



*Teal is the color of the awareness ribbon for sexual assault*

Sexual Assault Awareness Month calls attention to the fact that sexual violence is widespread and impacts every person in our community. The theme of the National Sexual Violence Resource Center's 2019 Awareness Month campaign is "I Ask." Events are being held nation wide to bring attention to this. In Rhode Island, Day One is holding a 5K Walk/Run to End Sexual Violence on May 4 at 10am. Call 421-4100 for information.

We have handouts that can be used to promote the power of asking for consent. Please ask a clinician or team member if you're interested in some for your family. Like the Resource Center, we believe it's important to teach children and youth how to ask for consent, and ensure they understand that asking for consent is a healthy, normal and necessary.

Please visit [www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org) for resources and additional information about awareness, education and prevention. The information in this CHAT was all obtained from their website.

*Our mission is to create an environment of healing and hope for those we serve. Children and families are empowered to develop healthy, trusting relationships. Through an array of residential and community based services, we create effective, lasting partnerships that enable children and adults to lead fulfilling lives.*

# ST. MARY'S HOME FOR CHILDREN

## AGENCY CHAT

*CHANGE HAPPENS WITH AWARENESS OF TRAUMA*

April 2019

# I Ask

## Sexual Assault Awareness Month

We encourage you to take a few minutes to CHAT with your colleagues, friends (and children if appropriate) about important issues we all face in our world, and here at our trauma-informed agency.

Our CHATs are designed to introduce topics and start conversations, not to be a substitute for training or consultation with a professional. Please talk to a professional at St. Mary's if you're concerned or have questions about any topics introduced in our CHATs.

If you have ideas for a CHAT, please contact any Program Director or the Executive Director. We strive to make CHATs meaningful and relevant to the issues facing children and families, as well as reflecting trauma-informed best practices.

## **Consent:**

### **What is Consent?**

- ◆ Consent means asking someone for their permission to do something and accepting their answer.
- ◆ Consent shows up in kids' lives when they ask peers if and what they want to play, if they want to sit together at lunch or on the bus, if they'd like to share school supplies, toys, food, etc.
- ◆ Helping kids to ask for consent and accept rejection in these everyday ways builds a foundation for practicing consent in intimate relationships as they get older.

### **Teach Consent Early**

- ◆ Children and youth will get messages about consent from their friends, social media and watching TV or movies.
- ◆ Talk about what consent means so they learn from a trusted adult.

### **Talk Openly**

- ◆ Ask yourself: *What messages are youth getting about relationships and consent? What messages do I want them to get?* Let youth know they can come to you with questions about consent and relationships.
- ◆ Answer questions honestly and encourage ongoing conversations about respect and safety. For example, you could tell your child, "Everyone's body deserves respect," or "If someone makes you feel uncomfortable, it's okay to talk about it."

### **Teach Respect for Boundaries**

- ◆ Teach children and youth that consent means always choosing to respect others' boundaries. Boundaries are a person's right to choose what is comfortable for them.
- ◆ For example, "It sounds like your friend didn't want to sit beside you on the bus today. Sometimes you don't want to sit beside me and that's okay. Everybody gets to make choices about what's comfortable for them."

### **Teach How to Ask for Consent**

- ◆ Help children and youth think about how their actions might make another person feel, and to ask questions if they don't know.
- ◆ Everyone has different boundaries, and no one should ever feel pressured to do something that they're uncomfortable with.

### **Model Asking for Consent**

- ◆ Show children and youth ways to ask for consent by modeling the words and actions yourself.
- ◆ Model respect for boundaries by asking your child for consent and accepting their answer, like when asking for a hug or sharing information about them with others.
- ◆ Use teachable moments to talk about consent and respect.
- ◆ For example, "I could tell your guidance counselor that grandma died if that's okay with you," or "It's okay if you don't want a goodnight hug."

### **How Power Impacts Consent**

- ◆ Consent can be complicated when one person holds more power than the other.

### **What is Power?**

- ◆ Power is the ability to influence the actions and choices of others.
- ◆ Power can be obvious, like in the case of a supervisor or mentor, or it can be less apparent like when there's a difference in experience.

### **Imbalances of Power**

- ◆ Relationships have a power imbalance when one person has the power to influence things like money, a place to live, a job, or a reputation.
- ◆ Having power over someone can influence how comfortable they feel saying no (someone may fear negative consequences for not consenting).
- ◆ When someone abuses power over a partner, they may use verbal threats or not. Either way, consent is never possible when someone feels they don't have a choice.

### **Examples of Imbalances of Power**

- ◆ Age differences and experience: An older or more experienced adult may make a younger or less experienced adult feel they need to "prove" that they are mature or experienced.
- ◆ Level of ability: Some adults who have physical or intellectual disabilities, older adults, or those who need assistance from a caregiver may rely on their partner in some areas of life, but their decision-making in other areas should still be respected.
- ◆ Position in society: Someone may have more social privilege than their partner (through their education, job, wealth, citizenship, or other factors).
- ◆ Privilege: White privilege, male privilege, and other unearned advantages are part of the power some of us bring to relationships.

### **Checking In**

- ◆ Before giving or asking for consent, consider how power might be influencing the situation.