Start by Believing: The Power of a Survivor Centered Process

Discussion Guide
“This was a wonderful program, it is so important to give survivors a platform to speak on, and I feel proud that this happened at my school.”

-Start by Believing attendee
**Film Summary & Description**

*Start by Believing: The Power of a Survivor Centered Process* documentary highlights Brie Sivy, a brave OHIO student survivor of sexual assault, and her story of working alongside Ohio University’s Survivor Advocacy Program and Police Department on a yearlong investigation process. The documentary highlights the ways that the two departments work together to empower survivors throughout sexual assault investigations and beyond.

Viewers hear a first-hand account of Sivy’s journey from victim, to survivor, to aspiring social worker and focuses on the process used by Ohio University Police Department (OUPD) detective Mathew Austin to investigate her sexual assault and the support provided during that process by Survivor Advocacy Program (SAP) Director Kim Castor. Viewers will also hear what sexual assault looks like from the perspective of both the survivor and the detective. Sivy, Austin, and Castor truly show the impact of a multidisciplinary approach and the benefit that can occur when police and advocates work together and center the survivor throughout the process.

The documentary also explains the barriers to reporting sexual assault experienced by survivors, how to respond empathetically when someone says they were assaulted and what happens to a survivor’s brain from the stress and trauma of a sexual assault.
Learning Outcomes

1. Recognize the emotional, physical, and psychological impacts of interpersonal violence
2. Develop empathy for survivors of interpersonal violence
3. Recognize the personal stories behind the statistics of the rate of sexual assault on college campuses
4. Analyze the difference between cultures of shame and cultures of acceptance when creating safe environments for conversations about interpersonal violence
5. Increase familiarity of OUPD’s process of investigating rape and sexual assault and recognize barriers to reporting that survivors may experience
6. Recognize the positive impact that a multidisciplinary approach can have for sexual assault survivors
7. Consider ways we can all embrace the Start by Believing movement.
8. Improve confidence in how one would respond to a survivor who chooses to disclose to them
9. Increase familiarity with the impact that stress/trauma has on memory and the range of various and valid responses to stress/trauma
10. Improve students’ knowledge of students’ reporting options and information about confidential resources
11. Increased understanding of the role of the Survivor Advocacy Program at Ohio University and how advocates provide support to survivors
Though Brie's story involves many people and departments. The following are the ones featured in the documentary.

**Brie Sivy, LSW (Ohio University, BSW, 2020)**

When Brie was sexually assaulted her first year of college by one of her closest new college friends, she had no idea where to turn. She was surprised with the support and collaboration between OUPD and SAP. Brie has chosen to share her story in hopes of helping other survivors regain power and to help others understand the importance of a survivor-centered approach to sexual assault investigations.

**Det. Mathew Austin (Ohio University Police Department)**

Detective Austin investigated numerous sexual assaults during his time at OUPD, allowing him to experience first-hand the positive impact of working alongside a survivor and letting them have as much control over their process as possible.

**Kim Castor, Ph.D., LISW-S (Director, Survivor Advocacy Program)**

Kim works with many survivors who do not choose to report to law enforcement and she understands their hesitations. When accompanying Brie throughout her investigation process, she saw the true impact that can happen when law enforcement utilizes a survivor centered approach and when agencies work together on behalf of the survivor. Her ongoing goal is for all survivors who choose to report to law enforcement receive the care, compassion, and control that Brie had in her case.
The following departments had a significant role in Brie's story though they weren't featured in the documentary:

**Equity & Civil Rights Compliance (ECRC)/ Community Standards & Student Responsibility (CSSR)**

Pursuant to Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 and Ohio University Policy 03.004, Ohio University prohibits sexual misconduct, relationship violence, and stalking in any of its employment situations or educational programs and activities. ECRC and CSSR follow a joint process for investigating and adjudicating incidents of student misconduct. This is an administrative process that is separate from a criminal investigation process.

