

Supporting Survivors

with Disabilities

Sexual Health and Abuse Prevention

Sexual Assault Service Center
at Guardian Angel Community Services





Learn more
about us
here!

Meet the Prevention Team



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What is Guardian Angel?

Foster Care
& parenting classes*

Suzy's Caring Place

Partner Abuse
Intervention Program*

Groundwork Domestic
Violence Program

Sexual Assault
Service Center

empowering people
to improve the
quality of their lives

SAFE SPACES
for



EVERYONE

Read more on
each program
here!



*program carries a fee

Sexual Assault Service Center



24-Hr Hotline

Prevention
Education

Medical & Legal
Advocacy

Counseling

Free and confidential services for survivors
and their loved ones.

Table of Contents

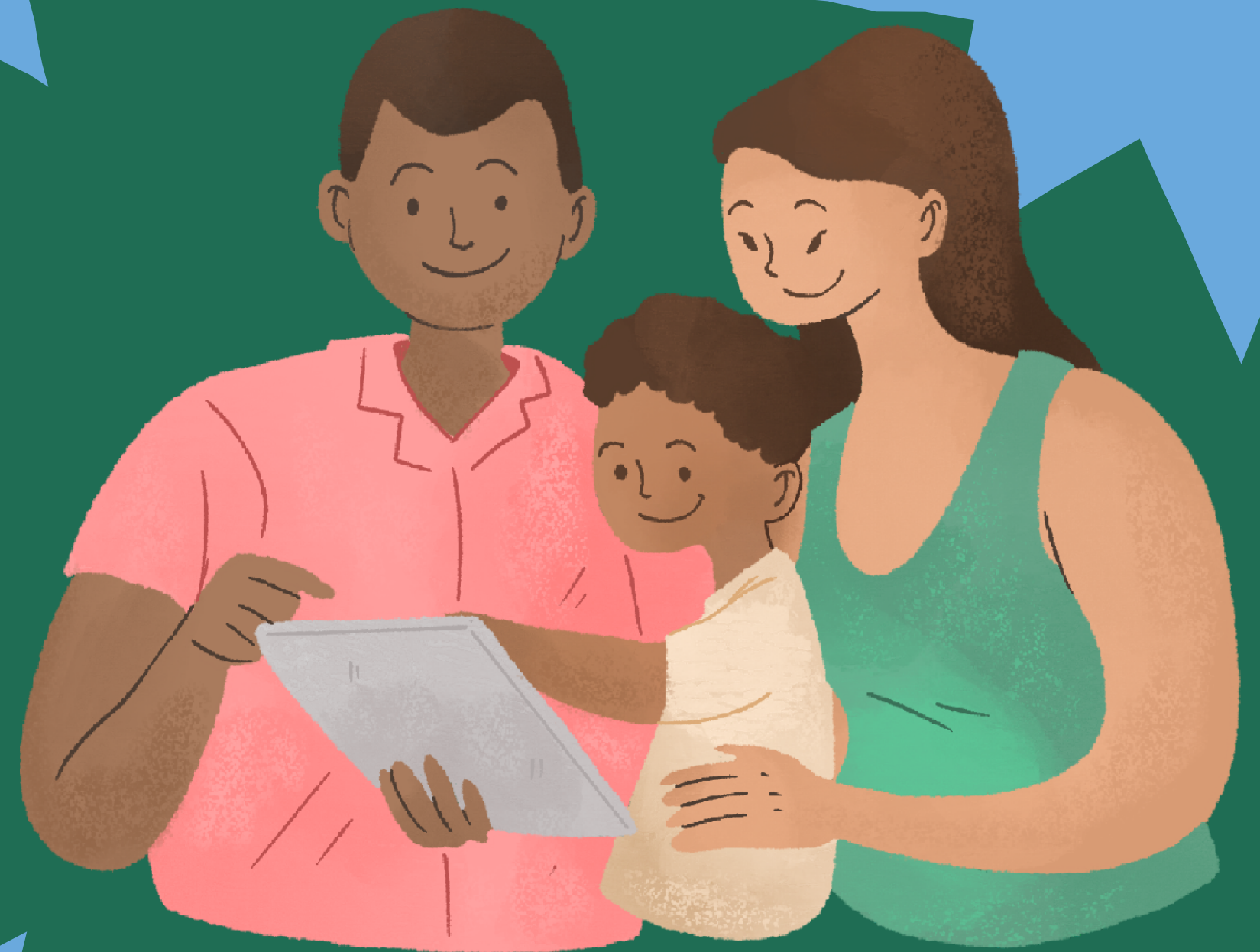
- * Introduction to Sexual Violence & Grooming
- * Myths about Survivors with Disabilities
- * How to Help!



