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The ASK WARIF is a monthly interactive section that will educate, motivate and encourage as we discuss all issues surrounding gender based violence and share some of our experiences working at the WARIF Rape Crisis Centre. All questions submitted will be answered by our team of experts and qualified personnel which include physicians, counsellors, lawyers, law enforcement and everyday women who have had personal encounters with rape and sexual violence and are willing to share their stories in the hope that it helps prevent the next woman from experiencing the same.  
  
Rape culture is pervasive It is embedded in the way we think, speak, and carry out our day to day activities. Rape culture is always rooted in patriarchal beliefs, power, control and the social environment that allows sexual violence to be normalized and justified, fueled by the persistent gender inequalities and attitudes about gender and sexuality in every society.  
  
Everyday, we have the opportunity to examine our behaviors and beliefs for biases that permit rape culture to continue. From the attitudes we have about gender identities to the policies we support in our communities, we can all take action to stand against rape culture.  
  
  
  
Rape Culture occurs when sexual violence is treated as the norm and survivors are blamed for their violent experiences. It is not just about sexual violence itself, but about cultural norms and institutions that protect rapists, promote impunity, shame survivors and demand that women make unreasonable sacrifices to avoid sexual assault and affects every woman in the society.  
  
Rape Culture thrives in the society when we “look away” from all forms of sexual violence against women. So endemic is this culture of sexual violence against women that it is woven into the very fabric of our existence.  
  
HERE ARE WAYS YOU CAN HELP STOP RAPE CULTURE:  
  
1. Encourage the culture of consent.  
  
Consent must be freely-given, Reversible, Informed, Enthusiastic and Specific. Without consent, sexual activity (including oral sex, genital touching, and vaginal or anal penetration) is sexual assault or rape. Our society needs to understand that consent cannot be forced and no simply means no in every situation.  
  
2. Stop victim-blaming.  
  
Victim-blaming suggests that sexual assault is the fault of the survivor and not the perpetrator. When we shame survivors for coming out to share their experiences, it discourages other survivors from speaking out and encourages perpetrators to continue the harmful cycle. What a woman is wearing, what and how much she had to drink, and where she was at a certain time, is not an invitation to rape or sexual assault.  
  
3. Educate the boy child.  
  
Rape culture is encouraged when we promote the idea that boys or men are stronger than women. We live in a patriarchal society where women are subjugated and made to feel less than they are. It is our responsibility to educate the boy child and change the already existing negative mindset they have about rape and sexual violence. Teaching them to be protectors and not perpetrators will go a long way in reducing the prevalence of gender based violence in our communities.  
  
4. Get involved.  
  
Rape culture affects us all, regardless of gender identity, sexuality, economic status, race, religion or age. We can get involved by sensitising and educating others on the effects of rape culture, challenge the gender stereotypes and violent ideals that children encounter in the media or at school and donate to organisations that empower women, amplify their voices and support survivors.  
  
5. Be an active Bystander.  
  
Being an active bystander can be an effective way of stopping sexual assault or rape before it happens, as bystanders play a key role in preventing, discouraging, and/or intervening when an act of violence has the potential to occur.  
  
Being an active bystander could also mean reporting cases of rape and sexual assault against children, women and girls, exposing perpetrators of these evil acts, helping survivors in violent situations, providing care and support to survivors etc. Intervening as an active bystander signals to the perpetrator that their behavior is unacceptable and may help someone stay safe.  
  
If interventions are constantly reinforced within our community, we can shift the boundaries of what is considered acceptable.  
  
If you are a survivor of sexual abuse and would like to speak to a counselor, please visit us at The WARIF Centre – 6, Turton Street, off Thorburn Avenue, Sabo, Yaba or call our 24-hour confidential helpline on 08092100009.