

5 crucial ways men can help end sexual assault

 mashable.com/2017/10/16/how-men-should-respond-to-sexual-assault-me-too/

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By [Rebecca Ruiz](#) Oct 17, 2017

If you've paid any attention to social media in the past 24 hours, you've seen [#MeToo](#), the viral hashtag that women have used to acknowledge, even in two simple words, that they've experienced sexual harassment and assault.



SEE ALSO: [Women endure a lifetime of sexual harassment even before they enter the workplace](#)

The [number of people](#) who've shared or discussed a #MeToo post is staggering. That so many women have experienced sexual violence should come as no surprise.

Last year, after Donald Trump's "pussy grabbing" tape became public, the author Kelly Oxford wrote about sexual assault using the hashtag [#NotOkay](#). Harrowing stories of harassment, assault, and rape poured forth.

Behind every [#MeToo](#) is a man that was told that what he did was ok. It 'boys will be boys'. They received a promotion instead of a sentence.

— [Panayiota Bertzikis \(@panayiotab\)](#) [October 16, 2017](#)

A month after that watershed moment — when it felt like American culture was on the brink of truly confronting its epidemic of sexual violence — voters elected Trump president. The allegations against him seemed ultimately irrelevant to millions of men and women.

While the catharsis and visibility of #MeToo is vital, what happened after #NotOkay is a disturbing reminder that women can tell their personal stories for the rest of time, but they alone cannot fundamentally transform a culture that condones and excuses behavior like sexual assault. That duty can and should fall to men.

[#MeToo](#) -- a wake-up call for a lot of men. <https://t.co/B4T63pAqLL>

— [Brian Stelter \(@brianstelter\)](#) [October 16, 2017](#)

As #MeToo emphasizes that harassment and rape are pervasive, it's up to men to respond with some sense of urgency. Otherwise, women will have once again struck back at rape culture by telling their stories, only to discover that men aren't willing to take an equivalent risk.

So here are five ways that men can honor #MeToo and become an advocate for meaningful change:

1. Listen to women.

If you've noticed #MeToo ricocheting across your newsfeed, stop and listen to those stories. Some posts might simply consist of two words; others may include details about harassment and assault. If you feel compelled to comment beyond words of support, think twice. People who've made themselves vulnerable by participating in the hashtag don't need you second-guessing their accounts or making contrarian remarks.

[#MeToo](#) is absolutely killing me tonight.

So full of sadness that this has been happening to so many.

Not surprised. Just sad.

— Jon of the Dead (@MrJonCryer) [October 16, 2017](#)

"This isn't new; we just haven't been listening," says Gary Barker, president and CEO of Promundo, a nonprofit organization that engages men and boys in gender equality.

2. Talk to boys and men about #MeToo.

If you can't believe so many women have experienced sexual violence, other boys and men probably don't realize it either. #MeToo is an opportunity for men to talk to each other about how those experiences are universal for women.

Men,

Don't say you have a mother, a sister, a daughter...

Say you have a father, a brother, a son who can do better.

We all can. [#MeToo](#)

— Nick Jack Pappas (@Pappiness) [October 16, 2017](#)

If you share a female friend in common, talk with another man about how you can both show support for her #MeToo post. Fathers can start or continue an ongoing conversation about how their sons can break free from stereotypes that give men permission to dehumanize women. And if you're friends with a man who regularly talks about or treats women as sexual objects instead of human beings, work up the courage to tell him you don't think that's appropriate or right.

When men choose to be silent about friends, coworkers, or acquaintances, says Barker, "we end up being accomplices of this horrendous behavior."

3. Don't act like real life is a porn movie and you're the star.

Some of the stories shared via the #NotOkay and #MeToo hashtags suggest men see interactions with women as if they're taking place on the set of a porn movie. No, women don't want strangers to grab their body parts in a bar. They loathe the sight of a random man masturbating on the subway. They don't want their coaches, teachers, or coworkers to make sexual innuendos. They're repulsed by men whose eyes remain fixated on their neckline during a conversation.

I am in awe of the courage of all the women sharing their stories. [#MeToo](#)

Men, time for us to huddle up, and get real with each other.

— Michael Skolnik (@MichaelSkolnik) [October 16, 2017](#)

There is nothing sexy about this behavior. In fact, let there be no confusion: operating from that perspective means you're likely to commit sexual harassment, assault, or rape — even if you think yourself incapable of those horrors.

4. Learn and practice consent.

Some men, says Barker, have "a sense of learned entitlement that sex is mine for the taking and women's bodies are objects to be taken by me."

So many I care about have written #MeToo. The voices of survivors are inspiring & heartbreaking. The silence of perpetrators is deafening.

— Hari Kondabolu (@harikondabolu) [October 16, 2017](#)

Don't be that guy. Instead, embrace [consent](#) as a healthy part of human sexuality. Consent can even be sexy, as this [web series](#) proved. Ultimately, consent is about communication and permission, and it can be withdrawn at any time.

5. Advocate for better education and prevention.

"We're so good in the U.S. at lurching from scandal to scandal," says Barker.

That's why it's essential for men to use #MeToo as an opportunity to advocate for longterm education and prevention efforts at schools, campuses, and workplaces.

Barker says research indicates meaningful change happens through multiple education sessions over time, institutional messages about prevention, and comprehensive training for staff and leadership. At schools and campuses, in particular, holding one assembly or bringing in a single speaker just isn't enough to shift attitudes and behavior.

The outpouring of #MeToo statements makes it clear: Many of us are survivors. All of us know one. This violence must end. #SupportSurvivors.

— Joyful Heart (@TheJHF) [October 16, 2017](#)

Similarly, it's essential to create an environment in which educators and parents can talk to children about sex, sexuality, and healthy relationships. "The world will teach them horrible things," says Barker. "The really big job here is to counter the messages out there."

Now that another viral hashtag led by women has done so much of that labor, consider it your responsibility to do even just a little more.

If you have experienced sexual assault, you can call the free, confidential National Sexual Assault hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE (4673), or access 24-7 help online by visiting [hotline.rainn.org](#).

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