

Sexual Assault is a Crime

Sexual assault is a crime of violence, power, and control. It happens when a person is forced, threatened, or coerced into sexual contact against her or his will. It includes unwanted touching, kissing, and rape.

Sexual assault is never the victim's fault

No one deserves or asks to be raped or assaulted. What a person wears, how much they drink, or how they act does not mean they want to participate in sexual activity. It is also not the victim's fault if they are unable to consent because of alcohol, drugs, or disability.

Indicators of sexual abuse in relationships

- ◆ Ignoring you when you say "no" to sex
- ◆ Pressuring you to perform sexual acts that make you uncomfortable
- ◆ Telling you it's your "duty" to have sex
- ◆ Forcing you to look at pornography
- ◆ Demanding sex when you're sick or physically unable to participate
- ◆ Hitting or choking you during sex
- ◆ Expecting sex after a fight

If you choose to report the crime to the police, the first 72 hours following the assault are vital. Physical evidence of the assault may be collected from your body. Try to not wash, shower, brush your teeth or hair, or use the restroom until the evidence is collected.

Healing from Sexual Assault

People react and cope in different ways to the trauma caused by sexual assault.

The feelings listed below, and many others, are all normal reactions to crises like sexual assault:

- ◆ Shock and/or disbelief
- ◆ Fear
- ◆ Anxiety
- ◆ Shame or embarrassment
- ◆ Helplessness or lack of control
- ◆ Isolation from others
- ◆ Inability to concentrate
- ◆ Emotional and physical exhaustion
- ◆ Lack of appetite or overeating
- ◆ Nightmares
- ◆ Flashbacks (memories so real you feel like you are re-living the assault)

Free and Confidential Services

Crisis Counseling ~ Support Groups
Hospital Companionship
Legal Companionship
24 Hour Hotline ~ Emergency Shelter
Information and Referrals
Community Presentations

Risk Reduction Tips

Most rapists are people that we know and trust. They are people we don't think would hurt us. Although not every assault can be prevented, there are some ways to stay as safe as possible.

1. Trust your instincts. If a situation feels bad, get out!
2. Be aware that drugs/alcohol and isolation are high risk factors for sexual assault.
3. Learn warning signs of potentially dangerous partners.
4. Stay aware of your surroundings and carry a cell phone.
5. Set clear sexual, emotional, and physical boundaries.
6. Meet new dating partners in a public place or double date with friends.



Strength.

If you were recently assaulted

Try to get medical help as soon as possible. There may be injuries you can't see. You can go to the emergency room or your own doctor. It is important to make sure your body is okay.

Medical staff can also:

- ◆ Call a companion from The Laurel Center to come stay with you for support
- ◆ Collect evidence
- ◆ Run medical tests
- ◆ Treat infections
- ◆ Talk to you about STD and pregnancy prevention

You have the right to ask questions about your treatment. You also have the right to say "no" to any treatment.

If you were assaulted in the past

Memories of the assault may keep coming to you long afterward. Or, you may remember only pieces of the assault.

Some survivors feel they may have recovered, but then feel bad again if something stressful happens in their lives.

All of these reactions are normal, but can be hard to overcome. Many survivors find it helpful to talk to a sexual assault staff person.

You are not alone.

Sexual assault can happen to anyone, young or old, rich or poor, male or female. One in four women and one in ten men will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime.



*You are not alone.
There is help available.*

For more information, contact:

The Laurel Center
Hotline: 540-667-6466
Office: 540-667-6160

or

Virginia Family Violence
& Sexual Assault Hotline
1-800-838-8238 (V/TTY)

www.thelaurelcenter.org



THE
Laurel
CENTER

Intervention for Domestic and Sexual Violence
formerly The Shelter for Abused Women

Sexual Assault

P.O. Box 14
Winchester, VA 22604
540-667-6466 Hotline
540-667-6160 Office
1-866-670-2942
540-667-0138 Fax
TTY Available

