

# Reporting on Sexual Violence

## A Guide for Journalists in Iowa

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A Project of the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault (IowaCASA)

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The Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault (IowaCASA) provides training, resources, and support to victim service providers, culturally specific programs, emergency sheltering programs, and allied agencies that work with survivors of sexual assault.

IowaCASA was founded in 1982 by local rape crisis centers and their allies. Our mission is to end sexual violence and improve support available to sexual assault survivors in Iowa.

Our organization provides a bridge between victim service advocates, statewide policymakers, and federal responses to sexual violence. *Victim service advocates* are trained professionals at victim service programs whose jobs are to support sexual assault survivors.

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*This guide is designed to provide journalists with context and guidance when covering stories involving sexual violence.*

Local media and aspiring journalists are encouraged to utilize this guide as a resource to help comprehend the complexities of anti-violence work and sexual violence in particular.

IowaCASA can assist journalists by providing interviews with coalition staff. Additionally, IowaCASA can provide support with sourcing by directing journalists to local resources within their distribution area or finding experts to speak about these complicated subjects.

To schedule an interview or to find out more, contact Communications Specialist Matty Smith at (515) 850-1907 or email [communications@iowacasa.org](mailto:communications@iowacasa.org).

## An overview of the coalition

Established in 1982, the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault (IowaCASA) works to unite the victim service programs, culturally specific programs, emergency sheltering programs, and allied organizations across the state in their efforts to prevent sexual violence and support survivors.

Our mission is to promote a society free from sexual violence and to meet the diverse needs of sexual assault survivors. We believe we can reach this goal by improving the programs and services available to survivors, and by supporting communities to prevent sexual violence before it occurs.

In 2013, Iowa restructured victim services statewide. This was a collaborative effort between IowaCASA, the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV), the Iowa Crime Victim Assistance Division, comprehensive sexual assault and domestic abuse programs, and state legislators.

Since restructuring, Iowa victim service programs have seen a 250 percent increase in the number of sexual assault survivors served. Now, Iowa acts as a national model to other states.

Currently IowaCASA has 25 member programs serving survivors of sexual violence in all 99 counties. The coalition's efforts include:

- Technical assistance and training to member programs
- Public policy efforts at the state and national level
- Civil legal services for survivors of sexual violence in middle school, high school, and college
- Improving response to sexual violence within communities of color
- Statewide sexual assault prevention
- Training for allied professionals, such as nurses and law enforcement
- A national project providing peer-based assistance to other sexual assault coalitions in all 56 states and territories
- ...and more

Visit our website at [www.iowacasa.org](http://www.iowacasa.org) for additional information.

## An overview of sexual violence

***What is sexual violence?*** Sexual violence includes all unwanted sexual acts meant to harm, humiliate, control, and intimidate. Rape and sexual violence is about using sexual assault to gain *power and control* over another person. (See also *Terminology and Definitions* section of this media guide, page 17.)

Sexual violence includes, but is not limited to:

- rape or sexual assault
- child sexual assault and incest
- intimate partner sexual assault
- unwanted sexual contact and/or touching
- sexual harassment
- sexual exploitation
- unwanted sexual comments or advances

***Who are the survivors of sexual violence?*** Sexual violence impacts all of us: our family members, friends, and neighbors. It impacts people of all ages, backgrounds, and genders. However, it's important to note that youth, people of color, transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, people with disabilities, and those who are incarcerated experience sexual violence at significantly higher rates. Sexual violence not only affects the survivor, but their loved ones, our neighborhoods, and all of society.

***Who commits sexual violence?*** Sexual assault survivors typically know the person who abuses them. Those who cause harm usually assault someone they know, such as a friend, family member, intimate partner, co-worker, or acquaintance. They are usually male-identified, although women can also cause harm. Many juvenile offenders are frequently survivors of sexual abuse themselves.

