

SEXUAL ASSAULT ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

Estimates suggest that one in six college women are victims of rape or attempted rape and ten percent of all victims are men. “Date” and “acquaintance” rape, forced intercourse by someone the victim is dating or knows, are common realities on college campuses throughout the country. The following risk reduction strategies are important for both men and women to put into practice to help prevent sexual assaults:

Talk openly and directly.

It is necessary for individuals to establish personal sexual limits and self-expectations. In every relationship and interaction, these limits and self-expectations need to be communicated. Communication about sexual desires and limits needs to happen as early as possible. Such intimate communication may feel awkward but directness about your intentions and limits is self-enhancing and demands respect from others.

Regard personal boundaries and feelings.

Unconditional regard for another’s feelings and personal space is a necessary dynamic in every interaction. Another individual’s personal boundaries and feelings may conflict with your own sexual desires and/or

expectations. However, it is important that you accept and regard the decision of another individual even if it differs from what you want or expect. Sexual assault is the result of not accepting the decision of another person and forcing that person against his/her will.

Be responsible.

Alcohol and drugs play a significant role in acquaintance/date rape. Responsible decisions are compromised while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Intoxication interferes with clear thinking and effective communication. It can also lower inhibitions and cause some people to behave more aggressively. Responsible drinking helps prevent sexual assaults.

Be aware of myths.

Many individuals subscribe to the abounding myths pertaining to sex: men must always initiate sex; sex and masculinity are one and the same; popularity among male peers will increase with more sexual exploits; men don’t talk about their sexual limits or desires; women don’t like to initiate sexually; women play “hard to get.” Believing in these myths will only create misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Asking your partner what she or he wants may feel initially uncomfortable. However, it will allow for the development of healthier interactions and more fulfilled individuals.

Safety

- Don’t drink to get drunk. Always be alert.
- Never leave your drink unattended.
- Never accept a drink from someone you do not know very well. Only accept drinks that come from the bartender or server.
- Get your own closed container and monitor it.
- Use the “buddy” system. Friends need to let one another know where they are at all times. Pay close attention to a friend who is not drinking responsibly.
- If you meet someone at a party or a bar who seems interested in you, avoid being alone with that person. Stay in public places, not in someone’s room or car.
- Communicate assertively both verbally and nonverbally in all situations. Passive behavior is associated with permission.
- Be aware of yourself and your environment at all times. Be cognizant of changes in your surroundings and trust your intuitions.
- Know your state laws regarding sexual assault and rape.

Pennsylvania Law

- **Sexual Assault** is non-consensual but non-forcible sexual intercourse or attempted sexual intercourse. The “No Means No” law refers to sexual assault.
- **Rape** is sexual intercourse or attempted sexual intercourse with a person by forcible compulsion, by threat of forcible compulsion, or with a person who is incapable of giving consent.
- **Indecent Assault** is unwanted sexual contact including kissing, grabbing, or fondling.
- **Coercion** is generally used with sexual assault. Coercion takes the form of threats, bribes, blackmail, or any psychological pressure (e.g., the pressure to drink excessively).
- **Physical Force** includes restraining, hitting, or the use of weapons.

Young adults, both men and women, have many questions but few answers regarding sexual relationships. They seem to receive opinions, conflicting at best, but relatively little guidance or understanding. It is imperative that individuals find this understanding on their own. Men and women need to define within themselves what is of importance and value to them. With a strong sense of personal clarity and conviction, they will feel free to be themselves and will not tolerate ambiguity or pressure from anyone in any kind of relationship.