**Housing & Residence Life**

Students frequently turn to their resident advisor (RA) or resident director (RD) as the professional staff with whom they are most familiar. It makes sense that people would report to them first. When reporting to residence life staff, like most other professional staff at Ohio University, they are not confidential which means that reporting to them will be considered notice to Ohio University. In Brie's story, her RA was the first person (other than her partner who she was talking to on the telephone) she disclosed to. The support and action by her RA was an important part of Brie's story and recovery.

**OhioHealth O'Bleness Hospital**

In Ohio a SANE exam can be conducted to provide documentation, identify injuries, and collect forensic evidence within 96 hours after a sexual assault. OhioHealth O'Bleness Hospital has SANE and SAFE trained nurses available in their emergency department 24 hours per day to conduct these exams. You can learn more about these exams by visiting SAP's website.

**Prosecutor's Office**

When survivors wish to pursue criminal charges against an assailant, it is the responsibility of the prosecutor's office to present their case in court. Generally, the case is first presented to a Grand Jury which decides whether to indict the assailant and if so, on what charges. Once an indictment is secured, the prosecutor's office either presents the case in a trial or negotiates a plea arrangement. Survivors can choose to have an advocate with them throughout this process.
**Others Involved**

**Friends & Peers**

Often the first person a survivor discloses an assault to is one of their close friends. This can be difficult for the friend to know what to do or say, but the Survivor Advocacy Program can help. You can learn information about how to support your friends who are survivors by visiting our website or scheduling an appointment with an advocate. Friends and peers can also play an important role by intervening when they see problematic behaviors occurring.

**Featured Departments**

**Ohio University Police Department (OUPD)**

OUPD began sending their detectives to trauma informed investigation training in 2016. They have since trained all detectives in the process, as well as many of their patrol officers. The department remains committed to supporting survivors.

**Ohio University Survivor Advocacy Program (SAP)**

SAP is a confidential resources for student survivors at Ohio University. Student survivors can work with SAP for support and resources regardless of when an assault occurred and regardless of whether the survivor wishes to report to law enforcement and/or the University.
Data

What does data tell us about the prevalence of sexual assault amongst Ohio University students?

Ohio University, like colleges and universities across the country, has students that have experienced different forms of sexual and gender-based violence both before and after coming to campus. It is important for us to consider the ways in which violence is experienced by our students and the ways in which violence affects our campus culture. To provide context, below is self-reported dating from the incoming first year class in Fall 2019.

19.2% (n=488) had experienced partner violence prior to coming to OHIO.

.7% (n=25) reported having nonconsensual sexual contact with someone prior to arriving at OHIO.

.1% (n=3) reported having nonconsensual sexual contact with someone after arriving at OHIO.

.1% (n=3) reported having nonconsensual sexual contact with someone before and after arriving at OHIO.

While it is alarming to see how many of our students have experienced violence prior to ever coming to OHIO, it tells us how pervasive violence is in our culture. Furthermore, a significant number of students have self-reported that they have engaged in non-consensual activity before and after coming to campus. These stats illustrate very clearly the need to engage students in prevention activities and education.

It is imperative that we all frame our prevention work in ways that does not lay the responsibility for assault on the shoulders of survivors. We need to comprehensively engage students who are at a higher risk for perpetrating violence, while simultaneously reducing our cultural tendency to victim blame.
General Discussion Questions

These questions are designed to facilitate a discussion with your class.

As Brie shares her experience with us at the start of the film, there are several moments that can be identified in which bystanders could have intervened to stop the sexual assault from happening.

What were those moments?

Brie was with a “friend” as she was walking home, and we would hope that her friend would care for her while intoxicated. However, that isn’t what happened. Intervention could have occurred if other friends had potentially joined them on the walk, or if the RAs had intervened at the Residence Hall to help Brieged to her room.

How did Det. Austin try to give power & control back to Brie during the investigation? What investigative approach did he use?