***Facts about sexual violence:***

- A survivor of sexual violence is *never* at fault for what happened to them, no matter the circumstances
- No one deserves to be sexually assaulted for any reason

- Men and boys can also be victims of sexual violence. Studies show that 1 in 6 men in the United States have experienced unwanted sexual acts before the age of 18.<sup>1</sup>
- Most survivors know the person who sexually assaulted them

## Iowa's sexual abuse laws and statutes of limitation

Chapter 709 of Iowa law refers to:

Any sex act between persons is sexual abuse by either of the persons when the act is performed with the other person in any of the following circumstances:

1. The act is done by force or against the will of the other. If the consent or acquiescence of the other is procured by threats of violence toward any person or if the act is done while the other is under the influence of a drug inducing sleep or is otherwise in a state of unconsciousness, the act is done against the will of the other, or
2. Such other person is suffering from a mental defect or incapacity which precludes giving consent, or lacks the mental capacity to know the right and wrong of conduct in sexual matters, or
3. Such other person is a child.

Under Iowa law, “sexual abuse” includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Rape and/or assault
- Marital rape and/or assault
- Intimate partner rape and/or assault
- Rape and/or assault of someone who is incapacitated and/or unable to consent
- Indecent exposure
- Sexual exploitation by a counselor, therapist, or school employee
- Sexual misconduct and/or rape/assault of incarcerated adults and juveniles
- Invasion of privacy for one's sexual gratification

**Sexual abuse in the first degree**, as defined by Chapter 709.2, is “when in the course of committing sexual abuse the person causes another serious injury.” Sexual

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control & Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/NISVS-StateReportFactsheet.pdf>

abuse in the first degree is a class “A” felony with the possibility of life in prison without parole.

**Sexual abuse in the second degree**, as defined by Chapter 709.3, is when:

- a) During the commission of sexual abuse the person displays in a threatening manner a dangerous weapon, or uses or threatens to use force creating a substantial risk of death or serious injury to any person, or
- b) The other person is under the age of 12, or
- c) The person is aided or abetted by one or more persons and the sex act is committed by force or against the will of the other person against whom the sex act is committed.

Sexual abuse in the second degree is a class “B” felony with a 25-year sentence. Because this is considered a “forcible felony,” the person who does harm would have to serve a mandatory sentence of at least 70 percent, or 17.5 years before any parole could be granted.

**Sexual abuse in the third degree**, as defined by Chapter 709.4, is when sexual abuse “is done by force or against the will of the other person, whether or not the other person is the person’s spouse or is cohabiting with the person.” Sexual abuse in the third degree is a class “C” felony with the possibility of a 10-year sentence.

[To access Chapter 709 in its entirety, visit \[www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/709.pdf\]\(http://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/709.pdf\).](http://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/709.pdf)

Under the Sexual Assault Protective Order ([Code Section 236A](#), passed during the 2017 legislative session), a survivor may petition the court for a civil no-contact order, based on a preponderance of evidence (more likely true than not true), against the person who assaulted them.

Chapter 802.2 of Iowa law outlines the various statutes of limitations for sexual abuse in the first, second, or third degree:

- Incest when the survivor is under the age of 18 has a 10-year statute of limitation after the survivor’s 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. If the survivor is 18 or older, the statute of limitation is 10 years after the abuse took place.
- Sexual exploitation by a counselor, therapist, or school employee:
  - Under the age of 18: within 10 years after the survivor’s 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

- Over the age of 18: within 10 years of the date the survivor was last treated by the counselor or therapist, or within 10 years of the date the survivor was enrolled in or attended the school.
- Other sexual offenses, including lascivious acts with a child (section 709.8); assault with intent to commit sexual abuse (section 709.11); indecent contact with a child (section 709.12); lascivious conduct with a minor (section 709.14); sexual misconduct with a juvenile (section 709.16, subsection 2); child endangerment (section 726.6, subsection 4,5, or 6); and sexual exploitation of a minor (section 728.12):
  - Under the age of 18: 10 years after the survivor's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday
  - OR if the person against whom the information or indictment is sought is identified through the use of a DNA profile, an information or indictment shall be found within 3 years from the date the person is identified by the person's DNA profile (whichever is later)

