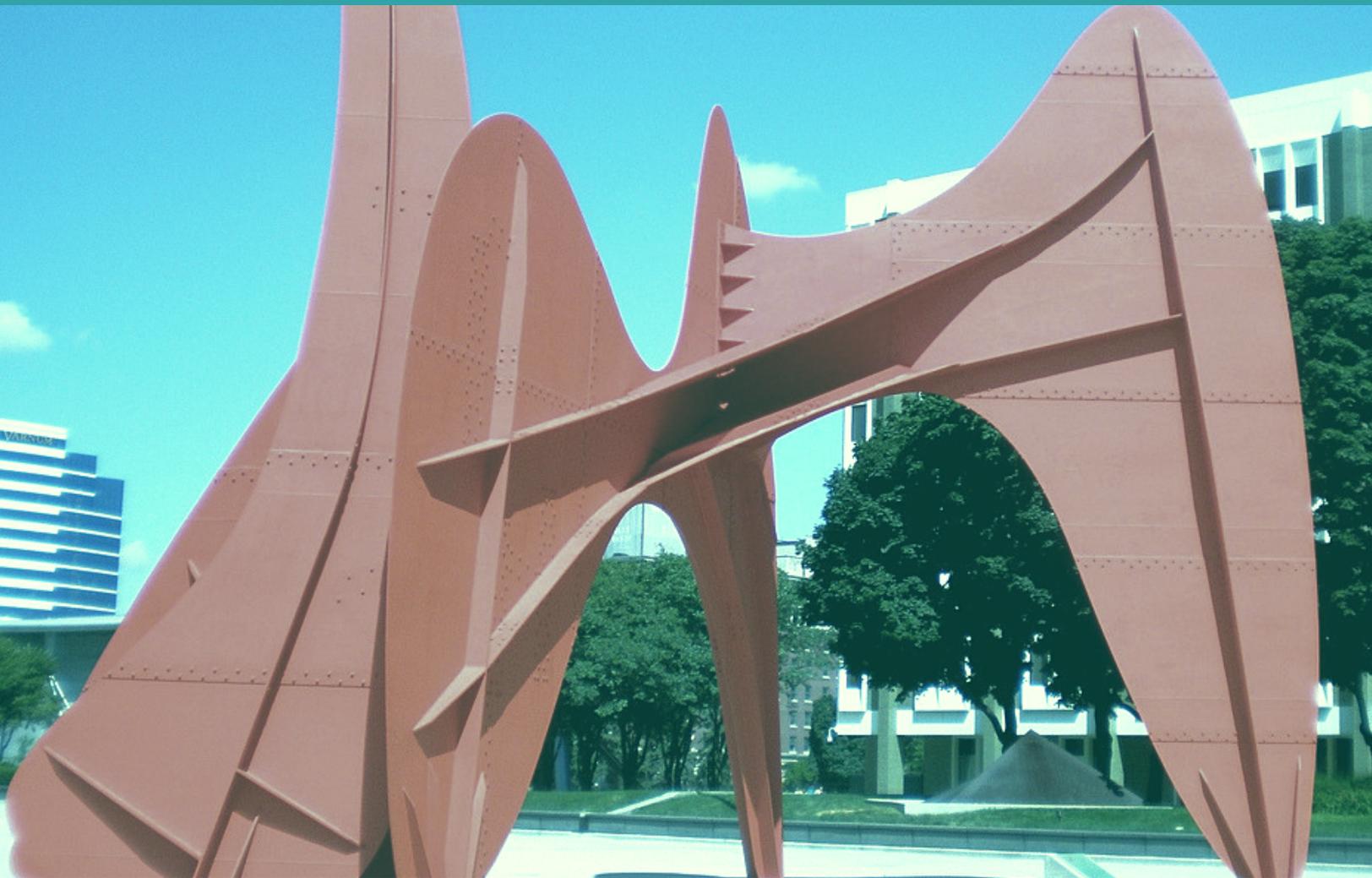


# 2018 SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH NEWSLETTER

KENT COUNTY SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION ACTION TEAM



## INFORMATION FROM...

YWCA WEST CENTRAL  
MICHIGAN

SAFE HAVEN  
MINISTRIES

CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY  
CENTER OF KENT COUNTY

MEN'S  
RESOURCE CENTER

SAFE CHURCH  
MINISTRY

KENT COUNTY  
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

APRIL IS SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH

# ABOUT THE KENT COUNTY SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION ACTION TEAM

BY MARA FURLICH

The Sexual Assault Prevention Action Team (SAPAT) is a coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to the elimination of sexual assault in Kent County, Michigan. Composed of a diverse team of professionals and community members, SAPAT brings passion and energy to the primary prevention of sexual violence.

