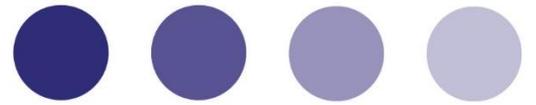


*Stories of*



# Preventing Healing & Transforming



*through Empowerment Self-Defense*

**IMPACT**

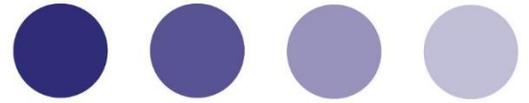
confidence ▶ safety ▶ empowerment





**Empowerment Self-Defense** is a comprehensive and holistic method of violence resistance education for women and other groups targeted for violence. It teaches verbal skills for violence prevention and de-escalation, including assertive body language, boundary setting, and the making of informed choices to assess and possibly avoid violent situations. It also provides physical skills that are adapted specifically for sexual attacks, harnessing the strength of the student's body and psyche and setting them against the weaknesses of the body and mind of an assailant.

**IMPACT Boston**, an affiliate of Triangle, is a program that teaches Empowerment Self-Defense by simulating real harassment and assault scenarios. IMPACT classes are trauma-informed, anti-victim blaming, and use evidence-based methods for teaching. There are IMPACT chapters throughout the country, as well as in Israel and the UK.



### Anonymous

*\*trigger warning for descriptions of attempted sexual assault*

About a month ago I was on a 4th date with a charming grad student I met at a lecture. We were sipping wine in his apartment when a dumb joke led to a sweet first kiss. The first kiss quickly and aggressively turned into an attempt at rape.

Out of nowhere I was pinned to the bed and he was dropping lines straight from a bad made-for-TV movie: “Oh, come on—You know you want it.” “You think I don’t know why you came up to my apartment?” I am confident that if this had happened a year ago I would have been raped. I am confident that if it had happened last night and I had not taken the IMPACT class I would have been raped.

“ “When his aggression escalated I yelled, ‘If you do this, it’s rape,’ a line I practiced word-for-word in my IMPACT class. ” ”

But I did take the IMPACT class. I did speak up. I did defend myself. And I was not raped. Instead, when he grabbed my wrists and forced me onto the bed I forcefully and calmly said “No, I don’t want to have sex with you!” When his aggression escalated I yelled, “If you do this, it’s rape,” a line I practiced word-for-word in my IMPACT class. His reaction was identical to that of the IMPACT suited instructors—he was outraged, he got off me, and I got out. The work I did with IMPACT allowed me to believe that my beautifully flawed self is worth defending.



## From the IMPACT Blog: **Timing is Everything**

by Aishah Shahidah Simmons | Mar 14, 2019 |



I just completed IMPACT Boston's 20-hour women's core self-defense course. I've wanted to take one of these courses ever since the 1990s but I didn't for a myriad of reasons. To say that I had one of the most physically and emotionally grueling 20-hour experience that was equally empowering and liberating is an understatement. I am not certain that I can fully articulate what I experienced because I am still processing everything and I am so physically sore.

Throughout the course, I experientially learned a lot about my fears that date back to when my paternal step-grandfather first took the night away from me forty years ago when I was a ten-year old girl. That was the beginning of my leaving my body and living in my head. The leaving continued through the molestation during my tween years and the rape in my sophomore year in college.

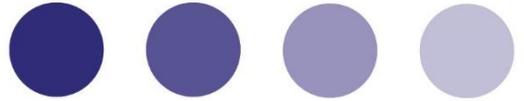
Despite my being an unapologetic Black feminist who fights against rape culture, I subconsciously and consciously blamed my body for the sexual harm I experienced as a child and also as a young adult woman. I don't know if I would've owned that prior to my self-defense course. Most importantly, I am unwavering in my understanding that I couldn't have stopped my child sex abuse or young adult rape.

I credit the IMPACT course with giving me an opportunity to face some deep-seated fears that I've held for decades. I credit the course with teaching me verbal and physical skills that make me feel empowered in ways that I haven't EVER felt empowered in my body.