Content Consideration & Self-Care Invitation



Part One:
Introduction to
Sexual Violence &
Grooming



What is Sexual Violence?

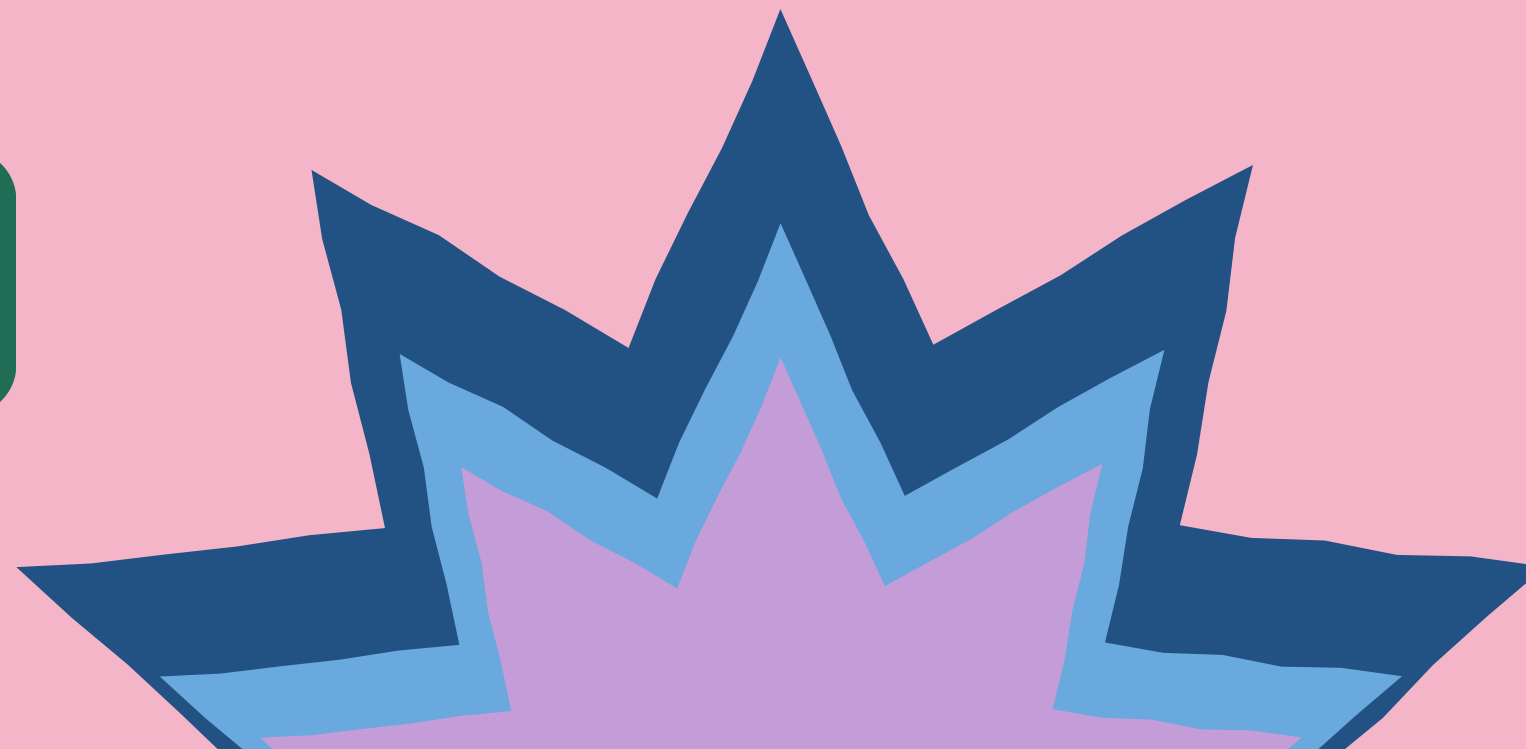
Sexual violence refers to any unwanted or coercive sexual behavior

