

# April 2021

## Sexual Assault Awareness Month



## *Sexual Assault Awareness Month Resource Guide*

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## Quick Facts

- Every 107 seconds, another sexual assault occurs
- 1 out of every 6 American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime (14.8% completed rape; 2.8% attempted rape).
- Women 18-24 who are enrolled in college are 3 times more likely than women, in general, to suffer from sexual violence. Females of the same age who are not enrolled in college are 4 times more likely
- Victims of sexual assault are:
  - o 3 times more likely to suffer from depression.
  - o 6 times more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.
  - o 13 times more likely to abuse alcohol.
  - o 26 times more likely to abuse drugs.
  - o 4 times more likely to contemplate suicide.
- The year in a male's life when he is most likely to be the victim of a sexual assault is age 4. A female's year of greatest risk is age 14.
- One in nine girls and one in 53 boys under the age of 18 experience sexual abuse or assault at the hands of an adult.

## Methods to Reduce Risk

### Safety planning when someone is hurting you:

- Lean on a support network. Having someone you can reach out to for support can be an important part of staying safe and recovering. Find someone you trust who could respond to a crisis if you needed their help.
- Become familiar with safe places. Learn more about safe places near you such as a local domestic violence shelter or a family member's house. Learn the routes and commit them to memory. Find out more about [sexual assault service providers](#) in your area that can offer support.
- Stay safe at home. If the person hurting you is in your home, you can take steps to feel safer. Try hanging bells or a noisemaker on your door to scare the person hurting you away, or sleep in public spaces like the living room. If possible, keep the doors inside your house locked or put something heavy in front of them. If you're protecting yourself from someone who does not live with you, keep all the doors locked when you're not using them, and install an outside lighting system with motion detectors. Change the locks if possible.
- Keep computer safety in mind. If you think someone might be monitoring your computer use, consider regularly clearing your cache, history, and cookies. You could also use a different computer at a friend's house or a public library.
- Create a code word. It might be a code between you and your children that means "get out," or with your support network that means "I need help."

- Prepare an excuse. Create several plausible reasons for leaving the house at different times or for existing situations that might become dangerous. Have these on hand in case you need to get away quickly.

### **Safety planning when someone is stalking you:**

- Tell someone you trust. Stalking shouldn't be kept a secret. Tell your parents, loved ones, a trusted adult, or the local police to determine if a report can be made.
- Be prepared to reach out. If possible, keep your cell phone charged and have emergency contact numbers programmed ahead of time. You may want to save these contacts under a different name. Memorize a few numbers in case you don't have cell phone access in the future.
- Change your routine. Be aware of your daily routine and begin to alter it over time. Switch up the way you commute more often, taking different routes or different modes of transportation.

Visit the [Stalking Resource Center](#) for more ways to stay safe.

### **Safety planning when leaving the person hurting you:**

- Make an escape bag. Pack a bag that includes all important papers and documents, such as your birth certificate, license, passport, social security card, bills, prescription drugs, and medical records. Include cash, keys, and credit cards. Hide the bag well. If it's discovered, call it a "hurricane bag" or "fire bag." If you are escaping with children, include their identifying information as well.
- Prepare your support network. Keep your support network in the loop. Let them know how to respond if the perpetrator contacts them.
- Plan a destination. If you're not going to stay with someone you know, locate the nearest domestic violence shelter or homeless shelter.
- Plan a route. Then plan a backup route. If you are driving, have a tank of gas filled at all times. If you rely on public transportation, know the routes departure times. Many public transportation systems have mobile apps that update their schedules and arrival times.
- Important Safety Note: If the dangerous situation involves a partner, go to the police or a shelter first.

## **Alcohol Safety**

### **What can I do to stay safe?**

You can take steps to increase your safety in situations where drinking may be involved. These tips can help you feel safer and may reduce the risk of something happening, but, like any safety tips, they are not foolproof. It's important to remember that sexual

assault is never the victim's fault, regardless of whether they were sober or under the influence of drugs or alcohol when it occurred.

