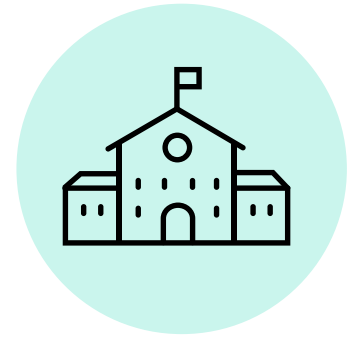


# The Red Zone: Sexual Violence on College Campuses



The first semester of college is an exciting time, filled with endless opportunities for learning, growth, new relationships, and increased independence. However, occurring among all of this newness is also what experts and academics have come to refer to as “the red zone.” The Red Zone is a time of statistically heightened instances of sexual assault that happens during the first semester of college. Read on to learn more and help you or your college-bound loved one have an informed start to the school year.

## What is “The Red Zone?”

The Red Zone is the time spanning the start of the fall semester through Thanksgiving break when more than 50% of all college sexual assaults are statistically found to occur.<sup>1</sup> *Inside Higher Ed* (2019) outlines this concept and the need for universities to take more effective preventative measures:

*While many colleges have programs that educate students about the Red Zone and how to avoid it, some institutions offer ineffective, “fluffy” programs that oversimplify the issue and fail to address the underlying culture that facilitates sexual violence on campus. Sexual assault prevention activists said college administrators must do more than just make students aware of the Red Zone.... A U.S. Department of Justice study of nine colleges found that 629 sexual assaults occurred among first-year students in September and October 2014, which was more than the assaults that occurred during the next four months combined, when 521 sex assaults were reported by first-year students.*

The timing of these incidents is not coincidental, the Red Zone time frame coincides with the countless parties celebrating students’ return to campus. Greek organizations also typically hold their “rush” events for students interested in joining fraternities and sororities during the

first couple of months of the semester. Freshmen are particularly vulnerable because they are unfamiliar with the campus, including where and to whom to report a sexual assault.<sup>2</sup>

While this information understandably might conjure feelings of alarm or anxiety, remember that knowledge is power. College can be a time of immense pleasure, exploration, and joy.

## How Can I Be Proactive About My Sexual Safety?

For many, college comes with it an increased freedom to learn more about yourself, including your desires, boundaries, and preferences. Listed below are some strategies to support you engaging in sexual relationships that feel safe and pleasurable.

- **Give some thought to your sexual desires and boundaries ahead of time.** While it’s often hard to know for sure, and changing your mind in the moment is always ok, feel empowered to communicate your wants and limits clearly to your sexual partner before you find yourself in the heat of the moment. Giving thought to this in advance can help empower you to more clearly know where your “yeses” and “nos” lie in the moment. Knowing what you want is sexy!

- **Ask your partner what they want, and really listen to what they tell you.** Asking communicates a respect of boundaries as well as your intention to be a connected sexual partner. What an exciting question to be asked!
- **Verbal communication, especially in regard to consent, is never the wrong move.** Share what you want, what you don't, and when you've reached your limits. Ask the same of your partner.
- **No one knows you better than you.** Trust your gut. If you're feeling unsure or unsafe, lean into those feelings. If you're feeling excited, pleasure-filled, and comfortable, it's ok to lean into those feelings, too.

### Are You a Survivor Heading Back to School?

Check out this [blog post](#) from End Rape On Campus, where a survivor of campus sexual assault shares tips on how she prepares herself makes the return to campus.<sup>3</sup> Key takeaways include:

- Identify your network of supportive people.
- Identify supports for your physical and mental health.
- Take advantage of academic services and accommodations when available.
- Be gentle with yourself.

### Additional Resources

The [Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape](#) has put together a digestible resource guide that walks you through questions to ask your campus or prospective campus about what its doing to prevent sexual violence and support survivors, steps for more effective prevention efforts, and links to resources to other organizations doing work to end sexual violence on college campuses.<sup>4</sup>

Want to brush up on ways to be proactive about your sexual health as your return to campus? This blog post from the [National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#) outlines some great need-to-knows.<sup>5</sup> Or, want to talk to your teen about healthy relationships and consent as they're packing up their twin-XL sheets? Again, the [NSVRC has you covered](#).<sup>6</sup>

If you have experienced sexual violence on campus and what to learn more about your rights, the [End Rape on Campus](#) website outlines numerous resources and policies, such as Title IX and the Clery Act, that are in place to support you.<sup>7</sup>

The [2014 Student Summit on Sexual Assault](#) report out of the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA) centers student voices and puts forth prevention recommendations for campuses working to shift the culture of sexual assault.<sup>8</sup>

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1 <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/campus-sexual-violence>  
2 <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/09/12/experts-say-new-methods-needed-combat-red-zone-campuses>  
3 <https://endrapeoncampus.org/eroc-blog/2018/8/22/back-to-school-for-survivors>  
4 <https://pcar.org/campus-sexual-assault>  
5 <https://www.nsvrc.org/blogs/5-things-know-about-sexual-health-back-campus>  
6 <https://www.nsvrc.org/blogs/add-consent-your-teens-college-checklist>  
7 <https://endrapeoncampus.org/>  
8 <http://www.calcasa.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/CALCASA-Student-Summit-National-Web.pdf>