[To access Chapter 802 in its entirety, visit \[www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/802.pdf\]\(http://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/802.pdf\).](http://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/802.pdf)

## National and statewide statistics

Statistics from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (2010-2012) tell us that **1 in 3 women** and **1 in 6 men** in the U.S. have experienced some form of unwanted sexual contact within their lifetime.<sup>2</sup>

According to a 2011 report entitled *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*, **nearly 50 percent of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals** have experienced sexual violence at some point in their lifetime.<sup>3</sup>

**The Iowa crime victim compensation program processed \$2,115,165 worth of claims for sexual assault forensic exams in fiscal year 2017.**<sup>4</sup> This includes time

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<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control & Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/NISVS-StateReportFactsheet.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> The National Center for Transgender Equality & the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force [http://www.thetaskforce.org/static\\_html/downloads/reports/reports/ntds\\_full.pdf](http://www.thetaskforce.org/static_html/downloads/reports/reports/ntds_full.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Iowa Crime Victim Assistance Division, 2017 Annual Report [https://www.iowaattorneygeneral.gov/media/cms/Crime\\_Victim\\_Assistance\\_Division\\_FY\\_82E1340FEF3D8.pdf](https://www.iowaattorneygeneral.gov/media/cms/Crime_Victim_Assistance_Division_FY_82E1340FEF3D8.pdf)

for nurses and doctors, facility cost, and the medical needs of survivors following a sexual assault.

In 2017, Iowa served 14,294 survivors of sexual violence. This is broken down into the following categories, according to the Iowa Crime Victim Assistance Division's annual report:

Female Adult Sexual Abuse/Assault	5,985
Male Adult Sexual Abuse/Assault	544
Sexual Abuse Adolescent	2,684
Child Sexual Abuse	3,578
Female Survivor of Incest	850
Male Survivor of Incest	178

Other categories of abuse that victim service programs in Iowa may encounter include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Survivors of elder abuse or neglect
- Victims of non-intimate partner stalking
- Individuals that have been victims of sex or labor trafficking

## Human trafficking in the media

The media plays a key role in the public's perception of human trafficking. Traditionally, media coverage has concentrated on the commercial sex trade and the public panic around trafficking. In reality, statistics show us that forced labor is more common than sex trafficking. Another common misconception from the media is that trafficking only happens to women and girls. Men and boys are also exploited by traffickers, although in smaller numbers than women and girls.

The International Labor Organization estimates there are 40.3 million survivors of human trafficking worldwide in its *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery (2017)*. Of these, 24.9 million (or 62 percent) are in the forced labor industry, whether in domestic work, food service, agriculture, construction, manufacturing, and more. This is compared to 4.8 million (12 percent) forced into sexual exploitation. Debt bondage (where a victim is forced into repaying a debt either through work or some other means) accounted for 50 percent of all victims of forced labor.

Women and girls make up 71 percent of trafficked survivors, while men and boys the remaining 42 percent. One in 4 (25 percent) victims of human trafficking were children.<sup>5</sup>

Sex trafficking is an important topic the media should be covering—but certainly not at the expense of those trafficked into forced labor. Because workplace protections do not exist within forced labor industries, survivors of forced labor face widespread abuses, including sexual violence, harassment, discrimination, and unsafe work conditions. Vulnerable populations are frequently targeted by traffickers, including immigrants and those living in poverty.

The media plays an important role with legislation aimed at curbing human trafficking as well. For instance, skewed media coverage focused on the commercial sex trafficking of young girls and boys could direct legislative and education efforts that end up excluding adults and forced labor survivors who could also benefit from legislators' actions.

