FACT SHEET:

Sexual Violence Prevention

What is prevention?

Prevention refers to efforts intended to stop the perpetration of unhealthy, harmful, dangerous, and illegal behavior and acts, as well as victimization and re-victimization by others.

What are the goals of prevention?

Prevention efforts include developing the attitudes, knowledge, skills, behaviors, and resources necessary to promote individual and community health, safety, and wellbeing. For example, we know that one factor with the potential to contribute to the development of sexually abusive behavior is attitudes regarding women, sexuality, violence and aggression. Therefore, sexual violence prevention efforts might target the development of healthier and less adversarial beliefs. Efforts along these lines in other areas demonstrate that prevention is effective. For example, research shows that public health prevention campaigns targeting tobacco use and drunk drinking have both been very successful at changing the attitudes related to these behaviors.

Prevention: WHEN do we intervene?

The field of public health prevention defines three levels of intervention in a social and/or health problem. Based on when the intervention is used in targeting prevention of problem, they are:

- **Primary Prevention:** Approaches that are employed before any sexual violence has occurred to prevent initial perpetration and victimization. Primary prevention includes building an environment that encourages well-being and healthy choices. This could include approaches such as public dissemination of information and resources. Primary Prevention can be directed toward either at "Universal" or "Selected" audiences. Universal reflects strategies aimed at everyone in the population of interest, independent of risk. Selected denotes strategies directed toward those in the population at increased risk for sexual violence perpetration or victimization.

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• **Secondary Prevention:** An immediate response after sexual violence has been perpetrated. Secondary prevention deals with the short-term consequences of violence; it attempts to reduce the harm to the victims in the immediate aftermath of the violence (e.g. separating the victim and the perpetrator; providing immediate crisis counseling for the victim), and to locate, contain, and address the perpetrators. Secondary and Tertiary prevention can be directed towards “Indicated” audiences, reflecting strategies aimed at individuals who have perpetrated sexual violence or those who have been victimized.

• **Tertiary Prevention:** A long-term response *after* sexual violence perpetration. Tertiary prevention addresses the lasting consequences of victimization (e.g. by providing ongoing counseling for victims) and the provision of specialized sex offender treatment and management to the perpetrators of sexual violence to minimize the possibility of re-offense. Tertiary prevention also includes intervention in family violence to prevent reoccurrence of the situations and behaviors that cause harm.

**Prevention: WHAT is the focus?**

Preventing sexual violence involves understanding what circumstances and factors can promote and inhibit its perpetration. These factors are often referred to as “risk” and “protective” factors for perpetration. It is also important to understand the risk and protective factors for victimization. A sound prevention program enhances and assists protective factors and reduces (and in many cases, eliminates) the identified risk factors.

There are many different theoretical models that attempt to describe the root causes of sexual violence. However, the use of an ecological model allows us to include risk and protective factors for understanding the complex interplay of individual, relationship, social, political, cultural, and environmental factors that influence sexual violence (Dahlberg and Krug 2002). The ecological model is helpful because it frames a comprehensive public health approach that not only addresses an individual’s risk and protective factors, but also addresses the norms, beliefs, physical environments, and social and economic systems that create the conditions that allow for the perpetration of sexual violence. By understanding the risk and protective factors within all of these realms, we can more effectively design multi-dimensional prevention programs that target individuals, families, communities, and other systems in which sexual violence is perpetrated, promoted and/or inhibited. The following discussion defines each element of the ecological model and offers illustrative examples (Powell et al., 1999):

• **Individual-level influences** include personal factors that increase the likelihood of an individual becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence. Interventions for individual-level influences are often designed to target social and cognitive skills, and include counseling, therapy, and educational training sessions;

• **Interpersonal relationship-level influences** are factors emerging from relationships with peers, intimate partners, and family members. Interventions for interpersonal relationship-level
influences could include family therapy, bystander intervention skill development, and parenting training;

- **Community-level influences** are factors resulting from community and social environments. They can include an individual’s experiences and relationships with schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods. Interventions for community-level influences are typically designed to impact the climate, systems, and policies in a given setting; and

- **Societal-level influences** are larger, macro-level factors that influence sexual violence. They include gender inequality, religious or cultural belief systems, societal norms, and policies (social or economic) that contribute to tensions between groups of people. Interventions for societal-level influences typically involve collaborations by multiple partners to change laws and policies related to sexual violence or gender inequality.

