

Stanford assault survivor showed power of words

Christine Sidwell 5:35 p.m. CDT June 23, 2016

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Disclosing and/or reporting a sexual assault is never an easy step to take. There is an incredible sense of bravery and strength when making such a decision that should be recognized and praised. This resilience is exemplified by the Stanford sexual assault survivor's recent statement made in court. The words she shared depict the dramatic effect that the sexual assault had on her physically, emotionally and mentally. Her heart-wrenching statement has been widely circulated and has struck a chord with many.

The judge's decision to sentence the assailant, Brock Turner, to six months in prison triggered an outcry from the public. Shockingly, the judge claimed that he was convinced a sentence longer than six months would ruin the young man's life. Unfortunately, the reality is that offenders' potential futures are being allowed to outweigh their past actions of violence.

It would be easy and perhaps more comfortable to let the Stanford sexual assault case run its course in the media; however, that should not be an option, because this case marks a crucial moment. This moment should not be ignored, for it could be monumental in ending sexual violence. The quest now is to make sure that this poignant moment becomes a part of the greater movement. We are all tasked to learn from this story and to remember it.

How should this case shape our actions and choices? It is clear that parents need to have conversations with their children about what respect, love and consent look like and feel like. These conversations should begin at home, but should also be echoed in facets throughout our community. If the next generation is raised with an understanding of what respect and consent are, then major ripples will be made in ending sexual violence. Our children deserve this. Our community deserves this. And our survivors most definitely deserve this.

Please do not be mistaken: The Stanford case is not just a call to action for parents. This case is a call to action for everyone. Every day we are all members of this community, and it is up to each one of us to make sure we are active bystanders. The Stanford case could have been dramatically different if it were not for two bystanders who intervened when they thought something didn't look right. We have a responsibility to our community and one another to be vigilant bystanders who are willing to intervene.

The nation has been captured with the most brutal softness through the words of the Stanford survivor. Her story is not singular or, sadly, even unique. Unfortunately, it is like so many other survivor stories. This case has become another wake-up call, and it is up to each one of us to learn from this tragedy in hopes of not letting it happen again. The Stanford survivor illuminated the impact words can make. Let

us not be afraid to use our own and begin conversations that will equip our children and community to end sexual violence.

Christine Sidwell is the Sexual Assault Center's sexual assault training assistant. The Sexual Assault Center provides therapy, advocacy, education and healing to those impacted by sexual abuse, no matter if they are able to pay. SAC's 24-hour crisis hotline is 800-879-7999.