

Lesson 10

Rights, Reporting, and Emotional Health (Knowing what to do if sexual violence happens)



Contents

1. Your rights to safety and privacy
2. Identifying sexual violence
3. Why report sexual violence?
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7. Creating a sexual safety plan

- According to Disability Justice, only 3% of sexual abuse involving people with developmental disabilities are ever reported.
- Familiarity with and trust in law enforcement make it easier for our loved ones with IDD to report sexually violent actions or attempts.
- Seeking therapy after sexual abuse results in reduced trauma, increased self-esteem, improved physical health, and recovery of personal power.

We can take all the necessary steps to prevent it, but sexual violence sometimes happens anyway. If it does, it is crucial that we know how to identify the behavior as violent, understand our rights, and know how to move on from the experience.

This unit will explore what to do if we do experience sexual violence, how to report it to the police, and how to begin to heal afterward.

A person's cognitive age is not always the same as their chronological age. However, while everybody and each body is different, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities physically mature at the same rate as people without disabilities, and should therefore receive age-appropriate sex health information. This curriculum is intended for *all* transition students ages 14-21.



"Regarding sex education: no secrets!" - Albert Einstein

According to the Public Library of Science, comprehensive sex education helps students "feel more informed, make safer choices, and have healthier outcomes."

This is exactly what we want!

Our purpose is to guide you through a comprehensive and accurate home-based sex education curriculum, ensuring that you have all the information you need to teach effectively.

For Parent/Caregiver/Teacher to **read to yourself**:

You may be uncomfortable with some of this material, and that's okay. Our kit is designed so that if any of the topics is in conflict with your religious or moral beliefs, you may simply skip over those parts and pick up at a place at which you are more comfortable. You may also want to adapt or adjust certain lessons, and that's okay too.

As for the parts that are simply embarrassing, uncomfortable, or feel icky, we ask you to keep pushing through! It is important that your student/loved one gain all the knowledge they need to make safe, healthy, informed decisions as they become more independent. And that means, well, talking about stuff that we don't feel great talking about.

Just remember: The more you talk about it, the easier it gets.

For Parent/Caregiver/Teacher to **read aloud before each session**:

We are going to talk openly here, ask questions, and allow each other to express ourselves without judgement. There are no silly questions and no wrong feelings. This is a safe space. This is a learning space. If you hear something that you do not understand or that upsets you, please speak up. You can take breaks or leave the room for a while if you need to. We are going to learn together.

This unit is about RIGHTS, REPORTING, AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH.

Get to know what to do if sexual violence happens!

Topics will include:

Understanding your rights

How to report sexual violence

Seeking emotional support after sexual violence

Creating a sexual safety plan

If any of these topics is a trigger for anxiety or negative feelings, please speak up so we can skip those areas or talk through what bothers you.

You will need:

- Pen or pencil
- Worksheets 37b, 88a - 93

Learning objectives for this lesson:

- Identifying barriers to reporting
- Understanding personal rights to safety and privacy
- Becoming comfortable with reporting procedures
- Understanding steps after sexual violence
- Developing a safety plan
- Recognizing benefits of mental health help

**You may read this lesson as it is written or use your own words.
And because everyone's abilities are different, you may choose to skip some worksheets.**

Section 1: Your rights to safety and privacy ★

As we learned in lesson 7, a *right* is a freedom that is allowed by law. When you have the right to something, it means that you may do it without getting in trouble or being stopped by anyone else.

Although it sometimes feels like we do not have many rights (how many times a day are we told “no?”), we do have certain freedoms that no one can take away from us!

The law says that we have the right to *equality, safety, home & family, and privacy!*

EQUALITY is when all people are treated fairly; when things are the same for different people.

For instance, there was a time when our right to vote depended on the color of our skin and whether or not we had a penis. But now we have equality, and the law says we *all* have the right to vote.

That includes your caretaker, your friends, your neighbors, and you!

SAFETY is freedom from injury, danger, or loss.

Believe it or not, there was a time in America when people were allowed to punish their children with terrible violence if they did not obey the rules. Today, no one is allowed to be violent to others - the police protect us and punish those who hurt other people!

HOME & FAMILY includes being allowed to love who we love, to build a family, and to have children. No one can be kept from doing so because of who they are or their disability.

PRIVACY means that we can do what we want in our own rooms (as long as we do not hurt anyone else), and that no one else is allowed to read our letters or listen to our phone calls. It's the law!

If someone tells us that we do not have the right to these things, they are wrong. The law clearly states what we are allowed and not allowed to do.



