A Guide for Friends and Family of Sexual Violence Survivors

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If you have experienced sexual violence and are seeking help or would like more information, call 1-888-772-7227 in Pennsylvania, or call the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) at 1-800-656-4673 from anywhere in the U.S.

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Immediate concerns

The period following a sexual assault is emotionally charged, confusing, and frightening. If you know someone who has been sexually assaulted, it is important to address the following topics:

Physical safety

Make sure the person is in a safe place. Be there emotionally for them and encourage reaching out for additional support. Contact your local rape crisis center for free and confidential counseling and support or call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at **1-800-656-4673** (**HOPE**).

Medical attention

A medical exam can reveal injuries that may not be visible. Hospital staff can also provide treatment for possible sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), medication to prevent pregnancy (emergency contraception), and perform an exam to collect evidence if the assault happened within five days. Hospitals may have different policies around the time frame for an exam.

Nearly 1 in 5 women in the U.S. have been raped at some time in their lives.

Reporting the Assault

If the victim goes to the hospital, the hospital will most likely report the crime to the police. However, the victim does not have to talk to the police in order to get a forensic exam. The victim can decide later whether or not to talk to police. Victims older than 18 years old have 12 years to report sexual assault in Pennsylvania. Victims younger than 18 years old can report the abuse until they turn 50, or 32 years after their 18th birthday regardless of when the abuse occurred. Once a report to law enforcement has been made, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, through the county prosecutor or district attorney's office, can chose to file criminal charges against the perpetrator. Even if report has been made, it is ultimately up to the prosecutor's office to decide whether or not to move forward with a case. During the decision process, the prosecutor is evaluating: if the crime occurred; what can be charged under Pennsylvania's criminal law; and whether or not the crime can be proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

1 in 6 boys experience child sexual abuse before the age of 18, and 1 in 71 adult men experience rape.

(Black et al., 2011, Dube et al., 2005)

Counseling

Victims and others in their life may need help dealing with feelings they experience after a sexual assault impacts their lives. Sexual assault is a serious crime, and is known to have short- and long-term effects on victims and those who love and care for them. If you are a victim of sexual violence seeking assistance or would like more information, please call **1-888-722-7227** in Pennsylvania or contact the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) at **1-800-656-4673** from anywhere else in the United States.

How you can help

Effective communication is important to a victim's well-being. If you are wondering what you can do, here are some suggestions:

- Remain calm. You may feel shocked or outraged, but expressing these emotions to the victim may cause confusion or discomfort.
- Believe the victim. Make it clear that you believe the assault happened and that the assault is not her or his fault.
- Give the victim control. Control was taken away during the assault. Empower the victim to make decisions about what steps to take next, and try to avoid telling her or him what to do.

- Be available for the victim to express a range of feelings: crying, screaming, being silent, etc. Remember, the victim is angry with the person who assaulted her or him and the situation, not with you. Just be there to listen.
- Assure the victim of your support. She or he needs to know that regardless of what happened, your relationship will remain intact.

- Avoid making threats against the suspect. Threats of harm may only cause the victim to worry about your safety and risk of arrest.

- Maintain confidentiality. Let the victim decide who to tell about the assault.

- Encourage counseling. Give the victim the hotline number for the nearest rape crisis center, but let the victim decide whether or not to call.

- Ask before offering physical support. Asking "Can I give you a hug?" can re-establish the victim's sense of security, safety, and control.

- Say what you can guarantee. Don't make promises you can't keep, such as saying the victim will never be hurt again, or that the offender will be put in jail.

- Allow the proper authorities to deal with the assault. Confronting the person who committed the sexual assault may be harmful or dangerous. Attempting to investigate or question others who may know about the assault may hamper a legal investigation. Leave this to the proper authorities.

- Be patient and recognize that healing can take years with advances and setbacks.

- Take care of yourself. If you need support for yourself, please contact your local rape crisis center for a confidential place to discuss your feelings.