Detective Austin used a trauma-informed approach (FETI). He begins with a short introduction but provides her space in order to give her time to sleep and process in her own way. He encourages breaks. He asks questions that will assist Brie in recovering her memories. He lets Brie know that she can control her parents’ involvement, and that he is “working for” her. He also engaged in a multidisciplinary approach and supported her use of an advocate from the Survivor Advocacy Program.

How do Brie & Det. Austin describe trauma responses for survivors? How can this help society understand that there is no "right way" for a survivor to respond to an assault?

Det. Austin describes the “fight, freeze, and flight” response. In the past, you may have heard people say that it’s not assault if a person doesn’t fight back; however, there are many reasons as to why someone’s brain may respond in different ways that prevent them from acting in a way that they may have always assumed they would and freezing is a common response to trauma. Survivors may not remember everything in chronological order and may remember details when prompted with particular questions (as described in the documentary). It’s important that if you are supporting a survivor that you not judge survivors for how they respond, and that you also not ask them questions about what happened. You should focus on providing them support as best you can, by getting them to resources like the Survivor Advocacy Program or Counseling and Psychological Services.
General Discussion Questions

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Why is it important to give power and control back to survivors?

Survivors have had power and control removed from them when they experienced the violence. It’s important that survivors be provided opportunities to take power back, including being able to decide if they would like an investigation pursued. This can be an important aspect of recovery and healing.

What role do advocates play in supporting survivors?

The Survivor Advocacy Program (SAP) provides immediate crisis intervention and advocacy services to all student survivors of Ohio University and the people in their lives who have been impacted by the trauma. Advocates can be called at any time, and are available to assist with medical advocacy (including going to the hospital for a SAFE exam - Sexual Assault Forensic Examination), as well as exploring reporting options (to the police and/or university officials). They are often the one person/office consistently alongside the survivor throughout long, sometimes confusing processes and can help the survivor understand the process, next steps, and their rights and resources. They are also able to support survivors who choose not to go through any formal reporting or investigatory process. More information about the various things advocates do can be found on SAP's website.
Why may a survivor choose not to pursue an investigation?

Investigations can be retraumatizing in and of themselves, as survivors recount the violence that they experienced. When a survivor chooses to go through an investigation, they may share their experience with an advocate, 2-3 people at the hospital, an initial investigator, another police officer, a prosecutor, a judge, a jury, and that is at the low end. According to Start By Believing, “of 100 rapes committed [sic] an estimated 5-20 are reported to police, 0.4-5.4 are prosecuted, 0.2-5.2 result in a conviction, .02-2.8 in incarceration.”

Additionally, survivors may choose not to pursue an investigation because of concerns regarding institutionalized oppression. For example, women of color may not want to report incidents of sexual violence that occur within their communities for fear that it could perpetuate stereotypes regarding men of color that are rooted in racism. Members of the LGBTQ+ community may not want to report because of concerns about homophobic or transphobic responses.

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Other reasons a student survivor may not want to report:

They were drinking underage at the time of the incident:

Some survivors are not only worried about getting in trouble, but they also worry about getting blamed for their assault. It’s important to note that survivors who are going through the process of reporting to Ohio University or the police will not be cited for being under the influence, even if underage, so as not to prevent them from coming forward about a serious crime.

They do not want their parents to know:

It can be very difficult for survivors to talk with others about their assault. Family situations differ for everyone, but the Survivor Advocacy Program and Counseling & Psychological Services are here to support survivors as they make these decisions about who they want to tell – and are confidential so that they can process their choices without others knowing.
Additional concerns a person may have when deciding to report:

- LGBTQ members of the population being concerned that their assaults are not taken seriously because of their sexuality and the gender of their assailant.

- Women of color not wanting to report on their own communities, out of fear that it will perpetuate racist myths and stereotypes about men of color.

- International students may be concerned about additional stigmas that their home countries may have for rape survivors or may fear jeopardizing their visa if they are involved in a criminal prosecution.
Rape culture is a culture in which sexual violence (and other forms of interpersonal violence, like sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking) is considered to be a normal part of the culture and those from privileged identities who are perpetrators of violence are excused. Rape culture is manifested in statements like “boys will be boys” to justify harassment, jokes about sexual violence (e.g. regarding violence in prisons), or through victim blaming (e.g. the victim shouldn’t have gotten drunk). How does hearing survivors’ experiences, and hearing Brie’s experience, help us to challenge rape culture or myths that we may have about rape?

