



**Wing Commanders' Series**  
**Additional Resource Document to the**  
**Wing Commanders' Guide to Sexual Assault Prevention & Response**

## **Effectively Engaging Your Wing in Sexual Assault Prevention**

A frequently insurmountable obstacle that faces any new or existing strategy attempting to address sexual violence is the pre-existing negative stigma and perceptions that often surround the crime. Before a program is even launched, expectations are negative for many – even most – within any given community. Many individuals carry deeply held negative biases often associated with “violence against women.” Divisive attitudes and opinions often associated with sexual assault programs can include:

- male-bashing
- “there’s nothing I can do”
- victim blaming
- “she had it coming”
- “it doesn’t happen to men”
- “it’s a women’s issue”

Despite years of attempts to correct these misperceptions, they remain inextricably tied to efforts to address sexual violence. The fundamental obstacle created by such negative associations is that, regardless of what educators, SARCs, or victim advocates are saying, most participants aren’t listening. Before the briefing even starts, many exclude themselves from the possibility of participating and decide in advance that they will not align with the effort.

In order to move forward with an effective sexual assault prevention strategy, the first task required is to fundamentally change the “reputation” of the issue to one that more Airmen, base and community members positively identify with. Because of the centrality of this issue, much could be gained by Commanders and their leadership framing sexual assault prevention and response in a new way. By employing new language, messages and approaches, while avoiding elements that have historically alienated many from the issue, significant improvement is possible in engaging men and women who have previously felt marginalized and/or hostile to the issue.

When talking about sexual violence in briefings, speeches or individual conversations, consider the following:

<b>Instead of...</b>	<b>Try...</b>
Engaging in a discussion about who is to blame after an assault has occurred;	Redirecting the conversation to focus on what bystanders might have done to prevent the assault from ever occurring.
Giving examples that focus exclusively on female victims;	Including statistics and examples that reference male and female experiences with sexual violence.
Telling men not to perpetrate and telling women not to put themselves at risk;	Giving proactive examples of what both men and women can do together to intervene in a potentially high risk situation and to communicate to others that they expect the same of them.
Limiting guidance to a slogan or sound-bite, such as “real wingman act;”	Building on the message by acknowledging that it can be hard to act due to peer pressure and social consequences, and giving specific examples of how



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Instead of...	Try...
	a wingman could act, even under difficult circumstances.
Limiting sexual violence prevention to a separate briefing or one awareness month;	Integrating messages about the importance of a community-wide approach to prevention into daily briefings, informal conversations, pre-existing programs and messages that focus on the wingman concept, and public speeches.

In summary, by being aware of the institutionalized negative perception that exists in all of society, you, as Wing Commander, can take steps to shift attitudes toward sexual assault by simply shifting the way in which you talk about it.



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## **A Broader Understanding of Bystander Intervention**

Research clearly indicates that there are far more individuals within the Air Force who are not committing sexual violence than those who are. Based on this reality, the key question that must be addressed is: If there are so many who are not committing sexual violence and are opposed to it, then how are current rates being sustained? The obvious answer lies in the fact that though few are committing the violence, there are even fewer acting to prevent it. A key to successful prevention is to understand and address this wide-spread bystander inaction.

Often, there is a pathological conceptualization of bystander inaction – such as apathy, indifference, character deficiencies or selfishness. The implication that bystanders who don't act simply don't care does not hold true most of the time, and may prove destructive when trying to mobilize them. Taking an alternate approach based on the premise that most Airmen and community members are decent and do not want their fellow Airmen to experience sexual violence, allows for a more productive strategy for Commanders.

In order to maximize those who will actively engage as bystanders, consider using the following guiding principles.

1. **Most civilian and Air Force members of your Wing are potential allies in prevention efforts.** Despite good intentions, however, each faces difficulties in acting or stepping up, even when they know they should. These “obstacles to action” (i.e., peer pressure, fear of retribution, fear of embarrassment, uncertainty, etc.) keep well-intentioned people silent – and often regretting their silence.
2. **Obstacles to action don't just disappear.** Rather than pretending you can eradicate things like peer pressure or fear of retribution with a good speech or a reference to core values, work to create a safe space for members of your Wing community to acknowledge these obstacles. When an individual feels safe enough to acknowledge what makes it hard to step up in a high risk situation, he or she can then begin to develop realistic alternatives to intervening that would avoid triggering those specific obstacles.
3. **Acknowledge the legitimacy and universality of obstacles to action.** Avoid historically ineffective approaches to these obstacles to action such as: using shame or guilt to try to push through the obstacles; “forcing” them out through rules and threats; trying to eliminate them with a pep-talk or slogan; or simply pretending these obstacles don't exist. Instead, an honest dialogue about what makes it hard for individuals to intervene will allow for an opportunity to generate realistic solutions for intervention.
4. **Allow for individual personal growth, but don't depend on it.** The assumption is that individuals will not overcome their obstacles immediately, and generating realistic solutions is based on acknowledging that reality. However, it can be valuable to embed key messages about bystander intervention within the context of individual and Air Force values, ideals and identity. The Air Force



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is an institution already set up to be personally transformative; transforming civilians to Air Force members driven by a shared set of core values. As Commander, it is important to balance two messages – one aspirational and one practical.