Parts of me wish I had taken the course decades ago. Yet, the timing was just right for me on the literal cusp of 50 years of living. I definitely want all of the young people and many of my peers and older in my life to have the opportunity to take a self-defense course. I am glad there are a range of courses that strive to address different identities and needs.

I am explicitly clear that my being able to defend my Black woman body against personal or stranger violence will not make me safe from subsequently experiencing police violence or being incarcerated precisely because I defended myself. Paraphrasing from the title of an anthology edited by Mariame Kaba cis and trans

## Stories of Empowerment Self-Defense



women of color do not have selves to defend. If you haven't read already, please read Andrea J. Ritchie's, *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black women and Women of Color*, and learn about the radical, transformational work of *Survived and Punished*. If you are able, please support their work.

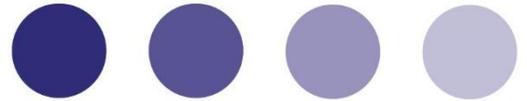
Despite all of the contradictions and complexities of literally surviving in a world where Audre Lorde reminds us colored girls, "we were never meant to survive," I am infinitely grateful that I took the course co-taught by Helen, Meg, Shay, Ann, and Sean. On a "personal is political level" it was a gift that the lead instructor, Helen, is a Black woman. I needed that and didn't even know it.

A big gratitude shout-out to friend and IMPACT Boston Executive Director Meg Stone for her camaraderie and support leading up to my finally taking a course (an 18-month discernment and life process), and immediately after completing the course.

It warms my spirit knowing that through their IMPACT Boston's fundraising work, they haven't ever had to turn down anyone because of lack of funds to take a course. I traveled to Boston because of my camaraderie with Meg. However, there are feminist led self-defense courses in various parts of the country.

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**Aishah Shahidah Simmons** is an award-winning Black feminist lesbian documentary filmmaker, activist, cultural worker, and international lecturer whose work examines the intersections of race, gender, sexuality and sexual violence. An incest and young adult rape survivor, Aishah is the creator of *NO! The Rape Documentary* and the *#LoveWITHAccountability* Project. Her forthcoming edited anthology *Love With Accountability: Digging Up the Roots of Child Sexual Abuse* will be published by AK Press in Fall 2019



### Katy

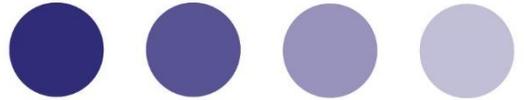
What I learned from IMPACT is the importance of following my gut and not being afraid to say "NO!!!" or in this case, to say something, maybe quieter, but to LISTEN to my inner voice and to feel comfortable setting boundaries. As a mother, I needed to feel comfortable being bolder to protect my kids and not worry so much if I offended anyone. IMPACT did that for me. The class did not make me more suspicious, just more aware.

I took my 3 kids to a party at a family member's house. There were about 60 people there, many I had never met before. When I saw a lot of strange faces, I pulled my older daughters, ages 4 and 6, aside and reminded them to be careful around people we didn't know well. I do this because 1 in 3 females is sexually assaulted at some time in her life, and usually by an acquaintance -- and these family situations are many times the stage for something to occur. It does not take 20 minutes alone to abuse a child; it takes no more than 10 seconds. I never believed this statistic until I starting talking to my family and friends -- and I found out it is true. Of the people I asked, 1 in 3 has been assaulted as a child.

“ It does not take 20 minutes alone to abuse a child; it takes no more than 10 seconds. ”

I reminded my husband to keep an eye on the girls when I saw a group of older kids start to befriend them. They were playing ball in the yard. I was helping with the party so I could not watch them too closely myself. A few minutes later I stepped back outside and noticed that they were no longer playing ball. I went to look for them and could not find them anywhere. I asked my husband, my relatives, no one knew. I started yelling for them and after I started getting very upset, one of them came out of the bushes on the side of the house. She told me that she was playing hide-and-seek with the older boys. The girls, of course, loved the attention. I explained that hide-and-seek was not allowed at parties like this.

