

WHAT IS SEXUAL ASSAULT?  
WHAT IS SEXUAL ABUSE?

CONSENT - YOU HAVE THE  
RIGHT TO SAY **NO!**

WHO IS ASSAULTED?  
WHO COMMITS SEXUAL  
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WHERE DO ASSAULTS  
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ALCOHOL AND DRUGS CAN  
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WHY DO THEY ASSAULT?  
LET'S **STOP** SEXUAL ASSAULT



## Sexual Assault: What every girl and woman should know

It's important to learn  
about sexual assault.

Here's why...

- Because girls and young women are at the highest risk of being sexually assaulted.
- Because, if you are sexually assaulted, it will most likely be by a boy or man who is a friend, family member or someone else you know – probably not by a stranger.
- Because you can learn how to increase your own safety by learning about the risks of sexual assault.

## What is sexual assault?

Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual act. It can include anything from unwanted sexual touching, to rape and sexual exploitation. Sometimes a sexual assault injures the victim, or is life-threatening.

A sexual assault can happen in many ways. Many people wrongly think that the only kind of sexual assault is rape, or forced sexual intercourse. Many mistakenly think that sexual assault is always part of a violent attack, or that the victim must be injured for it to be called a sexual assault.

But in many cases, no violence is used – instead, the victim may be threatened with words or pressured into doing something she doesn't want. These cases are also sexual assaults.

**Sexual assault is against the law.**

## **What is sexual abuse?**

According to the law, sexual abuse is any kind of sexual contact forced on a child or young person by someone who is significantly older, usually an adult. Sexual abuse might involve sexual touching of a child, or inviting a child to touch an adult in a sexual way.

Most often the person who sexually abuses a child or young person is in a position of trust and authority over the victim. Studies show that often the person who sexually abuses a child is a family member – like a step father, uncle, or older brother – or someone else known to the child like a family friend, a neighbour or a teacher.

Sexual abuse of children is a betrayal of trust and an abuse of power. Sexual abuse is a crime.

A person who was sexually abused as a child can make a police report at any time, even if the abuse happened many years ago.

\* Developed and Written by:  
Lori Haskell, Ed.D., C. Psych.  
Melanie Randall, Ph.D., LL.B.

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## Consent – You have the right to say NO!

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In Canada, the law requires that another person get your consent before starting any sexual activity with you. **To give your consent is to give permission, or agree to do something.** Any time someone wants to do something sexual with you, that person is not allowed unless he or she asks and you say yes.

### The other person does NOT have your consent if:

- You say no
- You give no reply
- The other person does not ask because you gave consent in the past
- You are too drunk or stoned to know what you're doing
- The other person manipulates, pressures, threatens or forces you to say yes
- The other person lies about what he or she wants to do with you.

By law, a child or young person can **never** consent to sexual activity with an adult.

In any situation and with any person, **you have the right to set your own sexual limits – to choose what you do and don't want to do. Trust your instincts as to what those limits are. Other people must respect those limits.** In other words, you have the right to say no to any sexual activity.

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## Who is assaulted?

Girls and women of all ages, sizes, sexual orientations, and racial, cultural and ethnic groups have been sexually assaulted – some are much like you.

- Some groups of girls and women have been found to be more often assaulted than others. These groups are:
- Girls, teenagers and women up to their mid-20s
- Girls and women of all ages who have a disability

These groups of girls and women are not to blame for these assaults. In the case of young women, it is often their lack of knowledge about sexual assault which puts them at greater risk. In cases of women with disabilities or Aboriginal women, their frequent experiences with discrimination, such as ableism or racism, can leave them more vulnerable to all sorts of violence, including sexual assault.

## Who commits sexual assaults?

One of the most difficult things to accept about sexual assaults is that **they are most often committed by someone the victim knows, trusts, or loves.** Most girls and young women are not prepared for the possibility of a sexual assault committed by a guy they know as a boyfriend, a classmate or co-worker, a date, a relative, or an authority figure. It's upsetting to think that someone who is known and trusted could behave in this way. But research shows that:

- Women are twice as likely to be sexually assaulted by a man known to them, than by a stranger.<sup>1</sup> Far fewer cases of sexual assault are committed by strangers.
- Girls and young women are sometimes sexually assaulted in their own families, by a father, brother, uncle or other family member. This is called incest. In one study, 17% of women interviewed reported that they had been sexually abused by a male relative before they reached the age of 16.<sup>2</sup>
- Girls and young women are sexually assaulted by men such as neighbours, family friends, religious leaders, or teachers. Up to one in three women (34%) have reported that, before they reached the age of 16, they had an unwanted sexual experience with a male who was not a relative.

