



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

**ACQUAINTANCE RAPE AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION:
WHAT ADULTS CAN DO TO HELP TEENS**

Is rape a problem for teens?

One rape is reported every six minutes in the U.S., according to the F.B.I. (1990). Only one out of ten rapes is reported (Koss, 1986). Girls between the ages of fifteen and nineteen years old are at highest risk and are most unlikely to report rape, especially if it involves someone they know.

How does rape affect teenagers?

Most teens do not think rape can happen to them. Although teenage girls are most often the targets of sexual assault or exploitation, teenage boys can also be victimized, most often by other males. Even when a sexual assault does occur, most teens do not label forced sexual acts as “rape,” particularly if there is no weapon involved and they know the perpetrator. Many victims confuse their own submission (out of guilt, fear, or confusion) with consent. The impact of rape can be severe. Some of the effects include an inability to concentrate, social isolation, low self-esteem, depression, difficulty in school and difficulty in trusting people. Many teens who are involved in substance abuse, prostitution, running away and suicide have been victims of sexual assault. The effects of sexual assault can be life-changing. It is important for teens to be able to talk about the assault with people who will be understanding and supportive of their feelings and will help them find their way.

How do teens get raped?

Teens are exploited, taken advantage of and raped in everyday situations: dating, at friends’ houses, partying, breaking rules, going to school and job hunting. They can be taken advantage of and trapped because of their fear of getting into trouble; their inexperience and lack of information about sexuality; their need (along with outside pressure) to enter the world of love and romance; the number of new people in their lives; their trust of others and their willingness to think they have misunderstood another’s intentions; their belief that if they are good, good things will happen to them, if bad things happen, they must have deserved it. They may have heard that rape is a violent, not a sexual, crime. But they are more likely to encounter sexual bargaining than an interaction which seems violent. Verbal pressure is more likely than a weapon. The difference between rape, sexual exploitation and consenting sex is how much, and what kind of pressure and force is used.

TEENAGE ACQUAINTANCE RAPE

Adults can help by beginning a dialogue with teens about the issues involved in acquaintance rape and exploitation.

Find out what they already know about sexual assault. “Do you and your friends ever talk about date rape?” Timing is important. A quiet, non-pressured time is more appropriate than when the boy or girl is about to go out on a date.

Before you start, you need to be prepared to have a discussion, rather than a lecture. The adult can listen and learn from the teens who are present. Resolve not to frighten them. The discussion should be a time of sharing ideas and strategies for situations that may arise.

Define the topic. “Rape is when a boy holds a girl down and forces her to have intercourse. Acquaintance rape is when it is someone she knows -- a date, a classmate, a co-worker. She often cannot believe that this is happening to her.”

Find out what “force” may mean to the teens you are talking to. It may mean:

- *Someone who tries to make you feel bad.*
“What’s the matter? Don’t you like me?”
- *Someone pressures you for sex.*
“If you really loved me, you would.”
- *Someone who refuses to accept no.*
“But I just spent all that money on you!”
“Girls are supposed to say ‘no!’ ”
- *Someone who feels he has the right to have sex with you.*
“You’re a tease.”
“You turned me on. Now you have to.”
- *Someone who commits emotional blackmail.*
“I’ll commit suicide if you break up with me.”

Tell the teens that you want them to make choices based on their own personal values, not to be forced, pressured or exploited by someone else. Both young men and young women have the right to be respected for their values, and neither should pressure the other into the violation of their personal choices.

HOW ADULTS CAN HELP

Parents can use a technique that has been used with teenage drinking - the “no questions asked bail-out.” Parents and their children agree that if the child is ever in a situation where he or she is stuck and can see no way out, even if the child has broken family rules, that they may call home and a parent will come to pick them up. No questions will be asked that evening and the parent promises not to embarrass the child in front of their date. The next day they will sit down and quietly talk about what happened. It is important for the child to understand that her safety is more important than the breaking of a family rule.

Because peer pressure becomes great in adolescent years, teens may not be as safe in groups as they are in early childhood. You can talk about group dynamics with teens, and offer the following ideas for their use:

- Keep your independence by having your own transportation or knowing you can call your parents.
- Keep in touch with your own feelings. If an okay situation becomes uncomfortable, pay attention to how your feelings change.
- If you’re out with a guy who has a reputation for “scoring,” be prepared for pressure.
- Decide ahead of time what you will do if he/she begins to pressure you for more sexual contact than you are ready for or are interested in.
- Practice making choices and asserting yourself in everyday situations. Do you sometimes feel taken advantage of, for instance by always being the one to provide transportation when you and your friends go somewhere? If you are able to decide and express what you want in everyday situations, you will likely feel more comfortable resisting unwanted sexual pressure.
- In a group situation, if there is any physical violence, leave without question.
- If you feel uncomfortable about how the situation is changing, pay attention to your feelings and act on them. Don’t hesitate to leave, if that is what you want to do.
- When someone stands too close, touches you all the time, touches your breasts “by accident,” or stares at you or the sexual parts of your body, they are violating your personal space. You have a right to confront the person or leave the situation if you are made to feel uncomfortable.

Encourage opposite-sex friendships. A boy and girl who view each other as friends are less likely to take advantage of or exploit the other. Friendships can provide fun and acceptance and help teens to be less dependent on dating for their self-worth and sense of belonging.

Remember!! Teens need adults whom they can trust to talk about the issue of acquaintance rape and exploitation. Just talking about the issue will begin to build communication lines which are vital during adolescence. If a situation does arise where they need guidance, they will know that they can come to you.

RESOURCES

Ongoing Counseling Services for Sexual Assault/Date Rape

Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program (VASAP)

(240) 777-1355 • FAX (240) 777-1329

TTY (hearing impaired): (240) 777-1347

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/vasap

Group Presentations on Sexual Assault/Date Rape

Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program (VASAP)

(240) 777-1355 • FAX (240) 777-1329

TTY (hearing impaired): (240) 777-1347

Crisis Assistance for Sexual Assault/Date Rape and After Hours Help

24-Hour Crisis Services

(240) 777-HELP (4357)

TTY (hearing impaired): (240) 777-4815

The content of this handout was adapted from Nobody Told Me It Was Rape: A Parent's Guide for Talking with Teenagers About Acquaintance Rape and Sexual Exploitation, by Caren Adams and Jennifer Fay, Network Publications, Santa Cruz, California, 1984.



Department of Health and Human Services

Behavioral Health and Crisis Services

Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program

1301 Piccard Drive Suite 4100

Rockville, Maryland 20850