

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE GLOSSARY

Far too many girls and young women experience sexual harassment and sexual violence, but many don't have the language to talk about these issues. In addition, many adults aren't familiar with the terminology we use to talk about sexual harassment and sexual violence; they might misuse words or incorrectly dismiss problematic behavior as "part of growing up." In order to create a world where girls grow up safe, respected, and valued, we have to start from a place of common understanding. While not exhaustive, we have designed this glossary to help you participate in a more informed exchange on these topics.

- **BYSTANDER:** Someone who either witnesses sexual harassment or violence but doesn't get involved or someone who witnesses the circumstances that lead to sexual harassment and violence but chooses not to intervene. For instance, a bystander might see a student slap another student's behind, and instead of intervening or notifying another person, this person chooses to watch. *See also* Upstander.¹
- **CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE:** A form of child abuse that includes sexual activity with a minor. A child cannot consent to any form of sexual activity, period. Child sexual abuse does not need to include physical contact between a perpetrator and a child. One in five girls and one in 20 boys is a victim of child sexual abuse.²
- **CONSENT:** An agreement between participants to engage in mutually desirable activity. Consent to sexual activity is one type of consent.³ It cannot be given while either person is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, unconscious, or out of fear or intimidation. Consent is about communication—and the clearest form of consent is verbal; getting verbally agreement can help ensure that both participants respect each others' boundaries. Learn more [here](#).
- **FLASHBACK:** Flashbacks are a heightened emotional state that transports a person back to an original experience of trauma. Flashbacks are frequently related to a sensory cue like a sound or smell.⁴ They can also be triggered by media coverage of sexual violence and the experiences of other survivors.⁵ *See also* Trigger.
- **#METOO MOVEMENT:** In 2006, Tarana Burke first used the term "#MeToo" to highlight how many people, particularly young women of color from low-income communities, experience sexual violence. The #MeToo movement grew substantially beginning in 2017 when dozens of people came forward with sexual assault claims against the movie mogul Harvey Weinstein. The #MeToo movement aims to raise awareness about the effects of sexual violence and remove the stigma attached to coming forward. Since #MeToo captured the world's attention in October 2017, millions of people have shared their experiences publically using the hashtag #MeToo.⁶
- **RAPE:** Rape is type of sexual assault that includes sexual "penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without consent."⁷

1. Are you a bystander or an upstander? (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://capsli.org/kids/are-you-a-bystander-or-an-upstander/>

2. Child Sexual Abuse | RAINN. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.rainn.org/articles/child-sexual-abuse>

3. What Is Sexual Consent? | Facts About Rape & Sexual Assault. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/sex-and-relationships/sexual-consent>

4. Flashbacks | RAINN. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.rainn.org/articles/flashbacks>

5. Tips for Survivors on Consuming Media | RAINN. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.rainn.org/articles/tips-survivors-consuming-media>

