KENTUCKY ASSOCIATION OF SEXUAL ASSAULT PROGRAMS

Covering Sexual Violence

A quick guide for Kentucky journalists

Accurate, trauma-informed reporting helps survivors, informs the public, and strengthens community response.

When interviewing a survivor

Let survivors lead. Explain how the story will be used, and let them skip questions or stop at any time.

Ask about identification. Ask how, or whether, they want to be named. Never identify a minor.

Trauma looks different for everyone. Delayed reporting, memory gaps, or a calm demeanor are common responses to trauma, not signs that someone is lying.

Be precise

USE PRECISE LANGUAGE

Such as *reported, disclosed, accused, charged, indicted, or convicted* to accurately reflect the legal status of a case, if applicable. Attribute claims when possible: police said, prosecutors said, court records show.

Terms to rethink

"Date rape" → rape

"Domestic dispute" → domestic violence / assault

"Child pornography" → child sexual abuse material (CSAM)

Language matters

DON'T CALL SEXUAL VIOLENCE "SEX"

"Sex" implies consent. Say "sexually assaulted," "sexually abused," or "raped."

Instead of:	*"the couple had sex," "engaged in sexual activity," "had intercourse"*
Use terms that reflect nonconsent:	*"raped," "sexually assaulted," "sexually abused," or other language that makes the lack of consent clear*

AVOID EUPHEMISMS

Skip "inappropriate relationship," "affair," or "became involved with" when describing sexual abuse or exploitation.

Instead of "A teacher had an inappropriate relationship with a student," write "A teacher was accused of sexually abusing a student."

NAME THE PERSON RESPONSIBLE

Passive: "A Lexington woman was raped."
More direct: "A Lexington woman reported that a man raped her."

Active language makes clear that one person harmed another, so the perpetrator doesn't disappear from the sentence.

Contact Us

www.kasap.org

communication@kasap.org

Kentucky sexual violence facts and statistics

Sources: CDC National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (2023/2024); U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (2019); Kentucky Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2025).

45% of Kentucky women experience contact sexual violence during their lifetimes.

17% of men nationally experience contact sexual violence during their lifetimes.

87% of sexual assaults recorded by Kentucky law enforcement were committed by someone the victim knew.

6% of Kentucky high school students say an adult or someone at least five years older made them do sexual things they did not want to do.

CONTRARY TO WHAT SOME MAY THINK

Sexual violence happens in homes, relationships, schools, workplaces, and communities. It is rarely a story about a stranger.

THE "WOULD WE DO THIS IN ANOTHER CRIME STORY?" TEST

Would we describe a robbery victim's clothing? Explain what a victim did wrong before being robbed? Focus on how devastating the arrest was for the accused person's family? If not, ask why those details belong in a sexual violence story.

Report the story, not just the incident

Ask more than "What happened?"

- How did schools, law enforcement, and other systems respond?
- What support was available to the survivor, and what barriers remain?
- How are local partners, like rape crisis centers, supporting survivors and strengthening communities?
- What prevention and policy efforts are making a difference?

Look beyond individual incidents to highlight stories of prevention, accountability, services, policy, and solutions.

Statewide & local perspective

Kentucky's **13 regional rape crisis centers** provide free, confidential support to survivors statewide, while KASAP strengthens this network through training, advocacy, resources, and coordination.

We are here as a resource.

KASAP can speak to statewide trends, policies, legislation, funding, prevention, training, and systems impacting survivors across Kentucky.

Regional rape crisis centers can speak to local trends, community needs, available services, and their direct work with survivors.

Not sure who to contact? KASAP can connect you with the right local partner or statewide expert.

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