



## An open letter to our community

**In response to recent cases of sexual violence, and the use of social media used to blame and shame victim-survivors, London Abused Women Centre, Sexual Assault Centre London and Women's Community House reach out to those affected by sexual violence in our community.**

The stories of young women who ended their lives – Rehtaeh Parsons, Audrey Pott, Amanda Todd – are too common. Rehtaeh, Audrey and Amanda's stories are not just about bullying or the malicious use of social media: more, these young women's stories speak of the impacts of sexual violence. These young women felt ashamed. The shame should not be theirs, but that of their aggressors – both those who perpetrated sexual violence against them, and those who participated in the distribution of images. It also belongs to those who colluded with the aggressors, who defended them and those who blamed the victims for their own assaults.

A woman is not responsible for her sexual assault under any circumstance, whether she has been drinking, because of the clothes she is wearing or because of her behaviour. It is solely the responsibility of those who assault her. Period.

We reach out to survivors of sexual violence, their support people, and to anyone who may find themselves as a bystander in situations of sexual violence. For example:

- It may be a friend who tells you that something happened to her
- It might be a party you attend, where a guest is so intoxicated that she cannot say yes or no
- It may be a picture that crosses your email inbox.

**If something has happened to you, there are people who will support you.** You can talk to a trusted friend, family member, or contact a sexual assault centre support line. There is a sexual assault centre in London. You can call the Sexual Assault Centre London at 519-438-2272. All calls are free and confidential.

**If you see something happen to someone else, there are things you can do.** You can speak up, or step in. You can ask for help from others, and then step in together. You can be an ally to the person who is victimized, instead of the aggressors. Lastly, you can choose NOT to pass along questionable photos that are forwarded to you.

**If you are an adult, there are things you can do too.** You can talk to young people in your life about the courage it takes to intervene. You can remind them about supportive people – for example, teachers, school community officers, youth centre staff, guidance counsellors – that can help if they ever need to talk about something troubling or serious. Lastly, you can model to young people what it means to not tolerate sexual violence:

- Speak out against jokes about rape, sexual violence and "slut or rape-shaming"
- Resist laughing at jokes about sexual violence
- Ask youth in your life what they think about stories of sexual violence in the news

London Abused Women's Centre, Sexual Assault Centre London, and Women's Community House recognize the impact of sexual violence on young women. We believe that education and information goes a long way toward the prevention of violence. Together, we will make a difference.

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