- Keep an eye on your friends. If you are going out in a group, plan to arrive together and leave together. If you decide to leave early, let your friends know. If you're at a party, check in with them during the night to see how they're doing. If something doesn't look right, [step in](#). Don't be afraid to let a friend know if something is making you uncomfortable or if you are worried about their safety.
- Have a backup plan. Sometimes plans change quickly. You might realize it's not safe for you to drive home, or the group you arrived with might decide to go somewhere you don't feel comfortable. Download a rideshare app, like Uber, or keep the number for a reliable cab company saved in your phone and cash on hand in case you decide to leave.
- Know what you're drinking. Don't recognize an ingredient? Use your phone to look it up. Consider avoiding large-batch drinks like punches or "jungle juice" that may have deceptively high alcohol content. There is no way to know exactly what was used to create these drinks.
- Trust your instincts. If you feel unsafe, uncomfortable, or worried for any reason, don't ignore these feelings. Go with your gut. Get somewhere safe and find someone you trust or call law enforcement.
- Don't leave a drink unattended. That includes when you use the bathroom, go dancing, or leave to make a phone call. Either take the drink with you or throw it out. Avoid using the same cup to refill your drink.
- Don't accept drinks from people you don't know or trust. This can be challenging in some settings, like a party or a date. If you choose to accept a drink from someone you've just met, try to go with the person to the bar to order it, watch it being poured, and carry it yourself.
- Check in with yourself. You might have heard the expression "know your limits." Whether you drink regularly or not, check in with yourself periodically to register how you feel.
- Be aware of sudden changes in the way your body feels. Do you feel more intoxicated than you should? Some [drugs](#) are odorless, colorless, and/or tasteless, and can be added to your drink without you noticing. If you feel uncomfortable, tell a friend and have them take you to a safe place. If you suspect you or a friend has been drugged, call 911, and be upfront with healthcare professionals so they can administer the right tests.
- Ask yourself, "Would I do this if I was sober?" Alcohol can have an effect on your overall judgment. You wouldn't drive, make medical decisions, or ride a bike while intoxicated. Many professionals, such as doctors, teachers, and pilots, cannot be drunk while doing their jobs. Given this context, is what you're about to do a good idea? Will you be comfortable with your decision the next day?

## Understanding What Consent Looks Like

### What is consent?

Consent is an agreement between participants to engage in sexual activity. There are many ways to give consent, and some of those are discussed below. Consent doesn't have to be verbal, but verbally agreeing to different sexual activities can help both you and your partner respect each other's boundaries.

### How does consent work in real life?

When you're engaging in sexual activity, consent is about communication. And it should happen every time. Giving consent for one activity, one time, does not mean giving consent for increased or recurring sexual contact. For example, agreeing to kiss someone doesn't give that person permission to remove your clothes. Having sex with someone in the past doesn't give that person permission to have sex with you again in the future.

### You can change your mind at any time.

You can withdraw consent at any point if you feel uncomfortable. It's important to clearly communicate to your partner that you are no longer comfortable with this activity and wish to stop. The best way to ensure both parties are comfortable with any sexual activity is to talk about it.

### Positive consent can look like this:

- Communicating when you change the type or degree of sexual activity with phrases like "Is this OK?"
- Explicitly agreeing to certain activities, either by saying "yes" or another affirmative statement, like "I'm open to trying."
- Using physical cues to let the other person know you're comfortable taking things to the next level

### It does NOT look like this:

- Refusing to acknowledge "no"
- Assuming that wearing certain clothes, flirting, or kissing is an invitation for anything more
- Someone being under the legal age of consent, as defined by the state
- Someone being incapacitated because of drugs or alcohol
- Pressuring someone into sexual activity by using fear or intimidation
- Assuming you have permission to engage in a sexual act because you've done it in the past

## Staying Safe on Campus

### Increasing on-campus safety

The following tips may reduce your risk for many different types of crimes, including sexual violence.

