MYTHS and FACTS about Sexual Violence

SEXUAL ASSAULT: Any sexual contact without consent.

RAPE: Sexual intercourse without consent.

1. MYTH: Rape is a crime of uncontrollable sexual passion or urge.
   FACT: Rape is a crime motivated by a need to control, humiliate and harm. Rapists use sex as a weapon to hurt and dominate others.

2. MYTH: Rape is defined as a sexual crime committed by strangers.
   FACT: Rape is defined as “Sexual intercourse without consent.” In 90% of incidents of rapes of college students, the person who commits the rape is someone who is known to the individuals they victimize. The same is true for 80% of rapes within the general public. Sexual assaults often occur in the home of either the perpetrator or victim.

3. MYTH: Only women can be victims of sexual violence.
   FACT: Sexual assault is not defined by the gender of the perpetrator or the person who is victimized. People of all gender identities and all sexual orientations are targeted by sexual violence. Although in a majority of cases of reported rape the victims are women, and in fact women are 10 times more likely to be victims of sexual assault than men, it is estimated that about one in thirty-three men have experienced attempted or completed rape in their lifetime. 1 in 6 males are sexually abused by the age of 18.. Transgender individuals are sometimes sexually assaulted as part of a hate crime.

4. MYTH: In order for a situation to be considered rape, the victim must fight back physically.
   FACT: Rape is sexual intercourse without consent. A person might not fight back for any number of reasons including feeling it is not safe to do so. This does not mean that the victim is giving consent.

5. Myth: If a person goes to another person's room and "makes out," it means that she/he wants to have sex.
   FACT: If a person went voluntarily to someone’s residence or room and consented to engage in some sexual activity, it does not serve as consent for all sexual activity. Consent is on-going. Saying “yes” to one form of sexual activity doesn’t mean the person is saying “yes” to all forms of sexual activity.

6. MYTH: A person who has really been sexually assaulted will be hysterical.
   FACT: Victims of sexual violence exhibit a spectrum of responses to the assault which can include: calm, hysteria, withdrawal, anger, apathy, denial, and shock. Being sexually assaulted is a very traumatic experience. Reactions to the assault and the length of time needed to process the experience vary with each person. There is no “right way” to react to having been sexually assaulted. Assumptions about a way a victim “should act” may be detrimental to the victim because each victim copes with the trauma of the assault in different ways which can also vary over time.

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7. **MYTH:** It’s not sexual assault if either party was under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.
**FACT:** Many state laws hold that a person who is cognitively impaired due to the influence of drugs or alcohol is not able to consent to sexual activity. Individuals who commit sexual assault might deliberately use alcohol as a means to decrease the ability of a potential victim to evaluate and respond to what is occurring in order to facilitate non-consensual sexual activity.

The person initiating sexual activity can be held responsible for a sexual assault, even if under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Being intoxicated is not an excuse for engaging in sexual activity with someone without their consent.

If the person who is not initiating the sexual contact is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, that person is considered unable to give consent.

8. **MYTH:** If a victim isn't a virgin, it can't be considered rape.
**FACT:** A victim's sexual history has nothing to do with the crime of rape. A victim could have had consensual sex with the attacker at an earlier time and could still be raped by them. With each sexual encounter, there must be a “yes” in order to know that consent is given. Consent occurs when individuals decide together to engage in mutually agreed upon sexual activity.

9. **MYTH:** Victims of sexual assault often ask to be assaulted by the way they are acting or the way that they dress.
**FACT:** Nobody asks to be sexually assaulted no matter how they are dressed or how they are present themselves. The way an individual presents themselves is their choice, and it is never justification for another individual to decide to sexually assault them. Rape and sexual assault are crimes of violence and control that stem from a person’s determination to exercise power over another. Forcing someone to engage in non-consensual sexual activity is sexual assault regardless of the way that person dresses or acts. Victims of sexual assault range in age from infants to the elderly. Sexual attractiveness is not the issue.

10. **MYTH:** The only way a rapist can really force a person to have intercourse is by using a weapon.
**FACT:** A very small percentage of rapists use a weapon, such as a knife or gun, to control their victims. More common than knives or guns is the use of verbal abuse, physical force, psychological pressure, coercion, intimidation and/or making sure the victim is drunk or drugged so that they don't know what is happening to them.

11. **MYTH:** If a date pays for dinner or a movie, then sex is expected as "pay-back."
**FACT:** Accepting a date for dinner or a movie does not obligate a person to do anything in return.

Many statements adapted from the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault (ICASA)