Despite popular belief, trafficking doesn't just happen in urban areas. Take, for instance, the *Des Moines Register* investigation in 2009<sup>6</sup> that led to the release of dozens of men with intellectual disabilities forced to work under horrible conditions in a turkey plant in Atalissa, Iowa—population 311 according to the 2010 U.S. census.

Human trafficking can happen anywhere, and Iowa is no exception. In 2018 (January – June), the National Human Trafficking Hotline documented 38 cases of human trafficking in Iowa.<sup>7</sup> In 2016, Des Moines ranked among the nation's top 100 cities for massage-parlor trafficking.<sup>8</sup>

Advocates provided direct service to 508 survivors of human trafficking during the 2017 fiscal year, according to an annual report from the Iowa Crime Victim Assistance Division. Of these, 33 were victims of labor trafficking and 475 were

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<sup>5</sup> International Labor Organization and Walk Free Foundation, 2017: Global Estimates of Modern Slavery [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms\\_575479.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575479.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Des Moines Register investigation, 2009 (PDF) via [www.legis.iowa.gov](http://www.legis.iowa.gov) <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/publications/SD/9859.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> National Human Trafficking Hotline <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/state/iowa>

<sup>8</sup> Des Moines Register <http://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/2016/11/16/des-moines-identified-top-100-human-trafficking-site/93952890/>

victims of sex trafficking.<sup>9</sup> Currently, the department is looking into how it can broaden its reach to provide services to more survivors of forced labor trafficking.

## Sourcing

When covering crime stories, many reporters primarily rely on law enforcement for sourcing. We encourage reporters to interview a wide range of subjects beyond police and law enforcement officials when covering sexual violence, especially since a majority of sexual violence is never reported to the police.

Reach out to local stakeholders within the community including:

- victim service providers and programs
- sexual assault advocates
- sexual assault prevention educators
- mental health professionals
- families of survivors
- survivors themselves (if willing to speak on the record)
- sex offender treatment providers
- and even those who commit sexual violence

Many survivors experience barriers when reporting to law enforcement, which affect whether they choose to report in the first place. Survivors fear they will not be believed. Simply making a report can often re-victimize survivors, causing great psychological distress and harm. Some survivors fear retaliation, especially if the person doing harm is an authority figure or someone in power (such as an employer, teacher, or coach). If the person doing harm is a family member, survivors may be concerned about how reporting to law enforcement will impact their family.

In other cases, survivors may also not have a legal status and may not report out of fear of deportation. Many survivors who identify as people of color have a general distrust of law enforcement rooted in their communities' negative interactions with that system, which certainly impacts their willingness to report.

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<sup>9</sup> Iowa Crime Victim Assistance Division

[https://www.iowaattorneygeneral.gov/media/cms/Crime\\_Victim\\_Assistance\\_Division\\_FY\\_82E1340FEF3D8.pdf](https://www.iowaattorneygeneral.gov/media/cms/Crime_Victim_Assistance_Division_FY_82E1340FEF3D8.pdf)

## The false reporting fallacy

### *False reporting*

A false report is one in which an investigation proves the crime was never committed. A common misconception is that survivors lie about what happened to them, or make false reports to get back at ex-lovers, et cetera. Multiple studies emphatically dispute this claim, placing the prevalence of false reporting around 2 percent.<sup>10</sup>

So why does this myth persist? Some of the ways reports are categorized can be confusing for those outside of the system. Let's look at the differences between *unfounded reports*, *baseless reports*, and *unsubstantiated reports*, as well as some of the reasons survivors recant their stories.

### *Unfounded report*

An unfounded report is when not enough evidence exists to meet the legal determination that a crime has been committed. This does not mean some form of sexual violence did not occur, just that the criminal legal system could not find enough evidence for the process to move forward.

### *Baseless report*

A baseless report is one where no evidence exists to be able to prosecute or find charges.

### *Unsubstantiated report*

An unsubstantiated report is often found in childhood sexual abuse cases when there is insufficient evidence to determine whether or not the abuse happened. Again, this does not mean the abuse never occurred.