**What is the unique contribution of ATSA to the prevention of sexual violence?**

ATSA’s work considers risk and protective factors for the perpetration of sexual violence across the various levels of the ecological model. In addition, ATSA’s efforts include moving from tertiary and secondary through primary prevention strategies to make our society a safer place to live. Through research, education, training, and public policy, our organization is committed to collaborating with victim centered programs to promote a healthier and safer society.

**How can we promote the prevention of sexual violence?**

**Policies and Organizational Practices** - Encourage the development and implementation of local, state, and national policies and organizational practices to advance primary prevention and strengthen comprehensive prevention measures. Work within your own organization/s to develop internal policies that promote practices that discourage sexual violence in all its forms and enforce a lack of tolerance for the behaviors that promote sexual violence. Ensure that policies that respond to situations of sexual violence are in place within your organization(s).

- Association for the Treatment of Abusers: [Public Policy Papers](#)
- Association for the Treatment of Abusers: [Prevention Education](#)
- Center for Disease Control and Preventions: [Preventing Sexual Abuse within Youth-serving Organizations: Getting Started on Policies and Procedures](#)
- Prevention Institute: [Transforming Communities to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation: A Primary Prevention Approach](#)

**Funding** - Advocate for increasing the dollars invested in prevention and positive development in proportion to the harm done and the real costs of sexual violence.

- Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers: [Awards and Grants](#)
- Prevention Institute: [Making the Case for Prevention](#)
**Research** - Promote the use of research to guide prevention and early intervention practice and to serve as a catalyst for positive change.

- Association for the Treatment of Abusers: *Report of the Task Force on Children with Sexual Behavior Problems*
- Prevention Resource Center of the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs
- Prevention Institute

**Advocacy for Violence Free Media** - Promote a closer examination of the negative influence of sexual violence in various forms of media (e.g., T.V., movies, video games, advertising), as a risk factor in the development of sexual perpetration. Advocate for violence free media, in collaboration with other organizations, to promote a healthy and safer society.

- Campaign For Commercial Free Childhood
- Media Awareness Network
- Entertainment Software Rating Board

**Public Awareness** - Increase public awareness of sexual violence and educate key constituencies about healthy sexuality as well as sexual violence, its prevalence, and effective ways to prevent and manage sexually abusive behaviors.

- Association for the Treatment of Abusers: *Public Health Approach to Sexual Abuse/Assault Fact Sheet*
- Association for the Treatment of Abusers: *Toward a Public Health Response to Sexual Violence*
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention: *Sexual Assault Prevention: Beginning the Dialogue*
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior*

**Collaborative Practices** - Promote multidisciplinary collaborations to foster successful prevention and positive development initiatives.

- Center for Sex Offender Management: *The Comprehensive Approach to Sex Offender Management* and *Twenty Strategies for Advancing Sex Offender Management in your Jurisdiction*
• The National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation: *The National Plan to Prevent the Sexual Exploitation of Children*

*Prevention Strategies into Your Work:* Identify ways that you can increase your involvement in prevention including: contributing to public awareness and education workshops; donating to rape crisis centers or victims’ counseling services or others working to prevent sexual violence; bringing sexual harassment workshops to your workplace; including prevention information and links on your website.

• **Prevention Institute:** *The Spectrum of Prevention: Developing a Comprehensive Approach to Injury Prevention*

• **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** *Preventing Violence Against Women: Program Activities Guide*