Can you prevent sexual assault?

Unfortunately, there is always some risk of becoming a victim of sexual assault. However, remaining vigilant and knowing some warning signs, you can minimize that risk. In addition, adopting a few practices can help ensure that you don’t cross the line and become an offender.

I can act responsibly in my personal relationships by taking the following actions:

- **Ensure my partner consents** (and that they can legally consent, they are not incapacitated, drunk, drugged, or underage)
- **Communicate my expectations**
- **Avoid the use of drugs and excessive alcohol**
- **Accept that if a person says, “No” it means, “NO!”**
- **Recognize non-verbal indicators that she/he is NOT giving consent**, such as, “freezing up,” crying, or any physical act to push you away

“Sex offenders are not reckless - they are at the very least knowing, and often intentional. Offenders tend to have very lengthy offending careers, beginning in adolescence and often spanning several decades. By the time they are captured – if they are captured – they have often victimized scores or even hundred’s of individuals.” (Understanding the Predatory Nature of Sexual Violence, David Lisak, 2008).

**Perpetrators** are most often described as **nice, normal, and charming**. They tend to be **top performers** with a protected facade and established mentoring relationships. They are:

- Work colleagues
- Business associates and connections
- Established friends and acquaintances in social networks
- Family members (immediate and extended)
- Partners
- Extremely adept at identifying “likely” victims, and testing prospective victims’ boundaries

**Perpetrators**: Plan and **premeditate** their attacks, using sophisticated strategies to groom their victims for attack, and to isolate them physically

- **Use “instrumental” not gratuitous violence**
- **They exhibit strong impulse control and tend to use only as much violence as is necessary to terrify and coerce their victims into submission**
- **Use psychological weapons** – power, control, manipulation, and threats – backed up by physical force, and almost never resort to weapons such as knives or guns
- **Use alcohol deliberately** to render victims more vulnerable to attack, or completely unconscious to:
  - Gain sexual access to them
  - Enhance offender confidence to perpetrate the crime
  - Reduce culpability and minimizing accountability
  - Increase victim blame
  - Affect the memory of victim
The vast majority of reported sexual assaults are committed by serial predators. If you have been sexually assaulted, you are, most likely, not the only one!

**Perpetrator strategies** are:
- Deliberate and calculated
- Designed to isolate the victim
- Focused on controlling the situation
- Used to humiliate and impose their own desires, intentions and perspectives on the interaction with the victim

Both sexual harassment and sexual assault happen between people of different genders and people of the same sex. It is important to note that being the victim of a same-sex crime does not make either the victim or offender a homosexual.

The common perception is that sexual harassment always involves a male mistreating a female and that sexual assaults always involve a male attacking a female. This is not always true, perpetrators can be either male or female.

**Be aware** that a person you know may be an undetected (non-stranger) sexual assault perpetrator and might exhibit the following warning behaviors:
- Ignores, interrupts, or makes fun of you
- Has a reputation for being a “player”
- Drinks too much or uses drugs
- Tries to get you to drink or take drugs
- Invades your personal space and sits or stands too close
- Tries to touch or kiss you when you barely know him or her
- Wants to be alone or pressures you to be alone together
- Pressures or tries to guilt you into sex
- Wants to appear strong and in charge
- Does what he or she wants without asking what you want
- Becomes angry or mopes if he or she doesn’t get their own way

Excessive alcohol use can increase the risk of being vulnerable to sexual assault or engaging in behavior that, by law, is considered sexual assault or abuse.

**Alcohol can:**
- Impair judgment and ability to recognize potentially dangerous situations
- Lower inhibitions and make it difficult to resist a sexual assault
- Increase sexual aggression

Offenders may take advantage of the fact that alcohol or other drugs increase vulnerability.

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**How do perpetrators of sexual assault exploit a person’s vulnerabilities?**

Sexual abuse and assault are crimes that take away power and control, leaving victims feeling vulnerable.

**What are the warning signs that someone you know may be an undetected (non-stranger) sexual assault perpetrator?**

The majority of sexual assault crimes are committed by those we know or are acquainted.

**How does the use of alcohol increase the chance of becoming a victim or an offender of sexual assault?**

Many sexual assaults involve alcohol use, either by the offender, the victim, or both.
What measures can minimize my risk of becoming a sexual assault victim?

