



Sexual Violence

What Everyone Should Know



AMERICAN
COLLEGE
HEALTH
ASSOCIATION

Sexual violence is a form of sexual harassment that includes physical sexual acts perpetrated against a person when they have not given consent or are unable to give consent due to the use of drugs and/or alcohol or an intellectual or physical disability. Sexual violence includes a spectrum of behaviors such as rape, sexual assault, sexual battery, and sexual coercion.

Sexual violence is an act of power and control. It can happen anywhere, at any time, and to anyone, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, or culture. And it is often committed by someone known to the victim/survivor—a partner, acquaintance, or friend.

Consent

Sexual activity requires consent.

- Consent consists of mutually understandable words and/or actions that indicate that an individual has freely chosen to engage in sexual activity. In the absence of such words and/or actions, consent does not exist.
- Consent may not be inferred from silence, passivity, lack of physical resistance, or lack of verbal refusal alone. Consent should not be inferred from the absence of a “no.”
- Consent to one form of sexual activity does not automatically imply consent to other forms of sexual activity, and previous relationships or prior consent does not imply consent to future sexual acts.
- Consent cannot be obtained by force, threat of force, or coercion. Agreement given under such conditions does not constitute consent.
- An individual who is incapacitated (including due to the use of alcohol and/or other drugs) is unable to give consent.
- Consent must exist from the beginning to end of each instance of sexual activity, and for each form of sexual contact.
- Consent may be withdrawn by either party at any time.

Communicate Effectively

Healthy sexual relations involve respectful communication. Communication involves attention to words and/or actions. Some things to remember are:

- Silence is **not** consent.
- Coerced sex is not consensual sex.
- If you hear someone pressuring another, speak up and intervene.
- If you are unsure of a partner’s messages or feel like you are getting mixed signals, stop and clarify.
- Attention to non-verbal language is very important.
- Never assume you know what someone wants. Ask them instead.
- Encourage respect of other people’s desires and sexual boundaries.

Sexual Violence Affects Everyone

Sexual violence impacts everyone in a community. Bystander intervention is an opportunity for community members to change the culture on campuses by demonstrating an intolerance for sexual violence. The more active bystander intervention within a community, the less likely it is for violence to occur. Bystanders have the power to make a difference.

What Bystanders Can Do

The following are some ways you can get involved as a bystander:

- Have a conversation with friends about sexual violence.
- Use your classroom as an opportunity to talk about sexual violence.
- Let others know that jokes that promote sexism or violence are not funny and are unacceptable.
- Organize a seminar on sexual violence for your residence hall or student group.
- Call out behaviors that perpetuate sexism and violence.
- Be proactive and respond when you see a friend or someone else in a vulnerable situation that might result in sexual violence.
- Volunteer at a rape crisis center or join a student organization that speaks out against sexual assault.
- Diffuse a potentially dangerous situation by intervening in a safe manner.
- Call the police if you see a potentially dangerous situation.

What You Can Do If You Experience Sexual Violence

- If possible, go to a safe place.
- Seek medical attention at your campus health center or a hospital. A sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) or other provider may be available in your area to provide a forensic medical exam (sometimes called a “rape kit”) to collect potential evidence.
- Do your best to avoid showering, bathing, cleansing, eating, drinking, going to the bathroom, or brushing your teeth after the assault so that evidence may be more likely to be present upon exam.
- Preserve all physical evidence, such as clothing and bedding. If you bag it, use paper, not plastic—plastic bags could potentially destroy DNA evidence by trapping moisture within the bag.
- Call someone you trust.
- Contact your campus violence resource center or local rape crisis center (contact the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE [4673] or www.rainn.org).
- Consult a health care provider about appropriate preventative (prophylactic) medications for possible exposure to sexually transmitted infections.

- If there is a need or desire, seek emergency contraception at the campus health center, hospital, or a local pharmacist. Some forms of emergency contraception are available over the counter. Consult with a health care provider or pharmacist regarding your options and see the resources listed in this brochure for help.
- You have the right to report the incident to your campus or local police department, campus Title IX compliance officer, and/or campus judicial office.
- Consider working with a victim advocate, counselor, and other available support resources.

Normal Thoughts and Feelings Following Assault

Survivors of sexual violence may experience a variety of reactions, emotions, and subsequent medical and mental health needs. Consider seeking help as soon as you are ready. These thoughts and feelings may occur at any time afterwards. Talking with a health professional, counselor, or advocate can help you process your feelings and understand your options and available resources. You don't have to go through this alone.

Survivors may experience:

- shock and disbelief
- fear, vulnerability, helplessness
- behavior changes, disturbance of appetite, sleeplessness
- flashbacks, dreams, nightmares
- sadness, episodes of crying, depression
- irritability, anger, rage
- embarrassment, shame, self-blame
- feelings that others don't believe them
- social withdrawal
- thoughts of self-harm or suicide

Helping a Friend in Need

A friend who has been sexually assaulted may confide in you 10 minutes, 10 days, or 10 years after the assault. When someone tells you they've been assaulted:

- **Let the person express their feelings.** Take their feelings seriously and listen instead of asking probing questions.
- **Let the person make their own choices.** You might present options, but they should decide what to do next.
- **Support your friend, but know your limits and when to refer to other resources.** Encourage your friend to contact the campus health or violence resource center or a sexual assault hotline. You can contact these groups to learn ways to better support your friend.

Incapacitated or Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault

There is a strong relationship between alcohol and drug use (either voluntary or involuntary) and sexual assault. It is important to note that the voluntary or involuntary use of alcohol and other drugs DOES NOT cause sexual assault. Alcohol alone is the number one predatory drug, but can also be combined with other drugs such as Rohypnol, GHB, and Ketamine that cause drowsiness, increased inhibition, memory loss, etc., to facilitate sexual assault. (Note: Incidents along the spectrum of sexual violence, including sexual assault, can occur without alcohol or other drugs and include misogyny, sexual harassment, sexist remarks, etc.)

Ways to Reduce Risk:

- If a friend seems more intoxicated than normal based on the amount of alcohol consumed, intervene and get them to a safe place.
- If you observe others encouraging an individual to drink more and more, intervene and make sure the individual is safe.
- At a party, bar, or club, accept drinks only from a bartender/server and do not accept open-container drinks from anyone.
- Do not consume drinks that have been left unattended.
- If you feel intoxicated or disoriented after only a few sips of your drink, go immediately to a safe place with a trusted friend or group of friends.

The term "sexual assault" often conjures the notion of a stranger jumping from the bushes or much physical force/violence being used, when in the majority of the cases, this is not so.

Often, sexual assaults are committed by someone who is known to the survivor and do not always involve physical violence.

For More Information

Contact your campus health center, campus counseling center, campus violence resource center, police department, campus Title IX compliance officer, or a rape crisis hotline. The resources below can also assist you in getting answers and finding local support.

Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN)

24/7 National Sexual Assault Hotline: 800-656-4673
Online Hotline: www.rainn.org

Rape Treatment Center

Information and support for sexual assault survivors
www.911rape.org

Bedsider.org Emergency Contraception Locator

www.bedsider.org/where_to_get_it

Anti-Violence Project

24/7 Crisis intervention and support hotline for
LGBTQ+ survivors of violence, English and Spanish:
212-714-1141
www.avp.org

GLBT National Help Center Hotline

888-843-4564
www.glnh.org/hotline

National Domestic Violence Hotline

24/7 Hotline: 800-799-7233
www.thehotline.org

Department of Defense Safe Helpline

24/7 Crisis intervention for military service members
887-995-5247
www.safehelpline.org

Not Alone: Together Against Sexual Assault

Online resource for students and institutions
of higher education
www.notalone.gov

American College Health Association

(410) 859-1500 | www.acha.org

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