

Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is any type of forced or coerced sexual contact or behavior that happens without consent. Sexual assault includes rape and attempted rape, child molestation, and sexual harassment or threats. In the United States, nearly one in five women has been raped, and almost half of women have experienced another type of sexual assault. If you have been sexually assaulted, it is not your fault.

Q: What does “consent” mean in sexual assault?

A: Consent is a clear “yes” to sexual activity. Not saying “no” does not mean you have given consent.

Your consent means:

- You know and understand what is going on (you are not unconscious or blacked out or intellectually disabled).
- You know what you want to do.
- You are able to say what you want to do.
- You are sober (not under the influence of alcohol or drugs).

Sometimes you cannot give legal consent to sexual activity or contact. For example, you cannot consent if you are:

- Threatened, forced, coerced, or manipulated into agreeing
- Not physically able to (you are drunk, high, drugged, passed out, or asleep)
- Not mentally able to (due to illness or disability)
- Younger than 16 (in most states) or 18 (in other states)

Q: How can I get help after a sexual assault?

A: If you are in danger or need medical care, call 9-1-1. If you can, get away from the person who assaulted you and get to a safe place as fast as you can.

After a sexual assault, you may feel fear, shame, guilt, or shock. These feelings are normal. It may be frightening to think about talking about the assault, but it is important to get help. You can call these organizations any time, day or night:

- **National Sexual Assault Hotline, 800-656-HOPE (4673)**
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline, 800-799-SAFE (7233) or 800-787-3224 (TTY)**

Q: How can I lower my risk of sexual assault?

A: You cannot always prevent sexual assault. But you can take steps to help stay safe in general:

- **Go to parties or gatherings with friends.** Arrive together, check in with each other, and leave together.
- **Look out for your friends, and ask them to look out for you.** If a friend is acting out of character, or seems too drunk to stay safe in general, get her to a safe place.
- **Have a code word you can text to your family and friends** that means “Come get me, I need help” or “Call me with a fake emergency.”

- **Download an app on your phone.** Some apps share your location with your friends or the police if you need help. You can also set up an app to send you texts throughout the night to make sure you're safe. If you don't respond, the app will notify police.
- **Avoid drinks in punchbowls or other containers that can be easily "spiked"** (when alcohol is added to a drink without permission). If you think that you or one of your friends has been drugged, call the police. Tell them what happened so that you can be tested for the right drugs.
- **Know your limits when using alcohol or drugs.** Don't let anyone pressure you into drinking or doing more than you want to.
- **Trust your instincts.** If you find yourself alone with someone you don't know or trust, leave. If you feel uncomfortable in any situation for any reason, leave.
- **Be aware of your surroundings.** Especially if you are walking alone, avoid talking on your phone or listening to music with headphones. Stay in busy, well-lit areas.

For more information...

For more information about sexual assault, call the OWH Helpline at 800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

Division of Violence Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), HHS

800-232-4636 • www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/index.html

Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice

202-514-2000 • www.ovw.usdoj.gov

National Center for Victims of Crime

202-467-8700 • www.victimsofcrime.org

National Sexual Violence Resource Center

877-739-3895 • www.nsvrc.org

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