Offenders may take advantage of the fact that alcohol or other drugs increase vulnerability.

How do I protect myself from “date-rape” drugs and the risk of sexual assault?

Date-rape drugs are easily slipped into a drink at a pub, club, or party and are colorless, odorless, and often tasteless.

These are some actions that may reduce your risk of becoming a sexual assault victim:

- Don’t assume coworkers or other non-strangers would never harm you
- Trust your instincts
- Be aware of your surroundings
- Avoid isolated places
- Travel and socialize in groups
- Ensure someone knows where you are
- Meet first-time dates in a public place
- Always have money to get home
- Have your cell phone with you
- Take a self-defense class
- Don’t prop outside doors open
- Always lock your door

Limit your alcohol consumption
- Understand the effects alcohol may have on you
- Watch what and how much you drink
- Make sure that you always have control
- Ask a trusted friend or call a taxi to take you home if you have been drinking

If you are going to drink alcohol:

- Be aware that many of the reported sexual assaults in the Coast Guard involve alcohol use, either by the offender, the victim, or both
- Drink responsibly
- Maintain awareness that predators commonly use alcohol to subdue their victims
- Watch your drink to make sure it does not get spiked with date-rape drugs such as GHB, Rohypnol, Ketamine, or Ecstasy. If you have been drugged you may:
  - Feel much more intoxicated than usual after only a few drinks
  - Wake up very hung over
  - Experience partial or total memory lapse

Ways to reduce risk of sexual assault when drugging my be involved, include:

- Do not leave your drink unattended (Note: If you do leave your drink unattended for any amount of time, discard it and do NOT let anyone pressure you into consuming it.)
- Drink from a bottle and keep a cap on top or cover with your thumb
- Avoid sharing or exchanging drinks
- Refuse drinks from an open container
- Appoint a trusted friend to help you watch your drink
- Refuse drinks from anyone you don’t know and trust
- Avoid drinking anything that tastes or looks unusual
- Go to pubs, clubs, and parties with trustworthy friends
- Seek help from a trusted friend if you feel really drunk after only a drink or two

Prevent Sexual Assault
As a bystander, how do I intervene when witnessing behavior that indicates potential for sexual assault?

As a good Shipmate, look out for yourself and others.

If you see something, say and/or do something!

As a bystander, how can I help?

Sexual harassment can lead to assault or to tolerance of forceful sexual acts. If you witness such behavior, intervene, either directly or indirectly.

As a bystander, I get involved because:
- Perpetrators are most likely to respond to my intervention.
- My involvement does not depend on my rank. We all need to care for each other. (If the offender is higher ranking, go to the next person in the chain of command or if immediate help is needed, contact the police.)
- It is my duty to prevent an opportunity for crime. If I remove the opportunity, it is difficult for a perpetrator to commit the crime.
- It is my duty to protect a Shipmate who may be incapacitated by alcohol, sleep, or medication that may attract the attention of a predator.
- I am mandated to report even though I have concerns that intervention could cost my status or respect of peers; that the perpetrator is a friend; that I might be drawing negative attention to myself; or that I might suffer retaliation.

Anyone who feels they are being retaliated against for reporting or intervening to prevent a sexual assault should report that behavior to his/her Command, SARC, VA, and/or CGIS.

As a bystander, I can help by doing the following.
- ABC’s: Assess the situation for safety, Be with others and Care for the victim.
- Notice the event, interpret it as a problem and intervene.
- Consider safety costs; values; consequences, and perspective of the victim.
- Assume personal responsibility and help (directly or indirectly).
- Talk to the victim or potential victim to make sure he or she is okay.
- Get others to help (friends, bartender, or bouncer).
- Distract anyone who engages in sexually harassing behavior (for example, if a man on the street is harassing a woman, you could ask him for directions or the time).
- Distract the potential victim.
- Make up an excuse to give a potential victim a reason to separate himself or herself from a potential perpetrator.
- Let a bartender or host of a party know when someone has had too much to drink.
- Address any disrespectful behavior in a manner that is courteous, but firm, to avoid violence.
- Make isolation impossible; be a third wheel or stay in groups.
- Avoid confrontation, if possible. Approach victim/offender in calm, respectful way, but be firm and avoid violence.
- Call the police, get authorities involved.

The ABCs of Bystander Intervention

Assess the situation for safety — Be with others — Care for the victim.