

A Reading Group Guide to

***I Have the Right To: A High School Survivor's Story of Sexual Assault, Justice, and Hope***  
**By Chessy Prout and Jenn Abelson**

**About the Book**

The numbers are staggering: nearly one in five girls ages fourteen to seventeen have been the victim of a sexual assault or attempted sexual assault. In 2014, Chessy Prout was a freshman at St. Paul's School, a prestigious boarding school in New Hampshire, when a senior boy sexually assaulted her as part of a ritualized game of conquest. Chessy bravely reported her assault to the police and testified against her attacker in court. Then, in the face of unexpected backlash from her once-trusted school community, she shed her anonymity to help other survivors find their voice. This gutwrenching memoir is more than an account of a horrific event; it takes a magnifying glass to the institutions that turn a blind eye to such behavior and a society that blames victims rather than perpetrators. Chessy's story offers real, powerful solutions to upend rape culture as we know it today. Prepare to be inspired by this remarkable young woman and her story of survival, advocacy, and hope in the face of unspeakable trauma.

**Discussion Questions/Writing Prompts**

These questions can be used as targeted questions for discussion and reflection or, alternatively, they can be used as writing prompts.

1. In the introduction by U.S. Congress member Ann McLane Kuster, Kuster suggests we are at a cultural tipping point in regard to sexual violence against women and the often unstated expectation that survivors remain silent. She goes on to ask the critical question: "What are we going to do about it?" How does Kuster's admission of her own personal experience as a survivor of sexual assault frame Chessy's story? What can readers gain from this knowledge in better understanding the scope of sexual assault?
2. Kuster encourages Chessy and all survivors to "rock the boat." What do you believe she hopes they will do? Why is this action so important? In your opinion, in what ways does Chessy accomplish this?
3. In the prologue, Chessy provides readers with an overview of her experiences on the night she was sexually assaulted, and closes with the advice given to her by Dr. G., who tells her, "Call your mother. How you handle this will inform the rest of your life." How does Chessy's choice to reach out to her family ultimately change the course of her life?
4. From your initial introduction to Chessy as the book opens, what are some of your impressions about her as a young teen? In what ways is her life similar to your own? How is it different?
5. Early in the book, Chessy shares her memories of growing up in Japan, including the earthquake and its aftermath that eventually causes her family's move back to the United States. How does her life there seem different than what she experiences in Florida and eventually at St. Paul's?

6. *I Have the Right To* is a memoir told in first person. Do you think if anyone besides Chessy were telling her story, the reader would have the same type of experience? In what ways does reading a memoir impact you as a person? Does knowing that Chessy's story is real make the experience more poignant?
7. How does Chessy's father's experiences at St. Paul's initially frame Chessy's opinions about the school? Why does learning that a stark contrast exists between expectations and the reality of the climate and culture at St. Paul's prove to be difficult and painful to both Chessy and her family?
8. Chessy states, "Tabitha said she refused to be used by anyone ever again. She tried to make sure I didn't either by calling me on my bullshit . . ." Do you believe Tabitha's attitude and willingness to share her struggles with self-harm, anxiety, and overcoming sexual assault ultimately help Chessy? If so, in what ways?
9. After hearing details of the events with Owen, Buzz tells her mother, "Susan . . . that sounds like rape." Why does hearing this declaration impact Chessy so strongly? In what ways does Buzz help her understand what has actually happened? Do you believe Buzz proves herself to be an important supporter for Chessy during this time?
10. In what ways is Chessy's relationship with Lucy typical for two sisters? Though Lucy struggles to deal with Chessy's assault, what are some of the ways she ultimately shows she is an advocate for Chessy and other survivors?
11. Discuss St. Paul's tradition of the Senior Salute and "slaying." What about it did you find most disturbing? How does this impact your understanding of the idea of tradition? In your opinion, what are the best ways to defend against these types of misogynistic behaviors?
12. Other female students suggest that Chessy is attention-seeking when speaking about what happened to her. Why do you think this kind of attitude toward those who bring awareness to being victims of rape and sexual assault is often prevalent?
13. Though some girls admitted to knowing Owen was a predator, why did so many girls choose not to believe Chessy after she came forward about being sexually assaulted?
14. Chessy states, "Dad was my hero. He had literally dropped everything and risked his career to make sure I was supported and protected each and every day." Why is having the support of her father and the rest of her family so critical to Chessy? Why can this battle be so difficult for survivors without family support systems? What advice would you offer to those who are suffering?
15. In *I Have the Right To*, fear both incapacitates and motivates Chessy and her family. Consider how each one deals with these emotions. In what ways do they acknowledge them? How are they able to turn to others for help? What are the consequences of their reactions?

