

NOVEMBER 2-21

IN-PERSON + ON-DEMAND!

BY **JOHN PATRICK SHANLEY**
DIRECTED BY **DAVID KENNEDY**

DOUBT

A PARABLE



A STUDY GUIDE

CREATED BY THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

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+ COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

[WESTPORTPLAYHOUSE.ORG/EDUCATION](https://westportplayhouse.org/education)

**WESTPORT
COUNTRY
PLAYHOUSE**

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WELCOME

Welcome to the Westport Country Playhouse 2021 production of *Doubt: A Parable* by John Patrick Shanley. It is our hope that this study guide enhances your experience before, during and after you view the production.

If other questions arise that are not answered in the guide, please feel free to reach out to us. We are here to make sure you have an enriching and positive experience at our theater, whether it is virtual or in-person. Email our Director of Education, **Jenny Nelson**, at jnelson@westportplayhouse.org and she'll be happy to answer your questions.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

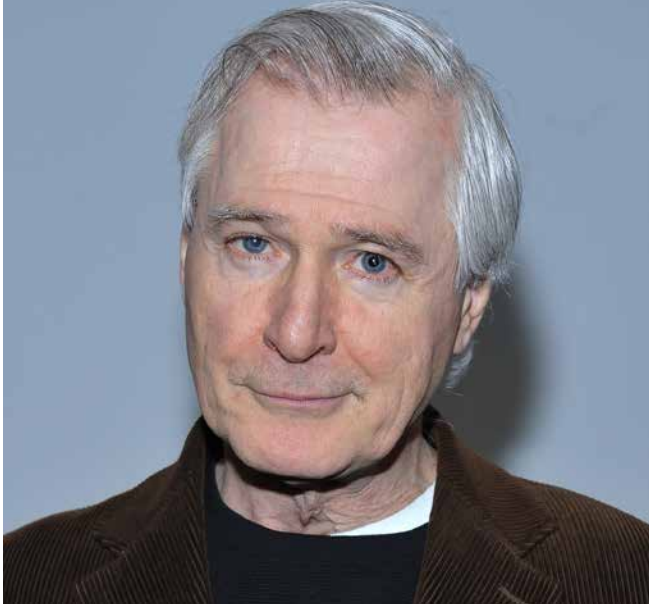
LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Westport Country Playhouse acknowledges the indigenous peoples and nations of the Paugussett and Wappinger that stewarded the land and waterways of Westport, Connecticut. We honor and respect the enduring relationship that exists between these peoples and nations and this land.

ANTI-RACISM STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

We resolve to place anti-racism at the center of our work. We are committed to holding ourselves accountable to short-and long-term goals, while realizing that this work has no endpoint and will evolve and change. We realize and acknowledge that this is an educational process for which we ourselves are responsible.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT JOHN PATRICK SHANLEY



In his youth, **JOHN PATRICK SHANLEY** felt like an outsider. To cope with his feelings of isolation, he cultivated his ability to listen and take in the world around him through close observation. In a 2004 interview with *The New York Times*, Shanley said of his childhood in the 1950s and 60s, “I was in constant fistfights from the time I was six. I did not particularly want to be. People would look at me and become enraged at the sight of me. I believe that the reason was they could see that I saw them. And they didn’t like that.” It was these very observations from his childhood that would become the foundation for some of the most popular, critically-acclaimed plays and movies of a generation.

Born in the Bronx, New York City in 1950, John was the youngest of five children. His father immigrated to the U.S. from Ireland at the age of 24 and worked as a meatpacker. His mother, a child of Irish immigrants, worked as a telephone operator. Shanley grew up in what could be described as a poor neighborhood that was often plagued with drugs and crime. After being expelled from St. Anthony’s Grammar School, he was sent to Thomas Moore Preparatory School, a private school with a Catholic orientation in Harrisville, New Hampshire.

There, he had several teachers that showed him kindness and much of *Doubt* is based on one particular teacher who was the head of discipline. The priest’s care and appreciation for Shanley’s writing inspired him to be a better student and pursue his writing as a career. In stark contrast to Shanley’s experience, one of his close relatives was abused by a priest in school, which also served as inspiration for the plot of *Doubt*.