Take out **WORKSHEETS 88a** and **88b, "My Rights to Safety and Privacy."** Look over the list of some of your rights, and learn them - they are for you! Read over the contract and sign your name or make an X where it says, "Sign your name here." You have now promised to know your rights and to stand up for them!



Take out **WORKSHEET 89, "Which Are My Rights?"** Let's see if you and your teacher can figure out which are your real rights and which are not! Put a check mark ✓ next to those that are your rights, and ~~cross-out~~ those that are not. Discuss why you think your answers are correct.

However, as we know, having the right to do many important things does not give us the right to do anything we want! That's because with rights come *responsibility*.

RESPONSIBILITY is doing what we are supposed to do and accepting consequences.

So, we should enjoy our rights, but we must also respect the rights of others.



Take out **WORKSHEET 90, "Rights and Responsibilities."** Read over the lists of rights and the responsibilities that come with them. Discuss why we need to accept these responsibilities - will we get in trouble if we don't? Will it hurt someone else if we don't?

BONUS: Discuss what the consequences could be if we enjoy our rights without taking responsibility.

DOUBLE BONUS: Think of some rights and the responsibilities that come with them that do not appear on this list! How many can you think of? What would happen if you did not take responsibility?

Understanding that we have to respect other people's rights will help us be good citizens (living among others).

Section 2: Identifying sexual violence ★

We know how to tell if we are experiencing sexual violence - our bodies will feel shaky, we will feel unhappy emotions, and our gut will tell us that something feels uncomfortable or wrong.



But how can we tell if someone else has experienced sexual violence?

People who survive this type of violence may demonstrate changes in behaviors. Although none of these are *necessarily* evidence of sexual assault - which require investigation/discussion - they are all potentially dangerous and/or symptomatic of some kind of emotional disturbance.

Self-harming behaviors:

- Beginning or increasing drug or alcohol use
- Engaging in cutting, excessive or restrictive/disordered eating, hitting oneself
- Mentioning or attempting suicide

Changes in social behaviors:

- Withdrawal
- Sexual promiscuity
- Dressing provocatively
- Wearing many layers of clothing
- Running away
- Aggressive or disruptive behavior
- Regressive behavior (particularly in people with intellectual or developmental disability)
- Sexually inappropriate behavior
- Excessive attachment
- Avoidance of certain individuals

Changes in individual behaviors:

- Excessive sleeping
- Exhibiting a change in eating patterns (bulimia, anorexia, weight gain)
- Bed wetting
- Incontinence
- Aversion to touch
- Frequent bathing
- Avoidance of previously favorite places
- Compulsive masturbation
- Isolation
- Sudden unwillingness to undress or shower in front of trusted persons
- Unexplained sexual knowledge inappropriate for developmental age



People who have been sexually assaulted or abused may also experience depression; spontaneous crying; feelings of despair and hopelessness; anxiety and panic attacks; fearfulness; compulsive and obsessive behaviors; feelings of being out of control, irritability, anger and resentment; emotional numbness; and/or withdrawal from normal routines and relationships.

Again, this does not mean that this person has, for a fact, endured violence. It does, however, give cause for attention - these feelings and behaviors indicate emotional distress and should be explored.

Some questions to ask if you do observe changes in actions or attitude are:

1. Have you been intentionally hit, slapped, kicked, pushed, or physically hurt by someone?
2. Have you been forced to have sexual activity?
3. Have you been prevented from using an assistive device such as a wheelchair, cane, or respirator?
4. Has anyone you depend on refused to help you with an important personal need, such as taking your medicine, getting to the bathroom, getting out of bed, bathing, getting dressed, or getting food or drink?
5. Have you been threatened, intimidated, coerced, or manipulated to do things that made you fearful or do things that you did not wish to do?
6. Have you been humiliated, shamed, called names, overly criticized, or otherwise belittled?

It is also highly recommended to follow up with a medical professional.

Section 3: Why report sexual violence? ★

According to Disability Justice, only 3% of sexual abuses involving people with developmental disabilities are ever reported.

Why are people with IDD unlikely to report?

There are a number of factors.

Some people experience shame, even though it is NEVER THEIR FAULT.

Some people are afraid, either of the police or the person who committed the abuse. They may fear that the person will harm them or refuse to give them what they need for daily living, such as access to transportation, wheelchair, medication, phone, or computer.

Some people fear they will not be believed.

Others do not know who or how to tell. Or they have difficulty communicating.



There are some people who have been abused who want to protect their abuser - maybe they are considered a friend or someone loved.

Some people do not want to “cause trouble” - they believe that they are supposed to be quiet and obedient, often referred to as the Culture of Compliance.

