

Sexual Health SEXUAL ASSAULT

creating healthy communities

together

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"Sexual assault is any unwanted act of a sexual nature imposed by one person upon another."

"Sexual assault of any kind is a crime, even in a marriage or a dating relationship." (Sexual Assault: What It Means, Ontario Women's Directorate, 1992)

"Without consent it is sexual assault."

Sexual assault can range from unwanted fondling and kissing to intercourse. It takes many different forms, such as stranger rape, date rape, acquaintance rape, marital rape, sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, incest or gang rape. In every instance, it is an act of violence, which is motivated by the wish to control, to humiliate, and to dominate. Sexual assault is a crime of violence acted out in a sexual way. Sexual assault is about power and control - it is not about sex.

What is Consent?

Consent is willingly giving permission through words or actions for sexual activity to happen.

A person cannot give consent if he/she is: under the age of 16, drunk or high on drugs, pressured, threatened or coerced into saying "yes", or in a power or trust based relationship (such as teacher, parent, religious leader, coach, doctor, etc.).

Who experiences sexual assault?

Statistics show that the majority of sexual assaults are committed by men against women or children. A very small percentage of reported sexual assault victims are male. There are also reports of assault by individuals of the same sex.

Sexual assault does not discriminate. Anyone can potentially be a victim of sexual assault, regardless of age, race, social class, religion, occupation, education level and physical description.

It can happen to anyone, anytime, and anywhere.

Who commits sexual assault?

People often think that a stranger commits sexual assault. In the majority of cases, the victim knows the person that has assaulted them.

Women face the greatest risk of sexual assault from men they know, not strangers. About 69% of women are sexually assaulted by men known to them; dates, boyfriends, marital partners, friends, family members or neighbours.

When a woman knows the man that sexually assaults her, it is less likely that even she will recognize it as a crime. These sexual assaults are no less a crime than those committed by strangers.

Who is responsible for a sexual assault crime?

People who commit sexual assaults are responsible for these crimes, not the victims. What a person wears, where they go, what they drink or who they talk to does not mean that they are inviting sexual assault or giving up the right to say no. The idea that a person "asks for it" is often used by offenders to rationalize their behaviour. It also blames the victim for the crime, not the offender.

Why does sexual assault happen?

Sexual assault happens when a person imposes his/her wishes on another person by pressure, force or other means. When a person says no, they mean no. Some people think that she/he really means maybe or yes. The law says that we have the right to say no to any form of sex or sexual touching, even in a marriage or when dating. No means no, whatever the situation!

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What are the effects of sexual assault?

The effects of sexual assault on a person's mental health and well-being can be just as serious as physical injuries. Nine out of ten incidents of violence against women have an emotional effect on the victim. Victims of sexual assault often report feelings of anger, fear, depression, anxiety and become less trusting. The emotional and psychological effects of sexual assault can also include sleep disturbances, nightmares, erratic mood swings, eating disorders and flashbacks.

What do I do if I have been sexually assaulted?

- Do not blame yourself. You did not do anything wrong.
- Find a safe environment and call a friend, family member, or the police.
- Do not wash, douche, brush your teeth, change your clothes, go to the washroom, or clean up the area where the assault occurred. This may destroy important evidence. If you already have, it does not mean that you cannot report it.
- Call your local sexual assault treatment centre.
- Get medical attention to determine the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or pregnancy. A sexual assault exam can be completed with your permission.

How do I help a friend who has been sexually assaulted?

- Listen to what they have to say and take them seriously.
- Believe them. People rarely make up stories about sexual assault, but one of the most common fears of sexual assault survivors is not being believed.
- Let them know you care by saying things like, "I'm sorry this happened to you" or "I'm glad you shared this with me."
- Reassure them that it is not their fault. No-one asks to be sexually assaulted, and no-one deserves to be assaulted.
- Do not blame by asking questions such as, "Why didn't you fight back?" Instead, say things like, "It's difficult to fight back when you're terrified."
- Let them control what they want to do next. In a sexual assault, the survivor has been robbed of control by the perpetrator. Help them feel more in control by supporting their decisions.
- Let them know that they are not alone in this. Many survivors feel that they are the only one this has happened to and may feel their reactions are not normal.

How can I reduce the risk of sexual assault?

- Do not leave your beverage unattended.
- When you go out with a group of friends watch out for one another and leave together.
- Be aware of your surroundings at all times.
- Do not allow yourself to be isolated with someone you do not trust.
- Think about the level of intimacy you want in a relationship and clearly state your limits.

Where can I get help?

Children's Aid Society
519.524.7356

Police
Emergency 911

Sexual Assault Unit
519.661.5674

Sexual Assault Centre London
519.438.2272 (crisis & support line)

London Abused Women's Centre
519.432.2204

Regional Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Centre
519.646.6100 ext.64224 (day time hours)

Emergency Services:
24 hours, 7 days a week through the Emergency Department
519.646.6100, ask for the nurse on-call for sexual assault.

Waterloo Region Sexual Assault/ Domestic Violence Treatment Centre
519.749.6994.

Women's Community House
519.642.3000

Adapted with permission from the Middlesex London Health Unit.