One of the older boys -- 13 or 14 years old -- kept hanging around. I got a bad feeling. I told my husband and my mother what had happened and that the girls were not to be left alone for a second. I took them over to the swing set. Although all of the other teenagers went to the basement to play, this one boy came with us to the swing set. He started by calling my 6-year-old a nickname. She giggled, of course.



Then he did tricks for her and made her laugh; then he started being physical with her -- tickling her, wrestling. It was weird. He then told me I could leave and that he would keep an eye on her. I said no. Then I heard him tell my daughter not to listen to me. He told her several times not to listen to me, and tried to get her to play hide-and-seek again. I felt more and more uneasy. My husband and mother then stopped by the swing set and both grabbed me to say I was right. I was not exaggerating. Each of us took turns sticking to the girls like glue. I also warned the other moms with small children to be careful.

Looking back, I will never know if that teenager had harmful intentions, but I'm glad I didn't take a risk with my children's safety. I am so glad that I was aware and picked up on this early.



From the IMPACT Blog:



## An Interview with Shanda from Turtle Mountain Reservation

by Shay Orent | Jan 22, 2019 |

*The following is an interview with future IMPACT Director Shanda Poitra of the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota. IMPACT Boston has partnered with Shanda and her team to train them as instructors and help them open an IMPACT chapter on the reservation.*

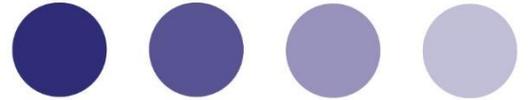
*\*Trigger warning for mentions of domestic violence/partner abuse*

### **How did you get connected to IMPACT Boston? Where did the idea come from to start your own IMPACT chapter?**

I was born and raised on the Turtle Mountain Reservation. It wasn't until I was 24-years-old with 3 children that I left my hometown for college and, unfortunately, I took my bad relationship with me. When I reflect back on those days, I feel like it wasn't me, like I don't even know the person I used to be and I can't imagine how I lived through most of those days. I had 2 children in diapers and daycare, and 1 in elementary school, not to mention a full-time University class schedule. I wore many masks back then... and layers of clothing to cover the bruises. Despite the darkness I was living in, I was a great student; I knew that no matter what, I HAD to succeed; I knew there was more to my future than what I was living, so I kept working hard.

Fall semester of 2010, I was searching for an elective and came upon an IMPACT self-defense class. It changed my life forever. I walked into class on a Friday thinking that I would learn how to handle an attacker with a weapon, and walked out that Sunday with a voice so powerful I could handle the most subtle boundary violations, along with physical attacks. I practiced what I learned from IMPACT every single day. IMPACT helped me heal from the violence I was experiencing at home, and also helped me develop the strength and skills to leave my abuser.

This experience strengthened my commitment to making the healing I found in that IMPACT class available on the reservation. I began working with Kay Mendick of



University of North Dakota, but when the University closed the IMPACT program, Kay became unable to train and support us. Instead she suggested that I attend

Empowerment Self-Defense Global Camp, which I did in 2017, along with Sara Rae Davis, the other lead instructor candidate. We met Meg Stone of IMPACT Boston at ESD Global camp, but it was Sara who actually sat next to Meg at an ESD dinner; Sara shared how much we loved IMPACT and explained that IMPACT was exactly what we wanted to bring to our reservation. Since then we have worked together toward our ultimate goal of bringing IMPACT home to the reservation.

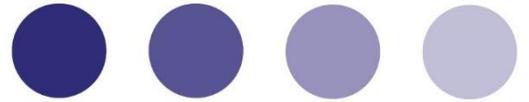
### **Why is this something you feel your community needs? Why is this important to you?**

I moved back to the reservation in the fall of 2015 to work for our Indian Health Service and to be around family for the first time in over a decade. Within my first week of being home, I noticed so much violence that I once thought was normal behavior. One morning, I got a phone call notifying me that my childhood friend was beaten and left for dead by her children's father; she was flown out to the nearest ICU and taken in for surgery for a hematoma in her skull. Having taken an IMPACT class and feeling that solidarity among a team of strong women, I knew something HAD to be done about this.