- Know your resources. Who should you contact if you or a friend needs help? Where should you go? Locate resources such as the campus health center, campus police station, and a local sexual assault service provider. Notice where emergency phones are located on campus, and program the campus security number into your cell phone for easy access.
- Stay alert. When you're moving around on campus or in the surrounding neighborhood, be aware of your surroundings. Consider inviting a friend to join you or asking campus security for an escort. If you're alone, only use headphones in one ear to stay aware of your surroundings.
- Be careful about posting your location. Many social media sites, like Facebook and Foursquare, use geolocation to publicly share your location. Consider disabling this function and reviewing other [social media settings](#).
- Make others earn your trust. A college environment can foster a false sense of security. They may feel like fast friends, but give people time to earn your trust before relying on them.
- Think about Plan B. Spend some time thinking about back-up plans for potentially sticky situations. If your phone dies, do you have a few numbers memorized to get help? Do you have emergency cash in case you can't use a credit card? Do you have the address to your dorm or college memorized? If you drive, is there a spare key hidden, gas in your car, and a set of jumper cables?
- Be secure. Lock your door and windows when you're asleep and when you leave the room. If people constantly prop open the main door to the dorm or apartment, tell security or a trusted authority figure.

### Safety in Social Settings

It's possible to relax and have a good time while still making safety a priority. Consider these tips for staying safe and looking out for your friends in social settings.

- Make a plan. If you're going to a party, go with people you trust. Agree to watch out for each other and plan to leave together. If your plans change, make sure to touch base with the other people in your group. Don't leave someone stranded in an unfamiliar or unsafe situation.
- Protect your drink. Don't leave your drink unattended, and watch out for your friends' drinks if you can. If you go to the bathroom or step outside, take the drink with you or toss it out. Drink from unopened containers or drinks you watched being made and poured. It's not always possible to know if something

has been added to someone's drink. In [drug-facilitated sexual assault](#), a perpetrator could use a substance that has no color, taste, or odor.

- Know your limits. Keep track of how many drinks you've had, and be aware of your friends' behavior. If one of you feels extremely tired or drunker than you should, you may have been drugged. Leave the party or situation and find help immediately.
- It's okay to lie. If you want to exit a situation immediately and are concerned about frightening or upsetting someone, it's okay to lie. You are never obligated to remain in a situation that makes you feel uncomfortable, [pressured](#), or threatened. You can also lie to help a friend leave a situation that you think may be dangerous. Some excuses you could use are needing to take care of another friend or family member, an urgent phone call, not feeling well, and having to be somewhere else by a certain time.
- Be a good friend. Trust your instincts. If you notice something that doesn't feel right, it probably isn't. Learn more about how to [keep your friends safe](#) in social settings.

## Feeling Safe after An Assault

If you have experienced sexual assault, there are steps you can take to feel safer.

- Make use of on-campus resources. Colleges often provide a host of services to students for free, including security escorts, health centers, psychological services, and sexual assault services.
- Request a schedule or housing change. If you have classes with the perpetrator or live in the same building, you can request a change from your college administration. Federal laws, such as the [Campus SaVE Act](#), require colleges to honor these requests.
- Access off-campus support services. If you are concerned about anonymity, you can seek out resources located off-campus in the community, like a [local sexual assault service provider](#) or domestic violence shelter.
- Seek a civil protection order (CPO). A CPO, sometimes also referred to as a temporary restraining order (TPO), is a legal document that bars an individual from certain types of contact with the person who is awarded the order. An individual who violates the terms of the restraining order can face criminal charges. Each state has its own rules and regulations for Sexual Assault CPOs that you can learn more about through the [American Bar Association](#).
- Create a safety plan. If you are concerned about your ongoing safety, it can be worthwhile to create a safety plan. [Safety planning](#) is about finding ways to be safe in the present while planning for your future safety as well.

## Additional Resources for Students

- Learn ways to [get involved on your campus](#) and share important information about sexual violence.
- The laws about consent vary by state and situation. It can make the topic confusing, but you don't have to be a legal expert to understand [how consent plays out in real life](#).
- Learn about ways to protect your friends and take [steps to prevent sexual assault](#).

## Steps to Prevent Sexual Assault

### Create a distraction.

Do what you can to interrupt the situation. A distraction can give the person at risk a chance to get to a safe place.

- Cut off the conversation with a diversion like, "Let's get pizza, I'm starving," or "This party is lame. Let's try somewhere else."
- Bring out fresh food or drinks and offer them to everyone at the party, including the people you are concerned about.
- Start an activity that draws other people in, like a game, a debate, or a dance party.