[Allow for personal reflections here] It is impactful to hear from individuals who have been impacted, as while we all may know the studies that suggest the rates of sexual violence, we may have become desensitized to that. I encourage you to continue exploring survivor experiences by visiting the virtual survivor-centered art exhibits: https://www.ohio.edu/diversity/womens-center/survivor-centered-programs
General Discussion Questions

YOUR ROLE

What can we, as allies, learn from Det. Austin’s & Kim’s approach to being trauma-informed?

As an ally, it is not our job to investigate. It is our job to believe the survivor and provide support in the moment. According to the Survivor Advocacy Program website, here are some ways in which you can support survivors:

Start by Believing
It can be very difficult for someone to come forward to share their story. Your job is to show support. The best thing you can do is to believe them.

"You are not alone."
Remind the survivor that you are there for them and are willing to listen. Remind them there are others that scare and services available to support them and help them recover.

"I’m sorry this happened."
Acknowledge that this experience has affected their life. Phrases like “I imagine this is so difficult and “I am so glad you are sharing this with me” help to communicate empathy.

"Are you open to seeking medical attention?"
The survivor might need medical attention or wish to have a nurse collect possible evidence. Offer to accompany them or give them information about the Survivor Advocacy Program who provides information about and accompaniment for medical services.
**General Discussion Questions**

**YOUR ROLE**

**What are other ways we can support the survivors in our life?**

**Holding Space**
Walking alongside someone in whatever journey they are on without judging them, making them feel inadequate, or trying to impact the outcome.

**Allow them to make choices**
Sexual violence, relationship violence and stalking take power and control away from the survivor. Your loved one should have the power and control over their own actions and responses to this experience. Do not tell them what to do. More than anything else, you can help by accepting and supporting their decisions, as long as their safety isn't at risk.

**Take care of yourself**
Understand that you will have to deal with your own feelings of frustration, anger and sadness. It is important to keep these feelings from being directed at the person you want to help through this crisis. SAP is here to support you as well.

**Be present and listen**
Being present & listening to someone is often the most helpful thing you can do:
- Use deep listening
- Don’t try to fix it
- Provide unconditional positive regard
- Allow them to feel whatever they are feeling
- Practice non-judgement
In addition to "Start by Believing", how can you show support of survivors by improving our culture?

Challenge rape culture and be a better bystander. [You can request an Interrupting Rape Culture and How to Respond workshop for your class by contacting the Women’s Center at womenscenter@ohio.edu; You can request a Better Bystander workshop for your class by contacting bystander@ohio.edu].

We encourage you to use bystander intervention techniques to disrupt rape culture, but also for you to individually consider your own biases. You can do this by reading articles, introducing yourself to media that challenges rape culture, critically analyzing the songs you listen to, and more! We invite you to explore 16 ways in which you as an individual can disrupt rape culture by reviewing these tips from UNWomen: https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/11/compilation-ways-you-can-stand-against-rape-culture
Another way you can improve our culture is by being an active bystander and practicing the 3 D's of bystander intervention:

**Directly Intervene**
If you see someone intoxicated at a bar leaving with someone else, you can always ask if the person who is intoxicated is okay. You can check to make sure that they know the person that is helping them out of the bar, and you can always suggest that you help them call a friend who they trust, or the [CATS late night shuttle](#) which can be reached at 740-593-4040 (also listed on the back of your Ohio University student ID).

**Delegate**
Enlist assistance from others. Should you feel unsafe or unsure, solicit help from someone who is better positioned to intervene (bouncers, police officers, a group of friends).