**SAPAT COLLABORATES, EDUCATES,  
AND CREATES HOLISTIC CHANGE TO  
ELIMINATE SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN  
KENT COUNTY, MI.**

SAPAT combines the expertise of individuals from many Kent County organizations to provide the community with resources to better understand the dynamics of sexual assault and how as a community, we can prevent sexual assault from occurring altogether. By focusing efforts on preventing the perpetration of sexual assault, SAPAT helps communities foster environments that are supportive of pro social youth development, survivors of abuse, and keeps individuals accountable for their actions.



**VISIT [SAPAT.ORG/GET-INVOLVED](https://www.sapat.org) TO LEARN MORE!**

**Community involvement is essential to the success of preventing sexual violence. SAPAT is thankful to be a part of the Kent County community- a community rich in resources, supportive neighbors, and individuals passionate about creating a just and better world. There are many ways to support SAPAT. Become an active participant in preventing sexual violence today!**

# INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY: A TOXIC FOUNDATION FOR SEXUALITY

AL HEYSTEK L.P.C, MEN'S RESOURCE CENTER



High tech, high speed intense visual imagery offered by the pornography industry is worth billions with millions of regular adult users and widespread exposure to children. Estimates are that 11 million teens regularly view porn online. Teens are interested in sex and online porn is available.

The problem is this repetitive and mood altering hyper-sexualized visual imagery:

- PROMOTES THE OBJECTIFICATION OF THE BODY, ESPECIALLY THE FEMALE BODY;
- CREATES A VERY DISTORTED VIEW OF SEXUAL INTIMACY;
- INCREASES THE VULNERABILITY OF INTERNET PORN ADDICTION.

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, children who begin drinking (before 15) are 4 times more likely to develop alcohol dependence compared with those who have their first drink at age 20 or older. It is reasonable and prudent to consider that early exposure to online pornography can lead to similar consequences for our youth, especially young men who often go underground with their emotional pain and insecurities.

A significant percentage of men in our Transformations (Sexual recovery) program began viewing pornography in middle school. Men in our program speak about the violence done to their sexuality:

**“YOU WANT IT MORE AND MORE”**  
**“IMAGES HAUNT ME AND WON'T GO AWAY”**  
**“WOMEN SEEM LESS HUMAN”**

Healthy relationships depend on emotional connection, tenderness and trust, yet online porn numbs and desensitizes viewers into normalizing hyper-sexualized behavior. While there are certainly those who argue that “internet porn is no real problem” there is increasing awareness that it is a toxin which is doing violence to those who view it and to those used to produce it by promoting disrespect and contempt toward women.

Dialogue about the realities of online porn needs to continue and expand along with steps to educate our youth about the risks and steps toward prevention.

## TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR HAVING THE 'PORN TALK' WITH YOUTH

**Step 1) Don't wait to have the talk!** The average age a child first views porn is 9 years old. Porn can be confusing and gives kids unrealistic expectations of sex and sexuality. It's important to talk about how sex and relationships are much more complex than what they see online.

**Step 2) Teach and support, don't criticize young people.** Porn is easier to access than ever before, and is often a substitute for comprehensive sex ed. Don't shame your child, but show them that you are a safe resource for questions and conversations about sex/sexuality.

**Step 3) Seek resources that can help you with this conversation.** You don't have to be an expert to talk with your child about porn. There are many helpful resources for teachers, parents, and caregivers. Below are some great resources to get you started:

**The Porn Conversation:**  
[www.thepornconversation.org](http://www.thepornconversation.org)

**Amaze:**  
[www.amaze.org](http://www.amaze.org)

# PREVENTION FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

ABBY JOHNSON, YWCA WEST CENTRAL MICHIGAN  
WORKING TO END ASSAULT AND VIOLENCE FOR EVERYONE (WEAVE)

Study after study shows that people with disabilities are more likely to be victimized by perpetrators of sexual violence than people who do not have disabilities. According to previously unpublished Justice Department data obtained by NPR in 2018, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) are sexually assaulted at a rate more than seven times higher than people with no disabilities, a rate higher than any other group.

