

Back the victims of sexual violence

An open letter to our community:

In response to recent cases of sexual violence, and the use of social media to blame and shame victim-survivors, Family Transition Place reaches out to those affected by sexual violence in the Dufferin and Caledon areas.

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. 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 or video that you're sent or one that is posted online.

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 support available through Family Transition Place. You can call our 24-hour Crisis Line at 519-941-8357 or 1-800-265-9178. 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. Last, 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. Last, you can model to young people what it means to not tolerate sexual violence:

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

Family Transition Place recognizes 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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