

Making Connections with Faith Communities

Communities of faith are in a unique position to be powerful allies in the prevention of and response to sexual violence. Not only are they trusted sources of support and guidance for their members, they reach people at all stages of the lifespan, creating unique opportunities for partnering in a wide-range of prevention and response efforts.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Different organizations, both rape crisis programs and faith-based communities, will be at different places in their ability to partner to address sexual violence. Communication is key; navigating between secular and religious boundaries can be challenging. Keep in mind that it is better to start small than to not start at all.

Inquire about hosting events in their space or invite the faith community to your events.

This simple outreach can provide both partners with a chance to learn about each other.

Submit information for a bulletin or newsletter.

Ask your religious organization to promote your services and events to their members. Ask for space on their bulletin boards or hang flyers in the bathroom stalls. Sexual Assault Awareness Month in April is a great opportunity.

Provide education or training.

From educating faith leaders about your services to conducting community-wide training, helping people to understand your services and issues related to sexual violence is a foundational step in relationship- and trust-building. Sometimes

current events or changes in legislation, such as updates to mandated reporting laws, provide opportunities for your organization to “get a foot in the door.”

Participate in their events.

If the religious organization is hosting an event, ask how you can help. Perhaps you can set up an information or activity table or serve on a planning committee for a community event.

Access different groups within the faith community. Discussions about sexual violence can cause discomfort. Identify different opportunities to reach out to faith community members, at all ages and stages. Perhaps there might be acceptance of a program about healthy relationships for teens or a training for religious-education volunteers about how to handle disclosures.

Empower leadership.

Encourage faith leaders to incorporate anti-sexual violence themes and words of hope into their messages. Ask them to pray for victims and families struggling as a result of victimization. Help them make their space safe by offering insight on how to be sensitive to and supportive of people who may have experienced sexual abuse or assault.

Assist in the development of policies and procedures.

While many faith-based organizations will already have these types of documents in place, offer to review them and provide feedback. Provide resources to bolster their response plans.



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