



**Wing Commanders' Series**  
**Additional Resource Document to the**  
**Wing Commanders' Guide to Sexual Assault Prevention & Response**

**Effectively Engaging Your Wing in Sexual Assault Prevention**

A frequently insurmountable obstacle that faces any new or existing strategy attempting to address sexual violence is the pre-existing negative stigma and perceptions that often surround the crime. Before a program is even launched, expectations are negative for many – even most – within any given community. Many individuals carry deeply held negative biases often associated with “violence against women.” Divisive attitudes and opinions often associated with sexual assault programs can include:

- male-bashing
- “there’s nothing I can do”
- victim blaming
- “she had it coming”
- “it doesn’t happen to men”
- “it’s a women’s issue”

Despite years of attempts to correct these misperceptions, they remain inextricably tied to efforts to address sexual violence. The fundamental obstacle created by such negative associations is that, regardless of what educators, SARCs, or victim advocates are saying, most participants aren’t listening. Before the briefing even starts, many exclude themselves from the possibility of participating and decide in advance that they will not align with the effort.

In order to move forward with an effective sexual assault prevention strategy, the first task required is to fundamentally change the “reputation” of the issue to one that more Airmen, base and community members positively identify with. Because of the centrality of this issue, much could be gained by Commanders and their leadership framing sexual assault prevention and response in a new way. By employing new language, messages and approaches, while avoiding elements that have historically alienated many from the issue, significant improvement is possible in engaging men and women who have previously felt marginalized and/or hostile to the issue.

When talking about sexual violence in briefings, speeches or individual conversations, consider the following:

Instead of...	Try...
Engaging in a discussion about who is to blame after an assault has occurred;	Redirecting the conversation to focus on what bystanders might have done to prevent the assault from ever occurring.
Giving examples that focus exclusively on female victims;	Including statistics and examples that reference male and female experiences with sexual violence.
Telling men not to perpetrate and telling women not to put themselves at risk;	Giving proactive examples of what both men and women can do together to intervene in a potentially high risk situation and to communicate to others that they expect the same of them.
Limiting guidance to a slogan or sound-bite, such as “real wingman act;”	Building on the message by acknowledging that it can be hard to act due to peer pressure and social consequences, and giving specific examples of how



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Instead of...	Try...
	a wingman could act, even under difficult circumstances.
Limiting sexual violence prevention to a separate briefing or one awareness month;	Integrating messages about the importance of a community-wide approach to prevention into daily briefings, informal conversations, pre-existing programs and messages that focus on the wingman concept, and public speeches.

In summary, by being aware of the institutionalized negative perception that exists in all of society, you, as Wing Commander, can take steps to shift attitudes toward sexual assault by simply shifting the way in which you talk about it.