16. How does learning that the parents of other St. Paul's students raised money for Owen's defense impact Chessy? What was your reaction to this knowledge?
17. Do you think Chessy's experience is a unique one? Why might it take someone time to understand what's happened to them? Why does Chessy refuse to be seen as a powerless victim?
18. Examine and discuss the significance of St. Paul's faculty and leadership in perpetuating a toxic culture at their school. In your opinion, why would adults supposedly committed to the education and well-being of children choose to behave this way?
19. Given what you've learned in *I Have the Right To*, what elements about the criminal trial against Owen and the aftermath surprised you the most?
20. Regarding her mother, Chessy states, "She assumed that her daughters would be treated equally at St. Paul's, that our bodies and voices would be respected. She'd never imagined that the most dangerous thing she could ever do was send us to boarding school." How does Chessy's mother ultimately deal with the gravity of what has happened to her daughter and her family? In what ways does her effort to help her girls state their rights impact each of them?
21. Discuss Chessy and her #IHaveTheRightTo movement. How does this hashtag become a catalyst for change within the framework of schools and communities, as well as with the survivors themselves? Do you think participants are better off for having joined forces instead of choosing silence, advocating for themselves as part of the team of survivors who speak up and out?
22. How does Chessy's work with PAVE help her continue to find her voice and use it as an instrument of empowerment and good for all those battling to survive sexual assault?
23. Thinking about what you've learned from Chessy and her family's experiences in *I Have the Right To*, what advice would you give to young women and men facing similar situations?
24. Explain the significance of the title, *I Have the Right To*. In what ways does it accurately describe the events and relationships portrayed in this memoir?
25. Using the phrase "This is a story about . . . ," supply five words to describe *I Have the Right To*. Explain your choices.

### **Extension Activities**

1. Empowering sexual assault survivors to stand up for themselves and each other is a hallmark of *I Have the Right To*. Can you think of other rights, causes, or issues to which you could apply the phrase "I Have the Right To" in order to assert your rights and your vision for a more just community or world?

2. Using the Internet and databases available from the library, research survivor-related organizations, clubs, and societies, especially those that are organized by teens. What are the biggest benefits of such organizations? What are the particular challenges faced by organizers? If you were to engage in a similar activity, what information from both your research and Chessy's memoir would you utilize to help guide your work?

3. Organize a group and watch one of the documentaries noted in the Resources section of *I Have the Right To*. After watching, discuss what was learned from the film and focus on what can be done to further help others in need. What would your next steps be? How would you convey to others the importance of speaking up and sharing stories?

4. The #MeToo movement has also empowered sexual assault survivors to speak up and out regarding their experiences. Using the hashtag as a search term, investigate specific ways this platform shares similar efforts and results with the IHaveTheRightTo campaign.

5. Create a campaign slogan and logos for a support group like Chessy's. Alternatively, use a variety of mediums to create an original piece of artwork that is symbolic of one of the major themes of *I Have the Right To*.

6. While what Chessy shares in *I Have the Right To* is her personal journey through the experience of sexual assault, her story is sadly not a unique one; similar events have happened in schools and universities across our country. Investigate other court cases where teen or young adult perpetrators have gone to trial for sexual assault crimes. What are the common themes in these cases? After your research, write a reflection of what you've learned and your response to this knowledge.

7. There are a number of national and local resources that can help provide support to rape victims and their families. Select one of the organizations from the resource list below and learn more about the services provided by considering the following questions:

- Who runs this organization?
- How long has it been in operation?
- How is it funded?
- What are the stated goals?
- What do they offer those in need of assistance?

## **Resources:**

### **Hotline Support for Survivors**

National Sexual Assault Hotline:

1-800-656-HOPE and [online.rainn.org](http://online.rainn.org)

En español: [rainn.org/es](http://rainn.org/es)

National Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-422-4453 and [childhelp.org](http://childhelp.org)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255 and [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

### **Loved Ones of Survivors**

Paving the Way for Parents: [pavingthewayforparents.org](http://pavingthewayforparents.org)

### **Teen-Dating Violence**

Love Is Respect: 1-866-331-9474/ Text “loveis” to 22522 and [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org)

Break the Cycle: [breakthecycle.org](http://breakthecycle.org)

Join One Love: [joinonelove.org](http://joinonelove.org)

### **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual**

The Anti-Violence Project: 1-212-714-1141 [avp.org](http://avp.org)

LGBT National Youth Talkline: Hotline 1-800-246-PRIDE (7743) and [glbthotline.org/chat.html](http://glbthotline.org/chat.html)

Gay Men’s Domestic Violence Project: 1-800-832-1901

The Network La Red: 1-800-832-1901 and [tnlr.org](http://tnlr.org)

### **Transgender Survivors and Loved Ones**

Forge: 414-559-2123 and [forge-forward.org](http://forge-forward.org)

### **Male Survivors**

1in6: Online chat support and peer support group: [1in6.org](http://1in6.org)

Male Survivor: [malesurvivor.org](http://malesurvivor.org)

### **School Sexual Assault**

Stop Sexual Assault in Schools: [www.ssais.org](http://www.ssais.org)

### **Military Sexual Assault**

Safe Helpline: 1-877-995-5247 and [safehelpline.org](http://safehelpline.org)

Protect Our Defenders: [protectourdefenders.com](http://protectourdefenders.com)

### **Domestic Violence**

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 and [ndvh.org](http://ndvh.org)

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence State Coalitions: [ncadv.org/stay-connected/state-coalitions](http://ncadv.org/stay-connected/state-coalitions)

### **Criminal Justice**

SurvJustice: 202-869-0699 or [survjustice.org](http://survjustice.org)

National Crime Victim Law Institute: [ncvli@lclark.edu](mailto:ncvli@lclark.edu) or

[https://law.lclark.edu/centers/national\\_crime\\_victim\\_law\\_institute/about\\_ncvli/](https://law.lclark.edu/centers/national_crime_victim_law_institute/about_ncvli/)

It Happened to Alexa Foundation: [ithappenedtoalexa.org](http://ithappenedtoalexa.org)

Office of Victim Services: [www.jud.ct.gov/Publications/vs030.pdf](http://www.jud.ct.gov/Publications/vs030.pdf)

### **Activism**

Promoting Awareness/Victim Empowerment: [shatteringthesilence.org](http://shatteringthesilence.org)

It’s On Us: [itsonus.org](http://itsonus.org)

No More: [nomore.org](http://nomore.org)

Survivor Love Letter: [survivorloveletter.tumblr.com](http://survivorloveletter.tumblr.com)

Joyful Heart Foundation: [joyfulheartfoundation.org](http://joyfulheartfoundation.org)

### **Engaging Boys and Men to End Sexual Assault**

ReThink: [we-rethink.org](http://we-rethink.org)

Men Can Stop Rape: [mencanstoprape.org](http://mencanstoprape.org)

Consent Is Campaign: [consentis.org](http://consentis.org)

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