

Sexual Assault Information

For sexual activity to be okay, it must be consensual, which means that both people want it to happen. Sexual assault is when any person forces you to participate in a sexual act when you don't want to. This can include touching or penetrating the vagina, mouth or anus of the victim (often called rape), touching the penis of the victim, or forcing the victim to touch the attacker's vagina, penis, or anus. Touching can mean with a hand, finger, mouth, penis, or just about anything else, including objects.

It doesn't always take physical force to sexually assault a victim. Attackers can use threats or intimidation to make a victim feel afraid or unable to refuse them. It is also sexual assault if the victim is drunk, drugged, unconscious, or too young (ages of consent differ from state to state) or mentally disabled to be legally able to agree to sexual contact.

Most victims are assaulted by someone they know: A friend, date, acquaintance or boy/girlfriend. Dating or being sexually involved with someone does not ever give anyone the right to force you to have sexual contact when you don't want to. Even if you have had sex before, you have the right to say "NO" at any time. You are also allowed to change your mind at any time. Being sexually assaulted is never your fault.

Most perpetrators of sexual assault are male, whether the victim is female or male. Victims can be males or females of any age, race, social class, appearance, or sexual orientation. The majority of sexual assault victims are women and girls, but many men and boys are sexually assaulted too.

Sometimes people will use manipulation to get someone to give into sex. They might say things like "If you really loved me, you'd do it" or "I'm going to tell everyone we did it anyway, so you might as well." This kind of behavior can be hurtful, though it often doesn't meet the legal definition of sexual assault, and is a sign of a controlling or emotionally abusive partner. The same is true of a partner who won't (or won't let you) use birth control when you want to. People who experience this kind of behavior can have similar reactions as people who have been sexually assaulted. If this is happening to you, consider seeking help.

If you are a victim of sexual assault, you may:

- Feel guilty and confused if you knew or had a relationship with the attacker, even though the assault was not your fault
- Feel like you have no friends or that your friends won't believe you
- Want to hurt someone else or yourself
- Feel like taking steps to defend yourself
- Feel helpless to stop the assault
- Feel hopeless that anything can be done
- Be afraid to go anywhere that the attacker might be
- Feel anxious all the time Feel bad about yourself or your body