

# WORDWATCH

How can the language we use be an active part of sexual violence prevention?

Avoid Using Consensual Language		
Use this...	Avoid this...	Because...
Rape, sexual assault, etc.	Sexual intercourse; sexual relationship	Implies a mutually consensual act
Was forced to	Engaged in; had sex with	Turns the victim into an active participant
Forced his penis into her mouth	Perform oral sex	Conveys the victim as the primary actor
Grope, made unwanted sexual contact	Fondle	Conveys that the act of assault is gentle, minimizes the fact it was unwanted
Avoid Using Victim Blaming Language		
Use this...	Avoid this...	Because...
Commercially sexually exploited youth, Prostituted child	Juvenile prostitute, child prostitute	Implies a choice; ignores the fact that child/juvenile is a victim
Alleged victim; victim (if post-conviction)	Accuser	Turns the victim into the perpetrator, she becomes the one "doing something" to him
Victim reports	Victim admits/confesses	Implies responsibility on the part of the victim; does not hold perpetrator accountable
Avoid Using Minimizing or Euphemistic Language		
Use this...	Avoid this...	Because...
Active voice: E.g. Joe raped Mary	Passive voice: E.g. Mary was raped	The perpetrator is "invisible" when this language is used, and responsibility not accurately conveyed
Rape, sexual assault, etc.	Date rape	Minimizes assault by categorizing it as a certain "type" of rape; misleading-perpetrator and victim may not be dating or even acquaintances
	He said, she said case	Implies that what "she said" is less credible
Groped, molested, describe body parts	Inappropriate touching	Does not convey seriousness of conduct
Rape, sexual assault, etc.	Forcible rape	All rape includes some element of force or coercion- this qualifies some as "worse"
Sexual assault; sexual abuse; rape	Sex scandal	Sensationalizes the crime, diminishes seriousness