Exhibit Content Outline for Adults
Visiting with Children 12 and Under

Note: This exhibition contains explicit material that may be challenging for younger visitors and may be disturbing or triggering for other visitors. Please exercise judgment in deciding whether to enter the gallery or bring others into this space. Visitors are welcome to exit the exhibit at any time.

Before Entering the Exhibit
Please review the ideas below for yourself and with your child/children before entering the exhibit.

What is sexual assault? Building on the "Consent" activities in the lobby, explain the basic definition of sexual assault. When someone harms your body on purpose, that is called assault. "Sexual assault" is sexual contact that perpetrators choose to make without the victim's consent. This can include things like someone touching people in private areas or asking someone to touch them. Kids can't consent to anything sexual because they are not old enough. Sexual assault is very serious. People often don’t feel comfortable talking about sexual assault, which makes it harder to discuss it with someone else. Remember, no matter what, sexual assault is NEVER the victim’s fault.

What is a survivor? People who have experienced sexual assault sometimes refer to themselves as "survivors," because they have lived through a very difficult experience. Many choose to refer to themselves as "victims" until they feel they have healed enough to identify as survivors. People who support survivors are called "allies."

What is this exhibit about? A group of sexual assault survivors called the "Sister Survivors" wanted to tell their stories. They worked with the MSU Museum to let their voices be heard. Their goal is to help everyone understand how to prevent things like this from happening again and help people heal. Most important, they want to remind every survivor that they are not alone. It's a story about people dealing with something very difficult and supporting each other.

Please use the exhibit outline below to decide which areas of the exhibit you will experience with your child/children. The words in italics show suggested ways you can explain the content to children. Sections marked with “*” include descriptions of abuse or trauma.

Front of Gallery (Sections 1-4)

*1. Something Happened: Talks about the more than 20 years of abuse committed by the doctor working at/with MSU, USA Gymnastics, and the U.S. Olympic team. The abuse was inflicted on children as young as six years old. [A doctor sexually abused his patients. The patients were kids. It’s important for kids to know what sexual abuse is and what to do if it happens. It’s also important to remember abuse is never the victim’s fault.]

2. Institutional Failures: Talks about the lack of oversight, people who knew and did not act, and lack of proper follow-up at Michigan State University and other places that allowed the sexual abuse to
continue without consequence. [Sometimes, people don’t do the right thing when sexual abuse happens. The right thing to do is report it to a trusted adult. Also, people need to believe it when people report sexual abuse. Some people at MSU and other places didn’t do the right thing.]

3. Speaking Out and Demanding Truth: The Sister Survivors show the power of speaking out about sexual assault and abuse in general. Describes the initial media coverage and legal suits from 2016. This public information helped survivors to realize they were not alone. Includes quotes from survivors’ public statements during the sentencing phase of the perpetrator’s trials. [When the Sister Survivors told about the abuse and were believed, the truth came out. News stories were written. The doctor went to trial for what he did and was found guilty. Many survivors felt stronger after all this happened because they knew they weren’t alone.]

4. Words Matter: How people discuss sexual assault and survivors matters. Some MSU alumni and fans have chosen not to wear Spartan items until the university changes the way it uses language to describe abuse, works more effectively to help prevent abuse, and reforms institutional practices. [People’s words can help or hurt. Some people said things that made the Sister Survivors feel bad about what happened. Some people did not believe them. People who believe MSU did not handle the abuse situation in the right way sometimes don’t feel good about wearing MSU items.]

Back of Gallery (Sections 5-11)

5. Sexual Violence by the Numbers: Shows statistics about sexual assault in the United States [Abuse can happen to anyone. That is why it is important to know what sexual abuse is and to remember abuse is never the victim’s fault.]

6. Trees as Witnesses: Tells the story of the teal bows and ribbons tied to more than 200 trees on the campus of MSU. Each ribbon honored the heroism of a Sister Survivor, with either her name or victim number (for those who chose not to have their names be public). [The Sister Survivors families made ribbons and bows in teal color. They wrote the Sister Survivors’ names on the ribbons and tied them on trees all around the MSU Campus. The ribbons helped people think about supporting survivors.]

7. Transformations: Many Sister Survivors are working to transform themselves and the institutions and systems around us. They also cope with life’s stresses in their private lives as they deal with hardship that was not their fault. [The Sister Survivors’ lives have changed a lot. Many are now well known for speaking out. They still have to deal with everyday life too. That can be hard. They are trying to be part of a better future for everyone. Life can get better. The butterflies remind us of this change.]

8. Advocacy and Activism: Many Sister Survivors work to educate the public, fight for legislative and administrative changes at MSU and elsewhere, and create a better world. [Many Sister Survivors help teach people about stopping sexual assault. They want to make sure more people don’t get hurt. New laws and rules can help.]

9. Global Efforts: The Sister Survivors’ struggle is part of a larger social movement (such as #MeToo and It’s On Us) in the fight against sexual violence and for human dignity worldwide. [Abuse can happen anywhere in the world. We can all work together to fight abuse and make sure all people feel safe and valued.]

Michigan State University Museum Education Team, 2019
10. Be an Ally: Each one of us can offer support - by being an ally or through self-care - and join in the struggle against sexual violence. [Being a friend and helping people who need it is called being an “ally.” You can be an ally to by being a good listener, believing, and encouraging people to get the help they need. Do you know someone you can be an ally to?]

11. It’s Not Over: Many survivors say they have both good days and bad days, which is normal. Coping and healing take time, support, and self-care. This section includes discussion of potential long-term impacts of this kind of violence on survivors of these experiences. [Feeling better after abuse happens can take a long time. People need a lot of support and care. There is hope for everyone.]

Resources Available in the Exhibit

- Publications about recognizing signs of sexual abuse and trauma
- Sexual assault hotline numbers
- Information about organizations that provide support and services for survivors
- Information about how to respond when someone discloses abuse