### Ask directly.

Talk directly to the person who might be in trouble.

- Ask questions like "Who did you come here with?" or "Would you like me to stay with you?"

### Refer to an authority.

Sometimes the safest way to intervene is to refer to a neutral party with the authority to change the situation, like an RA or security guard.

- Talk to a security guard, bartender, or another employee about your concerns. It's in their best interest to ensure that their patrons are safe, and they will usually be willing to step in.
- Don't hesitate to call 911 if you are concerned for someone else's safety.

### Enlist others.

It can be intimidating to approach a situation alone. Enlist another person to support you.

- Ask someone to come with you to approach the person at risk. When it comes to expressing concern, sometimes there is power in numbers.
- Ask someone to intervene in your place. For example, you could ask someone who knows the person at risk to escort them to the bathroom.

- Enlist the friend of the person you're concerned about. "Your friend looks like they've had a lot to drink. Can you check on them?"

### **Your actions matter.**

Whether or not you were able to change the outcome, by stepping in you are helping to change the way people think about their role in preventing sexual assault. If you suspect that someone you know has been sexually assaulted, there are steps you can take to support that person and show you care.

- [Help Someone You Care About](#)
- [How to Respond to a Survivor](#)

### **How to Respond to a Survivor**

When someone you care about tells you they've been sexually assaulted or abused, it can be a lot to handle. A supportive reaction can make all the difference, but that doesn't mean it comes easy. Encouraging words and phrases can avoid judgment and show support for the survivor. Consider these phrases:

1. "I'm sorry this happened." Acknowledge that the experience has affected their life. Phrases like "This must be really tough for you," and, "I'm so glad you are sharing this with me," help to communicate empathy.
2. "It's not your fault." Survivors may blame themselves, especially if they know the perpetrator personally. Remind the survivor, maybe even more than once, that they are not to blame.
3. "I believe you." It can be extremely difficult for survivors to come forward and share their story. They may feel ashamed, concerned that they won't be believed, or worried they'll be blamed. Leave any "why" questions or investigations to the experts—your job is to support this person. Be careful not to interpret calmness as a sign that the event did not occur—everyone responds differently. The best thing you can do is to believe them.
4. "You are not alone." Remind the survivor that you are there for them and willing to listen to their story. Remind them there are other people in their life who care and that there are service providers who will be able to support them as they recover from the experience.
5. "Are you open to seeking medical attention?" The survivor might need medical attention, even if the event happened a while ago. You can support the survivor by offering to accompany them or find more information. It's ok to ask directly, "Are you open to seeking medical care?"
6. "You can trust me." If a survivor opens up to you, it means they trust you. Reassure them that you can be trusted and will respect their privacy. Always ask the survivor before you share their story with others. If a minor discloses a

situation of sexual abuse, you are required in most situations to report the crime. Let the minor know that you have to tell another adult, and ask them if they'd like to be involved.

7. "This doesn't change how I think of you." Some survivors are concerned that sharing what happened will change the way other people see them, especially a partner. Reassure the survivor that surviving sexual violence doesn't change the way you think or feel about them.

## **Continued Support**

There's no timetable when it comes to recovering from sexual violence. If someone trusted you enough to disclose the event, consider the following ways to show your continued support.

- Check-in periodically. The event may have happened a long time ago, but that doesn't mean the pain is gone. Check-in with the survivor to remind them you still care about their well-being and believe their story.
- Avoid judgment. It can be difficult to watch a survivor struggle with the [effects of sexual assault](#) for an extended period of time. Avoid phrases that suggest they're taking too long to recover such as, "You've been acting like this for a while now," or "How much longer will you feel this way?"
- Remember that the healing process is fluid. Everyone has bad days. Don't interpret flashbacks, bad days, or silent spells as "setbacks." It's all part of the process.
- Know your resources You're a strong supporter, but that doesn't mean you're equipped to manage someone else's health. Become familiar with resources you can recommend to a survivor, like the National Sexual Assault Hotline 800.656.HOPE (4673) and [online.rainn.org](https://online.rainn.org).