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Show Your Community Support and Lead by Example

A woman drinks too much alcohol and passes out at a friend's house. The next thing she knows a male acquaintance is on top of her and she is being sexually assaulted.

A teenage girl takes a picture of herself without clothes on and sends a copy to her boyfriend. The boyfriend gets angry at her and posts that picture on a social networking site.

A child is sexually abused over a period of several years by a family member.

A husband and wife have been married for twenty years. During their marriage, the husband has forced his wife to perform sexual acts against her will.

Are any of these victims responsible for the traumatic events that they experienced? No. Who is responsible? The people who are responsible for these acts are the offenders. They are the ones who broke the laws that our legislators enacted to protect every citizen in Minnesota. While these scenarios involved female victims and male offenders, males can also be victims and females can be offenders.

It seems that our society tends to place more of the blame on the victim with statements like the following: "She shouldn't have had so much to drink." "She shouldn't have worn those clothes." "Those pictures should never have been taken." "That child should have told someone sooner." "A wife must submit to her husband." Why is it that we do not question the acts of the offender? Not only does society often blame the victim, victims may also blame themselves. In fact, self-blame may be one of many reasons why so few sexual assaults are even reported. The *2005 National Crime Victimization Study*, by the U.S. Department of Justice, estimates that 60% of sexual assaults go unreported. A report released in 2007 by the Minnesota Department of Health estimated that approximately 61,000 people in Minnesota (children and adults) were sexually assaulted in 2005 and some of those were victimized more than once. And that is just in one year. Now, imagine all the people out there who are victims and chose, for a multitude of reasons, not to make a report. Or, imagine those victims who found the courage to make a report. Anyone who has been

victimized, whether they report the assault or not, should feel supported by family, friends, and the community as a whole.

What can you do to support all victims? One of the most important things a person can do is to not be judgmental. That is what the criminal justice system is for. The jurors get the opportunity to hear the whole situation. Until then, we should not be judging the situation or questioning the victim and his or her actions. Articles printed in the media or stories on the evening news only share a part of the actual event that occurred. While everyone has the right to his or her own opinion, please be careful who you are sharing your opinion with. You never know who is reading a post online or who is listening to a conversation you are having. Questioning the victim or blaming him or her can cause a snowball effect not only for the victim, but also for the victim's family and friends. No one asks to be a victim. Let's do our part and show support for victims by not blaming them for the trauma that they have gone through.

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