### *Recanting*

A survivor may recant their testimony for any number of reasons. The survivor may not want their experience shared in the media as part of public record. While many news publications do not publish survivors' names as part of their reporting, survivors still face scrutiny—especially in rural areas or on campuses where everyone knows one another. Survivors may also face retaliation or have legitimate safety concerns after reporting, therefore choosing to recant. Also, because the survivor is not in control of the criminal legal process once it begins, recanting is often the only way

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<sup>10</sup> The National Center for the Prosecution of Violence Against Women (2009)  
[http://ndaa.org/pdf/the\\_voice\\_vol\\_3\\_no\\_1\\_2009.pdf](http://ndaa.org/pdf/the_voice_vol_3_no_1_2009.pdf)

that the prosecutor will drop the charges and stop the prosecution if that is what the survivor wants to have happen. Just because a survivor chooses to recant their story *does not mean the abuse didn't take place.*

## Interviewing survivors

When interviewing survivors, it's important to understand that sexual violence is a traumatic experience that affects everyone differently. Survivors can face long-lasting psychological and physiological effects such as anxiety, depression, and flashbacks. Special care should be taken when interviewing survivors.

Whenever interviewing survivors of sexual violence, keep the following in mind:

- Understand terminology. Rape is not the same as “sex.” Sex trafficking is not the same thing as sex work. Survivors may or may not wish to be referred to as “victims.” We encourage reporters to respect the survivor’s wishes in regards to how they choose to describe themselves.
- Survivors may not want to speak on the record or be identified in your story. Be respectful of a survivor’s right to say no. Additionally, a survivor may agree to go on record but then change their mind later on in the reporting process. Again, be respectful of the survivor and their choices.
- If a survivor plans to testify as a witness against the person who did harm, they may not legally be allowed to provide a comment. If the survivor is involved in school or college proceedings, they may also not wish to comment or may not be able to comment.
- Consider whether or not interviewing and/or naming the survivor will impact or compromise their safety. Especially in rural or campus settings, survivors may face retaliation from their abuser or other community members.
- Allow the survivor to lead the interview process and make choices that help them to feel safe and in control. Find a confidential place for the survivor to share their story, free from loud noises and other distractions that could interfere.
- Be objective and try not to make judgments. Avoid asking the survivor questions that might inadvertently blame them for what happened. For example, don’t ask the survivor how much they had to drink or what they were wearing when they were assaulted.

- Avoid asking a survivor to go into the details of what happened to them. Take the survivor at their word and don't ask for specifics. Try not to sensationalize the survivor's experience with explicit or extraneous details.
- When a survivor chooses to share an account of their assault, parts of it may not make sense—and that's okay. It's not uncommon for survivors to have fragmented memories of their assault. This is associated with the way the brain processes trauma. As a coping mechanism, survivors may "block out" certain parts of what happened to them. If possible, avoid asking too many clarifying questions.
- Consider allowing the survivor to be a part of the review process for your article. This can be tricky with editors and tight deadlines. But if you have the time, it may be beneficial to allow the survivor access, to provide them with a sense of security and reassurance that their story is in good hands.

**Please note:** At IowaCASA, we do our best to respond in a timely manner to requests from reporters. However, if a reporter is looking for a survivor to go on the record and talk about their experience, it can oftentimes be a time-consuming process. For confidentiality reasons, we do not keep a contact list for survivors who have worked with the media or who are willing to work with the media. As a result, it may be difficult for us to respond to these kinds of request in time to meet a reporter's deadline.

## Language matters

Word choices, the framing of a story, or even a story's headline may perpetuate harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about sexual violence. This includes language that blames the victim and minimizes the incident(s) of rape and/or violence against women.

While it's common for reporters to write about those who have survived some form of violent crime as "victims," some who have experienced traumatic events refer to themselves as "survivors." Some survivors see this difference as one of empowerment and owning their experiences. If you have access to the survivor, ask them how they would like to be referred to in your story. It's important to respect this nuance throughout the writing and editing process.

