

Preventing Sexual Violence on College Campuses: Lessons from Research and Practice

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PART ONE:

Evidence-Based Strategies for the Primary Prevention of Sexual Violence Perpetration

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Highlights

- Sexual violence is a serious and complex public health problem.
- CDC focuses on preventing sexual violence perpetration before it happens to achieve the greatest population level impact.
- Effective prevention strategies are comprehensive—addressing the multiple levels of influence for sexual violence victimization and perpetration in the social ecology. These levels include characteristics of individuals, their relationships, and their physical, social and cultural environments.
- Prevention strategies should be based on the best available evidence, with emphasis on rigorous evaluation that measures changes in behavior.
- Prevention strategies that are consistent with best practices—such as being theory-based and including multiple skill-based sessions—have the greatest potential in reducing rates of sexual violence.
- Only two programs have rigorous evidence of effectiveness for preventing sexual violence: *Safe Dates* and the building-level intervention of *Shifting Boundaries*. Both were developed with middle/ high school students but may provide useful models for the development of college prevention strategies.
- Other strategies have some evidence for changing behavior or modifying risk factors. These include:
 - Building relationship skills;
 - Organizational policies or practices to improve safety or climate;
 - Addressing social norms and behavior with messages from trusted and influential voices; and
 - Training student bystanders to intervene.
- Brief, one-session educational programs focused on increasing awareness or changing beliefs and attitudes are not effective at changing behavior in the long-term. These approaches may be useful as one component of a comprehensive strategy. However, they are not likely to have any impact on rates of violence if implemented as a stand-alone strategy or as a primary component of a prevention plan.
- There are steps that college campuses can take now to better address sexual violence. These include:
 - Using data to better understand sexual violence and student needs;
 - Developing comprehensive prevention plans that include campus-wide policy, structural and social norms components;
 - Selecting prevention strategies based on best practices and available evidence;
 - Evaluating strategies that are implemented; and
 - Sharing lessons learned.

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