### **What are some of the ways indigenous women are particularly vulnerable to violence?**

There hasn't been a whole lot of discussion about the violence against women in Indian Country. I suppose it's difficult for the leaders of this "free world" to really acknowledge Indigenous pain because that would bring up the cultural and historical legacy of the violence that was done to our people. The #MeToo Movement has moved mountains in how we view and discuss sexual abuse, however, many Indigenous women feel that the movement is often not inclusive or representative of our experiences. While our cries are being ignored, more and more of our women and children are being violated in countless ways. The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women organization has just recently begun to collect data on missing persons, but the numbers are uncertain.

In North Dakota, the development of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," created more than 100,000 new, high-paying jobs since April 2009. Tens of thousands of people from all over the country—the vast majority of them men—have flocked to Williston and the neighboring oil-patch towns of Watford City, Minot, and Dickinson, among others, seeking work. In Williston alone, the population grew from a quaint little farm town of 15,000 to 60,000 in just 4 years! North Dakota now has the largest concentration of men in any state, except Alaska; men who have come from all over the country have formed their temporary housing developments into "man camps," which have become a cesspool for crime, drugs, and violence, including prostitution and pedophilia.



These men didn't just stay in that part of North Dakota. With fluctuating schedules, they were able to travel throughout North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota, bringing their money and desire for criminal activities with them. Human trafficking became a major issue, and the majority of women and girls involved were Indigenous. According to the 2016 National Institute of Justice Report, 56% of Native women have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. The high rates of sexual violence are closely interconnected with the likelihood of Native women going missing or being murdered, and on some reservations, they are murdered at MORE THAN TEN TIMES THE NATIONAL AVERAGE. The numbers of Native women and girls missing and murdered in Canada are equivalent, if not higher than the United States, making this an International Crisis.

### **What kind of positive changes are you hoping to see in Turtle Mountain culture?**

To put it in the simplest terms, IMPACT saved my life and I want my Native sisters to have that same opportunity. I was lucky that my University offered IMPACT, but not all who need this class are in college. I truly believe that with IMPACT, we can do our part in healing our sisters and changing societal norms. With IMPACT Boston supporting our mission to become an IMPACT Chapter for Indigenous women, we can change the narrative and reclaim Native truth. Our women need to be reminded of the strength that we already possess.

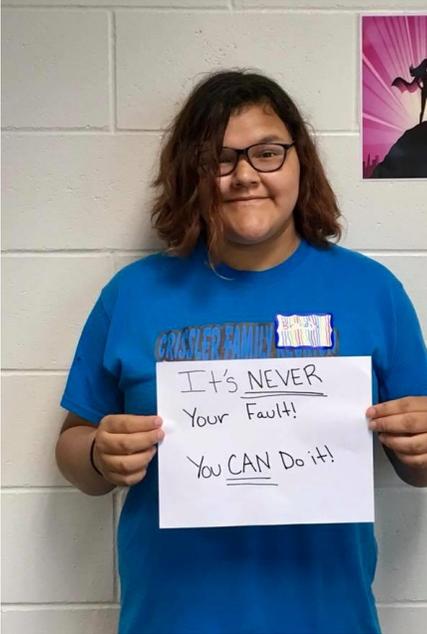
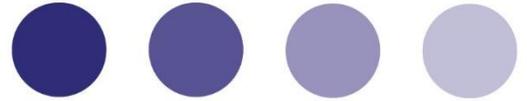
### **What has the training process been like? What's coming up next? When are you expecting to launch the IMPACT chapter?**

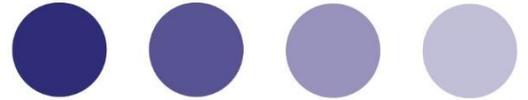
IMPACT Boston paid a visit to our reservation in June where we put on 7 workshops for women and girls. Then, in December and January, we attended a week-long training in Boston, learning how to teach a 3-hour workshop, which ended with two mock classes; both were very successful! The constant feedback we were given was constructive and honest. Training with IMPACT Boston feels equivalent to being a student; the atmosphere is safe and supportive, making it easier to drill the material over and over until we get it just right.