6. You Are Not Alone. (n.d.). Me too. Retrieved from <https://metoomvmt.org/>

7. Sexual Assault | RAINN. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.rainn.org/articles/sexual-assault>

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- **RAPE CULTURE:** When a society normalizes sexual violence, it accepts and creates rape culture. Rape culture includes jokes, TV, music, advertising, legal jargon, laws, words, and imagery that make violence against women and sexual coercion appear normal.⁸ The term was developed by feminists in the 1970s to expose the ways in which society blames victims of sexual assault and normalizes sexual violence.
- **SEXUAL ABUSE:** Refers to any action that pressures or coerces someone to do something sexually they don't want to do. This can include many different things, from touching a victim in a sexual manner to forcing a victim to touch the perpetrator in a sexual way to making a victim look at sexual body parts or watch sexual activity.⁹ Sexual abuse is a type of sexual violence. The term "sex abuse" is often used as shorthand for child sexual abuse. *See also* Child Sexual Abuse.
- **SEXUAL ASSAULT:** An act in which a person sexually touches another person without that person's consent, or coerces or physically forces a person to engage in a sexual act against their will. Sexual assault is a form of sexual violence which includes rape, attempted rape, unwanted sexual touching, and child sexual abuse.¹⁰
- **SEXUAL HARASSMENT:** Sexual harassment is unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature. It does not have to be physical; it can be verbal acts like name-calling, requests for sexual favors, sexual comments, jokes, gestures, images and graphics, graffiti, and other written statements or actions that may be threatening, harmful, or humiliating.¹¹ For the harassment to be prohibited by Title IX, the federal civil rights law prohibiting sex discrimination in education, it must be "on the basis of sex," which includes sexual harassment and gender-based harassment. Gender-based harassment is unwelcome conduct based on a student's failure to conform to gender stereotypes—for example, harassing a girl because she does not act the way her peers think girls should act. Harassment can include the use of cell phones or the internet (known as "cyberharassment"). It does not matter whether the harasser intends to cause harm, and harassment does not necessarily require repeated incidents. Under Title IX, if the harassment is severe, persistent, or pervasive, schools have an obligation to do something about it so that the victim does not have to endure a "hostile learning environment."
- **SEXUAL VIOLENCE:** An all-encompassing term that refers to sexual acts perpetrated against a person's will or where a person is incapable of giving consent. This term encompasses sexual harassment, sexual assault, and sexual abuse.¹² Learn more [here](#).
- **SURVIVOR:** A person who has experienced sexual violence and is on the path to healing. Some individuals prefer the term "survivor" over the term "victim" because the term "victim" might imply helplessness and "survivor" might reflect a path toward reclaiming power, and empowering others who have experienced sexual violence.¹³ When talking with people who have experienced sexual violence, it is recommended you use the language they prefer. *See also* Victim.

8. What is Rape Culture? (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.wavaw.ca/what-is-rape-culture/>

9. NSPCC. (n.d.). Sexual abuse. Retrieved from <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexual-abuse/>

10. Sexual Assault | RAINN. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.rainn.org/articles/sexual-assault>

11. Sexual Harassment. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/sexual_harassment.cfm

12. Violence Prevention. (2018, April 10). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/definitions.html>

13. Key Terms and Phrases | RAINN. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.rainn.org/articles/key-terms-and-phrases>

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- **TEEN DATING VIOLENCE:** Defined as physical, sexual, psychological, or emotional aggression within a teen dating relationship. This can include stalking. Dating violence can occur in-person or electronically, and it might occur between current or former dating partners.¹⁴
- **TRAUMA:** A distressing or disturbing experience, such as experiencing or witnessing physical injury, sexual assault, or natural disaster. Trauma can be ongoing or a single event. After experiencing trauma, someone may feel shock and denial. Long-term reactions can include: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, panic attacks, difficulty in relationships, and physical symptoms like headaches or nausea.¹⁵
- **TRIGGER:** A trigger is something, often related to a sensory cue like a sound or smell, that may cause a flashback or a heightened emotional state related to a past trauma. *See also* Flashback.¹⁶
- **TRIGGER WARNING:** A statement alerting the reader or viewer to the fact that content contains potentially distressing material. A trigger warning can be as simple as adding “CW” for content warning or “TW” for trigger warning to a social media post or including an acknowledgment of sensitive content at the start of a lecture or conversation. Trigger warnings allow survivors of trauma to prepare themselves and manage their reactions when interacting with sensitive content.¹⁷
- **UPSTANDER:** An upstander is someone who recognizes when something is wrong and acts to make it right. For example, an upstander who witnesses a student slap another student’s backside might intervene by calling out the behavior and reporting it.¹⁸ *See also* Bystander.
- **VICTIM:** A person who has experienced sexual violence. Some individuals prefer the term “survivor” over the term “victim” because the term “victim” might imply helplessness and “survivor” might reflect a path toward reclaiming power and empowering others who have experienced sexual violence.¹⁹ Victim is also frequently used in a legal context. When talking with people who have experienced sexual violence, it is recommended you use the language they prefer. *See also* Survivor.

14. Violence Prevention. (2018, June 11). Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teen_dating_violence.html

15. Trauma. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/topics/trauma/>

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17. Tips for Teachers and Professors. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.knowyourix.org/for-friends-and-fami/tips-teachers-professors/>

18. You’re an Upstander! (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.thebullyproject.com/be_an_upstander

19. Key Terms and Phrases | RAINN. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.rainn.org/articles/key-terms-and-phrases>