Then there are others who do not even realize that someone has sexually assaulted them.

The best way to overcome barriers to reporting is through communication!

First, know that fear is normal, even healthy (remember the story of the hungry tiger? We are smart to be afraid of him!), but it helps to know whom we should fear (hungry tiger) and whom we can trust (the police).

Second, begin developing a relationship with local police, either by visiting the station or contacting a community center to organize an event. Familiarizing ourselves with law enforcement *before* we need them allows us to get to know them in a relaxed, friendly manner. And the more comfortable we feel with these helpers, the more likely we are to turn to them in times of need.

Caregivers, too, should make themselves a safe and available resource for sharing thoughts, asking for advice, and confiding secrets. The better we know each other, the better we can take care of each other (and notice when there are changes in mood or behavior!).

Finally, go over Lesson 8, “Sexual Violence and Safety,” often! Knowing what to look for, noticing how we are feeling, and understanding that we have the right to say “no!” is the best way to protect ourselves from sexual risk.

Know that we do not have to report to the police in order to get a sexual assault forensic exam, also known as a “rape kit.” This medical process includes caring for *any* injuries, getting information about our general health, conducting a complete examination (sometimes including internal examinations of the mouth, vagina, and/or anus), obtaining a collection of bodily fluids such as blood and urine, collecting DNA (from swabs or hair), and offering follow-up care. This service is free.

While some people believe that a sexual assault forensic exam is only helpful for gathering evidence for reporting or in cases of rape, it is actually helpful for staying healthy after any form of sexual violence.

Feeling better after assault or abuse takes time, but reporting can be a healthy step in getting better. However, the decision to report or not to report is completely ours, and one that no one else can make for us.



Agencia Brasil Fotografias

Simone Biles is a record-breaking, Olympic gold-medal-winning American gymnast who has ADHD. Known as perhaps the greatest athlete of our time, she has written, “Having ADHD and taking medicine for it is nothing to be ashamed of.” Biles has also survived **sexual violence** and came forward to report it, testifying to the Senate Judiciary committee and helping other survivors put the abuser in prison. She has loudly and proudly said, “I know now it is not my fault.”

Section 4: What happens after sexual violence? ★

No matter how much “Law & Order: SVU” we watch, we still may have questions about what it is like to report sexual violence. Understanding the process can be a help when deciding whether or not to file with the police.

The truth is, even when we are comfortable with our local police, parts of reporting can still feel uncomfortable, even unpleasant. But it can also be very healing and *empowering*.

EMPOWERING means making us more confident and in control.

After an assault, you may not be certain if you want to report the violence.

You do not need to rush to decide: there is no time limit for reporting sexual assault or aggravated sexual assault in New Jersey.

Whatever you do decide, there are ways to make sure you stay healthy in the meantime.

IMMEDIATELY AFTER ASSAULT:

- The first and most important thing to do right after sexual violence is to get to somewhere safe. If leaving is not possible, get in touch with a trusted adult as soon as possible. Being near caring, responsible people will help the healing begin.
- In the case of a physical assault like rape or molestation, do not bathe, shower, douche (washing the inside of the vagina), urinate (pee), brush teeth, eat, drink, or smoke until there has been a sexual assault forensic exam. Staying away from these activities will help preserve evidence.

- Do not change clothing before going to the health facility or hospital, but bring along fresh clothes to change into afterward.
- Remember to use the real words for your body parts! This will help you communicate exactly what happened when talking to the medical professional.



Take out **WORKSHEET 37b, "Our Bodies."** Take a look at the worksheet and refresh your memory of all your body parts! Remember to quiz each other. You can ask, "Where is your elbow?" and "Where is your butt?" and have the other person point to theirs, or you can point to a part on yourself and ask the other person, "What is this part called?" The more often you review the real names for your body parts, the easier it will be to talk about them. (Remember: *repetition helps us remember things!*)

- Contact your county Sexual Violence Agency. The trained staff will provide the emotional support you require, and also inform you of your available options, including contacting the police and filing a formal complaint.
- If the person who committed the assault is a helper or caretaker, explore who else can be available to provide care temporarily (family, friends, faith community members) and long term.
- If you decide you must leave your home either temporarily or permanently, gather the following critical information: medical ID information including Medicaid or Medicare; written documentation of disability; social security awards, benefits and payee information; documents that prove identity; all disability related service eligibility documents; prescriptions; and any medical orders.

