

KEY ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE POLICY ADDRESSING CAMPUS SEXUAL VIOLENCE

THE VIRGINIA SEXUAL AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACTION ALLIANCE OFFERS THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON MORE THAN 30 YEARS OF WORK WITH STUDENTS, CAMPUSES, COMMUNITY ADVOCATES AND NATIONAL LEADERS DEDICATED TO BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO SEXUAL ASSAULT.

1 TRAUMA-INFORMED

- Victims of sexual assault must have immediate access to both on-campus and off-campus confidential advocates who can provide a trauma-informed response that includes an explanation of all of the options for moving forward. Effective advocacy and informed consent increases the likelihood that victims will participate in reporting to law enforcement and will participate in the adjudication process.
- Victims should have clear information about who can keep information confidential, who can act as a victim advocate and who is required to report to a third party.
- Campuses should enter into agreements with community Sexual Assault Crisis Centers to be available 24/7 to provide a confidential crisis advocacy response. Sexual Assault Crisis Centers should be adequately funded to provide this response.
- Sexual violence is a violation of personal autonomy and control over one's body. Supporting a victim's decisions is a critical element of a trauma-informed response and is a key component of creating an environment where victims will choose to report. Policies should be carefully scrutinized to ensure that they support reporting without further violating victims.
- Sexual assault victims are frequently reluctant to "officially" report the sexual violence they have experienced for a number of reasons, including:
 - the perpetrator is often someone known to the victim;
 - trauma can result in memory gaps of the actual experience that may lead victims to question themselves;
 - victims may be worried that their own behavior will be called into question or they won't be believed.

A consistent and trauma-informed response to sexual assault along with a pattern of offender accountability can turn this around.

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HOLDS OFFENDERS ACCOUNTABLE

CAMPUSES SHOULD OFFER A RANGE OF RESPONSES THAT BALANCE CONSIDERATION OF VICTIM NEEDS, THE SCHOOL'S RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE A SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, AND THE SAFETY OF THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE.

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- Given the broad continuum of acts of sexual violence and the wide range of victim responses, campuses should be prepared to offer a range of responses as part of their protocol, including:
 - An “anonymous report” option.
 - Amnesty for victims who are concerned that an official report might jeopardize their academic status (e.g. a student who was engaged in underage drinking at time of assault).
 - Clear guidance on crimes to be reported to local law enforcement and Commonwealth’s Attorney for investigation and adjudication. This should include drug-facilitated sexual assaults and felony assaults.
 - Clear guidance for connecting victims to community resources, including emergency shelter, civil protective orders, and trauma counseling.
- Campuses should provide training and support for a trauma-informed approach to all first responders and everyone involved in the campus disciplinary process to promote a fair response and carefully monitor internal disciplinary processes to ensure consistency.
 - Cases should be independently reviewed for consistency based on age, gender, race/ethnicity, status within the campus community and other characteristics of both the offender and the victim.
 - Sanctions should be independently reviewed to ensure that they are proportional to the offense, support a safe learning environment on the campus, and protect the public safety.
- Campuses should clearly explain how they balance confidentiality and community safety as well as how they balance the rights of the accused with accountability as they make decisions throughout the response process.

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COORDINATED AND CONSISTENT

SEXUAL ASSAULT POLICIES AND PROTOCOLS SHOULD BE APPLIED
UNIFORMLY AND CONSISTENTLY TO ALL STUDENTS, FACULTY, & STAFF.

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- Campuses should consider integrating sexual assault policies with policies that address stalking and intimate partner violence in order to keep options for support and resources as clear as possible for victims.
- Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs) should meet regularly and should include campus personnel. SARTs should have clearly established protocols for both the campus and the community response to crimes of sexual violence that are consistently applied and should conduct regular case reviews to determine how they can improve their response.
- Campuses should enter into formal agreements with community law enforcement agencies and Sexual Assault Crisis Centers, at a minimum, to ensure seamless access to coordinated services.
- The Commonwealth should ensure that training on trauma-informed response, trauma-informed interviewing, and trauma-informed investigation are provided to campus and community law enforcement, prosecutors and courts personnel.

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COMPREHENSIVE, WITH A FOCUS ON PREVENTION

EFFECTIVE PREVENTION INCLUDES AN ENVIRONMENT THAT ENCOURAGES REPORTING AND CLEARLY PROTECTS THE SAFETY OF ALL STUDENTS.

- Information about how sexual assaults are handled should be easily accessible to all students, staff and faculty. Transparency extends beyond the number of reports to include information about how cases proceed.
- Identify clear and limited “points of entry” to increase likelihood that victims will make a report or seek support .

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EFFECTIVE PREVENTION STRATEGIES REACH INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS, IMPACT STUDENT GROUP BEHAVIOR, EDUCATE FACULTY AND STAFF, AND MAKE SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES TO THE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT.

- Students, faculty and staff should be offered a clear picture of behaviors that constitute sexual violence and the associated consequences so they are in a position to choose not to perpetrate a sexual assault. Individuals should also be exposed to an accurate understanding of the fact that sexual violence is not “normal” male behavior.
- Student groups should learn to intervene as bystanders and to establish group norms that sexual assault is not acceptable. Student groups should promote positive and respectful dating relationships—a key factor for preventing the majority of the sexual assaults within this age group.
- Faculty and Staff should model healthy relationships and effective bystander behavior, and promote community characteristics that reduce sexual violence.
- Environmental scans on campuses may identify physical locations and/or student groups that pose a high risk for sexual assault. Campuses should commit additional resources to prevention in these high risk areas.
- Campuses should promote positive conditions that have been shown to reduce the level of sexual violence including gender equity, a climate of open dialogue about sexuality and consent, and community messages about the value of respect for all people.

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AS **NEW POLICIES**
ARE **DEVELOPED,**
CONSIDER!

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- Does this support a trauma informed response to the victim who has experienced a traumatic act of violence?
- Will this policy promote offender accountability for the act(s) of sexual violence proportional to the violence that is alleged?
- Can this policy be applied consistently, and will it be supported by an appropriately coordinated response that includes well trained professionals?
- When this policy is implemented, will it contribute to an environment that clearly protects ALL students?
- How will you evaluate the implementation of this policy to ensure that it is achieving the intended outcomes?

VIRGINIA'S LEADING VOICE
ON SEXUAL & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
FOR LONGER THAN 30 YEARS.



Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence
ACTIONALLIANCE

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