Abusive acts may involve physical contact (including sexual assault or unwanted touching) or non-physical behaviors (such as exposing oneself, taking explicit photos of someone without their consent, voyeurism, etc).

This act of violence is not about sexual gratification. Instead, it's about:

power

control



Who Experiences Sexual Violence?

Any person - regardless of race, class, gender, age, ability, sexuality, or any other factors- may experience sexual abuse. Marginalized groups often experience higher risks of sexual violence.

The 2010–2014 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) found that people with disabilities were more than three times as likely to experience serious violent crimes (including rape, sexual assault, aggravated assault, and robbery) compared to people without disabilities.

31.6 percent of college women with disabilities reported nonconsensual sexual acts compared to 18.4 percent of undergraduate women without a disability (Association of American Universities)

People with intellectual disabilities experience sexual assault 7x more often than people without disabilities (NPR Investigative Report, 2018)

Grooming is the process in which someone builds trust and a close relationship with another person---typically a child or young person--that creates a cycle of abuse. This abuse is very difficult to recognize as harmful.

Abusers often put effort into grooming an entire family or community in order to gain access to youth.

The process works to:

Normalize &
excuse abusive
behaviors

Silence
young survivors

Protect the
abusive person

**What is
Grooming?"**

Demystifying the Grooming Process



Abusers will ensure people feel comfortable around them before moving to abuse.

1. Targeting that person
2. Gaining their trust (and their family's / community's trust)
3. Filling a need
4. Isolating that person (physically and otherwise)
5. Creating a secret relationship
6. Sexualizing that person




Possible Warning Signs for Sexual Violence

Grooming techniques can be very effective in silencing survivors. But, people within these support systems can look out for the following:


- major behavioral changes
- sophisticated or unusual sexual knowledge,
- adult-like sexual behaviors (age-inappropriate),
- resistance to removing clothes
- hesitation about or resistance to being alone with a specific adult
- regressive behaviors (i.e., going backward),
- changes to mood (depression, aggression, anxiety),
- changes in habits (hygiene, eating and dieting, using drugs or alcohol), or
- sudden challenges including contraction of STIs, pregnancy, or running away.



Sexual violence is never the survivor's fault.



Tactics like grooming are nuanced and sophisticated. Survivors and their loved ones do not deserve to carry guilt or shame if the tactics were effective.



Though abusive people frequently capitalize on existing systems of power and target oppressed groups, survivors are not responsible for what happened to them.

It's very important to promote healthy relationships, encourage survivors to ask for help, and educate us all to believe and support survivors.

"Everyone does this, it's okay."

"It's your fault."

"I'll get you something special
if you keep our secret."

"You like it."

What Abusers Might Say

"Nobody will believe you if you tell."

"I'll hurt [somebody / a pet]
if you tell."

"You don't want me to get in
trouble, do you?"

"You're going to get in trouble"
or "They'll be mad at you."