Shanley attended New York University and graduated, as valedictorian, with a degree in Educational Theatre. Over the course of his 40-year career, he has written 25 plays to date and 9 films. His film *Moonstruck* won him an Academy Award for best screenplay and *Doubt* won both a Tony Award for best play and the Pulitzer Prize in Drama.

People would look at me and become enraged at the sight of me. I believe that the reason was they could see that I saw them. And they didn’t like that.

When describing Shanley’s work, Tony Kushner, author of *Angels in America*, said “What I admire most is that his plays are beautifully well-made, economical, sharp and coherent. I like the toughness of his writing a lot. He’s not a misanthrope, but he’s in pursuit of why people behave as badly as they do along with having a great compassion for them. That’s an unusual and interesting combination.” Through his writing and directing, Shanley continues to explore the human condition — our fears, our joys, our doubts. Ever the observer and always on the precipice of a new work that will both challenge and entertain audiences for years to come.

SOURCE: Witchel, Alex. “The Confessions of John Patrick Shanley” *The New York Times*, November 7, 2004

MEET THE CHARACTERS

FATHER BRENDAN FLYNN

Late thirties,
white man.

He is working-class,
from the Northeast.

SISTER ALOYSIUS BEAUVIER

A white woman in her
50s or 60s. She is
watchful, reserved,
and unsentimental.

She is from the
order of the Sisters
of Charity.

SISTER JAMES

A white woman in her 20s.
There's a bit of sunshine
in her heart, but she's
reserved as well.

MRS. MULLER

A Black woman;
about 38 years old.

Mother to Donald
Muller, a student
at St. Nicholas
Church School.

THE SISTERS OF CHARITY

In 1809, Elizabeth Ann Seton founded a Catholic religious congregation in Emmitsburg, MD that is today known as the Sisters of Charity. Primarily, the sisters aimed to serve the poor by providing education, although the order was responsive to community needs in its services. In 1814, Mother Seton sent three sisters to care for orphans after receiving a request from clergy in Philadelphia. In 1817, the Sisters of Charity answered a similar call from New York City to staff the Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum.

In 150 years of service, the Sisters of Charity of New York opened roughly 100 schools in New York, Pennsylvania, New England, and other areas. Their care of orphans and the sick, especially in response to public health crises, was an asset to the early community of New York City and significantly lowered prejudice against Catholics. They were involved in treating the Spanish Influenza, Titanic disaster victims, and those affected by 9/11.

The Sisters of Charity of New York have continued their traditional responsiveness to community needs during recent natural disasters. They have also provided care and services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and have been involved in calls for racial justice following increased attention to the deaths of Black Americans in 2020. Their dedicated service will likely impact those in need for generations to come.



Sr. Rose Maria Laverty before the first class of Elizabeth Seton College students, 1961.

