



## Safe Passage, INC.

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April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. This is a month where we hang teal ribbons, dust off our high heels to “stand with survivors”, and commit as a community to a future without violence. It is also a chance, as a business community, to reflect on the ways sexual abuse, sexual assault, and sexual harassment impact our workplaces.

The #MeToo movement was an awakening for many people into just how widespread issues of sexual harassment and abuse are in our organizations, businesses, and communities. From Hollywood to horticulture and hospitals to hotels, countless victims of harassment and abuse have shared their stories. This April is a chance to show that we’ve been listening. As business leaders and community leaders, we have the ability to set the tone for our town and build the kind of community we are proud of.

Active policies against sexual harassment are a good start, but even more important is a workplace culture of empathy, respect, and bystander intervention. Sexual harassment doesn’t happen because employees don’t realize it’s wrong. Sexual harassment happens because problem employees think they will get away with it and because the rest of us are too afraid, intimidated, or just not bothered enough to speak up.

We don’t want to wait until a lawsuit lands on the desk of HR. We want to be proactive about building strong organizational cultures that make it clear intolerance and inequality are unacceptable. When you hear an inappropriate joke being told over drinks at the office holiday party, speak up: “We don’t find that sort of thing funny here.” Is your female co-worker being paid less to do the same work you do? Offer to share your salary information so they can ask for the raise they deserve! Did a co-worker tell you that another employee is making them feel uncomfortable? Don’t shrug it off; let them know you believe them and you’re there to support them, if they need help reporting it.

The #MeToo movement wasn’t a witch hunt and it wasn’t the end of the ability to be helpful, fun, or friends in the workplace. It wasn’t even the end of being able to be romantically involved with your colleagues! What was it? #MeToo was a wake-up call that things weren’t and never have been equal. It was a reminder that we could all do more. It was an invitation to improve our business and our organizations by ensuring that all our employees could perform to their highest abilities without fear of harassment or assault. #MeToo was a clarion call for us all to speak up and speak out!

Sexual harassment isn’t just about a Hollywood bigshot and a “casting couch”, it’s also about the everyday interactions that send a message that someone is less safe, less valued, or less respected in the workplace. We’re not asking to change the world. We’re not asking to overturn “business as we know it.” We’re simply asking everyone to show empathy and put yourself in the shoes of your co-workers and employees.

This April, for Sexual Assault Awareness Month, it seems like a good time to listen, to reflect, and to remember, small changes can make a big difference. Speak out, speak up, and start by believing. Together we CAN end sexual harassment in our workplaces. Together, we can help everyone in the DeKalb community thrive!

