

# WHAT DOES VICTIM BLAMING LOOK LIKE?



Victim blaming refers to the tendency to hold the victim of a crime or harmful event responsible for what happened to them instead of holding the perpetrator accountable. This can manifest as suggesting the victim's actions, behavior, or decisions led to the harm they experienced. In the context of sexual violence, victim blaming often involves questioning the victim's actions (e.g., "What were you wearing?"), implying they could have prevented the harm, or downplaying the seriousness of their experience.

Victim blaming reinforces *harmful stereotypes* and prevents meaningful conversations about *accountability*.  
Have you heard any of these before?

“*“At least you weren't seriously hurt." or "It could've been worse." or "You should've known better."*

### Downplaying the Situation:

Dismissing the impact of what the victim has gone through.

“*“You shouldn't have been wearing that," or "Why didn't you just leave?" or "If you hadn't been out so late, this wouldn't have happened."*

### Judging the Victim's Behavior:

Implying the victim's actions caused the harm.

“*“You're overreacting," or "It's not that big a deal or "That's just how people are."*

### Invalidating the victim's feelings:

Telling the victim how they should feel or minimizing their experience.



This flyer was produced by Give An Hour, under [25EDR], awarded by the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants, Executive Office of the Mayor, District of Columbia. The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this flyer are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Executive Office of the Mayor.

SOURCES: Piquero, A. R., & Jennings, W. G. (2021). The role of victim blaming in sexual violence: A review of the literature and implications for the criminal justice system

## WHY IT MATTERS



### Emotional Impact

Victim blaming can have severe emotional and psychological effects on survivors, such as shame, self-doubt, and reluctance to seek help.



### Shifts Accountability

Victim blaming shifts accountability away from perpetrators, perpetuating a culture where harmful behavior goes unchecked.

## HOW TO ADDRESS IT

### Challenge Harmful Narratives:

When you hear victim-blaming comments, gently redirect the conversation to focus on the perpetrator's actions instead.

### Educate Others:

Share information about the impact of victim blaming to help change perspectives and encourage empathy.

### Support Survivors:

Offer affirming statements and listen without judgment to validate their experience.

## HELPFUL PHRASES TO USE

"I'm really sorry this happened to you."

"You didn't deserve this. No one does."

"I believe you, and I'm here to support you."

"Your feelings are completely valid."

"What happened wasn't your fault."