

APRIL IS SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH

In 2001, April was first declared Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM). The goal of SAAM is to raise public awareness about sexual violence and to educate communities and individuals on how to prevent sexual violence. Sexual assault is defined by the Department of Justice as “any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient.” Read below to learn more about sexual assault, what you can do to prevent it, and how the Center can help.

Prevalence and Nature

- Nearly 1 in 5 women have been raped at some time in their lives. About every 2 minutes, someone in the United States is sexually assaulted.
- More than 1 in 3 women and more than 1 in 4 men have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.
- Approximately 80% of female victims experienced their first rape before the age of 25.
- It is impossible to “ask” to be assaulted, and it is never the survivor’s fault. Only 2-8% of reports are false, which is a comparable rate to false reports of other crimes.

Impact on Victims

Each survivor reacts to sexual assault in different ways. Some may tell others right away what happened, while others will wait weeks, months, or even years before discussing their assault. Sexual assault takes a high psychological and physical toll on victims. Victims may experience nightmares, flashbacks, depression, difficulty concentrating, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, and eating disorders. In addition, sexual assault can cause changes in eating or sleeping patterns, physical injury, increased startle response, and concerns about pregnancy or contracting an STI or HIV. Further, victims often experience guilt, embarrassment, denial, and self blame.

What You Can Do

Get involved! Educate yourself about the issue. Talk to your friends about healthy relationships, and be a supportive listener to those affected by sexual assault. Replace victim-blaming statements with statements of support. Challenge rape myths and stereotypes, and speak up when you hear sexist language or someone downplaying the severity of sexual assault. Request our Community Educators to present a program for adults to your PTA, book club, social club, church group, or office. Talk to your children about safe touches and preventing violence. Request our Community Educators to present a program to your kids’ daycare, youth group, or sports team. Support the Center by donating and coming to our events. Volunteer as a Companion, Community Educator, Support Group Facilitator, and more. Host a fundraiser for the Center. And finally, Paint the Town Teal for Sexual Assault Awareness Month!

How the Center Can Help

The Orange County Rape Crisis Center is always available to support victims of sexual assault. All services are free, confidential, and available in both English and Spanish. Our 24-Hour Help Line provides support to survivors and their loved ones 24 hours a day, every day of the year. In addition, the Center offers support groups and therapy referrals. If you or someone you know has been a victim of sexual assault, contact our 24-Hour Help Line at 1-866-WE LISTEN or 919-967-7273.