Part Two:

Myths about Survivors with Disabilities



Myths about Sexual Violence

- * Sex education is not “developmentally appropriate” for people with disabilities
- * People with disabilities are not sexual beings
- * People with disabilities cannot make their own choices in romantic or sexual relationships



Limited Access to Comprehensive Sexual Education

Many people with physical and intellectual disabilities do not receive comprehensive sex education

36 STATES

fail to include youth with disabilities in their sex education requirements OR provide resources for accessible sex education curriculum

ONLY 3 STATES

explicitly include youth with disabilities within their sex education requirements. The State of Illinois mandates that individuals admitted to a developmental disability facility have access to sex education

When it comes to sex education, individuals with disabilities are often left out of the conversation. Disability is messy, confusing, and sometimes painful, but so is sex, and we need the knowledge and tools to make the same choices as our non-disabled peers. To deny people with disabilities the opportunity to embrace our sexuality is to deny us part of the human experience. This is why it is so important to make sex education inclusive for all.”

Amy Gravino

Autism sexuality advocate, international speaker

Desexualization of People *with* Disabilities



MYTH: people with disabilities do not desire sexual or romantic connection, will not attract sexual or romantic partners, or are not subject to sexual abuse

All people deserve to express themselves sexually—and safely—regardless of ability.

As caretakers and advocates, it's important to empower individuals with disabilities by offering access to appropriate sex education from an early age and knowledge of consent.

With the tools to understand their bodies and sexual encounters, people with disabilities can feel more comfortable maintaining healthy relationships and reporting abuse.



Difficulties with Reporting

In some cases, individuals with disabilities may rely on their abuser for care and support, which makes reporting these acts of violence even more difficult.

These unequal power dynamics may include:

- ✳ Caretakers
- ✳ Therapists
- ✳ Doctors and Nurses
- ✳ Teachers
- ✳ and many others

Survivors with disabilities may also have difficulty reporting if they don't receive adequate resources or accessibility--such as interpreters or proper equipment

Many survivors do not report instances of sexual violence because they feel like they won't be taken seriously or believed

Why talk about this?

Body safety instruction normalizes concepts like bodily autonomy, assertiveness, boundary-setting, listening to our feelings, pursuing healthy relationships, and seeking support.

These are examples of protective factors, which are associated with a lower likelihood of experiencing sexual violence and decreased impact if it does happen.



Part Three: How to Help and Extra Resources



Building a Network of Support

Who are 5 people you trust?
Who supports you?
Who can help ensure your safety?



You may be somebody's trusted adult
(Even if that somebody is another adult)

If applicable, assist young people and
survivors in your life with building a
trusted adult team or network of
support

Talk with them about who they can
trust and why

Think about your network too!

BE the Support!

If someone in your life discloses to you...

DO NOT:

- Interrogate or ask for lots of detail
- Blame them or feed their guilt
- Avoid hard conversations
- Use put-downs or shaming
- Be too focused on “solutions”
- Downplay their experience
- Use terms they wouldn’t use themselves

DO:

- Believe them
- Thank them for telling you
- Help them see it’s not their fault
- Be genuine, caring, and warm
- Show empathy
- Allow them to lead
- Help them where desired
- Reflect their language

Know Your Resources

Guardian Angel Community Services

24-Hr Sexual Assault
Service Center Hotline

(815) 730-8984

24-Hr Groundwork
Domestic Violence Hotline

(815) 729-1228



Adult Protective Services (APS)

to report suspected abuse of
adults 60 or older or people
with disabilities 18-59

