What is sexual harassment?

At the University of St. Thomas, sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, sexually motivated conduct, or other verbal or physical behavior or communication of a sexual nature. Use of authority to seek to accomplish an unwelcome relationship also constitutes sexual harassment.

What is sexual violence?

At St. Thomas, sexual violence is defined as any act of violence or force committed without the complainant’s consent, for the purpose of satisfying the actor’s sexual or aggressive impulses, including but not limited to contact of a person or a person’s clothing in the genital, groin, inner thigh, buttocks, or breast areas, or the use of threat of force or coercion which requires the victim to commit or submit to any kind of attempted sexual act. This includes a physical act that is sexual in nature, is intentional, and is committed either by:

1. physical force, threat or intimidation;
2. ignoring the objections of another person;
3. causing another’s intoxication or impairment through the use of drugs or alcohol in order to take advantage of another person;
4. taking advantage of another person’s incapacitation, state of intimidation, helplessness, or other inability to consent.

reporting options

Reporting the assault promptly. Reporting the assault does not commit you to filing charges and you can decide at any time not to pursue the case. While it is important that perpetrators be held accountable and prevented from doing this to others, you should never let anyone pressure you if you know you do not want to report. If you do choose to report, ask a friend to go with you for support. Reporting Options:

a) Public Safety or St. Paul or Minneapolis Police: You can ask for a male or female officer.

b) Dean of Students Office: to file any complaint. If you do choose to report, ask a friend to go with you for support.

C) Human Resources: to file a complaint against a faculty or staff person.

6. Talk with a counselor.

Working with a counselor can speed recovery and help you manage post-traumatic symptoms.

7. Take care of yourself.

Rest, eat well, seek social support, and engage in activities that are healing for you/your body.
what is relationship violence?

Violence in relationships is any pattern of behavior used to coerce, dominate, or isolate one’s intimate partner, ex-partner, or family member. It can involve physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse. Relationship violence typically cycles: from a tension-building period (abused partner works harder to avoid escalation of conflict, anxiety increases), to an explosive period (physical, sexual, verbal assaults), to a honeymoon period (violent partner apologizes, promises never to do it again, showers the abused partner with affection). Because of the isolation, fear, and denial that often accompany an abusive relationship, it can be very difficult for an abused partner to leave a relationship.

issues of race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status

Individuals with less power/status in their families and cultures may risk loss of social support and additional physical or psychological harm as a result of reporting sexual assault or relationship violence. They also may find it difficult or threatening to access available resources. It is critical that family members, friends, colleagues, and service providers be sensitive to these issues as they support victims/survivors.

not just a women’s issue

In recent years, men’s groups and individual men, recognizing the high personal and societal costs of sexual and relationship violence, have become active in sexual assault and relationship prevention work. Only through the joint efforts of men and women will it be possible to stop relationship violence.

a word about self-blame

While it is important for individuals to take responsibility for protecting themselves, it is critical to note that errors in judgment (e.g., not sizing oneself up accurately, getting drunk) or the failure to stop an attack are NOT the CAUSES of sexual assault or abuse. Persons who assault or abuse others are legally responsible for their actions, even if they themselves are under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

warning signs of a potential abuser may include

- pushes for romantic involvement/exclusive commitment almost immediately
- calls/emails constantly or visits unexpectedly
- expects partner to be perfect, obedient, and dependent
- isolates partner from friends and family
- blames others for his/her problems or feelings
- constantly criticizes, uses demeaning language, or curses at partner
- switches moods suddenly (e.g., from sweet to violent in minutes)
- uses force during sex
- threatens violence and then denies the threats
- admits to violence in past relationships, but blames ex-partner.

what to do if you think you are in an abusive or controlling relationship

1. Talk with a friend, counselor or staff member. It can be difficult to recognize an unhealthy relationship if you’re inside it. Getting other perspectives can help if you’re having some concerns or need support.
2. Make a safety plan. Plan what you will do if your abuser becomes verbally or physically violent or tries to make unwanted contact with you. Inform others about your situation.
3. Report the violence to Public Safety, the Police or the Dean of Students. (See what to do if you think you have been sexually assaulted: #5).
4. Get an order of protection. A protective order/peace order can be obtained 24-hours/day at your local courthouse (e.g., Hennepin or Ramsey County). This order requires the abuser to cease contact and to stay away from where you live/work/attend school. The decision to obtain an order should be weighed against the possibility of increased danger to yourself as a result of making the report.
5. During an attack: Defend yourself if you can, scream for help repeatedly, get away to a safe place, and call 911 if off-campus. On campus, call 2-5555.
6. After an attack: Seek medical attention immediately. Tell medical staff what happened and ask to have pictures taken of any injuries. Save any evidence of the violent behavior. Seek counseling.

common reactions to sexual assault and relationship violence trauma

Individuals who undergo traumatic events or ongoing violence in their lives experience various emotional, physical, and cognitive relations. These reactions sometimes occur in stages. Symptoms may last for short periods of time and then resolve, or they may become more chronic (e.g., as in Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD).

Typical Symptoms include:

- shock • numbness • disbelief • fear • anger • shame • phobic avoidance of places or things associated with the trauma • wanting to get on with life and forget the event(s) • flashbacks • sleep disturbances • heightened startle responses • trouble concentrating or remembering • depressed mood and/or dramatic mood swings • withdrawal from relationships • health problems • changes in eating patterns

healing from trauma

The mind and body integrate traumatic memories in order to heal. Unprocessed traumatic experiences may manifest for some individuals in physical, cognitive, and emotional symptoms up to months or years later. Treatment options include: cognitive-behavioral strategies, individual counseling, support groups, medications, and holistic bodywork. Later in the healing process, some survivors find it empowering to engage in advocacy and prevention work.

alcohol and drugs make a difference

One half of all assault victims report that they were drinking or impaired by drugs at the time of the violent episode. Alcohol is a depressant that actually slows the brains ability to make decisions. Drugs may produce a euphoric effect, but impair decision-making processes.

lower your risks:

- by building a trust level with your partner
- by going out in groups
- never going into rooms/cars alone with someone you do not know
- never leave someone behind who is impaired by alcohol or drugs
- developing the what relationship you want.