



Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force
Campus Sexual Violence Prevention Work Group



Primary Prevention of Campus Sexual Violence

"Sexual violence is preventable, and everyone has a role in preventing it."

Concepts

The Federal SaVE Act requires all colleges and universities to provide prevention programming addressing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Under SaVE, prevention programming on campuses must reflect primary prevention as well as awareness building programs, provide safe and positive options for bystander intervention, give students information on risk reduction for abusive behavior, as well as qualify as ongoing programs.¹

Primary Prevention: The Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force (AGSATF) defines primary prevention as *"approaches that seek to eliminate the root causes of sexual violence and to stop sexual violence from ever occurring."*

- Primary prevention engages individuals, communities, institutions and policy makers to create conditions that will stop sexual violence from happening.
- This is different from activities that exclusively raise awareness of the scope and impact of sexual violence and how to respond when sexual violence occurs.

Sexual Violence: AGSATF defines sexual violence as *any nonconsensual sexual act*. We define consent as *"a 'yes' when 'no' is a viable option."*

- To focus on root causes means that we are considering the entire continuum of violence in our primary prevention work.
- The National Sexual Violence Resource Center has written, *"While some forms of sexual violence -- such as sexist and sexually violent jokes... sexually explicit comments and vulgar gestures -- might not be illegal, this does not make them less threatening or harmful to the person victimized. All of these behaviors contribute to a culture that accepts sexual violence."*

Framework

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) consider sexual violence a public health issue. By combining primary prevention with the public health approach, we strive for health equity, where everyone has equal access to the resources and opportunities that make their lives healthier. The public health approach identifies sexual violence as a serious threat to public health, and seeks to prevent it by clearly defining the violence, identifying risk and protective factors, developing and testing primary prevention strategies, and ensuring widespread adoption of what has been shown to work.

The public health approach complements the public safety approach which guides our work in intervention and response to sexual violence that has occurred. Both approaches understand the importance of shifting responsibility for the prevention of violence from the victim to the perpetrator and to the community as a whole. Campus communities that vigorously act to hold perpetrators responsible for their actions have the capacity to bring that same vigor to identifying and addressing the conditions that allow the violence to occur.

Successful primary prevention programs are ongoing and comprehensive and include strategies that simultaneously address individuals, relationships, communities, and institutions, as well as society in general. Challenging attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that allow for violence at the individual level

¹ This does not serve as a complete list of SaVE requirements, but rather a reference of prevention oriented mandates included within the SaVE Act. VAWA SaVE Act provision, Section 304.

cannot create sustainable change alone. These efforts must be reinforced and reflected by the community in which individuals live, and by the society and institutions that create the policies and laws that shape and control their environment. For example, teaching students about healthy relationships is more likely to result in the changed behaviors we intend if the school adopts and systemically enforces policies that require safety and respect in all school-based relationships. This approach is summarized by saying, ***“Sexual violence is preventable, and everyone has a role in preventing it.”***

Recommendations

1. Focus campus sexual violence prevention efforts on risk factors for perpetration, not for victimization. While it can be useful to give individuals and communities information to help keep vulnerable members safer, this is risk reduction, not primary prevention.
 2. Work with your institution’s violence prevention staff, Title IX Staff, identity-based resource center staff, and health educators, among others, to ensure that your sexual violence prevention plan is comprehensive, theory driven, appropriately timed, socioculturally relevant, and includes varied teaching methods, sufficient dosage, positive relationships, well-trained staff, and outcome evaluation; this includes strategies that simultaneously address individuals, relationships, communities, and institutions, as well as society in general.
 3. Address factors that allow or support the continuation of violence in your community (i.e., strongly held views of dominant masculinity, the support of rape myths, etc.).
 4. Support research that will increase your ability to identify factors that protect against first time perpetration as an important part of strength-based primary prevention work.
 5. Prioritize evaluation. By documenting the efficacy of primary prevention programs and strategies, we can maximize the impact of activities and encourage replication of effective programs and strategies.
 6. Ensure that prevention staff at your institution have the necessary support and resources to stay current in research and best practices.
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Support from AGSATF

AGSATF looks forward to working with your campus community to support your role in violence prevention. We hope that this paper will provide a foundation on which to build and strengthen primary prevention at your institution.

You can receive additional information, technical assistance, and support related to sexual violence and campus communities by contacting AGSATF’s Campus Coordinator, Jackie Sandmeyer at jackie@oregonsatf.org or [\(503\) 990-6541](tel:5039906541).

For access to other AGSATF white papers, webinars, and information, including a complete draft of this paper with citations, please visit www.oregonsatf.org.