Examples of harmful language in news articles:

- Try to avoid passive voice when referring to rape and sexual assault. This is an example of a problematic headline written passively: "[Fox News guest alleges](#)

[she was raped by host and later blacklisted.](#)” (September 18, 2017) The words “was raped” remove the responsibility from the person committing the sexual assault. This is an easy fix: “Fox News guest alleges host raped and later blacklisted her.” Though a small change, it makes a big difference.

- If a sex act takes place without consent—allegedly or not—it is defined under Iowa law as rape or sexual assault. Reporters and editors have an obligation to call it that. Take, for instance, this Des Moines Register article (September 8, 2017): “[Iowa boarding school owner forced student into sex, felony complaint says.](#)” The article goes on to say the boarding school owner “required a female student to have sex.” Rape and sexual assault is all about power and control. Referring to an assault as “sex” minimizes the experience of the survivor and the nature of the violent crime itself. Consider rewriting: “Iowa boarding school owner raped student, felony complaint says.” The boarding school owner “sexually assaulted a female student.”
- In a 2011 New York Times article entitled “[Vicious Assault Shakes Texas Town,](#)” journalist James C. McKinley Jr. outlines the brutal rape of an 11-year-old girl in an abandoned trailer home (March 8, 2011). This led to 18 young men and teenage boys being brought up on charges of participating in the rape. Most of McKinley’s story heavily focused on the accused young men and the negative impact the accusations had on their lives, glossing over the experience of the survivor. The article also suggests that the survivor “dressed older than her age, wearing makeup and fashions more appropriate to a woman in her 20s. She would hang out with teenage boys at a playground, some said.” This is a very common form of “victim-blaming” which often takes place in popular culture and in the media, where a survivor of a crime is held responsible for the harm committed against them. Sexual violence is *always* the fault of the person who committed the harm; your reporting should reflect that.

A [2015 study by the Berkely Media Studies Group](#)<sup>11</sup> surveyed more than 300 articles on sexual violence in U.S. newspaper from 2011 to 2013. Of the articles surveyed, the study found:

- 15 percent of surveyed articles used language that minimized or excused the act of sexual violence

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<sup>11</sup> Berkely Media Studies Group <http://www.bmsg.org/resources/publications/issue-22-sexual-violence-news-analysis-2011-2013>

- Most articles surrounding sexual violence focused on the person who *did* harm rather than the person who *was* harmed
- Only 6 percent of articles discussed treatment for survivors of sexual assault
- Prevention (stopping sexual violence before it occurs) was mentioned in 8 percent of articles, and even then was “often vaguely or broadly defined”
- Risk-reduction strategies in articles (3 percent of those surveyed, according to the report) frequently focused on the behavior of the victim or potential victim instead of focusing on the harmful actions of those who do harm. There were zero references in any of the articles that were part of this study that referred to risk reduction strategies that make a person less likely to commit acts of violence against someone else.

The study recommends that journalists spend more time researching and writing about the scope of sexual violence and the impact it has on society, rather than one specific incident. Journalists must look for sources *outside* of the criminal justice system (such as advocates or local support groups) to write a full story. The study also suggests including contact information for local resources, such as a victim service program or a sexual assault hotline that survivors or family members can reach out to for help or counseling, as well as information about how sexual violence can be prevented.

## Ethical considerations when covering sexual violence

Unless a survivor goes on the record to share their name and/or their experience, IowaCASA urges members of the media to adopt a policy to keep survivors’ names and identifying details anonymous when reporting on issues of sexual violence. A sample policy, adapted from the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence<sup>12</sup>, is below:

*It is the policy of this news organization not to identify victims/ survivors of sexual assault unless those individuals consent to be named in the media.*

IowaCASA also recommends including **trigger warnings** in articles that contain descriptions or occurrences of sexual violence. A trigger warning alerts potential readers that the content of the story includes descriptions of sexual violence and advises discretion prior to reading or viewing.

