

What Should I Do?

What Should I Do if I Have Been Raped or Sexually Assaulted?

1. **Make sure you are in a safe environment. If you believe you are still in danger, call 911.**
 - Once you're out of physical danger, contact someone you know and trust, such as a friend, relative, teacher, school counselor, friend's parent, doctor or religious leader.
 - **Call us for advice, support and help.** We have trained rape crisis hotline staff and volunteers available 24/7 to answer your questions and help you through the recovery process. You can reach us at 1.800.656.HOPE (press ONE at the menu).
 - **If you are under 18, tell a trusted adult.** (But remember, not every adults is able to help. You may need to tell more than one person before you find someone who can help.) It's important to be aware that, if you disclose your identity and location and that you are being harmed, the person you tell may be required by state law to alert authorities.
 - If you do not have any trusted adults in your life or wish to talk confidentially for now, you can **call the [Child Help Child Help hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD](#)**.
 - You can also call Child Protective Services for your area. You can usually find the number in the blue pages of your phone book, or by contacting the local police department.
 - [Learn more](#) about mandatory reporting requirements.
 - **If you are thinking about suicide, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1.800.273.TALK.**
 - If you have already taken steps to harm yourself or feel that you can't stop yourself from committing suicide, **call 911 or go to the emergency room.**
2. **Consider reporting the attack to the police. If you would like to report, call 911.**
 - While many survivors find pursuing justice an important part of their recovery process, only you decide if it is the right choice for you. If you have questions about the process, call us and we can explain what to expect.
 - If you do plan to report the attack to police, or think there's a chance you will want to in the future, write down all of the details of the attacks that you can remember – while the memory is still fresh.
 - If you do report: Most successful prosecutions end in a plea agreement, without trial, which means that the victim does not have to testify. However, if your case does go to trial, you will generally have to testify. If you are worried about having to testify about intimate matters, let the police or prosecutor know

about your concerns. They can explain the laws in your state and help you understand what might happen if you do go to trial.

3. Complete a forensic exam (sometimes called a “rape kit”).

- To find a hospital or medical center near you with forensic exam capability, call us at 1.800.656 HOPE (press ONE at the menu).
- After a rape or sexual assault, there is certain evidence of the attack left behind on the victim’s body and clothing. A forensic exam collects this evidence and documents the physical findings to provide information to help reconstruct the details about the attack in question.
 - If you intend to report the attack to police, or think that there is a chance in the future, it is important to have a forensic exam as soon as possible – while the evidence is still able to be collected.
 - Under federal law, you are entitled to receive a free forensic exam even if you do not report the attack to police. This frees you from making an immediate decision about reporting – you can preserve the evidence now, and decide whether to report later.
- **Don’t bathe or brush your teeth before visiting the emergency room in order to preserve the forensic evidence.** The forensic exam involves collecting evidence of the attack, such as hairs, fluids and fibers, and preserving the evidence for forensic analysis. If you suspect you may have been drugged, as that a urine sample is collected during the evidentiary exam.

4. Seek medical attention (even if you don’t intend to report the attack to police). There are medical concerns that arise both immediately following the assault and much later. Even with no visible physical injuries, it is important to be tested for STIs and pregnancy.

- If you visit a hospital, ask for testing and preventative treatment. They may provide you with antibiotics for STIs as well as help you to arrange follow-up testing.
- The Center for Disease Control recommends post-exposure HIV prophylaxis for victims of sexual assault (prophylaxis is treatment meant to prevent, rather than treat or cure, a disease).
- The CDC recommends follow-up testing as well as other blood tests to rule out HIV at two weeks, six weeks, three months, and six months after an assault.

Rape, just like consensual intercourse, can lead to pregnancy. Therefore, it is important for female victims to be tested after an assault. For more information, visit [Medline Plus](#). (According to medical reports, the incidence of pregnancy following one-time unprotected sexual intercourse is about 5%.)

5. **The effects of sexual assault on victims and their loved ones can be felt psychologically, emotionally, and physically.** They can be very brief or end up long-term in duration; they may even last a lifetime. It is important to remember that there is no one “normal” reaction to sexual assault. Every individual’s response will be different depending on the situation. **Healing from rape or sexual assault takes time.** Here are some common issues that survivors may need to consider in working toward physical and mental health:

Physical Self-Care

We all function better when our bodies are in top condition. Therefore, those who take better care of themselves, have some key tools to better handle the aftermath of a stressful situation like sexual assault. We tend to underestimate the value of things like eating a healthy diet, getting regular exercise, and getting a good night’s sleep.

- **Adequate Nutrition:** To better concentrate on dealing with the emotional aspects of sexual assault recovery, ensure that you are receiving the nutrition you need. Learn more about eating a nutritious diet.
- **Exercise:** The CDC recommends at least 30 minutes of exercise 5 times a week. Even just a quick walk at lunchtime, can help combat feelings of sadness or depression and prevent chronic health problems.
- **Stay busy:** Many survivors have full time jobs, go to school, volunteer and have families. Finding time to do activities that you enjoy is an important aspect of self-care. Get involved in a sport or hobby that you love! If you have a spouse or partner, make a date night and stick with it. Treat leisure activities as seriously as work or school appointments.
- **Sleep:** Make sure your body is getting the rest it needs. Although every person is different, a reasonable guideline is that most people need between 7 – 10 hours of sleep per night.

Emotional Self-Care

Understanding the importance of your emotional well-being is the start of living a healthy lifestyle. You must be willing to feel and express emotions about what you’ve gone through in the past and what you will go through in the future. Whether it is with one other person, a group of people, or on your own, knowing, accepting, and saying how you feel are steps in the right direction.

- **Counseling:** Seeing a psychologist, a clinical social worker, or a therapist, one-on-one or as part of a support group, can help you and your loved ones process what has happened. Contact us for suggestions.
- **Journal or Diary:** Some survivors find that recording their thoughts and feelings in a journal or diary helps them manage their emotions after an assault. Meditation or relaxation exercises help many survivors as well.

- **Surround yourself with positive people:** It's important to make sure that the people in your life are supportive. Nurture relationships with people that make you feel good about yourself!
 - **Look out for yourself:** Be wary of friends or family who leave you feeling tired or depressed when you see them, never have time to listen to you, or dismiss or belittle your experience as a survivor. Focus on spending time with those you care about and who care about what is best for you.
6. **Know that is it never too late to call for help.** Even if the attack happened years ago, it's never too late to get help. Many victims do not realize they need help until months or years later. Call us at 1.800.656.HOPE (press ONE at the menu) to speak with someone about your attack.

To learn more about the possible effects of sexual assault, please visit:
<http://www.rainn.org/get-information/effects-of-sexual-assault>.