- a. **Aspirational:** You are the most elite Air Force in the world. You are capable of great things. Rise to your role as wingman, and intervene in high risk situations.
- b. **Practical:** Even a “real wingman” can face obstacles to intervening in a high risk situation. It’s not what you do that defines you as a “real wingman,” but rather that you do something. Even if you cannot intervene in a situation directly, by getting others to intervene or by simply creating a distraction, you can accomplish the same goal.

In summary, what remains critical to the prevention of sexual assault are strategies to engage bystanders in taking actions to prevent it.



## **Secondary Victimization: Implications for Sexual Assault Response**

It is well documented that the majority of sexual assault victims will never report their crime. This reluctance is understandable as evidence shows that climate and response systems can be, and often are, extremely hostile to victims. Without reports, it is not possible to hold perpetrators accountable; therefore understanding and addressing the factors that contribute to under-reporting will be very important in your efforts to address sexual assault in your Wing.

As you examine ways to increase reporting in your Command, it is important to understand the impact on victims of their own reporting experience. The phenomenon of secondary victimization is frequently discussed in the field of sexual assault response and prevention: According to Campbell (1999) secondary victimization refers to behaviors and attitudes of those receiving assault reports that are "victim-blaming" and insensitive, and which are traumatic to crime victims. "The disregard of victims' needs by providers can so closely mimic victims' experiences at the hands of their assailants that secondary victimization is sometimes called "the second assault." Research has suggested that almost half of rape victims are treated by law enforcement in ways that result in secondary victimization (Patterson, 2011). Additionally, victims of non-stranger rape (e.g., acquaintance rape and date rape) were at particular risk for secondary victimization (Campbell et al., 1999). When victims experience secondary victimization, they are much less likely to follow-through with a complete disciplinary process, thereby making it less likely that perpetrators are held accountable (Campbell, 2011).

### **How Reporting Processes Can Re-Victimize**

There are a number of ways that reporting processes can "re-victimize" those who come forward following a sexual assault.

1. Those receiving reports are uninformed about the rarity of false reporting and respond as if the victim is not telling the truth or as if the victim is responsible for the assault.
2. Victims are required to tell their story repeatedly and to multiple people.
3. Interviewers follow lines of questioning that involve victims having their prior conduct called into question.
4. Victims experience formal or informal retaliation (e.g., fail to get promoted; are harassed, etc.).
5. Victims must continue to interact with their alleged perpetrator on a daily basis.
6. When a case is handled such that a victim perceives that his/her assault is not being taken seriously, a plea deal is arranged without his/her involvement, or when the alleged perpetrator is not held accountable.

As a Commander you cannot always mitigate the unfortunate mis-steps during the reporting process. However, you are in a position to be sure that Air Force procedures are followed and that you do all in your power to minimize the negative impact on any victims who come forward. The reality is that many of the primary reasons victims of sexual assault in the Air Force give for not reporting include things within Commanders' reach such as: not wanting superiors to know; concern about privacy; fear of



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retaliation; lack of trust in the reporting process; not knowing the reporting process (AF Gallup Survey, 2010). The responsibility for an increase in reporting is that of leadership, not victims. Note what is being communicated within your Wing that is contributing to barriers to reporting, and address it. An increase in reporting will be unlikely to happen until after the response is strengthened and improved.

### **Creating a Safe Reporting Environment**

There are a number of things that Commanders can do to promote an environment that is safer for reporting.