I feel so relieved and grateful that IMPACT Boston agreed to work with us. The passion for this work is definitely electric on both sides; I know we're in good hands.

And I couldn't have found a better group of Turtle Mountain instructors. They are truly the right people to deliver this sensitive, yet empowering service to our community. Put that together with IMPACT Boston and we're definitely a force—a match so natural and genuine—we're a family. As a Native American, I strongly believe that if you're for our cause, you're one of us!

# Stories of Empowerment Self-Defense





### Lilian

When Lilian Calderon participated in an IMPACT workshop last Fall she never believed that only two hours of training would give her what she needed to stop an assault. Lilian participated in the workshop as part of a retreat for the staff of Renewal House, a Boston-area domestic violence program. “When I think about the day we took the training I remember saying to myself, ‘I don’t understand why we’re doing this.’ It was fun to learn but I didn’t think I’d ever need it,” she said.

Then, just before nine one Thursday morning, Lilian was walking to work from the subway when a man with a knife came up behind her and cut the straps of her handbag.

““ She saw that the skills she learned were exactly what she needed when she was faced with imminent violence. ””

She instinctively yelled, “NO,” turned toward him, struck him with an elbow and then a knee to the groin. “My adrenaline was pumping but I trusted my instincts and I fought back using all my strength,” she said. After Lilian used physical self-defense the attacker walked away. She then worked with local police to identify him. “The skills came to me automatically,” she said.

Lilian, a physically small woman, encourages everyone in her life to take IMPACT. She saw that the skills she learned were exactly what she needed when she was faced with imminent violence. “My life changed since I took the training because I learned how to protect myself. Since the incident I have been a voice encouraging other people to learn these skills.”



From the IMPACT blog:

## Safety Tips for Women, Revised

by Shay Orent | Apr 17, 2019 |



“Don’t talk to strangers.”

“Don’t walk alone at night.”

“Use your keys as a weapon.”

If you live in a body that society views as vulnerable, you have probably been the recipient of many safety tips. Often these are well-meaning, but too often they are also restrictive, impractical, and/or give fodder for victim blaming (“Well, she shouldn’t have gone out alone in that neighborhood” or “Why did she invite him in?”). They also very often just don’t reflect the reality of the lives we live and the way violence is perpetrated and avoided.

My favorite swing-and-a-miss attempt at safety advice is a 2013 article from Cosmo entitled [“21 Potentially Life-Saving Safety Tips That Every Woman Should Know.”](#) Some of the tips in here are so absurd you almost think it’s satire (which would’ve actually been a good genre for this, in my opinion).

The author seems to think you can ensure safety by assuming all men are potential predators and all women potential “lurers.” There is no mention of the possibility of being victimized by someone you know ([80% of sexual assaults, the unspoken crime this author is trying to help you avoid, are committed by someone the survivor knows](#)), or by someone who isn’t a man ([which happens more than we like to acknowledge](#))—don’t trust (male) strangers seems to be the essence of this piece, completely ignoring the reality of the sexual assault epidemic in this country.

While being wary of strangers may be a good strategy for some people or in some circumstances, following advice like “don’t accept help for a flat tire” and “check your smoke detector for a hidden camera” and “don’t order cocktails because the bartender could drug you” is an exhausting way to live, and may not decrease your chances of being assaulted. Like so much of the safety advice we hear, it seems like Cosmo’s approach here was to come up with scenarios that sound scary rather than talk about what the data says in terms of proven safety tactics.