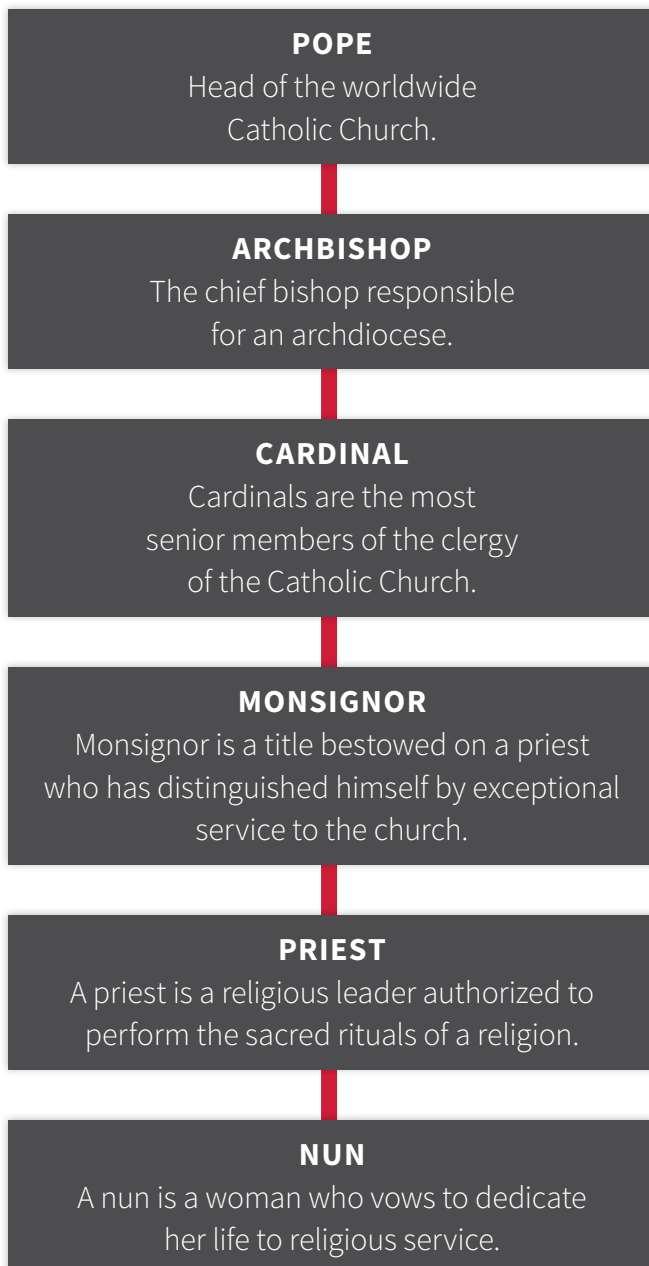


Portrait of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

CHURCH HIERARCHY

It's important to understand the **systems of power** within the Catholic church. The below chart illustrates these levels of hierarchy.

Note that the only role for women in the church is one with the least power relative to the others.



VOCABULARY + CONCEPTS IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Archdiocese

In church governance, a diocese or bishop is the ecclesiastical district under the jurisdiction of a bishop.

Laity

People of a religious faith.

Confession

Confession is the method of the Church by which individual men and women confess sins committed after baptism and have them absolved by God through the administration of a Priest. This sacrament is known by many names, including penance, reconciliation and confession.

Communion

Holy Communion is offered at every Mass, and in fact, the ritual of the Mass is largely taken up with preparing the hosts and wine to become the body and blood of Christ and the congregation to receive the body of Christ. Transubstantiation is the act of changing the substances of bread and wine into the substances of the Body and Blood of Christ.

Rectory

The residence of the priest in charge of a church or religious institution.

ACTIVITY

MOMENTS OF CHANGE

Break into small groups (4–5 people) and **discuss the following question.**

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Think of a time when something happened that changed your life forever, either positively or negatively.

Share with the group. If someone prefers not to share with the group, they can journal their answer.

Discuss for 15–20 minutes.

Once you’ve discussed as a small group, you can **return to the entire classroom and discuss as a larger group.** To ensure everyone’s safety in the room, please only share your own story/experience, not someone else’s experience (unless they request it). **Discuss as a class for 10–15 minutes.**

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

Other than you, who else was affected by this life event? What would be different about your life if that event didn’t happen?

WRITE YOUR ANSWER BELOW:

MOMENTS OF CHANGE IN U.S. HISTORY

Now that you've discussed your own moment of change in the previous activity, let's explore some pivotal moments of change throughout U.S. History. Our play is set in the Bronx, New York City in 1964. This year experienced several changes that altered the course of history.

Below is an outline of events that are considered to be pivotal moments in U.S. history. For each event, explore/research the effects of that event. **What changes occurred? How did the country react to the change(s)? Did the country become divided or aligned due to the change?**

Also, **explore how the concept of *doubt* plays into these pivotal moments.** It is moments like these where previously held assumptions may be challenged, and we start to question our beliefs. Here are some sites you may use in your research:

PBS Learning Media: <https://cptv.pbslearningmedia.org>

Smithsonian Institution: <https://www.si.edu>

American Historical Society: <https://www.historians.org>

Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov>

NOTE: Primary sources are always a good way to get a firsthand perspective of an event. Ask your friends or family about the events they witnessed and what they experienced. Feel free to notate your primary source information in the "Effects" section.

