



Parents Make A Difference!

Teens and Sexual Abuse

April 2005

“Every two minutes, somewhere in America, someone is sexually assaulted.”

(Cite:RAINN Calculation based on 2003 National Crime Victimization Survey)

April is Sexual Assault Awareness month, and a good time to think about how individuals, families, and communities can become educated, aware, and responsive to sexual abuse and assault. Sadly, sexual assault is an adolescent issue; sexual assault affects many more teenage lives than we might commonly think.

According to the Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS) of 5,704 students in 7th through 12th grades, seven percent of 8th and 10th grade females and six percent of 11th and 12th grade females report being victims of sexual abuse by an adult. Six percent of 12th grade males report being victims of sexual abuse by an adult.

Would you know a sexual abuser if you saw one? Based on national statistics the answer would be “no”. Those who abuse look and act just like everyone else, and are often people the victim knows. In fact, they often go out of their way to appear trustworthy. SWYS had similar findings as can be seen by examining teen perpetrators of teen sexual abuse in southwest Wisconsin (see Table 1). Most perpetrators were teens they knew; a friend, someone they were dating, the victim’s boyfriend or girlfriend. Only six percent of males and two percent of females reported that the perpetrator was a stranger.

**Teen Perpetrators of Teen Sexual Abuse
In Southwest Wisconsin (Table 1)**

	Males	Females
Someone the victim was dating for the first time	11%	10%
Someone the victim dated more than once	11%	7%
Victim’s boyfriend/girlfriend	28%	20%
A friend, not boyfriend/girlfriend	24%	37%
Someone the victim knew but did not consider a friend	14%	19%
Stranger to the victim	6%	2%
Brother or sister of the victim	4%	2%
Other teen relative of the victim	2%	4%

A Silent Problem

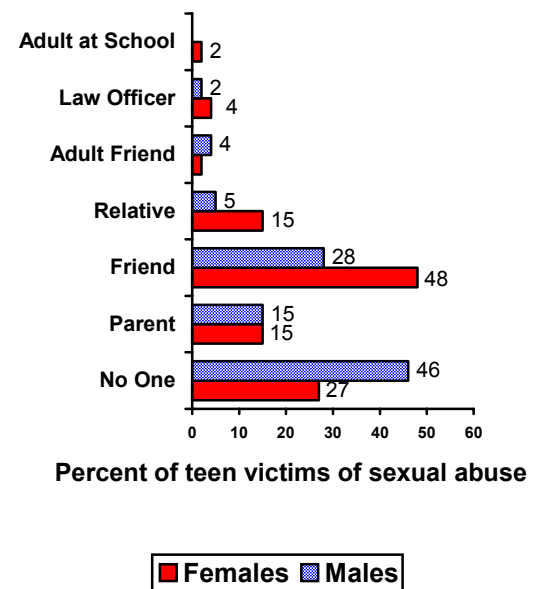
According to RAINN (Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network) one of the most startling aspects of sexual assault crimes is how many go unreported. Sexual abuse has been termed the “silent problem” because victims are often afraid to tell. The most common reasons given by victims for not reporting are the belief that it is a private or personal matter and they fear retaliation.

- People ages **12-34** are at the highest risk of being sexually assaulted.
- **80%** of sexual assault victims are under the age of 30.
- **61%** of rapes and sexual assaults are “**NOT**” reported to police.
- “**Risk peaks in late teens**”: 16 to 19 year olds are four times more likely than the general population to be victims of rape, attempted rape or sexual assault.

Victims of sexual abuse often experience feelings of shame, guilt, isolation, powerlessness, embarrassment, and inadequacy. They may even accept responsibility for the abuse by blaming themselves.

In southwest Wisconsin many teens remain silent about sexual assault. When asked, “If you have been forced by anyone to do something sexual, have you ever told anyone?”, 46% of male sexual abuse victims and 27% of female victims report they never told anyone about the abuse (see Figure 2).

