



Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual act forced by one person on another. This includes a wide range of behaviour from intercourse to touching and kissing.

Sexual assault is about power and control. **Sexual assault is a serious crime. It is against the law.**

Most sexual assaults are committed by friends, family and acquaintances.

Sexual assault can happen to anyone. Sexual assault happens to people of all ages, races, religions, economic background, and social status.

You are not alone.

In Canada a woman is sexually assaulted every six minutes.

Sexual assault happens to one out of every five Canadian women at some point in their lives.

What Can You Do If You Have Been Sexually Assaulted?

Tell someone.

Tell a friend, a family member, or call us at the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre.

Get immediate medical help

Go to the hospital emergency room. You can ask for the morning – after pill, which prevents pregnancy. Ask to be tested for sexually transmitted infections (STI).

It is your choice to call the police.

If you decide to tell the police, there will be an investigation. Try to save evidence. Keep the clothes you were wearing. If you were drugged, try to save some of the drink. Don't bathe or shower. Keep anything that might help identify your attacker.

For information about the legal process, call Community Legal Information Association (CLIA) at 892-0853 or 1-800-240-9798.

For support and information about helping you through the court process, call Victim Services, in Charlottetown: 368-4582 or Summerside: 888-8218.

Talk to Someone

Each person reacts to sexual assault in different ways.

You may feel:

- Scared
- Sad
- Angry
- Numb
- Confused

You may experience:

- Depression
- Panic
- Flashbacks
- Health problems
- Sexual problems

It is important to talk to someone about your feelings. Getting support quickly is important.

How to Protect Yourself

A frequently asked question is, “How can I protect myself from being sexually assaulted?” What is sometimes implied in this question is that if the person did the right things than they would not have been assaulted. **You are never to blame for a sexual assault – no matter what you did or did not do.**

On PEI over 85 per cent of rapists are known to the victim. Statistics show that 50 per cent of rapes occur in the home of the victim, a friend, or a relative.

There are some actions you can take for better self-protection.

Trust your feelings. In many cases your gut level suspicions will be your first indication that you are in a dangerous situation. Learn to trust your intuition.

Be aware of the danger signals. Some indicators of potentially explosive situations are:

1. When someone continues to make sexual advances after you say NO.
2. When someone offers favors in return for sexual activity.
3. When someone refuses to leave your car or home when asked.

Protect Yourself:

At home:

1. Make sure your home is safe by locking all doors and windows.
2. Never admit to being home alone or reveal personal information to a stranger on the telephone or at your door.
3. When leaving home switch on an inside light.
4. Have your keys ready when coming home after dark.
5. If you live alone use only your first initial and last name in the phone book or the mailbox. Your answering machine message should use the plural 'we' and not give details of your schedule.
6. When strangers come to the door, never hesitate to ask for identification.

On the street:

1. Wear non-restrictive clothing and shoes in case you have to run.
2. If a car approaches and you are threatened, scream and run in the direction opposite that of the car.
3. Avoid shortcuts, try to walk in well lit and well traveled areas.
4. Always lock your car doors when getting out and check the rear seat before getting in the car.
5. Walk with a confident purposeful stride when out alone.
6. If you suspect you are being followed, do not waste time wondering. Find out immediately by crossing the street. If your suspicions are confirmed, scream and run. It is better to overreact than to be raped or attacked.
7. If you are being followed, do not go home, even if it is close. It is not a good idea for a potential assailant to know where you live. Instead go to the nearest house that has lights on.
8. Be cautious of strangers asking for help. Rapists often pick out women who help strangers. Over one-quarter of rape victims in a recent study were responding to a call for help.
9. Do not carry weapons you cannot use. Weapons commit you to violence and may incite further violence against you.
10. Carry a whistle, if possible, a cell phone.

How You Can Help a Friend

- Believe your friend.
- Respect your friend's decisions about how to handle the assault.
- Ask your friend how you can help.
- Encourage your friend to see a doctor.
- Tell your friend about the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre.

Common Reaction Sequence After Rape

Sexual assault is always traumatic and those who survive often have severe stress reactions similar to those of people who have survived other life threatening events, such as war or natural disaster. There are four stages of reaction to a sexual assault:

Crisis Stage: In the hours and days immediately following the assault, shock and denial are common reactions. It's hard to believe the assault really happened and difficult to understand why. The victim may feel strong emotions and appear visibly disturbed, crying, shaking, or even fainting. Or she / he may be in shock, feel no emotion at all, and seem calm and composed or even cold and detached. All these reactions are normal.

During the crisis stage, the most common emotion is fear – fear of the attacker returning, of being alone, of places like the one where the assault occurred or of people who remind the victim of the attacker. Victims often feel angry, depressed, confused and irritable. Many also feel guilty, ashamed, and 'dirty' because they believe the myths that blame victims for the assault.

There are many physical reactions after a sexual assault, including pain, soreness, eating and sleeping disturbances. Some sexual assault victims may want to talk about their experience soon afterwards; others may wait until much later or may never feel comfortable talking about it. Some victims do not want to be touched after an assault and others want increased physical affection.

Denial Stage: During this stage, the victim may deny any effects from the assault and may assure you things are fine. This may be because she / he thinks everyone is tired of hearing about the assault or because the victim is trying to shut out the pain and get back 'to normal'. In an effort to put the assault behind him / her, the victim may also want to change lifestyles, jobs, or residences. This stage can be brief or can last for many years. Sometimes while in the denial stage, victims may turn to harmful things (alcohol, drugs, overeating or overworking) to enable them to numb their feelings and go on.

Suffering Stage: This stage is when the reality of the assault sinks in. It is characterized by depression and feelings of loss. The victim's sense of security and control over her / his life has been devastated.

Common reactions include fear, nightmares, changes in sleeping and eating, sexual problems, physical aches and pains, difficulty concentrating and loss of interest in usual activities. Anger, guilt, and shame are common. Victims may have frequent, disturbing memories of the assault and 'flashbacks', when it seems the assault is happening again. This stage is very painful for victims. Mood swings are common and it is not unusual for victims to misdirect their anger toward loved ones or themselves at this time.

Resolution Stage: This stage begins when the victim starts the long-term process of resolving her / his feelings about the sexual assault, the attacker and her / himself. The goal of this stage is to move from 'victim' to 'survivor' and to integrate the sexual assault

as an accepted, although painful, event in one's life. If integration is not achieved, the survivor may continue to have problems in many life areas.

Although all sexual assault survivors pass through the four stages of healing, the passage is not always smooth or straightforward. A survivor may be in two stages at the same time, may return to a previous stage for a time, or get stuck in one stage.