(866) 800-1409

**GACS staff may also make
this report.**

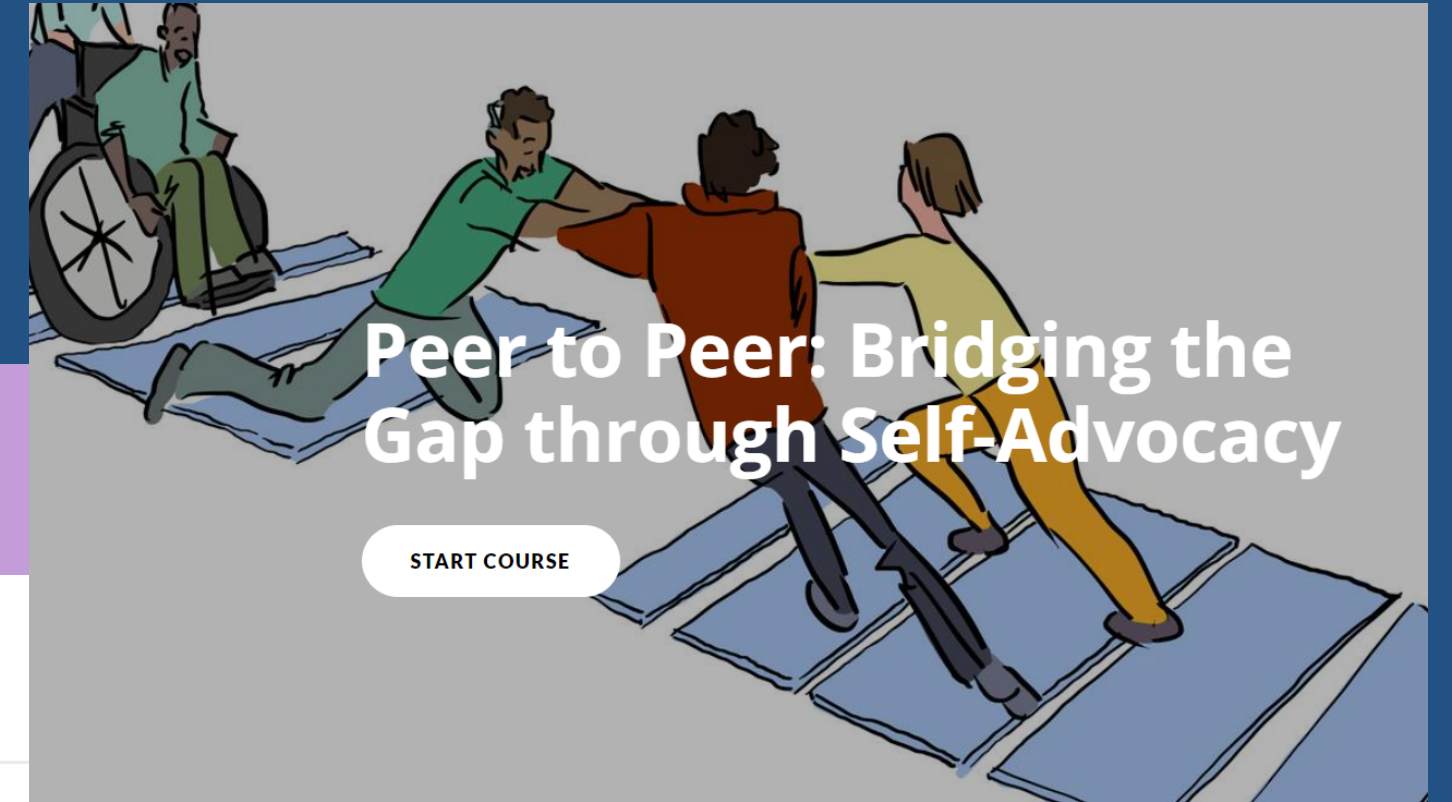
EXTRA RESOURCES

Activating Change Disability Curriculum



SEXUAL VIOLENCE TRACK

- ≡ Sexual Violence 101 ☐
- ≡ Sexual Violence and People with Disabilities ☐
- ≡ How a Peer Supporter Can Help Someone who has Experienced Sexual Violence ☐
- ❓ Sexual Violence Track Test your Knowledge ☐



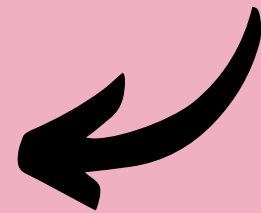
THANK YOU

for being an advocate!

SCAN ME



Tell us how we did
and/or ask for
follow-up here!





Sexual Assault of
College Students
with Disabilities



Vera - American
Safety Fact Sheet



More Resources!



Sexual Violence in
the Disability
Communities



Comprehensive
Sex Education for
Youth with
Disabilities





**Thank you
for listening!**