<sup>1</sup>Randall, M. and Haskell, L. "Sexual Violence in Women's Lives: Findings from the Women's Safety Project, a Community Based Survey," Violence Against Women: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal, vol. 1, no. 1, 1995, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Randall and Haskell, 1995 p. 19.

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## Where do assaults happen?

Sexual assaults happen mostly in places we may think of as safe:

- In one's own home, or that of a relative or friend
- In a car
- At a party, club or other gathering where there are many people
- At school
- At your workplace
- In a doctor's or other professional's office.



It is a mistake to think that sexual assaults happen mostly outdoors at night, in parks or dark alleys.

## Who's to blame?

**The person who commits the sexual assault is always responsible for their actions, no matter what the situation. If you have been sexually assaulted, it is never your fault.**

Girls and young women are not sexually assaulted because of what they wear, because they were flirting or because they "led the guy on." These excuses are called "rape myths" – they are called myths because they are not true.

Other rape myths include the following:

**MYTH:** "Men who rape have a stronger or uncontrollable sex drive so they just can't help themselves."

**THE TRUTH:** This is just an excuse used to justify sexual assault. Sexual assault is not about the aggressor's "uncontrollable sex drive" – there is no such thing. The rapist makes a conscious decision to use power and control to assault the victim.

**MYTH:** "Only certain types of men from certain social or racial groups commit sexual assault."

**THE TRUTH:** In fact, studies have shown that men who sexually assault are "normal" – ordinary people from all walks of life and all socio-cultural groups.

**MYTH:** "If there's no violence or physical force then it's not sexual assault."

**THE TRUTH:** Often, the victim is threatened and feels too fearful to struggle or fight back. In many cases, intimidation is all it takes to make the victim give in because the person who is sexually assaulting has power and authority over the victim. Sometimes date rape drugs are used in sexual assaults, making it impossible for the victim to fight back.

**MYTH:** “Women lie about rape in order to cover up the fact that they’ve had consensual sex.”

**THE TRUTH:** Sexual assault remains an under-reported, not an over-reported, crime. In fact, most sexual assaults are never reported. It is very difficult to come forward and report a sexual assault to the police – so it’s not likely that many women do so untruthfully.

**MYTH:** “A married man can’t rape his own wife. He has the right to demand sex.”

**THE TRUTH:** When a man forces his wife to have sex, it is considered rape. In fact, rape in marriage or marriage-like relationships is one of the most overlooked forms of sexual assault. It is not uncommon.

**The law in Canada recognizes that any unwanted sexual act without consent is a sexual assault.**

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## Alcohol and drugs can increase the risk

**Alcohol and drug use – by  
both girls and guys – can  
increase the risk of sexual  
assault:**

- When you have been drinking or taking drugs, you are not as able to recognize
- a potentially dangerous situation, or to react against unwanted sexual
- activity.
- Consent must be given for any sexual activity. If you are too drunk or stoned, it may be difficult or impossible for you to know what you're doing and to give your consent.
- If someone is too drunk or stoned, you can't be as sure he will understand your consent or when you say no to sexual activity.
- Some males use drinking and drugs as an excuse to behave aggressively and come on to girls and women in unwelcome ways.

Girls and young women often blame themselves for a sexual assault that happens to them after having drinks or drugs. They may feel embarrassed or angry at themselves for many reasons:

- Because they were too drunk or stoned to recognize a dangerous situation or react against the sexual assault
- Because they can't remember how they behaved and assume they somehow gave their consent
- Because they were consuming the drinks or drugs illegally or against their parents' permission.

**But remember: Alcohol and drug use are never the cause of sexual assault.**

- **You are never to blame for any sexual assault that happens after you've consumed alcohol or drugs.**
- **No matter how many drinks or drugs they consume, aggressors are always responsible for their actions.**
- **Alcohol and drug use never excuses someone who commits sexual assault.**

# Date-Rape Drugs

More and more girls and women report they were sexually assaulted using a “date-rape drug”. Date-rape drugs can:

- Change your normal self-control or inhibitions (for example, you do things or act in ways you normally would choose not to)
- Reduce your level of consciousness (for example, you feel sleepy, you can barely move, you feel distant from yourself or the world around you, you pass out)
- Cause memory loss or confusion.