**Create a Distraction**
This is handy for diffusing a potentially harmful situation without calling direct attention to it. If you think that someone has had their drink spiked, knock over the glass (please also tell the person and a bouncer/bartender, and/or police so the perpetrator is stopped).
General Discussion Questions - Your Role

- What are some examples of ways you, or your friends, have intervened using one of these three active forms? (Does not have to be related to sexual misconduct. Example - It could be intervening on behalf of a sibling or friend when they are about to get in trouble – and you distract your parent or teacher to help them forget that your sibling or friend is about to be grounded, etc.)

- What do you perceive are the anticipated risks of intervening using one of these strategies?

- What do you think are the potential benefits in intervening using one of these strategies?

- How can we practice using these bystander intervention strategies in our daily interactions as students?
Recommended Readings to Pair with the film


Futures without Violence (nd). Anti-Racism as Violence Prevention. [http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/health/racism/](http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/health/racism/) *There are short videos available that can help you discuss the intersection of interpersonal violence and racism, homophobia, sexism, etc. (For a deep dive on the intersection of this work, you may also wish to explore webinars provided by the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence on their initiative Prevention through Liberation: [https://www.ocadsv.org/our-work/prevention-through-liberation](https://www.ocadsv.org/our-work/prevention-through-liberation))


Lonsway, Kim, and Archambault, Joanne (2016). Start by Believing: Participation of Criminal Justice Professionals. Available online: [http://www.startbybelieving.org/resources](http://www.startbybelieving.org/resources) (link is located under “supporting research.”)

Next Steps & Resources

- Explore survivor centered programming offered through the Women’s Center, including Take Back the Night, virtual art exhibits, and the workshop Identifying and Responding to Rape Culture at: https://www.ohio.edu/diversity/womens-center/survivor-centered-programs
- Explore programming offered through Health Promotion, including how to be member of Better Bystanders, attend one of their workshops, or participate in the annual Walk a Mile Together event at: https://www.ohio.edu/health-promotion
- Explore local resources, tips for allies (and parents of survivors), support groups, workshops, and reporting options through the Survivor Advocacy Program at: https://www.ohio.edu/survivor
- Explore more Start by Believing resources & research https://www.startbybelieving.org/resources/
- Counseling and Psychological Services works closely with the Survivor Advocacy Program and also provides support for survivors. Find out more at: https://www.ohio.edu/student-affairs/counseling
- Schedule a ride along with OUPD
Background of Start by Believing at Ohio University

With the help of one brave student survivor, Brie Sivy, “Start by Believing” – first brought to campus by the Ohio University Police Department (OUPD) and the Survivor Advocacy Program (SAP) – is going strong at Ohio University. Brie has been publicly speaking and sharing her story alongside Detective Mathew Austin of OUPD and Kim Castor of SAP since 2018. Their first presentation to over 200 campus and community members spearheaded Ohio University’s “Start by Believing” campaign and highlighted how the often traumatizing experience of working with the criminal justice system can, in fact, be empowering for survivors if a survivor-focused approach and interdisciplinary team-model are used. A well-received second presentation followed the next school year, and the requests to repeat the talk came pouring in.

• Hoping to keep the momentum going and reach an even wider audience, the Ohio University Police Department & Survivor Advocacy Program partnered with Ohio University's University Communication and Marketing team to create a documentary to allow Brie’s story to continue being told. This 30-minute movie shows Brie’s journey from victim, to survivor, to aspiring social worker and illustrates how OUPD works to empower survivors throughout their sexual assault investigations. You will also hear about trauma’s impact on memory and witness the impact possible when police and advocacy work together with a common goal.
Ohio’s 'Start By Believing' campaign aims to transform community response to sexual assault

Ohio’s ‘Start By Believing: The Power of a Survivor-Centered Process’ documentary wins Telly Award

THEIR OWN JUSTICE

Film charts student’s journey from victim to survivor to empowerment

OU student shares story of survival in hopes of helping other sexual assault survivors

Believe Survivors: Ohio University's Survivor Advocacy Program, OU's Mission to Support Survivors
This discussion guide was created by the following Ohio University departments: