

Subject: April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month

Date sent: 4/01/2021

Dear Ospreys,

On behalf of the Harassment & Discrimination Response Team, I am bringing recognition to the fact that April is [National Sexual Assault Awareness Month](#), also known as SAAM. The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) chooses a campaign theme each year and 2021 is “**We Can Build Safe Online Spaces.**” While we are all still in a primarily remote world, we can continue to stand in solidarity with and provide support to survivors. Please visit the [Counseling Department’s SAAM page](#) to learn about RCC-specific SAAM events, helpful information, and resources beyond this email.

What is sexual assault?

Sexual assault encompasses a spectrum of unwanted sexual behaviors. In very broad terms, sexual assault is when one person does a sexual act to another person without their consent or against their will. It also includes sexual acts done when someone cannot consent. Sexual assault can include anything from unwanted touching to overt violence. It can involve the use of force, threats, or control of the other person.

The [Oregon Department of Justice](#) also notes: “*Sexual assault can happen to anyone. No matter who a victim is... sexual assault is **never** their fault. No matter where or how it happens.*”

And research does support the notion that sexual assault is a pervasive concern for our country:

- “Every 73 seconds, an American is sexually assaulted.” - [RAINN](#)
- “Nearly 1 in 5 women (18.3%) and 1 in 71 men (1.4%) in the United States have been raped at some time in their lives.” - [NSVRC](#)
- “American Indians are twice as likely to experience a rape/sexual assault compared to all races.” - [RAINN](#)
- The [2015 U.S. Transgender Survey](#) found that 47% of transgender people are sexually assaulted at some point in their lifetime. Among people of color, American Indian (65%), multiracial (59%), Middle Eastern (58%) and Black (53%) respondents of the same survey were most likely to have been sexually assaulted in their lifetime.

- The [2012-15 Sexual Victimization Reported by Adult Correctional Authorities](#) found that 58% percent of substantiated incidents of sexual victimization in 2015 were perpetrated by inmates, while 42% were perpetrated by staff members.
- “Marital rape is the most underreported form of sexual assault.” - [NCADV](#)

These stats are alarming and highlight how certain populations are disproportionately affected.

Did you know?

Research into the [neurobiology of trauma](#) has helped to reveal the trauma of sexual assault [affects the brain](#) and consequently influences how people respond during the assault and afterward. One of the impacts is on memory formation and memory recall. This may look like survivors remembering the incident in fragments and in a non-linear sequence. But the same research also supports that [the accuracy of the memory is intact](#) even if the survivor recalls details out of order.

Brain responses to trauma can also produce short-term tonic immobility, which is the reaction to “freeze” in the phrase “fight, flight, freeze.” The reaction to freeze during a sexual assault is involuntary, meaning [the option to fight back is in reality not always an option](#) that our bodies allow us to do.

Sometimes the repercussions of sexual assault can last for a very long time. Survivors may experience [physical, emotional, and psychological effects](#) such as PTSD, suicidal ideation, sleeping disorders, eating disorders, and [more](#) for years after the incident.

Knowing these facts helps you to be more trauma-informed about sexual assault, and can reduce the harmful misconceptions that often get perpetuated over how a person “should” act after an assault.

Suggestions to Quickly Build a Safer Online Space

You can help RCC bring awareness to SAAM in simple ways. For instance: consider updating your email signature to spread the word. You can [grab a graphic from NSVRC](#) and/or attach a short sentence acknowledging this month. You could even change your Zoom background to show solidarity! The possibilities are endless, and these are easy way to continue the conversation about SAAM in a virtual world. I’ve updated my own email signature to give you an example.

Learn More

[Intro to Trauma Informed Care](#) | Free Training Modules | Trauma Informed Oregon

[What Consent Looks Like](#) | Article | Love Is Respect
[All About Consent](#) | Youtube Video Series | Planned Parenthood
[I Ask for Digital Consent](#) | Youtube Video | NSVRC
[I Ask for Consent](#) | Youtube Video | NSVRC
[Yes, No, Maybe Chart – A Tool For Talking About Consent](#) | Article | The Good Men Project

Best,
Amy