

Sexual assault is any type of sexual conduct to which you do not agree. It can include touching (both directly and through clothing), molestation, rape, voyeurism (watching private sexual acts), exhibitionism (performing sexual acts in public), incest, and sexual harassment. It affects both men and women, and can happen anywhere, by anyone, at any time: at home, at work, on a date, by a stranger, during daylight, or at night.

The most common form of sexual assault is rape, though as mentioned above this is not the only form. What is important is that the conduct is unwanted.

Prevention

You don't have to be a victim; there are some steps that you can take to protect yourself. Here are some tips offered by the National Crime Prevention Council:

- Be aware of your surroundings—who's out there and what's going on.
- Walk with confidence. The more confident you look, the stronger you appear.
- Know your limits when it comes to using alcohol. Guard your drink—never put it down and leave it unattended, and don't accept open drinks from people you don't know (except for the bartender).
- Be assertive—don't let anyone violate your space.
- Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable in your surroundings, leave.
- Don't prop open self-locking doors.
- Lock your door and your windows, even if you leave for just a few minutes.
- Watch your keys. Don't lend them. Don't leave them. Don't lose them. And don't put your name

and address on the key ring.

- Watch out for unwanted visitors. Know who's on the other side of the door before you open it.
- Be wary of isolated spots, like underground garages, offices after business hours, and apartment laundry rooms.
- Avoid walking or jogging alone, especially at night. Vary your route. Stay in well-traveled, well-lit areas.
- Have your key ready to use before you reach the door—home, car, or work.
- Park in well-lit areas and lock the car, even if you'll only be gone a few minutes.
- Drive on well-traveled streets, with doors and windows locked.
- Never hitchhike or pick up a hitchhiker.
- Keep your car in good shape with plenty of gas in the tank.
- In case of car trouble, pull over, lock the doors, and call for help on your cellular phone. If you don't have a phone, put the hood up and put a banner in the rear window that says, "Help. Call police." If you call for a tow truck, know the name of the company that will be coming to you, and don't get out of the car for anyone else.

If You're Attacked

The number one thing you need to be concerned about is *your safety*. Depending on the attacker and the situation, as well as your capabilities, it may be better to fight back or it may be better to submit. Remember, *submission* does not mean *permission*—it may feel demeaning, but you need to do whatever it takes to ensure your safety.

Constantly reassess the situation during an attack or an attempted attack. If one defense strategy

doesn't work or stops working, try another. Some strategies include:

- Fighting back—kicking, hitting, clawing/scratching, biting, etc.
- Running away to a safe place, such as an open business or police station
- Negotiation (for example, offering your cash if the attacker lets you go)
- Stalling for time
- Distracting the attacker
- Screaming to draw attention

Some of these strategies may be more effective when combined, such as distracting the attacker so that you can run away, or stalling for time until a bystander is close enough for you to get their attention.

If you are ever a victim of rape, there are some very important things to do and not do immediately afterward:

- DO immediately call 911, or go directly to the nearest police, sheriff's, or fire station, hospital, or rape crisis center. If you are uncomfortable doing so, don't know where one is, or are far away from one, go to the nearest safe place (such as a trusted friend's home or a nearby business) and call the police or sheriff's department.
- DON'T change clothes, bathe, douche, or clean up in any way until after law enforcement responds. Doing so will destroy valuable evidence that is needed to catch and convict your attacker.
- DO try to remember as many details as you can about your attacker, such as clothing, facial features, general physical description, unique features such as tattoos or scars, which direction they went after the assault, etc. It's natural to want to block out every possible memory related to an attack, but these details are critical to helping law enforcement track the attacker down.
- DON'T feel guilty or ashamed. You are the

victim—*this is not your fault*; no one “asks” to be assaulted. Consider seeking counseling or other services to help you deal with the consequences of the assault.

- DO remember that most sexual assaults, particularly rapes, go unreported. The vast majority of attackers will continue until caught, and many start with minor assaults and work their way up to rape. If you don't report it, the person won't be caught—and will likely attack someone else.

Some More Things to Consider

- Choosing to carry a weapon for personal protection is a personal choice that you, and only you, can make. Some people don't feel safe without one, and others are uncomfortable with the idea.

If you do choose to carry a weapon for personal protection, such as pepper spray or a pocketknife, check with law enforcement to make sure that it's legal. Any weapon that you choose to carry should be easy to use and familiar to you so that you'll be able to use it effectively in an attack.

Consider taking a specialized course to train you in the proper, safe use of your chosen weapon, as well as special techniques that may be of use.

- Classes such as martial arts or general self-defense can give you invaluable skills and techniques to use during an attack. Remember, you can be assaulted anywhere, at anytime, by anyone—so you may not have a weapon or other option handy.

A side benefit to such classes is improved fitness, which will not only make you look and feel better, but will help make you stronger and faster (making it easier for you to fight off your attacker or run away).

- Practice things you might say and do during an attack, whether in your head or in a role-playing situation, on a regular basis. Make these things second-nature so that you'll be able to remember and implement them if you're attacked.