is an important part of encouraging communication of wants and boundaries.



6) Other ideas



Small emergency fund if you can afford it

You can create an account or put aside some money (no questions asked) for if your kid is ever in a situation where it would be better to take a taxi home or get a friend home via taxi. For example, we have heard stories of people sleeping over with someone after a party just because it was late and they did not want to walk home alone after midnight (not because they were interested in sex).

Ask about what pressures they are feeling

Nothing happens in isolation in terms of the college experience. One of the striking patterns we've noticed in interviews is how much pressure everyone feels in terms of their reputation, how they look, grades, making friends, etc. and how often people talked about alcohol or sex as a release from this stress. Even though your kid may seem like they are totally cool and collected, there may be more going on in their head.



Parents, you can make a difference! And this doesn't need to be a one-time conversation.

Want to learn more? Check out our full research report and other resources here:

<http://confi.co/research/>

**Have other ideas? We want to know.
Contact rachel@confi.co**



To learn more about consent, visit Confi.co

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