Section 5: How to report sexual violence

There are a number of ways to report having experienced sexual violence. You may:

- Call 911
- Contact your local police department
- Visit a hospital or medical center
- Call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.HOPE (4673)
- Ask your county Sexual Violence Agency
- If the sexual violence occurred within the family and against a minor, report it to the New Jersey State Central Registry (SCR), or New Jersey's Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline at 1-877-NJ ABUSE (652-2873); outside the state of New Jersey, call (800) 422-4453.



Wherever your first go, you will eventually have to answer questions about the event. Know that these questions are asked so the police can get a good understanding of what happened to you.

Questions may include:

- Where did the sexual violence happen?
- When did it happen?
- Do you know who assaulted you and what is your relationship to them (family member, friend, stranger, etc.)? Were they aware of your disability?
- What happened?

For this last question, you will want to use those good, *real* words for your body parts so the police can understand. It may feel strange saying these words to people who are not your teacher or caretaker, but the police know these words, too, so you don't need to feel embarrassed!

- They may ask if there was alcohol or drug use involved. Tell the truth. You cannot get in trouble for things you were doing before the crime, whether that was drinking while underage or breaking a house rule. Someone else committed the crime, and it was **NOT YOUR FAULT**.
- They may ask if there was a weapon involved.
- They may also ask if they can film you answering these questions with a video camera. You do not have to do this, and can say "no."

You may also be questioned by a detective, who is a special police officer who gathers information to help solve crimes. The detective will ask more questions or will repeat ones you were asked earlier. They are part of your team, and they are trying to find everything out so they can help you.

- They may ask for *eyewitnesses* (people who saw what happened) or *outcry witnesses* (the first people told about the assault after it happened).
- They may ask to see text messages with the person who committed the crime, especially if they admitted to the violence in these messages.
- They will ask about your injuries (if you have any), and possibly take pictures of them.
- They may also ask for receipts to show where you were at the time - if it was at the movies, maybe you have your ticket stub; if it was at a concert, maybe you have a food receipt.

Don't worry if you are nervous or if you cannot remember every detail. Just do your best to answer the questions and just tell the truth. And remember that - just like with sexual activity - you may change your mind about reporting at any time!



If you do choose to visit a healthcare facility, a sexual violence service organization, or a law enforcement agency (police station), or you call 911, you will learn about the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART).

SART is support team made up of a forensic nurse examiner, a confidential sexual violence advocate (CSVA), and a law enforcement officer.

This team provides compassionate and all-inclusive medical care, emotional and informative support, along with the gathering of crucial evidence of the sexual assault incident. The professionals help to support victims in making the best choices for their own care and healing.

You may use the services of SART if:

- you are 13 years of age or older
- the assault occurred within the past five days
- you consent to a SART activation

You may choose to work with any or all of these team members, or choose not to work with them. It is up to you.

The CSVA is also available on their own, even beyond the first five days after the assault. Available 24 hours a day, they will accompany you through all medical, legal, and court procedures. (But, while they may sit in on the police interview, they may not coach the survivor.) Their main purpose is to provide emotional support and information to the survivor and their families after an assault, as well as to gather community resources and address individual communication needs.

You may also ask for a Sexual Assault Protective Order from a judge, even if you choose not to seek criminal charges. This order prevents the abuser from having *any* contact with the survivor; it makes it a crime for the person who committed the assault to be in touch with the person they assaulted. This includes coming to the survivor's home, workplace, school, or other places they and their families frequently visit; communicating with the survivor and anyone else listed on the order (such as family members); and/or threatening or scaring the survivor.

There did not have to have been physical contact with the survivor in order to have a Sexual Assault Protective Order placed against someone.

Filing for this protective order will not put the person who committed the act in jail or prison. Therefore, there is no in-depth police investigation required to get one.



Section 6: Seeing emotional help after sexual violence ★

The final step after sexual violence is perhaps the most important: therapy.

People who have experienced sexual violence may deal with difficult and long-lasting psychological effects. Fears, negative emotions, and struggles with everyday tasks can leave a person feeling desperate and alone.

It is important for us to know that we are *not* alone, and that there are many trained professionals who can help us get better.

Most counties in New Jersey have Sexual Violence Agencies dedicated to survivors.

All services are confidential (no one will know who you are or that you have gotten therapy), and are available regardless of when the assault occurred or whether a victim reports the crime. They offer individual or group therapy.

If your county does not have an agency, the New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCASA) has a list of resources in both English and Spanish.

You can access NJCASA's "Find Help" section by scanning the QR code to the right.

If you do not have a smartphone, go to <https://njcasa.org/find-help/>.



Take out **WORKSHEET 91, "Resources After Sexual Violence."** Look at this worksheet and become familiar with the professionals who can help after sexual violence, and what they do.