Responding to child sexual abuse

The disclosure of child sexual abuse can affect the entire family system. If you are a caregiver of a child who has survived sexual abuse, you may want to seek support from family, friends, or a counselor at your local rape crisis center. You may even want to connect with other caregivers who are going through a similar experience. If you are able to work through your own feelings, you will be better able to support your child.

You may be experiencing many emotions right now. Often caregivers will have feelings of anger, sadness, and guilt about what has happened to their child. You may have clear feelings of anger at the person who abused your child, or you may feel confused, especially if the person who abused your child is also someone that you love and trust.

Recognize your own feelings; they are most likely very normal. Also know that your child may have different feelings than you, and that is okay. Let your child know that their feelings are also normal and that there are many ways to safely express these feelings.

Effects of child sexual abuse may be similar to those reactions experienced by adults after a sexual assault, found on the next page. Changes in behavior are perhaps the most important thing to note in children, since this is how they communicate. Children may have nightmares, difficulty sleeping, trouble concentrating, display regressive behavior such as thumb sucking or bed wetting, or a drop in grades at school.

Caring for a child after a disclosure of sexual abuse can be challenging. The disclosure of sexual abuse creates a crisis for many families. Caregivers may assume that once a child has disclosed that they will feel safe and return to normal functioning. While children are very resilient and can heal from this abuse, healing takes time and patience.

The following are some things you can do to help:

- Maintain consistent rules and structure to increase feelings of safety.
- Give choices whenever possible to allow a greater sense of control.
- Allow them to have ALL feelings and express these feelings in a safe way.
- Recognize their strengths and help them to see their own resilience.
- Listen, believe, and support them-your support is more important than anything else right now.

Effects of the assault

Each survivor reacts to sexual violence in her or his own unique way, such as:

- Expressing emotions or preferring to keep their feelings inside. Talking about the assault soon after or waiting weeks, months, or even years before discussing the assault, if they ever choose to do so.
- Experiencing physical responses to the trauma as an effect of the assault.
- Developing coping mechanisms that could be harmful or unhealthy such as drug and alcohol use or self-injury, or healthy and therapeutic options such as journaling, expression through art and seeking therapy. Some survivors will display a mix of healthy and unhealthy ways of coping.

It is important to respect each person's choices and style of coping with this, and any, traumatic event. You can help by offering to connect victims with the services of a rape crisis center where staff are experienced in dealing with the effects and responding without judgment. Whether an assault was completed or attempted, and regardless of whether it happened recently or many years ago, it may impact daily functioning. A wide range of reactions can impact victims, both immediately after the assault and for days or years after the assault.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, injury or other short- and long-term effects have been reported by 81% of women and 35% of men who experienced rape, stalking or physical violence by an intimate partner. (Black, et. al., 2011)

Reactions to sexual assault

Emotional

- Guilt, shame, self blame
- Embarrass-ment
- Fear, distrust
- Sadness
- Isolation
- Lack of control
- Anger
- Numbness
- Confusion
- Shock, disbelief
- Denial

Psychological

- Nightmares
- Flashbacks, or re-experiencing the assault
- Dissociation
- Depression and other mood disorders
- Difficulty concentrating
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Anxiety
- Substance use or abuse
- Phobias or fears
- Low self-esteem
- Thoughts of self harm, including suicide.

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The human body and brain are very resilient. Many victims fully recover from the emotional, physical, and psychological effects of the assault. For most, talking through the trauma is a key to healing.

Free and confidential counseling is available through local rape crisis centers. A list of rape crisis centers in Pennsylvania can be found at www.pcar.org. Outside of Pennsylvania, please visit http://www.rainn.org/ or call 1-800-656-4673.

Understanding sexual violence

People who perpetrate sexual assault often use coercion, manipulation, or "charm." In some cases, they may use force, threats, or injury. The lack of physical injuries to the victim does not indicate the victim's consent.

Sexual violence is any type of unwanted sexual contact. This can include words and actions of a sexual nature.

Sexual violence can be committed without the knowledge of the person harmed. For example, several factors can interfere with a person's knowledge that sexual violence has been committed against them: age, cognitive disabilities, mental illness, incapacitation due to drugs and/or alcohol, and others.

