Nearly 1 in 3 women and more than 1 in 4 men will experience some type of sexual or relationship violence in their lifetime. If you or someone you know is in a dangerous situation, please seek help immediately. Anyone can find discreet and non-judgmental help today at https://sexualviolenceprevention.asu.edu/.

An Interview with Mercedes Anderson, Coordinator of Peer Support Services

Q. Briefly tell us about yourself and your role in Sexual Violence Prevention and relationship wellness at ASU.

My name is Mercedes Anderson and I am a fourth year student in Counseling Psychology doctoral program. I work with the Sexual and Relationship Violence Prevention program coordinating the department’s peer support initiatives. Specifically, I oversee the Sun Devil Support Network, which is a network of students trained to provided peer-level support to survivors of sexual and relationship violence.

In my role I help to provide education and training to students about the resources available in the ASU community and the greater Phoenix area. I also help to train students on how they can be a resource to their fellow peers at ASU. For graduate students, I provided training on how students can increase their understanding of policies related to sexual violence, and they how they can use their leadership skills to create a trauma-informed community here at ASU.
Q. What resources are available for students who have questions/concerns related to Sexual Violence Prevention and relationship wellness?

There are a number of resources available for students at ASU! An overview of available resources and reporting options can be found on sexualviolenceprevention.asu.edu. If students are looking for support after experiencing sexual or relationship violence, they can utilize resources such as ASU Counseling Services, ASU PD’s Victim Advocate, ASU Health Service, or contact an advisor from the Sun Devil Support Network. ASU Wellness offers information about sexual violence prevention and healthy relationships. The Sexual and Relationship Violence Prevention department offers educational programming and events in collaboration with campus departments focused on different aspects of violence prevention including topics such as: healthy relationships, bystander intervention, human trafficking awareness, health sexuality, mindfulness, leadership in violence prevention, and many more! Attending these events can be a great way to learn more about these topics as well as what resources are available to students.

Q. What are some commonly asked questions you hear from students regarding Sexual Violence Prevention and relationship wellness at ASU?

Some common questions are:

1. What is sexual assault and how do I know if I’ve experienced it?

Sexual assault is broader term that includes rape. Rape usually means there was penetration. According to RAINN, sexual assault can include non-consensual touching, attempted rape, coercing a victim into performing sexual acts forced penetration. While the context of each individual’s experience will be different for everyone, when sexual assault occurs a victim or survivor may feel as though their boundaries were violated and/or sexual activities occurred without their consent.

2. What if I don’t want to report to the police? Is there someone I can talk to?

If a victim/survivor does not want to report to the police they can contact one of ASU’s confidential resources. ASU’s confidential resources include ASU Police Department’s victim advocate, ASU Counseling Services, or ASU Health Services.

3. Are my resources different if the sexual assault occurred with or outside of the ASU community?

If sexual violence occurred outside of the ASU community, police reporting and investigations will be handled by the city police within their jurisdiction. If the victims/survivors is affiliated with ASU, they are still able to utilize campus support resources such as ASU PD Victim Advocate, Student Rights and Responsibilities, ASU counseling services, and ASU health services even if their assault occurred outside of the ASU community.
4. If I just experienced sexual assault or rape, what do I do?

It can feeling overwhelming to know what steps to take immediately after an assault. If you have immediate safety or medical concerns, contact 911. Additionally, a victim/survivor can contact the national sexual assault hotline to receive confidential support at 1-800-656-HOPE, which will route them to a local RAINN organization. The hotline can help the victim to locate a health facility that offers sexual assault forensic exams, connect them to long term support resources, and provide in the moment support.

5. Are there low-cost resources for victims of sexual or relationship violence?

Yes, there are low-cost resources for victims of sexual violence. On campus resources include ASU counseling services where victims can receive counseling services at no cost. Within the larger community, EMPACT trauma healing services offers low-cost counseling options. Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence offers low cost legal resource options on their website. myPlan is a relationship assessment app to help with safety decisions if a victim is experiencing dating or relationship violence.

6. My friend is in an unhealthy relationship. How can I help them?

The biggest thing you can do is offer your friend unconditional support. This does not mean you actually approve of their relationship. Let your friend know they can talk to you about their relationship problems free of judgment toward their partner. When they talk about their relationship problems, always bring it back to them and what they have always wanted in a relationship as opposed to how horrible their partner is and why they should leave (ex. “You’ve always said you wanted someone who shares your values, do you think you can deal with that forever?”)

7. How can I support someone who has experienced sexual violence?

There are many ways to support someone who has experienced sexual violence but the most important is to be present and engage in active listening. The victim/survivor may want someone to talk to about their experience or they may be looking for specific resources. Throughout the process of supporting a survivor it is important to check in about what they want to do next and helping them to feel comfortable throughout the process.

8. How can I get involved in sexual violence prevention work?

Students interested in getting involved in sexual violence prevention work can find out more about involvement opportunities in a number of ways including: meeting with one of the peer educators in the sexual violence prevention department, stopping by one of our tabling or events, or attending a movement for violence prevention (MVP meeting)- https://eoss.asu.edu/movement-for-violence-prevention . If students are interested in receiving a training on supporting survivors, they are encourage to sign up to attend a Sun Devil Support Network Training at https://eoss.asu.edu/SSN-Registration.
Q. Who should students contact if they would like to report an incident? What is the reporting process?

Information about the reporting options and process can be found at https://sexualviolenceprevention.asu.edu/report. Students can pursue reporting to one or more of the following options.

- ASU Police Department
- Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities
- Office of Equity and Inclusion
- ASU Hotline

If students are seeking confidential support on the reporting options, they can utilize the ASU PD Victim Advocate. Students do not need to file a police report to meet with the Victim Advocate.

Q. What is the most important thing graduate students should know about Sexual Violence Prevention and relationship wellness at ASU?

Around 8.8% of female graduate students and 2.2% of male graduate students experience rape or sexual assault, (AAU, 2015). The most important thing for graduate students to know about sexual violence prevention is the number of resources and supports the university offers for students to learn more about violence prevention or to get support if they have experienced sexual or relationship violence. Graduate students are encouraged to take advantage of these resources.

Q. Please provide links to relevant resources for graduate students

- ASU Sexual Violence Prevention: https://sexualviolenceprevention.asu.edu/
- Sun Devil Support Network: https://eoss.asu.edu/sdsn
- ASU Health Services: https://eoss.asu.edu/health
- ASU Counseling: https://eoss.asu.edu/counseling
- ASU Community Link: https://asu.rints.com/
- Student Rights and Responsibilities: https://eoss.asu.edu/dos/srr/students
- ASU Wellness: https://wellness.asu.edu/explore-wellness/community-support
- myPlan: https://www.myplanapp.org/home