To help ourselves heal, we should also be sure to practice *self-care*.

SELF-CARE is doing the things that help you be as healthy as you can be, including eating nutritious foods, exercising, getting enough sleep, doing things you enjoy, and taking time to make sure we are relaxed and happy.

Love sports? Carve out some time on the weekend to watch a tennis match or go to the park and get some exercise.

Love a good book? Go to the library and find something new and exciting. Better still, get a friend or loved one to read the same book as you, then discuss with each other after reading each chapter! (Spending quality time together *and* discussing books? Double self-care!)

Whether or not there has been an experience of sexual violence, practicing self-care is a great habit to take you through life. Because nothing is more important than health and happiness.

Besides talking to a therapist and looking after our emotions, there are things family and friends can do to support us after an assault.

- Remain calm. People who have experienced trauma need cool heads to help them.
- Believe the survivor. Make it clear that you believe the assault happened and that the assault is **NOT THEIR FAULT**.
- Empower the survivor. (Remember that word, “empower?” It means “to feel confident and in control.”) People who have experienced sexual violence often feel helpless; allow them to make decisions about next steps such as filing a report or requesting a protective order. They need to know that their voice still matters.
- Be available for all their feelings. There may be anger, there may be tears. Help bear the burden.
- Maintain confidentiality. No one should know about what happened unless and until the survivor wants others to know.
- Get consent before giving physical support, like a hug or a hand on their shoulder. Touch might feel uncomfortable to them for a while (and we should ask for consent first, anyway!).
- Be patient and know that it will get better.

Healing from sexual violence takes a team effort, and that team includes professionals, such as the people on SART, loved ones, and ourselves. When we feel stronger, we may decide to report what happened.



Take out **WORKSHEET 92, "To Report Abuse."** Having a plan is a good way to feel safer when it comes to sexual violence. Fill in your important people, places, and phone numbers to have on hand.

Section 7: Creating a sexual safety plan

One of the best ways to feel safer is to plan ahead.

A SEXUAL SAFETY PLAN is a written document created by a survivor that sets out ways the survivor can stay safe and reduce the risk of harm, such as listing important phone numbers.

However, there is no need to have experienced sexual violence before creating one! Knowing there is something nearby to help - like a fire extinguisher in the kitchen - is a good way to feel more secure, even if you never need to use it. The same goes for a sexual safety plan.

Besides a list of important numbers, a safety plan includes:

- Awareness of safe places to go, like a loved one's home.
- A code word: it might be a code between you and your siblings that means "it's not safe here," or with your support network that means "I need help."
- The name of your trusted adult.
- Reminder to do private behaviors in private places; keep doors shut and curtains closed when changing clothes or touching yourself.
- Reminder to never meet new people by yourself (even if you have texted or spoken on the phone!).
- Reminder to give consent or non-consent, and to accept it from others.



Take out **WORKSHEET 93, "My Sexual Safety Plan."**

Fill in the blanks and hang this worksheet where you can easily see it. Go over each step with your caretaker, so you both know what to do if you feel unsafe!

One big factor in creating an environment of sexual safety is educating ourselves about boundaries, consent, self-advocacy, internet safety, and our rights! Knowing how to identify sexual violence, and being aware of how not to commit sexual violence can help keep us and those around us safe and secure.

You have done some great work and learned a lot from all of these lessons.

Please continue to look them over and revisit your other materials; practice your "let's role play" exercises; reprint worksheets or cover with clear plastic tape for filling out with erasable marker, so you can replay the games and refill in the worksheets; and always remember that *repetition helps us remember things!*

So repeat, repeat, repeat! And stay safe.

END OF LESSON 10 ★

Be sure to check in with your student about how they feel. Hard topics can bring up emotions like sadness or fear - make sure your student is ok, and talk it through if they are not. Then you can see if they have any questions! Great job!

EMPOWERING means making us more confident and in control.

RESPONSIBILITY is doing what we are supposed to do and accepting consequences.

THE RIGHT TO EQUALITY is when all people are treated fairly; when things are the same for different people.

THE RIGHT TO HOME & FAMILY includes being allowed to love who we love, to build a family, and to have children. No one can be kept from doing so because of who they are or their disability.

THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY means that we can do what we want in our own rooms (as long as we do not hurt anyone else), and that no one else is allowed to read our letters or listen to our phone calls.

THE RIGHT TO SAFETY is freedom from injury, danger, or loss.

SART is a support team made up of a forensic nurse examiner, a confidential sexual violence advocate (CSVA), and a law enforcement officer.

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