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<sup>12</sup> National Alliance to End Sexual Violence <http://endsexualviolence.org/where-we-stand/naming-victims-in-the-media>

Consider including a survivor hotline or a resource as part of your story, in case someone who reads it needs someone to talk to afterward or information to find out more.

The **Iowa Victim Service Call Center** is a 24/7 resource that is free and confidential. It offers phone counseling, support, information, and referrals and can be contacted at 1-800-770-1650 or by texting IOWAHELP to 20121.

**Parents for Prevention** is a web-based toolkit IowaCASA created to help parents and caregivers prevent sexual violence. Particularly if reporting on instances of child sex abuse, this website could help parents and caregivers navigate how to talk to their children about sexual violence and the prevention of abuse. The website can be found at [www.parentsforprevention.org](http://www.parentsforprevention.org).

## Terminology and definitions

*Acquaintance rape/sexual assault (or non-stranger rape):* a rape or sexual assault in which the survivor knows the person who does harm. This includes but is not limited to classmates, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Studies show that most survivors of sexual violence know the person who harmed them.<sup>13</sup>

*Advocate (or sexual assault advocate):* specially trained and certified individuals who can provide confidential support and guidance to survivors of sexual violence. An advocate will provide counseling, emotional support, resources, and referrals to survivors. They may also: notify a survivor of their rights and options; accompany a survivor for a forensic exam to collect evidence after a rape; provide legal information; attend court or a Title IX hearing with the survivor; or a variety of other needs the survivor may request. Iowa has advocates available for survivors in all 99 counties. Sexual assault advocates in the state are trained and certified by IowaCASA.

*Alcohol-facilitated rape/sexual assault:* a rape or sexual assault where the victim is intoxicated and under the influence of alcohol. It's common for people who do harm

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<sup>13</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs\\_report2010-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_report2010-a.pdf) (page 21)

to utilize alcohol to incapacitate potential victims. If someone is intoxicated, they are unable to provide consent.

***Child sex abuse:*** any kind of sexual contact or sexual exploitation of a child. Offenders of child sex abuse can be of any gender. Child sex abuse can be carried out by another child, young person, or adult. Those who sexually abuse children often use “grooming” tactics to gain the trust of their victim, such as providing the child with gifts, isolating them from other children and adults, and making the victim feel “special” in some way. Research estimates 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be sexually abused before the age of 18.<sup>14</sup>

***Coercion:*** a means of pressuring another person through force or intimidation into complying with an act (i.e. intimate or sexual contact). May include physical abuse, threats such as blackmail, or causing someone emotional trauma in order to have them perform the act.

***Consent:*** in context of sexual violence, consent is an agreement between two people of reasonably equal power to have intimate and/or sexual contact with one another that is mutually understood. Consent can be withdrawn at any time during the course of contact. An incapacitated person cannot provide consent. The absence of “no” does not equal consent. Previous or existing sexual activity does not equal consent.

***Culturally specific program:*** a program for culturally specific groups of people, generally developed by the same group that program serves. Iowa is one of the few states that has half a dozen culturally specific programs. Historically, mainstream services have not been inclusive. Because of this need, culturally specific programs were established through grassroots organizing and advocacy. For more information about the culturally specific programs available in Iowa, visit [www.iowacasa.org/culturally-specific-programs](http://www.iowacasa.org/culturally-specific-programs).

***Domestic violence:*** see intimate partner violence.

***Drug-facilitated rape or sexual assault:*** a rape or sexual assault where the victim is incapacitated and under the influence of some form of drug, regardless of whether or not that drug is legal. These can be drugs either ingested beforehand by a victim or given unknowingly to the victim by a person who does harm. Examples of drugs

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<sup>14</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/SV-Prevention-Technical-Package.pdf>

often used to facilitate rape or sexual assault include but are not limited to: Rohypnol, GHB, ketamine, and alcohol. Alcohol is considered the number one facilitator of rape and sexual assault.