PIVOTAL EVENT



NOVEMBER 22, 1963

Assasination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy

EFFECTS:

PIVOTAL EVENT



JULY 2, 1964

Passage of Civil Rights Act

EFFECTS:

U.S. Embassy New Delhi / Flickr CC

ACTIVITY: MOMENTS OF CHANGE IN U.S. HISTORY CONT'D

PIVOTAL EVENT



SEPTEMBER 11, 2001
Attack on the World Trade Center

EFFECTS:

PIVOTAL EVENT



MAY 25, 2020
Murder of George Floyd

EFFECTS:

PIVOTAL EVENT



FEBRUARY 2020 – PRESENT
COVID-19 Pandemic

EFFECTS:

THE ABUSE SCANDAL IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Doubt deals with the sensitive issue of child abuse within the Catholic Church. To give a clearer picture of the history of abuse allegations in recent history, we've provided a timeline of pivotal events.

1950s

One of the **first documented cases of abuse** by priests in France. A recently released inquiry found some **216,000 possible victims** of French clergy dating back to 1950.

1985

Abuse by priests becomes a national issue in the United States for the first time, as Louisiana priest **Gilbert Gauthé** pleads guilty to 11 counts of abusing boys.

1989

The **Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests**, known as SNAP, established in 1989, is a non-profit organization support group of survivors of clergy abuse and their supporters in the United States.

2001

The **Vatican first required that abuse cases be reported to the Vatican hierarchy**. Before this, the Vatican had left management of the cases to local dioceses.

2002

The **Boston Globe reported that cases of abuse were widespread** in the Church in Massachusetts (as well as elsewhere across the globe).

2002

The Archbishop of Boston, **Cardinal Bernard Francis Law**, resigns amidst the abuse allegations unearthed by The Boston Globe. In 2004, Pope John Paul II appointed Cardinal Law to a post in Rome, as Archpriest of the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore where he spent the remainder of his life, until his death in 2017.

2013

According to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office of Child and Youth Protection and independent studies commissioned by the bishops, in the United States, there have been:

- More than **6,800 accused priests** since 1950
- More than **16,000 victims** identified to date
- **\$2.5 billion** in settlements, therapy bills for victims, attorney's fees, and costs to care for priests pulled out of ministry from 2004–2011

2019

A Catholic Church summit meeting was held in Vatican City, called the Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church. On March 26, 2019, one month after the summit was held, Pope Francis adopted:

- **Vatican Law No. CCXCVII** on the protection of minors and vulnerable persons
- The **Motu Proprio** on the protection of minors and vulnerable persons
- The **Guidelines of the Vicariate of Vatican City** on the protection of minors and vulnerable persons

2021

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has criticized the Vatican, referring to persistent allegations that the Catholic Church had **obstructed and failed to cooperate with domestic judicial proceedings** in order to prevent accountability for abusers and compensation for victims.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR DAVID KENNEDY

David Kennedy is the Associate Artistic Director at Westport Country Playhouse and the director of our production of *Doubt*. He spoke with our Director of Education Jenny Nelson about why this play, why now, and why what lies beneath the surface is often more important than we think.

JENNY NELSON: Why did the Playhouse select this play?

DAVID KENNEDY: Mark [Playhouse Artistic Director Mark Lamos] was talking to a friend of his who'd seen a production of *Doubt* recently and remarked on what an experience it was for the audience, how thrilling a night of theatre it was, and how much dialogue it provoked. So, he quickly re-read it and then recommended I do the same. I knew the play, of course, but had never actually seen it. I was bowled over by how fresh it seemed. The issues that Shanley explores — what it means to live in a society of extreme confrontation and advocacy that leaves little space for nuance, self-questioning, or doubt—are even more relevant today than 16 years ago. Mark felt strongly that we had to do it, and I felt the same.

JN: What is a director's concept?

DK: A **concept** is a word for the director's point of view. The director intuitively knows what the story of the play is about and how that can and will be expressed using all the production elements — scenery, costumes, light, sound, staging, acting choices, etc.

A director spends a lot of time thinking about how each choice will impact an audience's experience and understanding of the play. The purpose of all of those choices is to reveal a point of view. But it's an extremely collaborative process. Ultimately, it's the director's job to interpret the play and the designers sort of interpret the director's interpretation, which is always exciting.

