

# Dissolve

a documentary on drug facilitated sexual assault

## Discussion Guide



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## Introduction

The play Dissolve focuses on the very serious topics of *drink spiking* and *drug facilitated sexual assault*. It is meant to provoke thought about drug facilitated sexual assault and touches on many related issues, such as sexual assault myths, the impact of this violence, and the lack of knowledge that often surrounds it. This guide is meant to help further tease out important themes that were presented in the video in order to assist classroom education about drug facilitated sexual assault. This guide also includes guiding questions that can help stimulate classroom discussions on the issue, as well as some activities to promote engagement with the subject matter.

## How to use this guide

In discussing drink spiking and drug facilitated sexual assault, it is important to connect the information presented in the video and here to real life experiences that youth can draw from to help them use it in a way that promotes their safety. Each section begins with information about specific aspects of sexual assault and is followed by questions and/or proposed activities. The activities/discussion questions provided at the end of each section are based on the information provided within that section. As some information may look different based on the setting (i.e. resources available), the questions included are also meant to facilitate people applying this information to their specific contexts.

**Tips:** Remember, sexual assault is a very common experience. Many people have experienced this violence or have been impacted by it through survivors they have in their lives. Therefore, in facilitating classroom discussions, it is really important to create an atmosphere of respect and support. Determining ground rules *before* engaging in classroom discussions and activities related to the topic of violence can be very important. Also, having extra support staff available can be helpful tending to anyone who may become triggered.

## WHAT IS SEXUAL ASSAULT?

While many people use the words “rape” and “sexual assault” interchangeably, in 1983 the term “rape” was replaced by “sexual assault” in the Criminal Code of Canada. This change in terminology was made to recognize a range of unwanted sexual interactions often experienced, as well as to highlight the violent nature of the crime.

*Sexual assault* is any form of unwanted touching of a sexual nature. It can include unwanted kissing and grabbing, as well as forced intercourse and many other non-consensual experiences.

The law divides sexual assault into 3 Levels:

Level 1 – “Simple Sexual Assault” – involves unwanted sexual touching where no physical injury has occurred.

Level 2 – “Sexual Assault with a Weapon” – involves unwanted sexual touching in which the person who assaults uses (or threatens to use) a weapon or threatens to hurt someone else, such as a friend or a child, in order to facilitate the assault.

Level 3 – “Aggravated Sexual Assault” – involves the person who was assaulted being seriously wounded, maimed, brutally beaten, or in danger of dying as a result of a sexual assault.

## Consent

When courts are determining whether an assault has occurred (whether the sexual touching was unwanted), they look to whether *consent* was present. Legally, consent refers to voluntary agreement, conveyed verbally or nonverbally, to engage in sexual activity.

Contrary to what many people think, a person does not have to say “no” or “fight back” in order for their experience to be an assault legal (or felt as an assault). Silence is not considered consent. Thus, only “yes” means “yes”.

Legally, consent is not present:

1. If each person in the interaction does not express consent/agreement to engage in the sexual touching occurring. **Both people need to express consent verbally or through their actions. No one can give consent for another person.**
2. If a person, having initially consented to sexual activity, expresses verbally or through actions that they no longer want to engage in the sexual interaction/in a specific sexual activity. **Consent is ongoing and can be withdrawn any time.**
3. When a person in the interaction is in a position of authority, trust, or power over the other person (such as an adult with a minor; a teacher with a student; etc.). **Consent cannot be given if a person is being coerced, pressured, threatened, or bribed to engage in a sexual interaction/a specific sexual activity. Therefore, a person is free to change their mind any time if they become uncomfortable with a situation.**
4. If a person is incapable of giving consent (i.e. if they are intoxicated, passed out, sleeping, etc.). **Therefore, whether a person is drinking/taking drugs themselves or has their drink spiked unknowingly, they are not legally able to consent to sexual activity.**

## Understanding Sexual Assault Beyond the Law

Laws related to sexual assault and consent have changed over time. We also know that these legal definitions have large grey areas that are left to interpretation. For example, when is a person considered intoxicated? After one drink, two, three? Also, what is considered pressure when a person is trying to initiate sexual contact? What actions imply consent or that a person has withdrawn consent? Determining consent in some situations may be easier than in others. Therefore, while it can be helpful to know the legal definitions of sexual assault, it is also important to recognize that the law leaves a lot of room for interpretation and in cases of sexual assault it is often one

person's word against another. In the case of a drug facilitated sexual assault, the survivor often has little to no memory of what happened, which makes it difficult for them to both report their experience and receive justice.

Therefore, in understanding what has occurred, how sexual assault can impact a person, as well as how to support survivors, rather than focus on legal definitions, it is important to understand the dynamic underlying the experience: **sexual assault involves one person asserting their power over another person and using it in a way to control what happens to that person's body.** In effect, the person experiencing the assault often feels powerless to change the situation during their assault, as well as to control the negative effects they experience afterwards.

### **ACTIVITIES/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

Present legal definitions of sexual assault and consent. Brainstorm with the class situations in which consent cannot be legally given. Discussion question: What might be some problems with legal definitions of consent? Describe the underlying power dynamic involved in sexual assault to the class and ask for their impressions.

Main points to highlight during this exercise include:

- Legally, consent has many boundaries that are important to be aware of
- There are many grey areas within legal definitions of consent and it can be helpful to also understand sexual assault in terms of the power relations involved.
- Sexual assault is a violent act that is about power and control.

## **DRINK SPIKING AND DRUG FACILITATED SEXUAL ASSAULT**

*Drink spiking* occurs when someone (sometimes known to the person drink spiked, other times not known) slips a substance/drug into another person's drink without their knowledge. While the media often focuses on illegal drugs being added to alcoholic drinks, drink spiking also includes:

- adding alcohol to a non-alcoholic beverage
- adding more alcohol to a person's drink than they know about

Many other substances commonly found around households are also sometimes used to spike drinks.

*Drug facilitated sexual assault* occurs when a person engages in physical contact of a sexual nature with another person:

- after spiking that person's drink
- being aware that person's drink has been spiked by someone else
- knowing that person is intoxicated or passed out due to voluntarily ingesting drugs or alcohol