These drugs can make it easier for a person to sexually assault you by controlling or overpowering you.

There are several kinds of drugs used as date-rape drugs:

- Sedating drugs
  - alcohol
  - benzodiazepines (for example Lorazepam “Ativan”, alprazolam “Xanax”, etc.)
  - GHB (also known as Easy Lay, Liquid Ecstasy, Gib, natural sleep-500, or somatomax)
  - Ketamine (also known as Special K, Kit Kat, vetalar, or ketaset )
- Stimulants, such as cocaine
- Socializers
  - amphetamines (Ecstasy – also known as E, or MDMA)
  - marijuana

**Date-rape drugs can be given to you without your knowledge.** For example, a date-rape drug can be slipped into a drink (which may or may not be alcohol) at a bar, party or other social event. Once dissolved, the drink itself can mask any colour or odour, so it cannot be seen or tasted. The drugs can lead you to do things you normally wouldn’t. Or they can make you feel so relaxed or lose consciousness so that you are helpless to sexual assault. They may also damage your memory, so that you cannot remember a sexual assault well enough to make an effective report to police.

**Protect yourself from being drugged.** At parties and social events, never accept a drink from anyone other than a trusted friend. Never leave your drink unattended. Watch out for yourself and your friends.

**And be careful when you use any of these drugs voluntarily. Some people may try to assault you when you are drunk or high and easier to control or overpower.** Plan for situations in which you may be vulnerable. Stay with trusted friends. Watch for unsafe places or people who may try to take advantage of your increased vulnerability to sexual assault.

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## Recognizing danger

There are many ways in which an aggressor might try to lead you into a dangerous situation

He might:

- Come on to you, in the hope of scoring or having sex, by flirting, complimenting you, touching you, and/or buying you drinks
- Attempt to kiss you or encourage you to go somewhere alone with him in order to be sexual
- Try to get you drunk or stoned
- Slip date-rape drugs into your drink to make you lose consciousness
- Coax, pressure or shame you into giving in to his sexual desires
- Physically use his body to hold you down while he forces unwanted sexual contact
- Ask to stay over at your place because he's too drunk or stoned or tired to get home
- Try to exploit you or take advantage of you by insisting that you'll go along with his sexual demands if you truly care for him.
- Expose you to pornography. For example, adult sex offenders who target children often try to make their behaviours seem acceptable first by showing their victims films that portray sex between children and adults as normal. The sex offender uses the pornography as a way to start sexual discussions or sexual contact.



In all situations, you must trust your own judgment to identify when you feel a boy or man is behaving in a threatening way.

Some guys are more sexually aggressive than others, and there are behaviours and signs you can look for to protect yourself. Avoid a guy who:

- Thinks that only his ideas and desires matter
- Doesn't listen to you, talks over you, or ignores what you say
- Isn't respectful of your thoughts, wishes or ideas
- Intensely focuses only on your body and your "attractiveness"
- Talks about girls and women in a derogatory or only in a sexualized way
- Drinks or takes drugs to excess
- Tries to make you feel guilty if you don't give in to him
- Invades your personal space and gets sexual too quickly.

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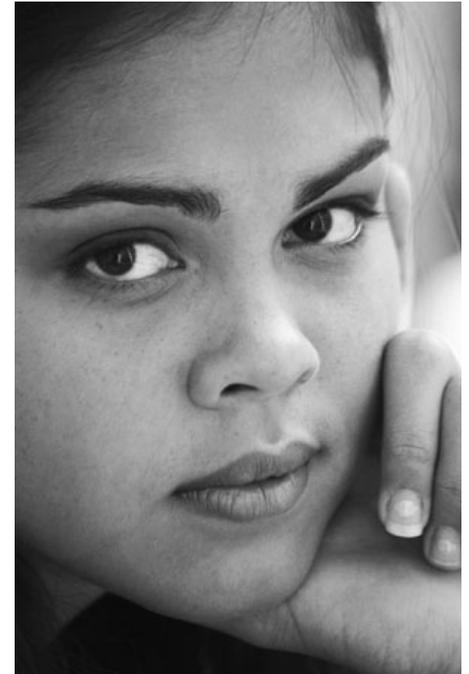
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## Sometimes it's hard to prevent

You have a right to say no to any unwanted sexual activity. But preventing or stopping unwanted sex is sometimes difficult because you may feel:

- Uncertain about what is happening ("Could this really be an assault?" "Could he really be doing this?")
- Self-blame ("Is this my fault?")
- Embarrassed or ashamed about what is happening
- Afraid of hurting the feelings of the person committing the assault
- Afraid of being rejected for not sexually satisfying a date
- Afraid of misinterpreting that a sexual assault is happening; afraid of embarrassing yourself by being wrong.