There are certainly things one can do to try to minimize risk when out in public (spoiler alert: running away from someone in a zig zag pattern, as if they’re an alligator, is not one of them, Cosmo). Being alert and aware of your surroundings, actively changing your circumstances when you are feeling uncomfortable/unsafe (like exiting an enclosed space with a stranger who makes you feel nervous), or even following some of Cosmo’s



advice and being cautious about who could be overhearing your private information at hotels and elsewhere are all good things to consider doing. But assault is always caused by the person doing the assaulting, and again, that person is usually not a stranger.

So what can you do?

**Know the signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships.** These can be hard to see from within a relationship you're invested in, so get to know them outside of that context. Early red flags from a partner who may later become abusive can easily go undetected when you don't know what to look out for, or when you're already emotionally or financially invested. For example, one thing to look out for is controlling behavior—is your new partner jealous or upset when you spend time with your friends? Do they try to mask their unhealthy expectations with flattery? (“It’s not that I don’t trust you, I don’t trust the intentions of the people around you because you’re such a catch.”) Healthy relationships include ample room for meaningful friendships, and healthy partners don’t try to control who you spend time with, regardless of your friend’s gender. For more info, here’s a [good resource](#) for healthy vs. unhealthy relationships.

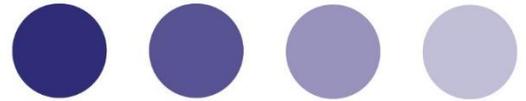
**Practice, practice, practice boundary setting.** By setting boundaries and paying attention to how the other person responds, you get information about them—are they trustworthy, do they understand limits, do they listen to me or are they trying to change my mind? Boundary setting can be a difficult skill, so practicing when the stakes are low—like about something small with a friend you trust, or with a stranger in a non-dangerous situation—can make it easier to do when the stakes are higher.

**Know the research.** According to researcher Sara Ullman’s analysis of national crime victimization survey data, physical resistance is effective in deterring sexual assault, as is forceful verbal resistance in some circumstances. Physical resistance is especially important if the offender is using physical force; one study showed that the most successful resistance strategies were those that matched the strategies of the offender (Dardis 113-114). Resistance strategies employed immediately in the encounter were also shown to be more effective, so listening to your gut and sticking up for yourself early on when you’re feeling uncomfortable is key to prevention. If you know you have a strong freeze reaction (a totally natural reaction in these situations), you might want to look into taking an empowerment self-defense class so you can practice accessing your voice and your “fight” instinct in highly stressful situations.

Ultimately, you’re the best judge of which tactics make you feel safer and which feel laborious and unhelpful. But when we dole out advice to each other, considering the reality of violence against women—and thinking about how we can realistically empower people of all genders to disrupt it—is a good place to start.

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**Shay Orent** is an instructor with IMPACT Boston.



### Vicky & Jamie

Before my 16-year-old daughter Jamie traveled to Ghana to take part in a veterinary assisting program this summer I insisted she take an IMPACT class. As her Mom I knew she was empathic and giving, and that she did not know how to say no or set boundaries.

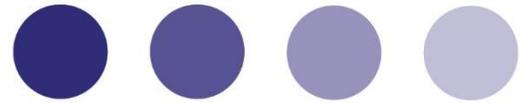
This is partly her and partly our cultural stupidity that we teach girls to “be nice” despite their uncomfortable feelings. As a society we seem to share a delusion that bad things don’t happen to good people. Additionally, we ignore data that shows us that, in many situations of attempted violence, being nice doesn’t work.

““ On the first night of class, as we were introduced to concepts and physical routines, I could see that neither Jamie nor I had a clue about what to do in a potentially difficult situation. ””

When I signed my daughter up for Women’s Basics I realized I could not ask her to learn how to defend herself physically and psychologically if I were not willing to do so myself. How could I really say it was important for all women, if I didn’t go? As a middle aged woman I no longer receive the unwanted commentary on my body or presumed sexuality, but I am no less of a possible target than my daughter. Another reason I wanted to take the course with my daughter was that I love her so much that I did not want her to have to face her internal demons alone.

