

4 Factors That Put Your Teen at Risk for Sexual Assault

The Dec. 4, 2014, edition of *Rolling Stone* magazine contains a story about a 2012 sexual assault on the campus of the University of Virginia. It was published this week and was so horrid that the school decided to suspend all Greek activities until they could adequately address the issue. [A Rape on Campus: A Brutal Assault and Struggle for Justice at UVA](#) by Sabrina Rubin Erdely is a difficult read. It graphically describes the “worst case scenario” of a more widespread problem involving predatory young men and vulnerable young women.

In a culture where our young men are taking in a steady stream of illicit material, many come to see young women as targets. Or challenges to be conquered. Or prey to be devoured.

Watch any African wildlife documentary and you can see exactly how this works. You’ll see a pack of carnivores sizing up a group of animals, looking for the one that will be their lunch. Do they choose the fastest or the strongest from the herd? The most alert and prepared? Absolutely not. They move in on the young, helpless and clueless. The ones whom they deem the most vulnerable.

The same is true for our girls.

The hyper-sexualized college environment that Erdely describes in her *Rolling Stone* article can be found throughout our nation. Here in conservative Georgia, I have heard firsthand accounts of all sorts of troubling stuff. Fraternities that *require* all email communications within the frat to have a favorite adult video attached. University band parties where a couple is having intercourse in a living room with everyone watching. And when statistics show that 1 in 5 college girls

will be sexually assaulted, it is apparent that we have a problem.

So what can make your daughter vulnerable? And what are you doing about it?

Before I go any further, let me make something absolutely clear: Men who sexually assault women are the problem. Not women. These men are predatory criminals and should be held fully accountable for their actions. If a woman is taken advantage of in any way, she is not to blame. Hopefully, we can all agree on that.

However, as parents, we must do all we can to help our young women avoid high-risk situations. Based on the nature of the predators who are out there, we would be wise to realize that there are at least four things that can make our daughters vulnerable. We should consider these things as we coach our daughters to guard themselves.

Alcohol and Drugs

Our girls must be taught that intoxicants can significantly affect their ability to make good decisions and even their ability to defend themselves. Social drinking even puts a target on them. The *Rolling Stone* article shows that predatory men know this far better than our girls do.

One offender described how his party-hearty friends would help incapacitate his victims: "We always had some kind of punch. ... We'd make it with a real sweet juice. It was really powerful stuff. The girls wouldn't know what hit them."

Question for Parents: Have you discussed at length with your teenage girls the reasons WHY drinking and drugs is a bad idea? Have you told them how easy it is for someone to take advantage of them when they are under the influence of intoxicants?

Dressing to Arouse

I know I am inviting passionate debate by including this. But I had to. To be clear: Women have the freedom and right to dress however they want. Likewise, men should be able to control themselves and *not* feel compelled to assault a sexually attractive woman. However, these ideals will not change the fact that there still are some men who are predators. The *Rolling Stone* article suggests that when a woman dresses in an overtly sexy way, she does, in fact, run a higher risk of being a target. Here's how the article describes the typical frat party:

"Hot girls who are drunk always get in" says third-year Alexandria Pinkleton, expertly clad in the UVA-after-dark uniform of a midriff-baring sleeveless top and shorts. "Also? You have to seem very innocent and vulnerable. That's why they love first-year girls."

Question for Parents: Are you coaching your daughters on how to celebrate their feminine beauty without working too hard to be "hot," especially in moments when predatory men might be looking for signals from women?

Being Alone and Unprotected

When another UVA student, Hannah Graham, was abducted and murdered earlier this year, one question I kept asking as I watched the grainy surveillance footage that captured her walking around town alone: "Where were her friends?" How could they let their drunk friend wander off by herself? Just as the carnivorous hunters on the wildlife show try to isolate a weak animal from the herd, predators will do the exact same thing. Here's how the process is described in the article:

*In dark, loud basements, girls accept drinks, are pulled onto dance floors to be ground and groped and, later, **often having lost sight of their friends**, led into bathrooms or up the*

stairs for privacy.

Question for Parents: Are you diligently training your daughters on the buddy system? Are you teaching her that when she is at a party or with a group she doesn't know well she must stay close to her trusted friends. (If alcohol is involved, this advice is even more essential.)

Being Emotionally Disconnected from Parents (Especially Dad)

Nothing will make a young woman vulnerable to the influence of a (perhaps evil-willed) young man than an inadequate relationship with her parents. While I thought the following characterization of the rape victim in the *Rolling Stone* article sounded a bit trite, it still rang true:

Jackie had a strained relationship with her father, in whose eyes she'd never felt good enough, and always responded by exceeding expectations—honor roll, swim team, first-chair violin – becoming the role model for her two younger brothers. Jackie had been looking forward to college as an escape—a place to, even, defy her parents' wishes and go to a frat party.

Too many of our young women are left open to the dishonorable advances of men because they are looking to fill empty places that have been left there by their fathers. A girl will likely be vulnerable if she hasn't been taught that she is loved, that she has incredible worth, and that she should diligently guard every part of her personal identity ... which includes her sexuality.

Question for Parents: How is the heart connection that you have with your daughters? Does she feel safe and secure in your unconditional love and acceptance?

I hate the world that we live in. I hate that we have to even have these discussions. I wish that every man was hardwired

with a degree of chivalry and a default position of showing extravagant honor to every woman. (Thank God that there are still men men who are like this.) But sadly, the world is broken and has plenty of young men who will look for any weakness they can find to take advantage of women. That includes your girls and mine. None of them gets a free pass.

May we be parents who diligently train our daughters to be strong, confident, and cautious. And may we train our sons to be the men of valor who are willing to guard and protect women at any cost to themselves.

*After serving in the local church for 25 years, **Barrett and Jenifer Johnson** launched INFO for Families as a ministry designed to encourage people through speaking, personal coaching and resource development. They have a heart for newlyweds, marriages at mid-life, and parents who want to help their kids enter marriage without a ton of sexual and relational baggage.*