

Rape and Rape Prevention

Date and Acquaintance rape

One of the most popular myths is that strangers who are lurking in the bushes somewhere commit rapes. While these rapes do occur, most rapes are committed by acquaintances, someone you know, perhaps a boyfriend, friend, husband, or relative. Almost half of all rapes occur in the victim's home or room.

Many times a woman will not want to confront her assailant, for fear of losing a job, getting a bad grade or losing respect within the community. Women sometimes look towards themselves, asking what they did wrong, therefore shifting the blame away from where it really should be.

The best way to protect yourself is to be aware of your surroundings and the people that you're with. Don't ignore feelings of uneasiness you may feel around a certain man, and don't worry about being rude or unfriendly. If someone is making you uncomfortable, don't let them intimidate you, and don't be afraid to let them know what your limits are. Keep in mind that whether you know the man, if it is a friend, if they assault you, it is rape and it can be reported.

Some steps to be taken in preventing date rape are:

- If you live alone, only use your first initial and your last name on your mailbox.
- There is safety in numbers, travel in groups whenever possible.
- Take a self-defense course for women and learn how to resist an assailant.
- Keep in mind that any date can turn into a date rape.
- Know the name of the men that you date, and be reserved on the first day. Perhaps offer to pay for yourself so that you don't 'owe' anything.
- If you're going home with a man that you don't know very well, make sure that someone else knows, and let the man know this as well.
- If you begin to feel uncomfortable let him know right away that he's gone too far. Look for a way to leave.
- Never feel that you have to give in to sexual intercourse. If you feel pressure, leave.
- Use drugs and alcohol with caution.

Rape Trauma Syndrome

Surviving a rape puts a large emotional burden on a woman. She should seek some sort of counseling. Rape crisis centers exist in most metropolitan areas. They provide counselors to be with you for emotional support and to meet you at the hospital. The first thing that rape victims want to do is to shower or take a bath. This erases all evidence. Even though you may not want to visit a hospital and have an examination, it is crucial that you get some sort of immediate medical attention.

Rape also has a profound psychological effect. Often, women experience low self-esteem or low confidence. Again, it is a lot of self blame, for 'why did I agree to go out with him', or 'why did I wear that dress.' Please remember that it is not your fault, and you did not ask for it. Other things that are commonly experienced post rape are:

- Denial - numbness and uncomprehending. You may deny the whole experience altogether, even if it means convincing yourself that you consented at some point in time.

- Anger/grief - After experiencing shock and denial, a survivor often moves to the stage where she admits to herself that she has in fact been viciously violated and allows herself to react emotionally.
- Depression - Experiencing both a loss of self-esteem and self-confidence, and even independence, some women fall into a long-term depression.
- Taking action - At some point, a woman may take steps (described above) to protect herself from another attack
- Acceptance - A survivors sense of safety and view of the world is usually permanently altered by experiencing a rape

Preventing Rape

If you are in immediate danger of being raped, here are some things that you can do.

- Make a loud noise - Carry a whistle or scream "police" to attract attention
- Run - Only run if there is somewhere safe to run to. If there is no where to go you may aggravate the assailant further by running
- Stall - Speak calmly and rationally. Try not to plead, cry or show that you're scared, this may be the reaction that he's going for.
- Urinate or vomit - Do anything you can to repulse the assailant. Tell him that you have a STD or AIDS.
- Fight - Women who resist attacks and act quickly are less likely to be raped, than those who are passive. The optimum time to react is in the first 20 seconds when the body releases chemicals in the blood that help to put up a fight. Be cautious if he has a weapon.
- Keep alert - Even though it will be difficult, try to pay attention to as many details as possible, so that you can identify your assailant.
- Get help - Call 9-1-1 as soon as possible. Police are becoming more willing to help victims of rape. You are not obligated to press charges or go to court.
- Collect evidence - Do not bathe, shower, or douche. If you change clothes, put the clothes you were raped in into a bag and seal it.
- Tell someone - Call the police, rape crisis counselor, telephone operator, friend. It is very important that someone knows and that it is not kept a secret.

To Get Help Contact:

National Organization for Victims Assistance
1757 Park Road N.W.
Washington D.C. 20010
(202) 232-6682

Violence Against Women Act Task Force
NOW Legal Defense and Education Task Force
99 Hudson St.
New York, NY 10013
(212) 925-6635