On the first night of class, as we were introduced to concepts and physical routines, I could see that neither Jamie nor I had a clue about what to do in a potentially difficult situation. She mastered the physical skills quickly, but her response to the verbal scenarios concerned me: she said in a small wavering voice “please? go away?...please?” I knew then that my worry for her had been correct. She would not have been able to defend herself, much less take and keep her own space.

By the middle of our second day of training she was loud and getting strong. At first I was scared for her, but as I watched her I saw how strong she had become. I was proud of her, proud to be her Mom. I saw her confidence and ability to take care of herself surge. Doing the scenarios challenged me. I remembered things that I would rather not have: times that I had been powerless and a man had taken advantage of me. I am sure that was part of why I initially did not want to do the course. But when I came off the mat



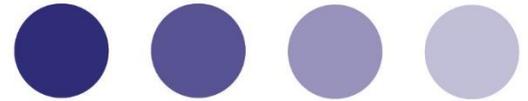
after a scenario, I could see how proud Jamie was of me. This was a giant plus that I never anticipated. As it turned out, it was critical that Jamie took the course and I with her.

One day, a few weeks after she arrived in Ghana, she was walking to the bus with her friend Alice, arms linked. Two men grabbed Jamie's arm; two others grabbed onto Alice and tried to pull them apart. Alice froze. Jaime didn't. She dropped into a squat, pulling rapidly so the men lost their balance and fell. Jamie jumped up and ran to the two men who had Alice. She whacked their hands. Jamie then pulled Alice away and both girls ran to safety. It was Jamie knowing what to do instantly that saved them both.

“ Two men grabbed Jamie's arm; two others grabbed onto Alice and tried to pull them apart. Alice froze. Jaime didn't. ”

If I had not taken the course, I would have yanked her out of Ghana immediately, despite knowing that she goes to New York and Boston and she could just as easily have been attacked in the U.S. Instead I knew my daughter was capable of protecting herself. Additionally, I felt empowered to speak about this incident to the organizers of the program and achieve a resolution that made me feel confident that they were taking the young women's safety seriously.

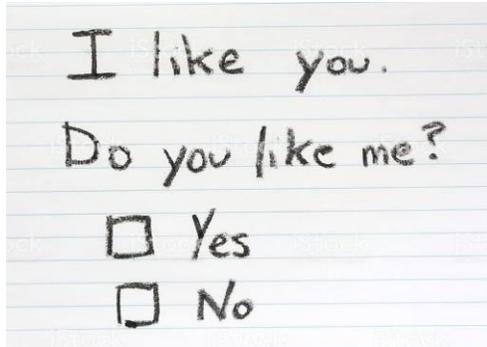
As I write this I have come to realize that knowing how to protect myself is part of my responsibility as a good parent. Our children deserve for us to be alive and uninjured for as long as that is possible. Anything we do to protect ourselves is part of fulfilling our responsibility to them. We brought them in the world, we have a duty to stay.



From the IMPACT Blog:

# Girls—It's Okay to be Rejected

by [Shay Orent](#) | May 17, 2019 |



It isn't just boys who need to learn to hear the word "no."

I'm at a high school teaching our IMPACT:Ability program. We're about 6 weeks into the program, so we're starting to address some more uncomfortable topics. This week we're doing dating scenarios, where students have to practice saying "no" to a partner trying to coerce them into having sex. The

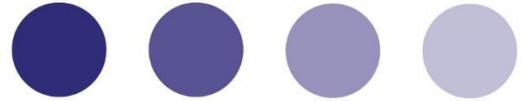
teens all seem receptive when the girls are practicing—girls saying no to a pushy partner appears to register as a normal, albeit objectionable, situation. But when the boys come up, it seems only the boys are buying in.

A few of the girls are making disgusted faces; they look as if they feel personally offended by the scenario. "I would flip out if a guy did that to me," I hear one girl say to her friend.

To clarify, "that" isn't being manipulative, coercive, or otherwise pushy as a dating partner. "That" is simply saying no to sex.