Not being able to prevent or stop unwanted sexual contact does NOT mean you are to blame for a sexual assault. It is up to the other person to ensure you have consented to any sexual activity.



## What can you say to protect yourself?

Sometimes it's hard to know what to say or do when a boy or man is trying to pressure you into sexual activity that you don't want.

You have the right to set limits. Before you begin any sexual activity you can say something like:

"I really like you and want to kiss but I don't want to go any further than that."

Or you can say, "No," firmly and clearly, to anything you're not comfortable with.

Or you can say:

- "I'm not comfortable doing this and want to stop here."
- "I don't want to do this."
- "It feels like you are putting pressure on me to do something I don't want to do."
- "If you continue doing this against my wishes it is sexual assault."

Listen to your gut instincts and feel confident about them, even if all you can say about them is:

- "No because I don't feel good but I can't say exactly how."
- "No because I don't know what I want."
- "No because I feel confused."

## How else can you protect yourself?

- It is your right to set limits on what happens sexually. It is your right to say no to any sexual activity. Take time to think about what your sexual limits are with certain people and in certain situations.
- Be on the lookout for risky situations. If you feel uncomfortable in any situation, or think you may be at risk, leave immediately and go to a safe place. Trust your instincts.
- Don't be afraid to offend the boy or man if you feel he is threatening, manipulating and/or not listening to you. If you are being pressured into sexual activity you don't want, say how you feel (if you can) and get out of the situation. It is better to have a few minutes of social awkwardness or embarrassment than to go through the pain of a sexual assault.
- Keep in mind that alcohol and drugs increase your vulnerability for sexual assault. Use your best judgment.
- Go with friends you trust to any large or unfamiliar party, club, or event. Agree ahead of time that you will leave together.

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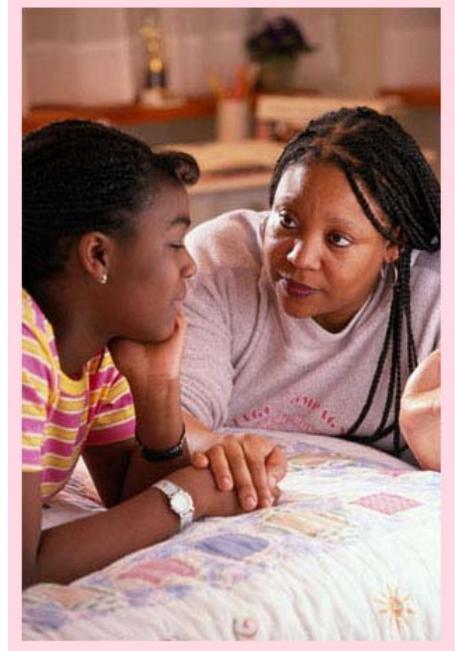
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## If you are assaulted...

Despite all you do to reduce the risk of sexual assaults, they may still happen. If you are sexually assaulted, take the best possible care of yourself by doing the following:

- **Consider telling someone you trust** so that you feel less alone. You can call a sexual assault/rape crisis centre even if you don't want to report the assault to the police. A friend or trained crisis worker can provide the confidential advice and support you deserve.
- If the assault has recently occurred, **take care of your immediate medical needs.** You may need to be checked for injuries, pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Look on the Ontario Women's Directorate website or in your local phone book for the nearest Sexual Assault Treatment Centre, where there are nurses and doctors specially trained in responding to sexual assault. They will tell you about the Sexual Assault Evidence Kit and talk to you about your options. **Ideally, you should go to the hospital within 72 hours after the assault in case you want the doctors to collect physical evidence which could be used in court if you report the assault to the police.**
- **Believe in yourself.** What happened to you was wrong. No matter what the situation – no matter what you were doing or wearing, whether you had been drinking or taking drugs, or where you were when the assault took place – you are not to blame.
- **Seek support.** Consider going to counselling. Sometimes talking about your experience can be the most important step in healing.
- **Give yourself time to heal.** Remember that recovery from sexual assault is different for everyone.



