

Becoming a Youth Agent of Change

You may have learned that sexual assault, harassment, and abuse, are any unwanted sexual activity or touch. Sexual assault can happen to people no matter their age or identity. One and 26 men and one in four women reported completed or attempted rape at some time in their life (Basile et al., 2022). Transgender or non-binary students in grades K 12 reported significant rates of harassment, physical assault, and sexual violence – with 47% of all transgender people having been sexually assaulted at some point in their lives (James et al., 2016).

Odds are, someone you know has experienced sexual assault. It could be someone in your family, circle of friends, or school. Sexual violence is significant and affects us all.

Talking about sexual violence may be difficult and uncomfortable to discuss, but we can all work together to make a world where sexual assault, harassment, and abuse do not happen. Social change happens when we shift attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to positively address social issues. Becoming an agent of change is about taking small, sustainable steps to positively influence the world around you. We can all become a social change agent regardless of age, race, gender, and sexual orientation. Being a social change agent is one way you can help build a future where you, your relationships, your community, and the world are safer and healthier.



HOW TO BECOME AN AGENT OF CHANGE

Know your power. As a young person, you are in a unique position to provide your friends with useful information and perspective. Adults and communities can learn from the voices and experiences of you and your friends.

Engage friends and build a network.

Social change takes time and teamwork. You can encourage your friends to join you, ask for help from local and national organizations, and inspire others to get involved. You can have a positive influence on your friends by being a role model of healthy behaviors.

Take a stand against oppression. Working for positive social change involves challenging oppression. It is important to understand how issues are interconnected when working on social change. Oppression occurs whenever one group has control over another, and it frequently includes inequality, silenced voices, and abuse of power. Racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism or other aspects of people's identities can all be forms of oppression.

Every Person has a Role in preventing Sexual Violence. What Role will you play?

Partner with supportive adults. You can also seek support from reliable adults by developing positive relationships with them. Adults and youth can learn from and teach one another in a healthy partnership and ensure that all voices are heard and respected. Members of your family, neighborhood, community, school, or church organization can be adult allies.

Use your creativity. Social change work can build on diverse strengths, and everyone has something valuable to bring to the table. Whether you love social media or prefer creative arts, think about how your interests and skills can educate and inspire others.

Take one step at a time. Whether you are looking to start small or reach for the stars, it is important to take change one step at a time. Approach challenges as an opportunity to problem solve and learn. Look at what inspires you, learn from others, and work to build your network of support. As you start to see an impact, share your successes and give others the opportunity to participate.

Seek out resources. Consider trustworthy online resources, your local library, and trusted adults as additional resources for information-seeking assistance.

Although it may seem complicated at first glance, remember you can use these simple tools and support from peers and adult allies to move forward. Every person has a role in preventing sexual violence.

Look for resources in your neighborhood. You might discover that there are already people and groups working to make a difference in your neighborhood.

Organizations such as your local rape crisis center are excellent places in your community to look for opportunities to participate, volunteer, or intern.

References

Basile, K. C., Smith, S. G., Kresnow, M., Khatiwada S., & Leemis, R. W. (2022). *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 report on sexual violence*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs/nisvsreportonsexualviolence.pdf>

James, S. E., Herman, J. L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., & Anafi, M. (2016). *The report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*. Retrieved from the National Center for Transgender Equality: <https://www.transequality.org/sites/default/files/doc s/USTS-Full-Report-FINAL.PDF>