***Human trafficking:*** an umbrella term for modern-day slavery that includes but is not limited to sex trafficking and labor trafficking. It's estimated that human trafficking affects the freedoms of some 40.3 million people all across the world.<sup>15</sup>

***Incest:*** sexual abuse of one family member against another, commonly referred to as familial sex abuse. The family member who causes harm can be a parent, sibling, or other family member (uncle, aunt, et cetera).

***Intimate partner rape or sexual assault:*** a rape or sexual assault in which the survivor has an intimate partnership with the person who does harm. This can be a spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, et cetera, and is not limited to couples of the opposite sex.

***Intimate partner violence:*** violence that occurs between two people who are intimate with one another. This can be a spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, et cetera, and is not limited to couples of the opposite sex. Sexual violence commonly occurs in instances of intimate partner violence to harm, humiliate, or to create a power imbalance over the survivor. Intimate partner violence is frequently referred to under the umbrella term of “domestic violence.”

***Labor trafficking:*** the use of coercion (often including, but not limited to, sexual violence) to force people to work against their will within many different industries (including commercial sex trafficking).

***Perpetrator:*** a person who carries out an illegal or harmful act, including but not limited to rape and/or sexual assault. In instances of sexual violence, the perpetrator is typically male-identified, although women can also cause harm. A perpetrator may be a family member, friend, co-worker, intimate partner, or in rare cases a stranger. *(see person who does harm)*

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<sup>15</sup> <sup>15</sup> International Labor Organization and Walk Free Foundation, 2017: Global Estimates of Modern Slavery [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms\\_575479.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575479.pdf)

***Person who does/causes harm:*** the term “person who causes harm” stems from a preference by many within the anti-violence movement to avoid defining and/or labeling a person based solely upon their violent act(s). A person who causes harm can be a family member, friend, co-worker, intimate partner, or in rare cases a stranger. (*see perpetrator*)

***Rape:*** any kind of nonconsensual penetration to the vagina or anus by another person (whether by finger, penis, other body part, or object) or the nonconsensual oral penetration of a sex organ by another person. Any individual no matter their gender or how they identify can be a survivor of rape. Any individual no matter their gender or how they identify can commit rape.

***Sex trafficking:*** the use of coercion to force adults and children to engage in commercial sex acts against their will. This differs from sex work (prostitution) in that the sex acts are being performed against the will of the victims, and they gain no economic benefit from their labor.

***Sexual assault:*** a broad umbrella term associated with any form of forcible sex offenses (for example, rape) or nonforcible sex offenses (for example, groping). Commonly referred to as “sexual violence.”

***Sexual harassment:*** may include suggestive comments, lewd behavior, and other sexually explicit and inappropriate conduct meant to intimidate or humiliate.

***Sexual misconduct:*** typically used by higher education institutions when referring to offenses of sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking.

***Sexual violence:*** a broad umbrella term associated with any form of forcible sex offenses (for example, rape) or nonforcible sex offenses (for example, groping). Sexual violence and sexual assault are commonly used interchangeably within the anti-violence movement.

***Stalking:*** behaviors meant to intimidate and threaten one’s safety, including monitoring a person’s movements, online activities, phone messages, emails, and more. While stalking is usually associated with intimate partner violence, it also occurs by those who do harm as a means to threaten or intimidate survivors of sexual assault.

***Survivor:*** within the anti-violence movement, a term used to describe people who have experienced instances of rape or sexual assault. Many survivors do not see themselves as victims, and use the term “survivor” as a means of empowerment.

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***Victim service program:*** a safe space for a survivor and/or friends and family members of survivors to contact for resources, counseling, information, and support. IowaCASA has 25 victim service programs across the state that include rape crisis centers, culturally specific programs for diverse communities, emergency shelter programs that provide housing, and dual programs that provide crisis counseling services for both sexual assault and domestic violence.

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