

General note: SexualAssaultEdu™ is a module embedded within in the AlcoholEdu for College© course. The user does not experience SexualAssaultEdu as a separate “course” but as part of the overall AlcoholEdu course curriculum.



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Review of on-line courses for college students about sexual assault By Staff of the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC)

Many colleges and universities have started using online tools to educate incoming students about sexual assault. Two that are marketed nationally are *nformd about sexual assault* and the sexual assault section of *AlcoholEdu*. BARCC staff has reviewed these courses to assess whether:

AlcoholEdu

1. The information about sexual assault perpetration is consistent with current research;
2. The program provides education on the prevention of perpetration of sexual assault by changing cultural norms and increasing bystander intervention;
3. The format of the program employs effective teaching strategies.

Review of the Sexual Assault section of *AlcoholEdu.com*

AlcoholEdu

Their introduction to the section:

“This section of the course will give you the facts about sexual assault — plus information about what you can do to protect yourself.

When you are finished with this section you will know the answers to these questions:

What are some facts and myths about sexual assault and rape?

What is consent?

What are the best steps to take if you are being stalked?

How can you get involved in preventing sexual assault on your campus?

What strategies can be used to intervene when you see a situation that might lead to sexual assault?

How can you best help a friend who has been sexually assaulted?”

Introduction has been re-written (see text below).

NEW INTRODUCTION:

“This section of the course discusses sexual assault and rape and its impact on the campus community. It gives you the facts about sexual assault and rape—plus information about what you and others can do to help make your campus safer for everyone.

When you are finished with this section you will know the answers to these questions:

- What are the facts about sexual assault and rape?
- How is consent for sexual activity determined?
- *Male pathway only:* How do most men feel about consent and sexual assault?
- How can you get involved in preventing sexual assault on your campus?
- How can you make informed decisions to avoid dangerous situations?
- What strategies can be used to intervene when you see a situation that might lead to sexual assault?
- How can you best help a friend who has been sexually assaulted?
- *Female pathway only:* What are the best steps to take if you are being stalked?

Overview:

This program uses written material throughout the course, which might not be effective in engaging students in the material. There are different ~~programs~~ for men and women.

pathways

Men's Section

Fact/Not a Fact

This section uses multiple choice questions to provide information.

1. Social norm data is used to reinforce the research-based information that most men do not rape and that a small number of men are repeat rapists.

Update to this section: Additional messaging reinforcing the role of men in preventing sexual assault (see example below – additional examples provided in outline)

Example from **Social Norms** exercise (Male module):

What do you think?

In a recent university study, what percentage of male students do you think agree that it is not right to pressure a woman to drink alcohol in order to increase their chance of having sex? 10% 35% 50% 75%

Most men— 75% of those surveyed—don't think its right to pressure a woman to drink alcohol to facilitate sex... Most men wouldn't want alcohol to get in the way of their partner's judgment.

Added: If you thought the percentage was lower, you should ask yourself how you came up with that response. Most likely, you based your answer on perceptions and not facts. Those perceptions can be created by what you hear and see in the media and occasionally from those around you. But while some people do use alcohol to take advantage of others, it is not the norm. You can help change that perception by challenging the attitudes and behaviors of others who think its okay to knowingly take advantage of another person.

2. Information on rape of men is provided and the program states that most assailants identify as heterosexual and that assaults are not motivated by attraction. This information will be helpful to some male survivors.

Know How to Intervene.

This section is being re-worked for 2011.

1. This section shows pictures of students at a party with a narrator explaining the situation. This will be more accessible for some students than providing only written material.
2. The escalating scenario is problematic because it seems to show that the interventions used do not work. The students try to talk to the woman involved and then to talk to the male friend who is pursuing the woman. The situation keeps escalating until a group of students decide to enter the bedroom where the male friend has led the woman who is drunk. Because the options will need to be read and imagined by the viewers, they may not be able to envision themselves taking these actions and the lack of success of any of the suggested actions might prevent them from intervening in real situations.

Women's Section

Fact/Not a Fact

1. The factual material that is provided is accurate and challenges the viewers' beliefs about the prevalence of sexual assault and dating violence.
2. There is not information for the women about the research documenting that most men are not sexually aggressive towards women but that a small percentage of men are ve aggressive and are repeat rapists.
3. This section includes information about the sexual abuse of boys and uses gender-neutral language that is more inclusive of male survivors. This section does not provide any information on males assaulted as adults.

This is covered in the male pathway only, but has been noted for 2011 updates to the female.

1. See examples of updates to this section in the outline. The male pathway also addresses this in the social norms section (see previous example).
I'm not clear on what part of this section is referenced as sending the message "that it is best for women to avoid rude men". This section does encourage women to stay away from a stalker, but also encourages them to communicate directly regarding their wishes to be left alone, and to contact authorities. These are recommendations based on a specific scenario that is presented to "Maxine" but there isn't anything that tells women to avoid men who behave badly, in general. Happy to discuss further if additional details can be provided.

Dear Maxine section.

This section features answers to letters from real students about problematic situations.

1. The focus is on reducing the risks of being around men behaving inappropriately by trying to stay away from them—not on thinking of ways to stop the behavior. Because this section is focused on what women can do, it seems to assert that it is best for women to avoid rude men.
2. One of the letters is from someone describing a situation and asking, "Was I raped?" The answer states strongly "You were raped." This is not the recommended way for people to help survivors to understand their experience. A better answer might be to say that, according to law, someone who is unconscious cannot consent. If this description fits your situation, the legal requirements for this to be rape have been met.

Know How to Intervene.

Because this is an "advice column" format, the tone is definitely direct. That said, there were some changes made to this part of the section that are noted in the outline.

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1. The women's section includes a list: "Here are some tips on how someone like *Leah might have prevented this situation* from happening in the first place:" (italics added). The tips are ways that Leah could have reduced her risk of being in a dangerous situation. Using the terminology of "prevention" implies that Leah is responsible for the behavior of the assailant.
2. This section did not discuss interventions when people make comments that are incorrect, sexist, or supportive of assault. There was no discussion of the environment in which assault might occur. This would have complemented the information presented in the men's section that a small percentage of men who are repeat rapists commit most of the rapes and sexual assaults on campuses.
3. This section touched on barriers that people have about intervening but there was no real discussion about how to manage them.

1. Text for the scenario with Leah has been re-written (see below).
2. Will be added in 2011.
3. In the final feedback section, suggestions are made (i.e. "If you are uncomfortable [intervening] on your own, then gather together a group of friends to help you approach them.") The demo allows you to skip certain sections, so that may have been missed.

Example from *Dear Maxine - Was I Raped?* (Female module):

Dear Not Sure, ...you clearly said "no" to this man. He overpowered you physically, and then took advantage of you while you were unconscious. His drunken state is not an excuse. What he did to you constitutes rape. *Added:* Even if you were drinking, you did NOT cause the rape. Would it be your fault if you were mugged coming out of a bar? No – it was someone else's decision to commit a crime.

For both men and women:

What Does Consent Mean?

1. This is a thorough discussion of consent including information about alcohol use and consent.
2. This section covers communication, honesty about desires, ability to speak freely and legal issues about alcohol and drug use.

Sexual Assault and the Law

This is more information about legal issues. The information presented is accurate and complete. The student will need to read several pages of material to benefit from it.

Preventing Sexual Assault

This is the weakest section of this program. It gives no context for understanding the role of the community in stopping sexual violence and no training for the students in how to talk to their friends or to confront inappropriate attitudes or beliefs.

As mentioned previously, the updates include more direct messaging to men about challenging the behaviors of their peers. Examples of specific recommendations made to both men and women are provided below.

Unfortunately, some of the feedback noted in this review (i.e. providing skills training on intervening or challenging inappropriate attitudes), is very difficult to incorporate in an online format.

This is why we do not recommend this program for any school that does not plan to complement it with follow-up discussions or additional policies and practices, including those that challenge environmental factors that contribute to unhealthy attitudes and behaviors around sexual decision-making.

Three positive things that YOU can do prevent sexual violence on campus:

1. **Start a discussion.** Talk to your friends about dating, sex, and relationships. Find out what they really think. Help make the point that hookups that people have when they are impaired or unable to give consent are dangerous and that it is unacceptable (and illegal) to use alcohol or other drugs to incapacitate someone in order to have sex.
2. **Get involved with sexual violence prevention on your campus.** How about volunteering to serve on a sexual assault hotline? Or taking the sexual assault prevention training at the local rape crisis center?
3. **Organize a charity benefit for your local domestic violence or rape crisis center.** This is a great activity for fraternity brothers and sorority sisters! Don't forget that Greek members and college students can also help host events like a "Take Back the Night" march or a "White Ribbon Campaign."

Helping a Victim of Sexual Assault

This section has good content. In order for the viewer to learn it, they will have to read several paragraphs for each choice that they think of making. This might be unrealistic at the end of a lengthy program.