Some forms of sexual violence may not be illegal, such as sexist and sexually violent jokes, street sexual harassment and catcalling but this does not make them any less threatening or harmful to the person victimized.

There are many forms of sexual violence, including but not limited to:

- Child sexual abuse (see page 12 for a definition)
- Commercial sexual exploitation, including prostitution and human trafficking
- Exposure and voyeurism
- Forced participation in the production or viewing of pornography
- Incest
- Rape– whether the victim knows the perpetrator slightly, casually, intimately, or not at all
- Ritual abuse
- Sexual harassment
- Sexual or gender-based bullying, including cyber-bullying

The majority of sexual violence is committed by someone the victim knows. They can include:

- Caregivers
- Classmates
- Family members
- Friends and neighbors
- Healthcare providers
- Members and leaders of faith communities
- Partners
- Teachers and coaches

More than half (51%) of female victims of rape reported being raped by an intimate partner and 41% by an acquaintance; for male victims, more than half (52%) reported being raped by an acquaintance and 15% by a stranger (Black et al., 2011).

Persons victimized by sexual violence can be any age or gender, but children and teens are at the highest risk. People may experience more than one sexual assault during their lives. They may also face other forms of violence and social struggles.

Sexual violence can occur in any setting, including but not limited to:

- Faith communities
- Healthcare facilities
- Homes
- Party or other social events
- Prisons and other correctional facilities
- Residential care facilities
- Schools and childcare programs
- Teams and other organized recreational activities
- Workplaces

Sexual violence is sometimes covered up by institutions or people in positions of authority. Sexual violence is sometimes ignored or allowed to continue even after it is discovered by family members, friends, or other community members.

Oppression is a root cause of sexual violence. Sexual violence is tied to inequality. People who commit sexual violence may target people who may have less perceived power in society due to factors such as (but not limited to):

- Age
- Disability
- Gender identity
- Immigration status
- Income
- Political identity
- Race or ethnicity
- Religious or spiritual beliefs
- Sexual orientation

Inequality can result in people having less access to information and resources. This can make it hard for a person to report sexual assault or get help.

Sexual violence affects everyone: individuals, families, communities, and the larger society. Sexual violence often impacts an individual's education, employment and income, housing and shelter, and physical and mental health. Relationships with friends and family members may be impacted.

Sexual violence can be prevented. Community members can work to prevent sexual violence by establishing healthy and positive relationships that are based on respect, safety, and equality. Community members can play an active role in stopping sexual violence before it occurs by becoming engaged bystanders. Sexual violence affects us all; therefore, we are all a part of the solution.

Child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse is physical or visual contact between an adult, teen, or another child and a child that results in sexual stimulation and gratification for the adult or minor. Child sexual abuse is often a gradual process, with the adult deliberately testing a child's boundaries using his or her familiarity with the child, social status, or power. This process is called "grooming" and often happens by building trust, giving gifts or favors, separating the child from others, creating a norm of secrecy for other activities, and violating boundaries. The adult will continue to act in this manner and perpetrate sexual acts upon the child. This may go on for years, and the child may never tell anyone about the abuse due to the coercive behaviors, feeling of love, dependence, and/or fear for the adult.

The majority of sexual victimization starts early in life.

- Approximately 80% of female victims experienced their first rape before the age of 25 and almost half experienced the first rape before age 18 (30% between 11-17 years old and 12% at or before the age of 10).
- About 35% of women who were raped as minors were also raped as adults compared to 14% of women without an early rape history.
- 28% of male victims of rape were first raped when they were 10 years old or younger. (Black et al., 2011)

Teens' experience with sexual violence

Sexual violence can happen at any age, but research has found that young adults might be at higher risk.

Sexual violence and dating

During a large research online study, 45% of girls said they know a friend or peer who has been pressured into having either vaginal or oral sex (Futures Without Violence, 2010).

Technology and abuse

Pressure from a dating partner or even friends can be a reason to send sexy images or messages – 51% of young women who took a survey said they felt a lot of pressure from a guy they liked or were dating to send sexual pictures or texts (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and CosmoGirl.com, 2008).

