



Key Elements of Addressing Gender-Based Violence on Virginia's College Campuses and Universities

All college students have the right to learn and live in an educational environment where they are safe and treated equally. This is the overarching spirit of federal and state legislation, like Title IX, governing campus gender-based violence response and prevention efforts. It is also a core belief of the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance and our partners on Virginia's Campus Task Force. However, the presence of sexual violence, dating/domestic violence, and stalking threatens this right.

We have made significant progress in the past thirty-five years, but justice for victims of gender-based violence and assault can still be elusive. Statistics show that of the cases of sexual assault reported to police, few are prosecuted and adjudicated and even fewer result in convictions or disciplinary outcomes. A consistent, coordinated, and trauma-informed response to gender-based violence and sexual assault along with a pattern of offender accountability can turn this around.

Virginia's college campuses should offer a range of responses that are in alignment with best practices in response and prevention and that seek to balance serious consideration of victim needs, including confidentiality with the school's responsibility to provide a safe learning environment, and the safety of the community at large. **This resource can be used as a starting place, or a set of benchmarks, for considering how your campus can engage in comprehensive, trauma-informed, and effective responses to gender-based violence.** For further information on this work please refer to the Action Alliance's [*Best Practices Guides for Virginia Campuses Addressing Gender-Based Violence*](#).

The Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance offers the following recommendations based on more than 35 years of work with students, campuses, community advocates and national leaders dedicated to building an effective response to gender-based violence and sexual assault.



RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE SHOULD BE TRAUMA-INFORMED, ASSET BASED, AND INCLUDE A FOCUS ON RACIAL JUSTICE & EQUITY

- ✓ When victims report violence or sexual assault, they must have immediate access to both on campus and off-campus **confidential advocates** who can provide a trauma-informed response that includes safety planning and an explanation of all of the options for moving forward. **Effective and confidential advocacy along with informed consent increase the likelihood that victims will participate in reporting to law enforcement and will participate in the campus 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 the Title IX Coordinator.
- ✓ Campuses should enter into agreements with community-based Sexual and Domestic Violence agencies to be available **24/7 to provide a confidential crisis advocacy response**. These agreements can go beyond victim service provision to include representation on community and campus-based coordinated response teams, the delivery of training and prevention programming, etc. Campuses should also work to ensure that these agencies are adequately funded to provide this response.
- ✓ Gender-based 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 a victims' self-determination.
- ✓ Victims are frequently reluctant to report the violence they have experienced for a number of reasons: because the perpetrator is someone known to them; because trauma can leave an individual with gaps in memory of the actual experience that may lead them to question their experiences; because they fear that their own behavior will be called into question or they won't be believed, or because they believe they won't be truly safe reporting to officials, to name a few. **A consistent, coordinated, and trauma-informed response to sexual assault along with a pattern of offender accountability can turn this around.**
- ✓ Cultural relevance is a basic component of trauma-informed care. However, working from a racial justice lens moves beyond this to address community and policy level changes that **center historically marginalized and oppressed voices** and recognize the impacts of racial and cultural violence inflicted on victims and communities of color. **The unique barriers that exist for victims of color in seeking advocacy services and reporting should be addressed as part of a holistic approach.**



ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES SHOULD BE SWIFT, CONSISTENT, AND PROPORTIONAL

- ✓ Campuses should offer a range of responses that balance serious consideration of victim needs, the school responsibility to provide a safe learning environment, and the safety of the community at large.
- ✓ 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. Response protocols should include:
 - **Options** for victims who do not want to make an official report to make an anonymous report.
 - **Amnesty** for victims who are concerned that an official report might jeopardize their academic status, for example, a student who was engaged in underage drinking at the time the assault took place.
 - **Clear guidance** on crimes that are to be reported to local law enforcement and to the local attorney for the Commonwealth for investigation and adjudication. We would recommend that this guidance include drug facilitated sexual assaults as well as acts that are considered felony assaults in Virginia.
 - **Clear guidance** on linking victims to community resources including emergency shelter or housing accommodations, 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 to 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 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.



RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE SHOULD BE COORDINATED AND CONSISTENT

- ✓ Gender-based violence and sexual **assault policies and protocols should be applied uniformly and consistently to all** students, faculty, and staff on campus.
- ✓ Campuses should consider integrating sexual assault policies with policies that address stalking, intimate partner or dating violence, and harassment in order to keep options for support and resources as clear and as streamlined as possible for victims.
- ✓ **Coordinated Community Response (CCR) and/or Sexual Assault Response Teams (SART) should meet regularly** and should include campus personnel such as confidential victim advocates, campus police and security, student conduct and/or ethics administrators, Title IX administrators, campus health professionals, student housing, dean of students, the local sexual and domestic violence agencies, and other representatives who are integral to ensuring a coordinated and comprehensive response to violence. CCRs and 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.
- ✓ A critical component of multidisciplinary CCR and SART teams should include identifying and reviewing policies that are designed to respond to violence and support the expansion of prevention efforts on campus. **Sexual assault, dating violence, stalking, and harassment policies should be routinely updated** to reflect student and administration experiences with effectively responding to and preventing violence.
- ✓ Campuses should enter into formal agreements with community law enforcement agencies and community-based Sexual and Domestic Violence agencies, at a minimum, to ensure seamless access to coordinated services both on and off campus.
- ✓ Campuses and state partners should **ensure that training on trauma-informed responses, trauma-informed interviewing, and trauma-informed investigation are provided** to campus and community law enforcement, prosecutors, and misconduct or judicial staff.



