

Sexual Assault

Sexual assault can be verbal, visual, or anything that forces a person to join in unwanted sexual contact or attention. Examples of this are voyeurism (when someone watches private sexual acts), exhibitionism (when someone exposes him/herself in public), incest (sexual contact between family members), and sexual harassment. It can happen in different situations: in the home by someone you know, on a date, or by a stranger in an isolated place.

What do I do if I've been sexually assaulted?

These are important steps to take right away after an assault:

- Get away from the attacker to a safe place as fast as you can. Then call 911 or the police.
- Call a friend or family member you trust. You also can call a crisis center or a hotline to talk with a counselor. One hotline is the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800-656-HOPE (4673). Feelings of shame, guilt, fear, and shock are normal. It is important to get counseling from a trusted professional.
- Do not wash, comb, or clean any part of your body. Do not change clothes if possible, so the hospital staff can collect evidence. Do not touch or change anything at the scene of the assault.
- Go to your nearest hospital emergency room as soon as possible. You need to be examined, treated for any injuries, and screened for possible sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or pregnancy. The doctor will collect evidence using a rape kit for fibers, hairs, saliva, semen, or clothing that the attacker may have left behind.

While at the hospital:

- If you decide you want to file a police report, you or the hospital staff can call the police from the emergency room.
- Ask the hospital staff to connect you with the local rape crisis center. The center staff can help you make choices about reporting the attack and getting help through counseling and support groups.

How can I lower my risk of sexual assault?

There are things you can do to reduce your chances of being sexually assaulted. Follow these tips from 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.
- 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, call for help on your cellular phone. If you don't have a phone, put the hood up, lock the doors, and put a banner in the rear mirror that says, "Help. Call police."

How can I help someone who has been sexually assaulted?

You can help someone who is abused or who has been assaulted by listening and offering comfort. Go with her or him to the police, the hospital, or to counseling. Reinforce the message that she or he is not at fault and that it is natural to feel angry and ashamed.

For More Information

For more information on sexual assault, contact the National Women's Health Information Center at 800-994-9662 or the following organizations:

Division of Violence Prevention, NCIPC, CDC, HHS

Phone: (770) 488-4362

Internet Address: <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/index.html>

Office on Violence Against Women, OJP, DOJ

Phone: (800) 799-7233

Internet Address: <http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov>

National Sexual Violence Resource Center

Phone: (800) 692-7445

Internet Address: <http://www.nsvrc.org>

National Center for Victims of Crime

Phone: (800) 394-2255

Internet Address: <http://www.ncvc.org>

National Crime Prevention Council

Phone: (202) 466-6272

Internet Address: <http://www.ncpc.org>

National Domestic Violence Hotline

Phone: (800) 799-SAFE

Internet Address: <http://www.ndvh.org>

National Sexual Violence Resource Center
Phone: (877) 739-3895
Internet Address: <http://www.nsvrc.org>

Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network
Phone: (202) 544-1034
Internet Address: <http://www.rainn.org>

Pinellas County - Sexual Assault Victim Services - 727-530-7273

Pinellas County- S.A.V.E. Program - 727-344-5555

Family Service Center
2960 Roosevelt Blvd.
Clearwater, FL 33760
Phone: 727.531.0482
Fax: 727.536.7867

Wesley W. Jenkins Community Resource Center
928 - 22nd Ave. South
St. Petersburg, FL 33705
Phone: 727.822.3961
Fax: 727.823.0544

901 Chestnut St. Suite E.
Clearwater, FL 33756
Phone: 727.446.7778
Fax: 727.446.7728
<http://www.familyservicecenters.org/>