1. Educate those in your command about the benefits of reaching out to the SARC first to report. This not only protects their right to choose either restricted or unrestricted forms of reporting, but it also guides them to someone who is trained to understand this issue and avoid responses associated with secondary victimization.
2. Be sure that those in your command avoid asking questions that imply a victim is to blame for his/her assault.
3. Be sure that all individuals who interact with victims avoid any explicit statements suggesting that a victim's actions contributed to his/her assault (e.g., victim's dress, use of alcohol or drugs, being at a certain location at the time of the rape, degree of resistance, prior sexual encounters with the alleged offender, whether the victim responded sexually during the incident) (Campbell, 2011).
4. Do not require a victim to share his/her story more times or with more people than is absolutely necessary for a fair process.
5. Balance victims' needs with the necessity of gathering sufficient evidence to move forward with a case.
6. Ensure that procedures are utilized to minimize stress during interviews and/or testimony (e.g., don't require a victim to testify in the same room as his/her alleged assailant, limit cross-examination to information that is germane to the case, etc.).
7. Strictly enforce Air Force non-retaliation policies to protect victims who come forward.
8. Strictly enforce Air Force confidentiality processes for sexual assault cases.
9. Whenever possible, involve a victim in the decision-making process regarding his/her case.
10. Do all you can to be sure that victims are treated with dignity and respect throughout the entire process.
11. Educate yourself and those in your command about reporting procedures, victim's rights, and resources.

In summary, by understanding and addressing one of the primary factors that leads to under-reporting – the reporting process itself – you can contribute to increased accountability for perpetrators in your Wing.



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### **The Importance of Overseeing the Sexual Assault Case Management Process**

Proper leadership oversight of the Sexual Assault Case Management Process in your Wing is essential for all parties involved. A principal justification for assigning the SARC to work directly for the Vice Wing Commander was to ensure sexual assault cases were being handled properly and efficiently within the wing. The SARC needs unimpeded access to the Vice Commander, not only for timely notification about an allegation, but also for the "top-cover" sometimes needed to ensure all support agencies understand the importance of their active involvement in the case management process. This may entail actions from ensuring timely attendance by all parties at monthly Case Management meetings to ensuring specific cases get their due attention. This support also includes helping lower-level commanders understand and appreciate both the unrestricted and restricted reporting options. Your strategic leadership and guidance, as well as your active support of the SARC as they lead this group, are critical.

While the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) and Case Management Group (CMG) mirror each other, they are not the same. The SART is an initial response team with an operational focus. The CMG is an administrative group designed to be a check and balance in the processing of cases to ensure interdisciplinary support for all parties and timely investigation and adjudication of cases. Both serve an important purpose as it relates to victim care and must be tested and process improved over time to provide the best possible care and support for both victims and alleged perpetrators.

Among the various agencies that make up the Case Management Group are some special areas to monitor.

#### **SARC/VA:**

- In an unrestricted reporting situation, Commanders have responsibility for all military members as a case is processed. If the allegation is military-on-military, be sure that both parties are getting proper healthcare.
- Ensure that SARCs and Victim Advocates are not pressured by anyone for information on the existence of a restricted report nor any of the details, except as noted in the AFI.

#### **Healthcare providers (Physical and mental health):**

- Ensure SARCs and Victim Advocates have an avenue for expedited access to care for victims.

#### **Victim's Commander (for unrestricted reports only):**

- Commanders have responsibility for all military members in an unrestricted case until that case is investigated and adjudicated. They must ensure both parties are getting full access to support services throughout the process.

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**Chaplain (HC):**

- Ensure HC personnel are included as desired by the victim or alleged perpetrator.

**Military Criminal Investigative Organization/Law Enforcement (OSI, CID, NCIS, SF):**

- In unrestricted cases ensure there are procedures that are as timely as possible and also mindful of the state of the victim.

**Judge Advocate (JA):**

- Ensure your Wing has a strong Victim Witness Assistance Program (VWAP) that is working hand-in-hand with the Sexual Assault Response Team members.
- Ensure that feedback on the progress of each case through the system is shared with the victim as often as is needed.
- Ensure feedback and an explanation of the final case disposition is thoughtfully shared with the victim. The victim will greatly benefit from the support of the SARC in that meeting as well as continued support by their Victim Advocate afterwards.

The excerpt below is from AFI 36-6001 (29 Sept 08) outlining the specific duties of the Case Management Group:

**AFI36-6001 29 SEPTEMBER 2008**

**2.7. Case Management Group.**

2.7.1. DoD Directive requires the establishment of a multi-disciplinary case management group, chaired by the SARC, to meet monthly to review unrestricted cases, improve reporting, facilitate monthly victim updates, and to discuss process improvement to ensure system accountability and victim access to quality services.

2.7.1.1. For unrestricted cases, the case management group includes the SARC, VA, AFOSI, SF, Healthcare Personnel, HC, JA and the reporting victim's commander.

2.7.1.2. For restricted cases, the group membership is limited to the SARC, assigned VA and Healthcare Personnel representative.

2.7.2. The case management group will review sexual assault trends for the area of responsibility, including environmental information provided to the WG/CV under restricted reporting. The group will provide a report to the WG/CV no less than quarterly, including recommendations.