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment could include verbal harassment like unwelcome comments about a person's body and inappropriate jokes. Harassment can also be online or virtual through texts, social networking sites, or by other electronic sources. Almost half of students in a nationally representative survey said they had experienced some form of sexual harassment at school (Hill & Kearl, 2011).

Male survivors of sexual violence

A national study found that 1 in 71 adult men reported being raped (Black et al., 2011). In addition, one in six boys will experience child sexual abuse before the age of 18 (Dube et al., 2005). The same study found that 6% of men have experienced sexual coercion and 11% reported unwanted sexual contact at some point in their lives.

Questions and answers

Q: Since she was raped, my teenage daughter has been having sex a lot. Why is she behaving like this? It doesn't make sense.

A: Each person who experiences sexual violence reacts differently. Some survivors respond by engaging in a lot of sexual activity with many partners while others stop all sexual activity. Each of these are normal, common reactions to the traumatic event, but your concerns are valid. Her response may take an emotional toll on both you and your daughter.

The sexual assault impacted your daughter's sense of control over her life and sexuality, and she may view sexual activity as a way to re-gain control. Talking to a counselor about her experiences may help your daughter understand the link between the assault and her sexual choices. It may be helpful to also talk to your daughter about how to stay safe during sexual activity.

Q: My brother was sexually abused as a child. Now, as an adult, he abuses drugs and alcohol. Is there a connection?

A: Most likely, yes. Higher levels of stress caused by fear and danger related to sexual violence can cause long-term effects to the brain and can heighten the need for coping mechanisms, including self medication. Research shows overwhelming evidence that victims of sexual violence are much more likely to use alcohol and other drugs to cope with the trauma of their victimization. Drugs and alcohol produce chemical changes to the body every time they are used. They are a reliable, immediate way to alter how a person is feeling. The short term relief provided by alcohol or drugs may also become problematic for many survivors.

Victims of rape are 13 times more likely to develop two or more alcohol-related problems and 26 times more likely to have two or more serious drug abuse-related problems (Kilpatrick & Aciemo, 2003). Drugs and alcohol are fast acting, socially accepted, available, and cheap ways to make the symptoms of trauma go away, at least for a short time. The problem is that drugs and alcohol are addictive, meaning people need more and more to maintain the effects, and using drugs and alcohol can increase the risk of experiencing additional violence because many offenders see intoxication as a vulnerability to exploit. If your brother is thinking about or in treatment for addiction, it may be helpful to encourage him to also talk to someone about the abuse he experienced. Often, when sober, the effects of trauma come rushing back to survivors and can lead to relapse.

What you can do to prevent sexual violence

Create safe communities for children

It is important for adults to feel confident in their ability to protect children from violence. Children are not responsible for protecting themselves or avoiding sexual abuse. Parents, guardians, educators, and other adults can create safe communities for all children by:

- Becoming comfortable talking with the children in their lives about their bodies and physical development, respecting when a child does not want to give or receive physical affection such as a hug, kiss, or "high-five" – even if it is from a family member.
- Practicing action steps when another adult acts inappropriately with a child or children (such as insisting on spending time alone with a child or not respecting the child's boundaries).
- Knowing what support is available if they think abuse is happening.
- Reaching out for help when they suspect any form of abuse against a child.

We can all help create respectful, healthy, and safe places for children. You can make your community a better place for everyone.

If a child shares abuse with you or you suspect that a child is being abused, this may be information that you are required to report. You may also wish to make a report simply because you care about the safety and well-being of children. For information on reporting child abuse and neglect in your state go to Child Welfare Information Gateway at www.childwelfare.gov or call The Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453).