Unfortunately, our society has created an environment that leaves many vulnerabilities for people with I/DD. People with I/DD are often denied critical information about human sexuality and many people are dependent on others for care like bathing, dressing and using the bathroom. Factors like these can cause confusion about rights to privacy and make it difficult to understand what sexual abuse is. When people with I/DD do report, people can wrongly assume that they are not credible or misunderstand what happened which can allow abuse to continue. Sex offenders specifically target people who they can more easily threaten or manipulate. As we think about some of these factors, we can see why the statistics are as high as they are.

**ONE STUDY ESTIMATES THAT AS MANY AS 83% OF WOMEN AND 32% OF MEN WITH I/DD WILL BE SEXUALLY VICTIMIZED IN THEIR LIFETIME.**

These rates of assault are astounding, and we must be asking ourselves what can we do to promote safety and prevent sexual assault of people with I/DD. Prevention of sexual assault requires us to address root causes of sexual assault and the social norms that allow sexual violence to exist. It is imperative to dispel harmful myths about sexual assault and individuals with I/DD and create access to information on sexual violence.

Supporting the safety of individuals with I/DD requires a multifaceted approach that must flow from the inclusion of people with disabilities. In Kent County, WEAVE is working with self-advocates in our community to train staff at disability service providers about sexual assault, promote inclusive access to sexual assault services, and teach Healthy Relationships class to promote the rights and safety of individuals with I/DD.



**CONTACT INFORMATION:**  
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# IT'S TIME TO STOP CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

MISTI DEVRIES, COMMUNITY ADVOCATE  
CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER OF KENT COUNTY

Reporting sexual abuse means taking risks. At this point in time, most of us are aware that multiple factors led to the abuse by Dr. Larry Nassar not being reported. Staff and parents were unaware and/or groomed, and his position made the allegations seem impossible. The truth is, there are so many reasons why people do not report abuse; however, reporting is the first step to healing. This is exactly why it is imperative that we believe the child and embrace our voices.



children's  
ADVOCACY CENTER  
OF KENT COUNTY

"THIS IS EXACTLY WHY IT'S  
IMPERATIVE THAT WE BELIEVE THE  
CHILD AND EMBRACE OUR VOICES."

So, why don't people report, and why is it important that they do?

"I'm not sure if what I'm seeing is actually maltreatment" – It is not your job to determine if maltreatment is occurring, but you should always report when you see signs or have suspicions.

"I'm afraid of making a false accusation" – Reporting does not mean you're making an accusation of abuse. You're simply reporting signs that have caused concern.

"I know these parents, and I don't want to damage our relationship" – The child's wellbeing is the most important factor, and this must supersede our feelings towards any of the adults involved.

"I don't want to make matters worse for the child" – If abuse is occurring, you **MUST** take action. By not taking action, you are allowing the suspected abuse to continue and can certainly make matters worse for the child and their future.

When it comes down to it, adults have a responsibility to protect children. We can empower the children in our lives with the tools they need to protect themselves; however, we cannot put all of the responsibility on them. We must take risks and be advocates for those most vulnerable...our children.

# COULD COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION BE THE SOLUTION TO PREVENTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Mara Furlich, Program Director Prevention and Empowerment Services  
YWCA West Central Michigan

The Sexual Assault Prevention Action Team of Kent County is comprised of professionals and community members from many different backgrounds and experiences, but it didn't take long for us to all find common ground. One major concern that we all saw affecting our clients, work, and community was the apparent lack of access in education for young people to learn about healthy sexuality. Whether it was the detective on our team or the therapist who works with juvenile sex offenders, preventionists and clinicians alike agreed that the young people we work with often don't have adequate knowledge or understanding of their own bodies, their's and other's rights, consent, or healthy sexuality.

The unfortunate truth is that if young people aren't learning about sex and sexuality from a trustworthy source, they will look to the only other places they can find: the media, pornography, or their equally misinformed peers. Many of the messages in these sources reinforce and normalize behaviors that lead to perpetrating sexual violence, such as hyper-masculine attitudes, male dominance and female submissiveness, sexual entitlement, and value in gaining and maintaining control over others, just to name a few.

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) refers not only to education regarding human anatomy and biological function, but to education on relationship equality, human rights, and respectful sexuality (1). It gives young people the opportunity to discuss and learn about consent culture and healthy vs. unhealthy relationships, which is vital to reducing rates of sexual and domestic violence and eradicating the social norms that contribute to the perpetration of such behaviors.

Michigan currently does not allow public schools to teach comprehensive sexuality education regardless of the needs and wishes of their communities. The current laws limit a school's ability to choose CSE curriculum that is evidence-based and effective in promoting healthy behaviors. They also require processes for sex-ed curricula approval that are very lengthy and cumbersome for many schools, leading districts to either completely opt out of teaching sex-ed or struggle to maintain an updated curriculum. Currently, schools may opt out of teaching sexuality education altogether, are not required to teach beyond STD and HIV education, and don't have to require students to participate in sexuality education before graduation (2).

1. United Nations Population Fund. "Comprehensive Sexuality Education." September 30, 2016.

2. "HIV/STI and Sex Education in Michigan Public Schools." Michigan Department of Education, July 2013.



## WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT THIS?

### ATTEND YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD MEETING AND VOICE YOUR SUPPORT FOR COMPREHENSIVE SEX EDUCATION.

Oftentimes the most vocal individuals on the topic of comprehensive sex education are those that oppose it. We can't be silent anymore. The time for evidenced-based models of sexuality education is now.

### JOIN YOUR DISTRICT'S SEX ED ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO MAKE SURE YOUR VOICE IS HEARD.

Schools that opt to teach sex ed are required to form an advisory board which holds meetings at least every two years. Contact your school district for information on their sex ed advisory board's upcoming meetings and how to join the group.

### WRITE YOUR LEGISLATORS AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO RETHINK MICHIGAN'S CURRENT STANDARDS FOR SEX EDUCATION.

The current laws and regulations for sex education in the state of Michigan are outdated and doing a disservice to our state. Many legislators are unaware of the impact these laws have, and you can help to educate them through writing and/or calling them.

### TALK WITH YOUR FRIENDS, FAMILIES, AND COWORKERS ABOUT THIS ISSUE. THERE IS POWER IN NUMBERS.

Most people are unaware of the state of sexuality education in Michigan. Visit [Michigan.gov](http://Michigan.gov) for more information.



## CONTACT US

### TARA ADAY, SAFE HAVEN MINISTRIES

*Its Creating a Safe Haven is a church certification program to help equip faith communities with the education and resources to prevent and effectively respond to domestic and sexual violence. For more information, visit*

*[www.safehavenministries.org/certification](http://www.safehavenministries.org/certification)*

### ERIC KAS, SAFE CHURCH MINISTRY

*Safe Church Ministry equips congregations in abuse awareness, prevention, and response. For more information, visit [www.crcna.org/safechurch](http://www.crcna.org/safechurch)*

# CREATING REFUGE IN THE CHURCH

TARA ADAY & ERIC KAS

While Safe Haven Ministries and Safe Church Ministry hold very different roles in our community, the work of both of these agencies is often intersecting. In our respective roles, we are often called to walk alongside a church or church member after an instance of domestic violence or sexual violence. Their stories are not from the worlds of Hollywood, Wall Street or politics; these are individuals in our communities sharing their stories of sexual assault and harassment in the #ChurchToo.

The power of story is unquestionable. The power of multiple stories being told together has compellingly unveiled patterns of victimization that have been hidden for too long. We have witnessed a cultural tipping point, a movement take place, and our society will be forever changed. The response to the #metoo movement varies greatly, however, we believe there is reason to be hopeful for the future. As Ruth Everhart, author of *Ruined* states, "As difficult as it is, I believe this cultural movement is a gift to the church. We have the opportunity to lead boldly rather than to trail timidly or argue defiantly." The opportunity is a heavy, but hopeful one.

As the church takes on this opportunity it will need to listen to their own powerful #MeToo stories with the story of Jesus, the cross, and the resurrection as the bedrock. Jesus' story is one of humility and of giving up power, that leads to new life and restoration. It is out of humility that the church must continue to listen and lead. This is the place where transformation and tangible steps forward begin.

It is out of this place then that we may begin to ask questions like: What are our policies and procedures to prevent these forms of violence? If or when someone discloses violence, are our staff and community members equipped with the tools and knowledge to appropriately respond?

A victim or survivor of abuse is far more likely to turn to their faith community for help before they call a hotline or reach out to a professional organization for support. Do you know how you would respond? If not, consider reaching out to Safe Haven or Safe Church Ministry. We offer resources and programs to help you create these changes.

It is our sincere hope and prayer that lasting change continues to happen so that in every community the value of each person is honored; and each person lives free from abuse; and where abuse has occurred, the response is compassion and justice that fosters healing.

# SHINING THE SPOTLIGHT ON REPRODUCTIVE COERCION

AARON TOFFOLI, PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATOR- SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION  
KENT COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

## DEFINING THE ISSUE

In the US, 45% of pregnancies are unintended, and many women have experienced multiple unintended pregnancies. Ever wonder: Why so many? Many theories and myths exist, many which blame and shame these women. Research shows that many of these individuals may be a victim of Reproductive Coercion (RC). RC is defined by The National Domestic Violence Hotline as “Threats or acts of violence against a partner’s reproductive health or reproductive autonomy.” It is experienced by about 25% of women, and can include:

- **PRESSURE TO BECOME PREGNANT AGAINST HER WILL**
- **MANIPULATING OR DESTROYING BIRTH CONTROL METHODS, OR NOT USING BIRTH CONTROL METHODS AS PREVIOUSLY AGREED UPON**
- **COERCION TO EITHER CONTINUE OR ABORT A PREGNANCY AGAINST HER WILL**
- **USING ECONOMIC CONTROL, SUCH AS NOT ALLOWING HER TO PURCHASE BIRTH CONTROL**

RC is often combined with other forms of Intimate Partner Violence (also known as Domestic Violence), and is a likely cause of many of these unintended pregnancies. In one study, 40% of abused women report that their pregnancy was unintended, as compared to 8% of those not experiencing abuse. In addition to repeat pregnancies in short intervals, victims may also experience repeat abortions, or frequent sexually transmitted infections.

## ADDRESSING THE ISSUE

Helping victims recognize RC is vital. To do so, health and human service providers should provide a safe, supportive and confidential environment. Providers should ask questions such as these to ALL clients/patients when discussing reproductive health:

- **HAS YOUR PARTNER EVER FORCED YOU TO DO SOMETHING SEXUALLY THAT YOU DID NOT WANT TO DO OR REFUSED YOUR REQUEST TO USE CONDOMS?**
- **HAS YOUR PARTNER EVER TRIED TO GET YOU PREGNANT WHEN YOU DID NOT WANT TO BE PREGNANT?**
- **ARE YOU WORRIED YOUR PARTNER WILL HURT YOU IF YOU DO NOT DO WHAT HE WANTS WITH THE PREGNANCY?**
- **DOES YOUR PARTNER SUPPORT YOUR DECISION ABOUT WHEN OR IF YOU WANT TO BECOME PREGNANT?**

Want to learn more about Reproductive Coercion, and how you and your organization can reframe the way in which you respond to intimate partner violence and reproductive coercion? Futures Without Violence has created a guide entitled Addressing Intimate Partner Violence, Reproductive and Sexual Coercion. Check it out here:  
<https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/addressing-intimate-partner-violence/>

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE KENT COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT'S APPROACH TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION, CONTACT AARON TOFFOLI AT:**

**aaron.toffoli@kentcountymi.gov  
(616) 632-7295**



**VIOLENCE IS NOT  
INEVITABLE.  
PREVENTION IS  
POSSIBLE.**

## **WHAT'S NEXT FOR SAPAT?**

At this time, SAPAT is developing a community climate survey to assess Kent County's current understanding and readiness for sexual violence prevention. The information obtained through this survey will help to inform SAPAT's collaborations and direction for future projects.

This survey is being developed in collaboration with Grand Valley State University's School of Criminal Justice, and is slated to be distributed in fall 2018. Details for distribution have yet to be finalized. Results from this survey will be released in winter 2019.

SAPAT is currently seeking individuals connected to the local media and diverse community groups for collaboration on distribution of the climate survey. If you are interested or know of anyone that may be interested, please contact:

Mara Furlich: [mfurlich@ywcawcmi.org](mailto:mfurlich@ywcawcmi.org)

or

Aaron Toffoli: [aaron.toffoli@kentcountymi.gov](mailto:aaron.toffoli@kentcountymi.gov)