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College can be such a great and exciting time in a person's life. You may be a freshman just starting out wondering what college life has in store for you and hoping that you've chosen the right major. Or maybe you're a senior eagerly awaiting to get out and start your life, while also hoping that you have chosen the right major. College is a time and place to discover who you are, meet tons of new people make some of the best friends of your life. But college can also be kind of scary place and unfortunately can also be dangerous.

Campus sexual assault is an uncomfortable topic but one that must be talked about. You may think "I would never be assaulted." But did you know that 1 in 6 women have been a victim of attempted or completed rape in her lifetime and 3% of men have been a victim of attempted or completed rape in their lifetime. But while in college, a young woman's risk increases to 1 in 4 chance of being sexually assaulted. "College women are more at risk for rape and other forms of sexual assault than women the same age but not in college." (COPS) This means that someone you may already know or someone you may meet on this campus has been a victim of sexual assault.

What exactly is sexual assault? Sexual assault can consist of sexual harassment, stalking, sexual coercion, sexual contact- denotes unwanted fondling/groping, attempted rape, and rape- denotes penetration. Often times in society today the victim of sexual assault or rape faces blame and shaming.

"What were they wearing?"

"How much were they drinking?"

"They should have fought back."

"They shouldn't have gone out alone."

"Did they send mixed signals?"

These all perpetuate rape culture. And this needs to stop. It is never the victim's fault. Ever. Rape and sexual assault are not crimes of passion and love. Rape and sexual assault is about power and control.

So what can you, as men and women of this campus, do to help prevent sexual assault? Well there are lots of things.

When you go out be safe and stay together. Large parties can be fun but they can also be dangerous. Make sure to keep track of your drink. Don't leave it unattended and don't accept a drink that has already been opened for you. You can't be positive of what's in the drink.

Watch other people's drink. If you notice someone has put something in someone's drink, do something about it. Stop the person from doing it and stop the person from drinking it. Or if it's more comfortable for you, tell someone else and they can step in.

Be careful drinking in general. Alcohol is the number one drug used to initiate sexual assault. But the fact is, consent cannot be given when a person is intoxicated. Consent is a SOBER, verbal, and continuous yes.

Don't be a bystander! If you see someone getting sexually assaulted step in the help!

If someone comes to you claiming to be victim, believe them and help them. Contact the police or there are local resources such as La Pinon rape crisis center that you could contact at 575-526-3437. The WAVE office is also available to you. We're located in Corbett Center room 106 and our number is 575-646-2813. We'll be more than happy to help provide you with more resources such as the Counseling Center (646-2731) and the Office of Institutional Equity (646-3635).

If you ever find yourself in a situation with your partner where things are starting to go to the next level and you feel uncomfortable, don't be afraid to say no. Or if your partner says no and that they're uncomfortable, stop, don't get upset. Listen to them and respect their wishes. Fight back against rape culture and pledge to be respectful of both women and men. Together we can educate people and get them to understand that rape is never okay or justified and that it is never the victims fault.