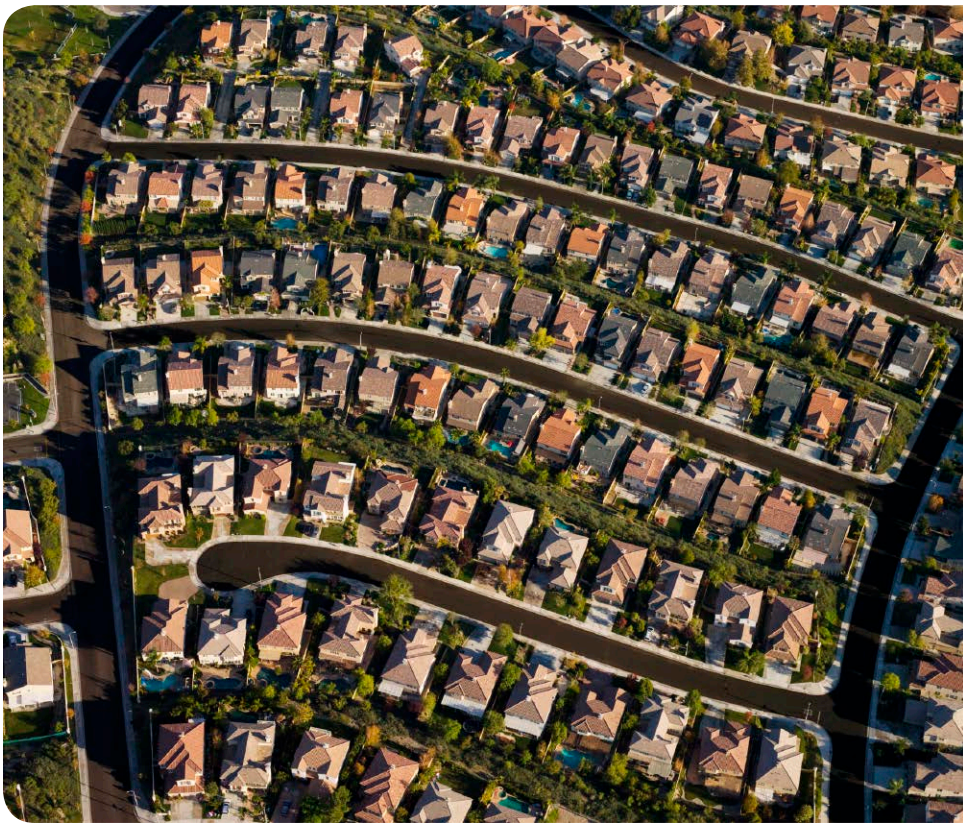
Create safe communities for everyone

Every person has the ability to promote and share respectful behaviors. This can be as simple as privately asking a friend not to make inappropriate comments or as public as intervening during an argument or conflict. Taking action in some way, shape, or form begins to change the thoughts or beliefs or norms of a community.

For example, a friend of your family makes "jokes" or comments about a highly-publicized case of sexual assault. They imply the victim is at fault. In this situation, you could:

- Share the information you know about sexual violence and say that sexual assault is always a choice made by the perpetrator, and victims are never at fault.
- Ask compassionate and thoughtful questions about the person's attitude. Why do they feel that way? Maybe having a discussion could change their attitude or belief.
- Tell them those comments are not appreciated in your home/workplace/presence and you would appreciate it if they stop.

These small, but long-reaching, actions can create tremendous change. We start the wheels of change when we do something that interrupts or brings attention to something people see as "normal" or accepted. People who commit sexual violence rationalize their actions with belief in inequality and oppressive attitudes and systems – changing these attitudes and systems can begin to bring about an end to sexual violence.



Encourage healthy relationships and interactions

Many of the messages we receive from media are violent, manipulative, or harmful to both young women and young men. It is important to think carefully about these images and stories so that you can create healthy relationships and sexual experiences.

Consent means both people actively agree with what they are doing together. It is a mutual decision that both people make without any coercion or force. Consent is best recognized when it is verbal and when it shows a "yes" (or something like "sure" or "please").