JN: What is your concept for this production?

DK: We took the idea of a **parable** (Shanley's full title for the play is *Doubt: A Parable*) as the starting point. What is a parable? The dictionary says it's a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson. That's one way of looking at a parable. Another comes from Franz Kafka, a writer I love, for whom a parable must contain an irresolvable paradox. It can be a small story which seems as if it wants to point its way to a moral lesson, but whose lesson is obscured or even incomprehensible. A riddle of sorts.

I think this play might be described according to both of those definitions. But one thing that's true regardless of the definition is that the purpose of a parable is to point to something else. The simple story is not to be understood solely as what it is, but you look *through* it to its larger implications. Jesus was always doing this in the gospels, which is clearly why Shanley chose the word.

The simple story is not to be understood solely as what it is, but you look *through* it to its larger implications.

So we asked ourselves: How do we make a production that both tells the story, but also reveals something else behind the story? We knew right away that at the very least that meant dispensing with a realistic approach. We needed to reveal the actor as a storyteller, call attention to the story being told as a deliberate act, strip away realistic surfaces, etc., all so audiences would remember that they're in a theatre watching actors enact a story. The rest of the choices we made flowed from that one idea.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR DAVID KENNEDY CONT'D

JN: Were there any particular current events, books, music, etc. that inspired your concept?

DK: My influences on this production were rather disparate, but among the most important were Lars von Trier's 2002 film *Dogville*, which inspired the idea that a parable can be told in the most bare bones way. And there's an extraordinary installation by the sculptor Robert Gober called *Untitled (1995–1997)* that depicts the Virgin Mary with a large sewer pipe running through the middle of her torso. It's the most remarkable mixture of the sacred and the profane, which of course I felt was something we had to bring to this play since it's a religious parable that's also ultimately about our secular world.

And finally, *Our Fathers*, David France's first-rate account of the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church, was instrumental in helping me understand the culture and psychology of the Church in the mid 1960s, when the play takes place.

JN: How does the production design (set, costumes, sound and lighting) play a role in supporting your concept?

DK: The language of design is among the most important elements in bringing the vision of the play to life. Whether there are realistic environs, walls and doors and such, or as in this production simply a platform suspended in an empty theatre, scenic design does much of the work to situate the production, convey its meaning. Same with the clothes, lights, and sound. It's almost always design that brings a production concept to life.

JN: Is there anything you'd like to add that might enhance the audience's experience?

DK: Enjoy the uncertainty of it. Shanley is very crafty about how little he gives the audience to hold onto. That's by design. That doesn't mean you won't have opinions after you've seen it — you'll definitely have opinions — but know that, as Shanley says in the published introduction to the play: "There is no last word."

BEFORE YOU WATCH

1. Watch this clip about how the **Civil Rights Act of 1964** changed America:
<https://cptv.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/amex26-soc-64ntcivilact/1964-the-importance-of-the-civil-rights-act>
2. Take a look at these **flyers from the 1963 March on Washington**:
<https://cptv.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/iml04.soc.ush.civil.mowfly/march-on-washington-flyers>
3. Listen to this playlist of **Peace Songs of the 1960s**
<https://folkways.si.edu/peace-songs-of-the-1960s/music/playlist/smithsonian>
4. Listen to this playlist of **Sounds of the Civil Rights Movement**
<https://folkways.si.edu/sounds-of-the-civil-rights-movement/music/playlist/smithsonian>
5. Clip about **The Beatles** in 1964
<https://cptv.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/amex26-soc-64beatles/1964-the-beatles>
6. Read and discuss the **preface** to the play (published in March 2005)
[See pages 5–7 of the enclosed script]
7. **What is a parable?** Discuss the meaning of this word and how it might relate to the play.
8. Pause the video at the top and **look at the setting**. Before the action begins, what do you see on the stage? How does it make you feel? Where might the setting be located? Can you tell what time of day or year it is based on the set and lighting? Does the set seem abstract or realistic? The definition of abstract is a set that does not attempt to represent reality, but seeks to achieve its effect using shapes, forms, colors, and textures. The definition of a realistic set design (or realism) is a set that attempts to reflect a concrete world as close to real life as possible.