**Who Teens Have Told About Sexual Abuse
in Southwest Wisconsin (Figure 2)**



Parents Make a Difference!

Having open and honest discussions with your teen about safety issues and relationships may enable them to make important decisions on their own when parents are not there to protect them. The sad reality of this world today is that there are real life people that we need to fear. So how can parents help their children stay safe in a world of invisible threats without fearing the whole world? Having basic street smarts and common sense is a good place to start. The following is a list of tips to share with your teen:

- ♥ **There is safety in numbers!** It is always better to go out with a group of trusted friends. When walking, avoid short cuts, hidden or secluded areas, and whenever possible have at least one other person to walk with.
- ♥ **Walk with the light!** Staying in well lit areas, preferably well populated, is your safest route to any destination; even if it takes a bit longer. After all, personal safety is worth more than a few saved minutes.
- ♥ **Keep your head up and look confident.** Your posture can make all the difference in how you are perceived. If you are looking down, seem distracted or look afraid you are more likely to become a target. Keep your head up, be aware of what is going on around you and keep your gaze fixed at nose level.
- ♥ **Do not shut yourself off from the rest of the world.** When walking alone keep your headset off. They cut you off from your surroundings and make it very easy for an attacker to sneak up on you.
- ♥ **Give accurate details on where you're going and when you'll be back.** Teens may not like to tell their parents where they are going for fear of being forbidden to do so, but keeping their whereabouts a secret could put them at risk.
- ♥ **Know basic self defense.** You don't need to know how to beat an attacker, only how to buy yourself enough time to get away. It is helpful to know basic evasive moves.
- ♥ **Be assertive and stay away from places or activities that may put you at risk.**

Resources for Parents or Teens

National Sexual Assault Hotline:

1-800-656-HOPE
Free. Confidential. 24/7
www.rainn.org

Family Advocates, Inc.:

Headquartered in Platteville with offices in
Darlington and Mineral Point

1-800-924-2624
24-Hour Crisis Line
608-348-3838

Passages

Headquartered in Richland Center

24-Hour Crisis Line
608-647-3616

How Can I talk to my Teen?

Using everyday opportunities to talk about sexual abuse, and role modeling healthy relationships can also help your teen as they develop relationships of their own. Everyone has the right to be safe! Here are some things you may talk about with your teen:

- ❖ Explain that sexual abuse is any sexual act that breaks a person's trust or threatens his or her safety.
- ❖ Discuss rape, date/acquaintance rape, sexually transmitted diseases, and unintended pregnancy.
- ❖ Tell them that nobody has the right to force them to do any act that they consider sexual (kissing, hugging, any contact with the breasts or genitals, sexual intercourse, etc.).
- ❖ Reiterate the importance of keeping their bodies safe, saying no, and telling an adult if something is wrong or something that felt wrong has happened.

Remember: Parents Make a Difference!!

"Parents Make a Difference" is a product of the Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS), a program of the University of Wisconsin-Extension, local school districts and UW-Platteville. This series is adapted from the UW-Extension "Whose Kids?...Our Kids!" series. This issue was written by Bev Doll, UW-Extension Grant County and edited by Deb Ivey, Ruth Schriefer and Sarah Weier, UW-Extension Iowa County and Tom Schmitz, UW-Extension Grant and Lafayette County. Thanks are extended to the 5,704 7th to 12th graders from southwest Wisconsin who participated in the 2001 SWYS survey. Contact UW-Extension for further information, or by phone: Grant County (608) 723-2125; Lafayette County (608) 776-4820; and Iowa County (608) 935-0391 or on the web at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/grant/tap/parentresources.html>. References for this edition of *Parents Make A Difference* include: www.rainn.org, <http://kidshealth.org/>, <http://www.prevent-abuse-now.com>, <http://teenadvice.about.com/cs/abusesexual/a/BIRAINN1.htm>, <http://www.darkness2light.org>.