The belief that boys always want sex, and shouldn't refuse it when the offer comes from a girl, is just as damaging as all the harmful messages out there about girls and sex. It robs boys of their agency, it renders invisible their pain after an assault, and it fails to hold girls accountable for their actions—depriving them of the personal growth that comes from understanding and admitting a wrongdoing.

Girls need to learn to accept rejection in sexual situations just as much as boys need to learn to take no for an answer when a girl they like turns them down. In both cases, we should be encouraging respect for the other person's autonomy and the development of a self that doesn't rely on outside validation (there's nothing more attractive than someone who wants, but doesn't **need**, to be with you). Just like we need to counteract the message that a girl who doesn't want to date a guy just hasn't been convinced yet, we also need to correct the idea that girls are the gatekeepers to sex—the only ones with the power to decide if it's a yes or a no. Heterosexual girls need to realize that sexual rejection is a part of life.



The idea that boys always want sex also feeds into the notion that a girl's greatest power is in her sexuality, which makes rejection unpalatable. (If a guy doesn't want to sleep with you, you must be worthless). Put in a situation where their sexual advances are denied, someone with this belief is likely to choose not to accept rejection and instead double down on their goal—and deny later that what they did was sexual assault.

It's worth noting that these narratives about sex and sexuality exclude non-binary people entirely, as well as LGBTQ+ people. So they not only serve the harmful purpose of putting cis-gendered heterosexual young people in a box that tells them how to behave/perform sexuality, they reinforce the idea that being cis and straight is the only acceptable way of being.

Girls (and everyone who needs to hear this): your value is not in how "f\*\*\*able" you are. You are valuable as thinkers, creators, writers, friends, daughters, problem solvers, athletes, caregivers, and loud-mouthed dissenters. How you respond to someone setting boundaries with you—and whether you give them the chance to—says so much more about you than whether someone wants to sleep with you.

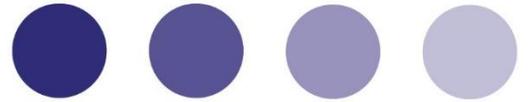
And if someone doesn't want to sleep with you, be grateful for their honesty, and move on to someone who does. Sex is 1000x better when everyone is into it anyway.



Note: For more on this topic and for personal accounts from boys, I highly recommend checking out Peggy Orenstein's article "[Boys Often Don't Recognize When They've Been Sexually Assaulted.](#)"

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### Sonia

I am the mother of two eighteen-year-old daughters with Autism Spectrum Disorder who attend the Boston Public Schools. Through their amazing experience of participating in just one IMPACT session, I was able to see first hand that the skills, training and scenarios really work. Seeing my daughters pick up the skills quickly, and re-enact each scenario to show what they learned was one of the most gratifying feelings I could have as a parent of young adults with intellectual disabilities.

It has been six months since that IMPACT session and my daughters have continued to use these real world strategies in many situations. Just last week while one of my daughters was standing in the checkout line at a store, someone spoke to her in what she felt was a threatening tone. She was able to speak up assertively, and came outside to the car and told me what happened. She later told her father. This was a direct result of the IMPACT training. She used an assertive voice in the uncomfortable situation, she told two people what happened, she described how it happened, and gave me a physical description of the person who had spoken to her in a threatening tone.

“ “ We were waiting to board a bus, and one of the people directly behind her was standing obviously too close. Before I could speak up for her, she spoke up for herself. ” ”

Another situation with my other daughter happened while we were working to train her to commute on public transportation. We were waiting to board a bus, and one of the people directly behind her was standing obviously too close. Before I could speak up for her, she spoke up for herself. She firmly said, “Please stop, you are too close to me”. The person was apologetic, and backed up. I knew that the IMPACT training was at work and she applied what she learned.

As a parent, I feel reassured that my daughters can learn how to handle challenging potentially unsafe situations. With just a small amount of training, they have been able to put IMPACT skills into practice in the real world. This program is IMPACTFUL, both to individuals with disabilities and to those who love them and want to keep them safe.