## Some effects of sexual assault

It is normal to feel a wide range of emotions after being sexually assaulted. Some of these may include:

- self-blame
- anger
- feeling powerless
- a sense of worthlessness
- feelings of confusion

Some of the more extreme after-effects might include:

- anxiety and fear
- nightmares and flashbacks (sudden disturbing images/memories)
- emotional numbness (a feeling of “nothingness”)

You might even feel as if you want to die or kill yourself.

**It is very important to get help** in dealing with the harmful and often long term effects of sexual assault.

For example, you can speak to someone at a sexual assault/rape crisis centre without having to give your name so your privacy is protected. You might also want to see a counsellor (like a guidance counsellor or nurse at your school) or talk to a therapist for support.

**NEED HELP NOW? IT'S AVAILABLE 24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK.**

**CALL KIDS HELP PHONE TOLL-FREE AT 1-800-668-6868**

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## Why do they assault?

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There are many complicated reasons why boys and men commit sexual assault.

For example, boys and men constantly receive sexist and violent messages about how they should act and how they should treat girls and women. These harmful messages might lead them to think that a sexual assault is no big deal or even to think about committing one.

Harmful, sexist ideas show up almost everywhere – you may hear them from your friends and people at school, from song lyrics, music videos, movies and other media, and from your parents or other relatives. They might come from people you dislike, or from people you like and respect.

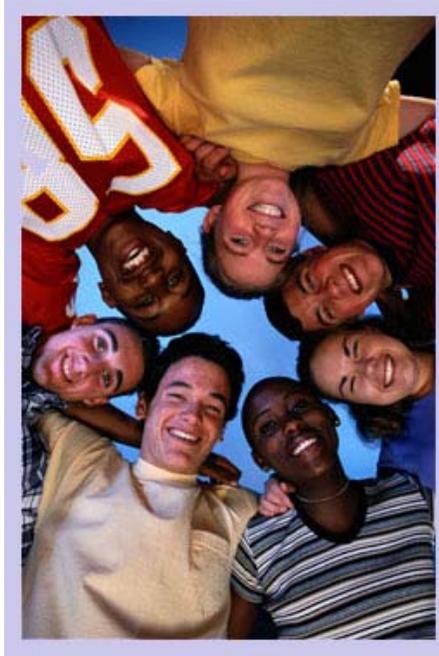
Some of these harmful ideas include:

- Considering it okay for males to use violence and other threatening behaviours to get what they want.
- Thinking that males are allowed to act in sexual ways toward girls and women without first getting their consent.
- Believing that females always like sexual attention, even when they say they don't.
- Believing that females always should be available and willing to fulfill males' sexual desires.
- Considering males as more important than females and that females' ideas, opinions and work are not as valuable as males'.
- Thinking that females don't deserve the same respect and opportunities as males.
- Believing that males have a right to control the girls and women in their lives – if they don't they aren't "real men" and should feel ashamed.

**All of these sexist and violent messages are FALSE**, yet many people mistakenly believe them.

Boys and men who believe these harmful messages may be more likely to commit sexual assault. They may feel threatened when females do not share these ideas because they are afraid of feeling powerless or ashamed around other people. As a result, they may feel a sense of power when they control a girl or woman by manipulating, threatening, or physically assaulting her.

## Let's STOP sexual assault



Sexist attitudes that continue to blame females for being assaulted – as well as any ideas that put women down – are part of the problem. These must be challenged if we are to put an end to sexual assault.

Living free of sexual assault is every girl and woman's right. Sexual assault violates our basic human right to respect, to being treated as equal to males, to safety, and to being able to make decisions about our bodies.

Right now there are girls and guys like you and your friends who are speaking out. They are active in their schools and communities, teaching others why it is important that males and females have equal and respectful relationships. So join a group at your school that works on

sexual assault prevention, or speak to your student council, school nurse or guidance counsellor about setting up prevention education and events. Anti-violence education is an important part of sexual assault prevention. You can also approach your local Rape Crisis Centre to find out how you can help with their public education campaigns.

Don't be afraid to set limits on what sexual activities you will and will not take part in. Be on the lookout for dangerous situations and people who don't respect your rights. If you are assaulted, don't be ashamed, don't blame yourself, and make sure you take proper care of yourself so you can heal.

Educate yourself and the people around you. Make yourself aware of sexist ideas and messages in the media and in what people say and do. Raise awareness of the problem of sexual assault by discussing it with your friends, family, and classmates. Speak out against sexist ideas and messages.

Your work will become part of the important, worldwide movement to achieve real equality between men and women.

For more information on sexual assault, other forms of violence against women, and other issues important to women, try following some of the [links](#) listed here.

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