

## Cultural Competency

**B**ecause sexual violence crosses all racial, ethnic, age, gender, sexual orientation and socio-economic boundaries, you can expect to work with people from very diverse backgrounds. No client wants to have to educate you on their culture just to be able to get help after an assault. Keep these tips in mind when confronted with cultural differences:

- Self-awareness is key. It is important that you know and acknowledge your own biases and prejudices. Rape Response staff can help you work through these.
- Do not impose your values on the people you are working with. For example, an Asian woman may believe that in her culture, women must always be submissive towards men. You may disagree, but do not present your value as superior to hers.
- When working with a client who speaks a different language (including sign language), remember that hospitals are mandated to provide an interpreter. At Rape Response, we will also provide interpreters in order to work effectively with clients who speak different languages.
- Different people have different styles of communicating. Do not hesitate to ask a client to repeat what they said. It is always better to clarify than to assume.
- Rape is a universal crime. Do not assume that a certain population group is more acquainted with the crime than others.
- Different cultures have different concepts on touch and personal space. When in doubt, ask.
- Not every person will understand what an “advocate” means. Explain that your role is to listen, support, and provide information.
- Names are important because it is part of a person’s identity. Make an extra effort to pronounce names correctly. It shows respect and care for the person.
- Be respectful of differences. Do not be quick to judge. And always begin where the client is.
- Always respect the client’s decision, opinion, or judgment of their life situation. They know what is best for them because they know their life and/or situation best.

## Working with Translators or Non-English Speaking People:

When working with translators and/or interpreters remember to focus on the client as much as possible. Talk to the client not the translator. Make eye contact and use non-verbal cues to let the client know you are there for them. Keep conversations outside of the client's language to a minimum. Do not make decisions for the client because it is harder to ask them for their opinion. Remember it is the client's life.

## Working with People with Disabilities:

If a client has a physical disability, do not assume they cannot do something by themselves. Allow the client to ask for help if they need it. If you are uncertain how to handle a situation, ask before doing. If a client has some sort of mental illness, focus on providing unconditional positive regard and help them where they are.

## Working with Teens:

Working with teens is sometimes difficult. It might be harder to build rapport with a teenager. It might be that the perpetrator is an authority figure or someone they know, and teen clients are scared of the trouble they will get into if they tell someone the details of their assault. There might be issues with parents or guardians. Do not assume a teen's family will support them. There might also be fears that their parents or guardians will punish them for the assault or their behavior surrounding the assault.

## Working with Older Adults:

When working with older adults, remember they might be feeling a lot of pressure because of the stigma surrounding sexual assault in their generation. Unfortunately many older people might still feel like they shouldn't report an assault. There might also be complications because of health concerns. If the perpetrator is a caretaker, an older adult might not have any other support system.

## Working with People Who Identify as LGBTQ:

Do not assume heterosexuality when speaking with clients. Recognize that there are many different ways to express one's gender and sexuality. The client might not want to disclose their sexuality to you for fear of judgment or loss of access to services. LGBTQ clients might have a hard time coming forward to report or receive help with their assault because of fears that the authorities will not care about their assault or that they will not be taken seriously simply because they are LGBTQ. There might also be fears surrounding outing their perpetrator. LGBTQ communities are small and a client may fear everyone they know finding out about their assault.

## Working with Survivors of Human Trafficking/Sex Trafficking:

Survivors of sex trafficking might not identify themselves as victims/survivors of human/sex trafficking. There is so much power and control exerted over people in this situation that they might believe they are at fault for any criminal activity they have participated in. Follow their lead, offer support, and do not be judgmental. We rarely serve these survivors because they are incredibly hard to make contact with.

## Working with People from a Rural Area:

Clients from rural communities might be worried that everyone they know will find out about their assault if they report. They might not want to involve local law enforcement for this fear. As with all sexual assaults the chances they know their perpetrator is high. Their perpetrator might be well-known in the community.

## Working with Military Personnel:

In 2012 the Secretary of Defense estimated 26,000 U.S. soldiers received some sort of unwanted sexual contact<sup>1</sup>. The military is very hierarchical and stresses unit cohesion. By reporting a sexual assault, clients might feel as if they are breaking ranks with their unit. They might also fear retribution from colleagues or from commanders. Deployment is linked with increased

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<sup>1</sup> NSVRC "Talking Points for Advocates: Sexual Violence in the Military" 2013

violence against women<sup>2</sup>. Dealing with PTSD from both serving abroad and experiencing sexual violence might contribute to not wanting to report.

## Working with Male Survivors:

Many people still believe that men cannot be raped. This is false. Approximately 1 in 33 men are sexually assaulted in their lifetime. That number represents the reported cases. Far more men are assaulted than ever report. Male survivors might feel as if they will not be believed if they come forward. They often feel more isolated than women, simply because much more attention is paid to violence against women than men.

## Working with Survivors of Intimate Partner Sexual Violence:

Intimate partner violence is a difficult subject area. Many people believe it is easy to leave a partner who is abusive. In reality there are usually many more reasons to stay in an abusive relationship than there are to leave. A person might not have any way of supporting themselves outside of their relationship; they might want to stay because regardless of how they are treated they believe their abuser is a good parent. It could simply be that the person loves their abuser. It is not our place to judge. Even if the client is at SANE to get an exam, they could still go back to their partner. On average people try to leave 7 to 8 times before they can actually get out of the situation. Violence typically escalates when someone is trying to leave or has gotten away. According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NIPSV) of 2010, 1 in 10 women are raped by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime. In the 12 months prior to the survey 5.9% or 7 million women and 5% or 5.7 million men experienced being abused by their intimate partner. When working with survivors of IPSV, follow their lead. They do not need a lecture on healthy relationships, what they need is support and unconditional positive regard. Remember it is their life and at the end of the day, whatever they choose is the right decision for them at that time. As much as we might want to help them out of the situation, if we isolate them, or judge them, we could be proving their abuser is right when he/she has told them no one will want to help them.

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<sup>2</sup> NSVRC "Talking Points for Advocates: Sexual Violence in the Military" 2013