



Teal Paper: Collaboration

MEANINGFUL SOCIAL CHANGE: PRIMARY PREVENTION

NJCASA's mission is to promote the compassionate and just treatment of survivors and their loved ones; foster collaborative relationships between community systems; and affect attitudinal and behavioral changes in society as we work toward the elimination of sexual violence against all people. This document seeks to outline our approach to social change and efforts that seek to end sexual violence.

Sexual violence as a social and community concern

Over 24 million people in the United States report experiencing some form of sexual violence during their lifetime – many before they turned 18. These different forms of violence and violation – sexual assault, coercion, being made to penetrate another person, or any unwanted sexual contact – seek to establish dominance and exercise control over another person. Sex and sexuality are manipulated as weapons to cause harm, rather than to affirm our humanity.

When left unaddressed, these early traumas can lead to poor mental and physical health outcomes later in life. In fact, **researchers have found a relationship between trauma in childhood and some of the leading causes of early death among adults in the U.S.** Conditions such as asthma, heart disease, depression, and anxiety have been connected to unaddressed trauma early in life.

"I see so much potential for the world to be a better place. I know we can be better, to do better. What I love about prevention is that I'm working toward that world. I'm helping people find the very best versions of themselves." - NJ Prevention Specialist

Cultivating meaningful and lasting social change

Sexual violence *is preventable*. We have guideposts highlighting some of the routes to meaningful individual and social change. NJCASA believes that most people are not inherently violent or abusive – social norms supporting aggression, isolation, hypermasculinity, and power imbalances manipulate us. This may mean a young person feels it's alright to treat classmates with disrespect, or for an adult to harm a child, or for a system to make a survivor feel they are untrustworthy. **These patterns do not make these realities “the Truth.” It simply means they are the status quo.**

Primary prevention – or efforts to uproot some of these patterns – seeks to increase feelings of responsibility for communities to end sexual violence. Primary prevention leverages awareness and interest to engage in the deep work of attitudinal and behavioral change. Prevention is not like education or awareness-raising programming. These programs and events are designed to increase awareness, empower survivors and connect them with services, as well as begin a dialogue about the issue of sexual violence. One strategy alone is not effective in ending violence – we need a comprehensive and multifaceted approach.

Primary prevention supports NJCASA's mission of affecting attitudinal changes in society

Attitudinal Changes Promoted by Prevention

- “People of all genders are equal and bring important strengths to my community.”
- “I am bothered by violence against women as portrayed in the media.”
- “As an adult, it is my responsibility to keep children safe from abuse.”
- “Consensual sex is the best kind of sex I can have.”

Knowledge informs attitudes, which then shape some of our behaviors. Education, empowerment, and awareness activities serve to raise consciousness within a group or community, while also empowering survivors and significant others to connect with local services. But these efforts alone do not impact attitudes or behaviors in the long term.

Primary prevention is the additional layer to knowledge-based activities like educational presentations. Prevention offers space and, most importantly, time for individuals to reflect on currently-held attitudes and possible alternatives. **Changing attitudes requires more time than an hour assembly or a one-time presentation – prevention gives us the opportunity to help people reflect and grow.**



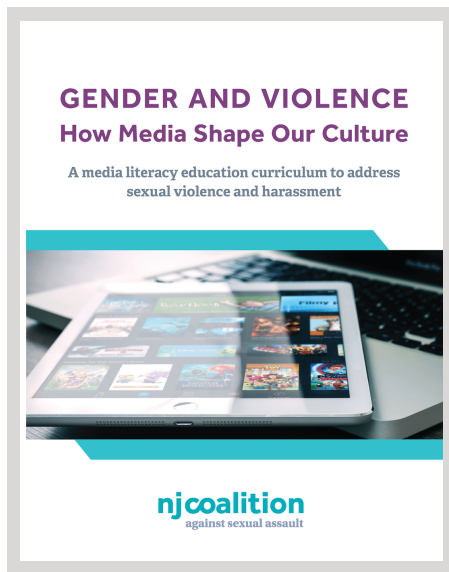
Primary prevention supports NJCASA's mission of affecting behavioral changes in society

Behavioral Changes Promoted by Prevention

- "I always check in with a new partner when we hook up. I ask them if they're into it and wait for them to respond."
- "I tell another adult that their behavior makes me uncomfortable when they [want to be alone with a child / pay too much attention to a child that isn't their child]."
- "I want to help my friend be the best person they can be – I tell them it's hurtful when they use 'rape' insensitively in a sentence."

Changing behavior is the next stage of this process – and anyone who has ever tried to change a habit knows that it is not a quick journey. A person needs support, coaching, encouragement, and practice. Prevention offers these resources to a person who hopes to be an agent of change. **The primary goal of prevention is to consistently change a person's long-term behavior to counter harmful norms and patterns.**

"Being a preventionist is the best job. I get to have really important conversations about really important issues with different people throughout my community. I learn as much as I share. The other day, a young man who went through our media literacy program said to me, 'I tweeted at [popular actor] about the way his character treated women in his new movie! I told him he was better than that!' That quick interaction made my whole week."
- NJ Prevention Coordinator



Innovative prevention in the Garden State

In 2010, NJCASA partnered with Media Literacy Project, New Mexico to create a custom media literacy strategy specific to sexual violence. ***GENDER AND VIOLENCE: How Media Shape Our Culture* is the result of years of research, implementation, and expertise.** The materials and strategy are intended for young adults (typically 8th or 9th grade) to college-aged adults. The strategy is being used widely among Sexual Violence Programs in New Jersey and was selected in 2016 for the CDC's Systematic Screening and Assessment, which identifies practice-based sexual violence prevention strategies ready for more evaluation.



Encouraging self-reflection among professionals, communities, and allies

Each community is an expert in its experiences, resources, and challenges. While a few promising prevention strategies have been identified, prevention does not operate exactly the same way from one community to the next.



Who is being asked to be responsible for ending sexual violence or violent behavior? *For example, are conversations centered around community members taking action, rather than speaking solely to possible victims? Is sexual violence presented as a public health or social issue, rather than an individual problem?*



Does the strategy require multiple separate conversations about strategy concepts? *For example, will a person need time and space to process what's happening? Are they going to need to "unlearn" concepts over time? Are there multiple opportunities to practice new skills or language?*



Is this strategy addressing causes, motivations, or other reasons someone may hurt another person? *For example, is the goal of the strategy to help young men and boys express a wide range of emotions? Will we be discussing gender norms? Will we be focusing on dispelling rape myths or victim blaming?*

Sources

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The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCASA) is the statewide organization representing 21 county-based rape crisis centers and Rutgers University's Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance. NJCASA elevates the voice of survivors and service providers through advocacy, training, and support for efforts to create safer communities for all.