Some ways you can practice consent:

- Ask the other person if they are comfortable when you are in a sexual or romantic situation. This doesn't have to be formal or stuffy, a simple "Are you OK with this?" works just fine.
- Wait for a verbal "Yes" (or clear body language like nodding their head that tells you they feel good about the situation). Silence, a "No," or physically resisting means things need to stop.
- Answer honestly and verbally when someone asks you for consent. They might not know about this kind of consent, so have a conversation ahead of time. Again, it doesn't have to be a big deal, just a simple request between two people who respect and like each other.

Definitions

Consent

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Dissociation

Those who were forced to undergo traumatic sexual abuse can find the experience too much to bear. Since the victim was prevented from leaving the assault physically, the only remaining option was mental escape (dissociation). Victims often describe it as "floating above themselves" or concentrating intently on a particular object in the room. Survivors may continue this behavior throughout their lives and in times of stress, may "space out," or go numb. Dissociation is a normal response to victimization, but some survivors may find it disruptive in their daily lives and can seek help to learn to manage it.

Engaged Bystander

An engaged bystander is someone who intervenes before, during, or after a situation when they see or hear behaviors that promote sexual violence. It is common for people to witness situations where someone makes an inappropriate sexual comment or innuendo, tells a rape joke, or touches someone in a sexual manner. Bystanders may also witness other forms of sexual violence. Bystanders who witness the behavior or hear the comment can intervene in a positive way that will help create a safer environment.

Flashbacks

A flashback is a complete re-experiencing of the sexual assault. It is more than a memory — the survivor actually believes the trauma is occurring right now, all over again. They are reliving the experience. Often, victims are unable to distinguish the past from the present, a friend, or loved one from the person who assaulted them. This is a very scary experience, and they may need your help in re-establishing their sense of safety in the present.

Grooming

A gradual process where a perpetrator will deliberately test a person's boundaries using his or her familiarity, social status, or power to take advantage of the person. Grooming often happens by building trust and familiarity, giving gifts or favors, separating the person from others (such as care providers, friends, etc.), and violating boundaries. Grooming with children often also includes a gradual process of normalizing secrecy, including for sexual activities.

Offender

There are a lot of misconceptions and stereotypes about people who sexually abuse, however we know these stereotypes do not tell the real story. In general, here are some facts about people who offend:

- People who sexually abuse can be male or female, and span a variety of backgrounds and ages. Some individuals are married with stable relationships, employment, and lack a criminal history. They can have strong social ties in the community.
- The majority of sexual violence is committed by someone the victim knows — a family member, intimate partner, coworker, classmate, or acquaintance. Not all offenders are the same. Some are more likely to reoffend than others, and there are different motivations for offending.

Most people who commit sexual offenses begin their offending behaviors during adolescence. Additionally, intervention and treatment is more likely to be successful when it happens early. For these reasons, it is important to address sexual violence committed by youths as well as by adults.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, is a psychiatric disorder that can occur following the experience or witnessing of life-threatening events such as military combat, natural disasters, serious accidents, or violent personal assaults like rape.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, a person diagnosed with PTSD experiences the following:

1. A traumatic event that involved a serious threat of injury or death and a response of extreme fear
2. The unwelcome re-experiencing of the event
3. An effort to avoid things associated with the event
4. Persistent symptoms of arousal (irritability, difficulty concentrating and/or falling/staying asleep, etc.)
5. The above symptoms for a month or more
6. The above symptoms that cause noticeable strain at work, in relationships, and/or other areas of life.

Triggers

Triggers are specific touches, sights, sounds, smells, places, etc., that involuntarily evoke a memory of the sexual assault. Triggers often lead to painful flashbacks. Victims often take conscious or unconscious steps to avoid triggers such as avoiding certain places, kinds of music, foods, smells, etc. Doing so means the victim is forced to limit her or his life activities.

Victim vs. survivor

Throughout this guide, the terms "victim" and "survivor" are used interchangeably to be inclusive of the various ways people who have experienced sexual violence may identify. The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) recognizes and supports the use of person-first terminology that honors and respects the whole person, which is also reflected in this guide. Individuals may ultimately choose the language that is used to describe their experiences and therefore, supports advocacy approaches that are person-centered and that use the terminology preferred by individuals they serve.

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To contact your local rape crisis center, please call: