ACTIVITY 4

The Basics of Sexual Violence

ACTIVITY: Introducing and defining sexual violence. Identifying some of the ways that sexual violence affects a faith community.

BACKGROUND: Sexual violence is rarely discussed in faith communities. Because of this, there is a lot of misunderstanding and misinformation. Clergy and lay leaders can play a role in getting more accurate and helpful information out into the community and breaking the silence around sexual violence.

GOALS:
1. To strengthen participants’ understanding of sexual violence.
2. To strengthen participants’ understanding of consent.
3. To explore how sexual violence could affect a faith community or congregation.
4. To expand participants’ understanding of who is affected by sexual violence.
5. To consider sexual violence in the context of trauma (Activity 2).

OBJECTIVES:
At the end of this activity, participants should be able to:
1. Understand and be able to differentiate among different forms of sexual violence.
2. Describe the necessary elements of consent.
3. Understand sexual violence as a crime that traumatizes, shames, silences, and wounds victims on all levels: physical, emotional, and spiritual.
4. Identify some of the ways that sexual violence could affect a congregation or ministry.

ESTIMATED TIME: 30 minutes

MATERIALS: Flip chart, markers, tape
Talking points (below)
Video capabilities
Facilitator Talking Points

- It can be difficult to discuss sexual violence. People hear the words “sexual violence” and they focus on the word “sex” rather than “violence.” There is a misconception that sexual violence is about sex. But in fact, we are not talking about sex. We are talking about violence—violence against another person in order to control, humiliate, or harm. Sexual violence breaks every possible standard of respect and human dignity.

- The irony is that victims of sexual violence have all too often been blamed and stigmatized for the violence perpetrated against them. Victims have been doubted and disbelieved, judged and blamed for far too long. Here’s a short video that illustrates what it would look like if victims of theft were treated the way victims of sexual violence are treated.

  ◊ Play the following short (3-minute) video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0L4V5BWITM

  ◊ After the video: provide time for a short discussion. What did they think? Did this help them understand how victims of sexual violence might feel when they are blamed for the violence?

- The #MeToo movement has opened up a conversation about sexual violence and begun to counteract the victim blaming and shaming that so often has been the response. Millions of women and men have shared their experiences of sexual violence ranging from sexual harassment to rape, and the blame and stigma society has placed on them afterward. Over 12 million posted on social media with the hashtag #MeToo in the first 24 hours alone. For the first time, we have had a glimpse into how widespread sexual violence is. No community is immune.

- Because sexual violence affects women and men in congregations and faith communities across the U.S., and because so many survivors need to find healing, it is critical that the faith community have a voice in this conversation. For many victims, healing includes a spiritual component.

- Most people have not received any training about sexual violence, so we’re going to start with the basics. Sexual violence is an all-encompassing, non-legal term that includes a wide range of behaviors. We are going to identify some of these behaviors as a group. Then we will provide you with definitions.

- So, what are some of the different types of sexual violence that you have heard of?
Make a list on the flip chart of everything they mention. The list could include sexual harassment, sexual abuse, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, rape, cat-calls, and any other words they think of.

Provide a brief definition (see below) for each of the major types of sexual violence that the group names. If necessary, fill in forms of sexual violence they don’t mention. The list should include sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape.

Definitions:

◊ **Sexual harassment:** Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature, often in a workplace. For example, an employer might demand sexual favors by promising a promotion or raise, or by threatening to demote or sanction an employee.

◊ **Sexual assault:** Sexual contact or behavior without the consent of the victim, including unwanted sexual touching, forcing a victim to perform sexual acts, attempted rape and rape (Definition from Rainn.org). Perpetrators may use physical force, a weapon, or a threat to harm the victim further or harm someone or something that is important to the victim. Perpetrators may also play on a victim’s vulnerabilities, such as physical incapacity or emotional trauma and fear.

◊ **Rape:** A sexual assault that specifically entails penetration, no matter how slight, of any body part by another body part or object. As in sexual assault, the perpetrator uses physical force, weapons, threats, and fear to control the victim.

❖ The hallmark of all forms of sexual violence is lack of consent. Understanding consent can be tricky, for the same reason that talking about sexual violence can be tricky.

❖ A sexual violence advocate wrote a blog about consent. She thinks the problem in understanding consent has to do with the word “sex.” So, she says, pretend instead that you are asking someone about a cup of tea. Here is a portion of her explanation:

❖ If you say, “hey, would you like a cup of tea?” and the person you’re with goes, “Absolutely, I would totally LOVE a cup of tea,” then you know they want tea.

❖ If you say, “hey, would you like a cup of tea?” and they “um and ahh” and say, “I’m not really sure,” then you can make the tea, but they may not drink it, and that’s ok. Just because you made them tea doesn’t mean that you are entitled to watch them drink it.

❖ If they say, “No thank you,” don’t make them tea. At all. Don’t make them tea, don’t make them drink tea, don’t get annoyed at them for not wanting tea. They just don’t want tea, ok?
Pieces of a Bigger Picture Training Model

❖ They may say, “Yes please, that’s kind of you” and then when the tea arrives they actually don’t want the tea at all. Sure, that’s annoying, but they are under no obligation to drink the tea. It’s ok for people to change their mind. You are still not entitled to watch them drink it.

❖ If they are unconscious, don’t make them tea. Unconscious people don’t want tea. They can’t answer the question “do you want tea?” because they’re unconscious.

❖ If they were conscious when you asked, but by the time you make the tea they’re unconscious, you should just put the tea down, make sure they’re safe, and don’t make them drink the tea. They said yes then, but this is now. Unconscious people don’t want tea.

❖ If someone said “yes” to tea last Saturday, that doesn’t mean they want you to make them tea all the time. You can’t force them to drink tea while yelling, “But you wanted tea last week!” They don’t want to wake up to you pouring tea down their throat while you yell, “But you wanted tea last night.”

❖ If you understand when people don’t want tea, how hard is it to understand when people don’t want sex?

❖ So, based on this “cup of tea” illustration, there are several factors that determine consent. Can anyone name something that is needed to determine if consent occurred?

Make a list on the flip chart of everything they mention. Provide a brief definition for each of these major terms.

◊ Affirmative consent: The person must express clearly their agreement to partake in sexual acts.

◊ Freely given and explicitly communicated: Consent must be freely given, without coercion, violence, or the threat of violence. It should be affirmative and enthusiastic.

◊ Capacity to consent: The person must have the capacity to consent, meaning they must be at or above the age of consent, must not be intoxicated, must be conscious, and cannot be a member of a vulnerable population, for instance, with a developmental or physical disability that would make it impossible for them to consent. (Adapted from Rainn.org)

◊ Mutual: Consent is clear and all parties know what has been consented to. Consenting to go to someone’s apartment is just that and does not mean anything more.

◊ Consent can be reversible and/or limited. For example, someone could say, “I want X but not Y,” or “I thought I wanted X, but now I’m not sure,” or “I wanted X then, but now I don’t want X.”
One reason that it is so important that you are all here today is that many people who have experienced sexual violence suffer silently. This can make the trauma worse and healing impossible. These are folks in our congregations and communities. As the #MeToo movement has shown us, sexual violence is extremely common, more than many of us thought. In the U.S., one in three women and one in six men experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime (NSVRC). Because of under-reporting, the reality may be even higher than those numbers suggest. It is not a stretch to say that there are many members of our faith communities who have been affected, directly or indirectly, by sexual violence.

Now I want to invite you to work with the person next to you to identify some of the ways that people in a faith community could be affected by sexual violence.

After you make a list of possibilities, please discuss what this means for faith communities. What role could faith community leaders or members play in responding to sexual violence?

Give participants 5-7 minutes to discuss, and then make a list with their input on the flip chart. Examples include:

◊ Some congregants may have started attending a faith community because they are survivors looking for the strength and spiritual healing that faith can offer. Faith communities could welcome survivors, and not push them away or re-traumatize them with messages about sexual violence that blame victims.

◊ Young people in a faith community may know someone who has experienced sexual violence. They are learning from the community about how to understand sexual violence and how they should respond. Faith communities could model how to support victims and survivors rather than blame or silence them.

◊ Many congregants are members of a faith community from an early age. Faith communities can teach that sexual violence is never acceptable. Faith community leaders could talk about healthy relationships and invite sexual violence advocates to provide information about sexual violence. This can help to prevent sexual violence and lead to a wider culture that rejects all forms of sexual and domestic violence.
Like any trauma, sexual violence affects victims emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Victims will be feeling many of the same symptoms we discussed in the trauma exercise in Activity 2. Sexual violence can completely alter a victim’s worldview, making them feel unsafe in their own congregation, community, neighborhood, or home. Victims may be distrustful of those around them, and may feel totally alone and isolated.

Advocates, faith leaders, and members of faith communities can work together to make sure that blaming, shaming, and silencing victims is a thing of the past. Faith communities have a critically important role to play in helping victims find healing, justice, peace, and the services they need and deserve.