

Information for Teenagers

The Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress (HCSATS) is here to help you cope with the effects of sexual assault. We can answer questions about sexual assault and what happens afterward, like getting a medical exam, being involved in the criminal justice system and telling family and friends.

Although this handout is for teenagers, the information can also be helpful for family members or friends.

What is Sexual Assault?

Sexual assault is a crime. It is against the law. Sex is always illegal when force is used or the person cannot give consent. It is always illegal if the person is a close relative.

Different Kinds of Sexual Assault

Rape ...is any kind of sexual penetration by force or when the person cannot consent. It is usually a single attack. In most cases physical force is used or threatened. In some cases the victim is helpless or under the influence of alcohol or drugs and cannot consent to sex.

Sometimes the offender is a stranger, but more often the offender is someone the victim knows or has just met. "Acquaintance rape" or "date rape" is the same as rape. They are terms used for situations where the victim knows or was going out with the offender. It can include a boy or girl friend.

Child sexual abuse...is when an older person has sexual intercourse or sexually touches a child or teenager without using force. The offender might use manipulation or pressure or just take advantage of the situation.

Incest...is when the offender is a close relative like a parent or stepparent. It is always illegal no matter how old the victim is.

In Washington sex is illegal even when there is no force when:

- The younger person is under 12 years old, and the older person is more than 2 years older
- The younger person is 12 or 13, and the older person is more than 3 years older
- The younger person is 14 or 15, and the person is more than 4 years older

The younger person is 16 or 17, and the older person is more than 5 years older and is in a position of authority to the younger person (such as a teacher, coach or pastor)

The reason why it is illegal is because children or teenagers in these situations are considered too young to understand what is happening, they may feel they cannot say no even if they

want to, or because the offender is taking advantage of them. This is usually because the offender is someone in the family or a family friend, or even a teacher, coach, youth leader, pastor or someone in a position of authority.

Special Issues for Teenagers:

Teenagers are more independent than younger children and want to be able to make choices and do things on their own. When teenagers get sexually assaulted parents may want to be more protective and keep them closer to home. This can make it harder for teenagers to tell and can be frustrating afterwards.

Sometimes sexual assault happens when a teenager is doing something that is against family rules like being at a party where alcohol or drugs are used or going out with people without parents' permission. This can make it hard to tell about what happened because of worrying about being believed, being blamed or getting in trouble.

Another type of situation is where the teenager does not agree with the law and wants to have a sexual relationship with an older person. Even if the teenager does not think it is abuse, it is illegal and the older person knows that it is wrong.

Whose Fault is Sexual Assault?

It is always the offender's fault. You did nothing to deserve being sexually assaulted. Some people blame victims for putting themselves in a situation or doing something that made the sexual assault happen. **This is never true.** Sexual assault is never the victim's fault.

There are some situations, though, which can put a person at greater risk. For example, it can be risky to go somewhere with someone who you don't know very well. Using drugs or alcohol can also increase risk. Still, no one has the right to force sex on another person.

About Offenders

People who rape or sexually abuse teens have very serious problems. They are doing something that they know is wrong, is illegal, is against the teenagers will and can cause harm. Offenders can be any kind of person, from any background. Sometimes offenders are the opposite sex and sometimes the same sex as the victims. Offenders can be teenagers or adults. The main point is that it is not possible to tell if someone is going to rape or sexually abuse you by how they look or by how they act a head of time.

Criminal Justice System

The law requires professionals to make a police report when they find out that teenagers are raped or sexually abused. However, victims have a say about whether they want to cooperate in the criminal investigation or prosecution. Victims may have a good reason why they don't want to participate or they may not know what is involved. You have a right to a legal advocate who can explain what happens and what victims' rights are and be with you during interviews.

Child Protective Services (CPS) has to be called if you are in danger or the offender is in the family. CPS is a state agency with the legal responsibility for making sure that children and teenagers are safe in their homes. The social worker, doctor, nurse or counselor will tell you if a report **has** to be made and help figure out with you what your options are.

How will the Sexual Assault Effect Me?

Sexual assault affects people differently. Some people don't seem to have many problems, some have problems for a while and then get better, and others can be seriously distressed by the assault for a long time. Some people may experience problems right after the abuse is reported, and others may not have problems until much later. Most people are very upset in the beginning and gradually feel better.

The most common effects are feeling afraid, remembering what happened and getting upset, having trouble concentrating, nightmares or difficulty sleeping, being nervous, jumpy or irritable, crying or being sad. These reactions are normal. However, they can be difficult to cope with alone and sometimes they don't seem to be getting better. Counseling can help you deal with your sexual assault reactions.

Getting raped or sexually abused can also change how victims think about themselves as a person, how trusting they are of other people or their views on how safe and fair the world is. Some changes from such a big experience are to be expected, but the changes do not have to interfere with having a normal life. Again, counseling can help.

Getting Help After Sexual Assault

Medical Care

It is important to have medical treatment after a sexual assault. There may be physical problems from the assault that can be treated. You may need to be tested for sexually transmitted diseases. Also, if needed, medical evidence may be collected for legal purposes.

Counseling

If you want someone to talk to, a counselor can help. He or she will listen, help you feel better and help you solve problems.

Counselors have talked to a lot of other people who have been raped or sexually abused and know it is never the victim's fault. . Talking to a counselor can help you sort out feelings and reactions to the abuse and figure out how to handle them. You can get counseling here at Harborview, from a counselor elsewhere, or through your school. You might not want counseling now, but at a later time feel that counseling might help.

Legal Advocacy

This is help answering questions about the legal system, preparing you for what will happen, helping find out what is happening with your case or going with you to appointments or court. You have a right to have an advocate.

Our mission is to prevent and counter the harmful effects of traumatic experiences on victims, families and our community. These experiences include sexual and physical abuse and neglect of children, rape, sexual harassment, violent crime, accidents and disasters. Services reflect the values, beliefs and traditions of our community and are available to people of all ages. We strive to create a society free of interpersonal violence.

Founded in 1973, the Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress is a Washington state accredited Community Sexual Assault Program.