COMPREHENSIVE RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE SHOULD INCLUDE PREVENTION

- ✓ Effective prevention includes an environment and community that **encourages reporting and clearly protects the safety of all students.**
- ✓ Information about how gender-based violence and sexual assaults are handled should be **easily accessible** to all students, staff and faculty all of the time. **Transparency** extends beyond the number of reports to include information about how cases proceed.
- ✓ Identifying **clear and limited “points of entry” to advocacy** makes it more likely that students will make a report or seek support when they experience gender-based violence or sexual assault. **Both passive and active communications strategies should be used to disperse information on how and where to access confidential services.**
- ✓ Effective prevention includes strategies that reach individual students, impacts student group behavior, educates faculty and staff, and makes substantial changes to the campus culture and environment.
 - Students, faculty and staff should be exposed to information and activities that **offer a clear picture of behaviors that constitute gender-based violence** and the associated consequences so that 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 violence is not “normal” behavior.
 - Student groups should **learn to intervene as bystanders and to establish group norms that clearly identify that violence and assault – across the spectrum - is not acceptable.** Student groups can also be engaged in activities that promote positive and respectful relationships—a key protective factor for preventing the majority of the sexual assaults within this age group.
 - Faculty and Staff should be engaged in **modeling healthy relationships**, modeling effective bystander behavior, and promoting the community characteristics that reduce sexual violence and promote open and nuanced discussion about its root causes.
 - A needs and resources assessment may identify environments, norms, or student populations that pose a high risk for perpetration. **Campuses should commit additional resources to prevention in high-risk arenas.**
 - **Campuses should promote positive conditions** that have been shown to reduce the level of gender-based violence including normalizing gender and racial equity in policies, practices, and protocol, encouraging a climate of open dialogue about sexuality and consent, and programming and campaigns that utilize public health and behavior change theories to explore the value of respect, joy, and healthy relationships for all people.



MORE TOOLS & RESOURCES FOR CAMPUS COMMUNITIES

[Virginia's Best Practices Guides for Campuses Addressing Gender-Based Violence](#)

A Guide from the Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance that includes recommendations, resources, and concrete examples for campus leaders interested in implementing a trauma-informed and social justice-oriented response to sexual assault, dating violence, stalking, and other forms of gender-based violence on campus. Includes a Community College Edition as well as an edition for traditional 4-year institutions.

[KnowYourIX.org](#)

Know Your IX is a survivor- and youth-led project of [Advocates for Youth](#) that aims to empower students to end sexual and dating violence in their schools. We envision a world in which all students can pursue their civil right to educations free from violence and harassment. We recognize that gender violence is both a cause of inequity and a consequence of it, and we believe that women, transgender, and gender non-conforming students will not have equality in education or opportunity until the violence ends. We draw upon the civil rights law Title IX as an alternative to the criminal legal system — one that is more just and responsive to the educational, emotional, financial, and stigmatic harms of violence.

[End Rape on Campus \(EROC\)](#)

EROC advocates for fair and equitable sexual assault and interpersonal violence policies and legislation on the campus, local, state, and federal levels. We support reforms that ensure holistic support for all survivors, statewide affirmative consent standards, and federal accountability for Title IX, Title II, and Clery Act enforcement.

[Sexual Violence on Campus: Strategies for Prevention](#)

A resource from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention that outlines a framework for campus sexual violence prevention efforts that includes five components: comprehensive prevention, audience, infrastructure, partnerships and sustainability, and evaluation. Based on CDC's STOP SV: A Technical Package to Prevent Sexual Violence, evidence-based strategies and approaches that may be implemented on a college or university campus are also included. Finally, examples are shared from states implementing sexual violence prevention efforts on college campuses.

[Campus Advocacy & Prevention Professionals Association \(CAPPA\)](#)

CAPPA provides space for campus-based advocates and prevention specialists to come together to share their expertise, develop best practices, and support each other as professionals in the field. CAPPA is designed for campus-based professionals who work to educate their campuses and colleagues about interpersonal/gender-based violence in all its forms, and those who advocate for and support students who have been affected by dating and domestic violence, sexual assault and harassment, and stalking.

[National Women's Law Center \(NWLC\): Education & Title IX](#)

NWLC fights for gender justice — in the courts, in public policy, and in our society — working across the issues that are central to the lives of women and girls. We use the law in all its forms to change culture and drive solutions to the gender inequity that shapes our society and to break down the barriers that harm all of us — especially those who face multiple forms of discrimination, including women of color, LGBTQ people, and low-income women and families.