AFTER YOU WATCH

1. Investigate and discuss the following **themes** in the play:

POWER AND ACCOUNTABILITY
DOUBT AND UNCERTAINTY
TRADITION VS. CHANGE
LOSS OF INNOCENCE

► *Can you think of any other themes in the play?*

2. Investigate and discuss the following **symbols** in the play:

BALLPOINT PENS
SUGAR
CROW
BLINDNESS
FATHER FLYNN'S LONG FINGERNAILS
STORMY WEATHER

► *Can you think of any other symbols in the play?*

3. In 1962, the Vatican created The Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, commonly known as Vatican II, to address relations between the Catholic Church and the modern world. The intention was to help the Catholic Church connect with the people more fully and create a more accessible form of the religion. **Locate examples in the play of ways that Father Flynn utilizes the new method of the Vatican II. How does Sister Aloysius react to the qualities of Vatican II?**
4. Why doesn't Sister Aloysius **go to the police** to report her allegations against Father Flynn?
5. How is **the parable device** utilized in the play? What might be the larger implications of the plot in relation to society?
6. List and discuss **each character's doubt(s)** and if they are resolved by the end of the play.
7. What is Sister Aloysius referring to when she exclaims at the end of the play **"I have doubts! I have such doubts!"**
8. The set was configured to show both backstage and on-stage during the performance. In your opinion, what was the **effect of seeing "behind the scenes"** on stage?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

► CREATE YOUR OWN PARABLE

Brainstorm as a class (or in small groups) a story that has a higher “moral” lesson. To activate the parable, **write the story in script form and share it as a short play.**

► HIERARCHY ACTIVITY

Print and cut out the cards on the next page. Make several for each position so you have enough for each student to have one card.

INSTRUCTIONS

Pick a card without looking at the name and have your teacher tape it to your forehead.

Once everyone has a card, walk around the room and talk with one another.

Try to figure out your position by the way people react and treat you (without saying each other’s position.)

If you are a bishop/archbishop, people may bow to you or treat you very respectfully. If you are a nun (one of the lowest on the hierarchy of the Catholic Church), they may not treat you with respect or they may tell you what to do.

Walk around for 5 or so minutes, then stop the action and try to guess your position.

Feel free to do multiple rounds until everyone guesses their position.

After everyone has discovered their position, reflect as a class how you felt while you were walking around the group. **How did it feel to be treated poorly or reverently? Why do we have hierarchies in religious institutions? What purpose(s) might they serve?**

HIERARCHY CARDS

PRIEST

BISHOP

NUN

ARCHBISHOP

POPE

LAITY

CARDINAL

Print and cut out the
cards on this page.

Make several
for each position
so you have enough
for each student
to have a card.

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

Learn more about playwright John Patrick Shanley

<https://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/07/magazine/the-confessions-of-john-patrick-shanley.html>

John Patrick Shanley's Filmography

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0788234/>

History of the Catholic Church in the United States

<https://www.usccb.org/offices/public-affairs/history-catholic-church-united-states>

IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS BEING ABUSED OR HAS BEEN IMPACTED BY ABUSE:

Survivors Network for those Abused by Priests (SNAP)

SNAP is the largest, oldest and most active support group for women and men wounded by religious and institutional authorities (priests, ministers, bishops, deacons, nuns, coaches, teachers, and others).

<https://www.snapnetwork.org>

Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN)

RAINN is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. RAINN created and operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline (800-656-HOPE) in partnership with more than 1,000 local sexual assault service providers across the country and operates the DoD Safe Helpline for the Department of Defense. RAINN also carries out programs to prevent sexual violence, help survivors, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

<https://www.rainn.org>

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)

This unique network of frontline providers, family members, researchers, and national partners is committed to changing the course of children's lives by improving their care and moving scientific gains quickly into practice across the U.S.

<https://www.nctsn.org>

United Way 211

The United Way supports 211, a free and confidential service that helps people across North America find the local resources they need 24/7.

<https://uwc.211ct.org/sexual-assault>