

# Sexual Assault Awareness

WHAT TO KNOW & HOW TO HELP





# what is sexual assault?

## STATISTICS

- Each year in the United States, **433,648 people** (age 12 and older) are sexually assaulted.
- **1 in 6 women** and **1 in 33** men in the United States has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime.
- From 2009 to 2013, Child Protective Services agencies substantiated or found strong evidence to indicate that **63,000 children** each year were victims of sexual abuse.
- Females ages 16 to 19 are **four times more likely** than the general population to be victims of rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault.
- Women ages 18 to 24 who are college students are **three times more likely** than women in general to experience sexual violence. Females of the same age who are not enrolled in college are **four times more likely**.

## WHAT IS SEXUAL ASSAULT?

Sexual assault refers to sexual contact or behaviors that occur without explicit consent. It includes attempted rape, unwanted touching of a sexual nature, the performance of sexual acts through force, and completed rape. The force used in sexual assault includes physical pressure, emotional coercion, psychological pressure, and manipulation.

In the United States, sexual assault is considered a serious public health problem that deeply affects a survivor's lifelong health, opportunities, and general well-being. Sexual assault impacts people of all genders, sexual orientations, and ages from all backgrounds. Approximately eight out of every ten sexual assaults are committed by someone the victim knows as an intimate partner, friend, or acquaintance.

## SEXUAL ASSAULT & SEX TRAFFICKING

Sexual assault can make someone vulnerable to sex trafficking in several ways. First, survivors of sexual assault may experience feelings of shame, guilt, and low self-worth, which can make them ideal targets for traffickers who prey on vulnerable individuals.

Traffickers may use coercion, manipulation, and force to exploit survivors of sexual assault

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for commercial sex acts. Additionally, survivors of sexual assault may suffer from trauma, which can lead to substance abuse, mental health disorders, and homelessness, all of which can make them more susceptible to trafficking. Furthermore, traffickers may use the survivor's fear of being prosecuted or stigmatized for their sexual assault to control and exploit them. The experience of a sexual assault can be a powerful tool for traffickers to force or manipulate survivors into trafficking and make it difficult for them to escape exploitation.

## HOW CAN I HELP?

Unfortunately, a large majority of sexual assaults and sex trafficking incidents go unreported in the United States. There are many reasons why a victim may choose not to report the abuse to law enforcement or tell anyone else, including distrust of law enforcement, a desire to protect the perpetrator, shame about the attack, denial that the abuse occurred, or concern about not being believed or being treated differently.

Whether you are a parent, teacher, employer, coworker, or friend, you can make a difference in a survivor's life by noticing the signs that they may have experienced sexual violence. If you notice any of the signs in someone you know, reach out to them and remind them that you are willing and available to talk about whatever may be troubling them.

## WHAT DO I SAY?

If a survivor chooses to share with you that a sexual assault or trafficking situation has

## SIGNS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- Depression
- Changes in sleeping patterns
- Changes in eating habits
- Low self-esteem
- An increase in drug or alcohol use
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Avoidance of specific places, situations, or people
- Falling grades or withdrawing from classes
- Self-harming behaviors or suicidal tendencies
- Increased anxiety

It is not always obvious when someone you care about has been affected by sexual violence. Learn more about the warning signs at [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)

occurred or is occurring, you may be unsure how to respond or support them. Often, simply listening to them is the best way to support a survivor. Allow them to lead the conversation, being careful not to push for information about the abuse or assault. It is important to remember that the large majority of survivors know the person that assaulted them or is trafficking them, then they may struggle to trust the people around them afterward. Don't expect a survivor to immediately trust you fully, but do everything you can to be trustworthy.

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**RAINN's National Sexual Assault Hotline** staff recommends using the following phrases when speaking with a survivor of sexual assault:

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| **I believe you. It took a lot of courage to tell me about this.**

Due to the nature and violence of sexual assault or trafficking, it can be extremely difficult for survivors to come forward and share their stories. Many survivors feel ashamed, concerned that they won't be believed, or worried that they will be blamed for the assault. Remember to leave the investigation and prosecution to the experts – your job is to support this person as they work toward healing.

“—  
| **You are not alone. I care about you and I am here to listen or help in any way I can.**

Ask a survivor how to best support them, and be consistent in doing them. Remind them that you are not going to leave them to deal with the assault alone. Assess if there are people already present in the survivor's life that they would feel comfortable going to if you are unavailable, and encourage the survivor to consider telling them about the sexual assault. Help the survivor understand the options for treatment and service providers that will be able to help them as they heal from the experience, and offer to go with them to appointments.

“—  
| **It's not your fault. You didn't do anything to deserve this.**

Especially if a survivor personally knows the perpetrator of the abuse, they may blame themselves. Survivors are never responsible for someone else's decision to abuse them, and it is important to be careful to use words and phrases that emphasize that they are not at fault.

“—  
| **I'm sorry this happened. It shouldn't have happened to you.**

Acknowledge that the experience has affected the survivor's life. It can be tempting to say things like, "Everything will be okay", but phrases like this can communicate to the survivor that the challenges they face shouldn't exist. Avoid phrases that suggest they may be taking too long to recover, such as, "You've been acting this way for a while". Remember that a singular timeline for healing from sexual violence does not exist. The abuse may have happened a long time ago, but that does not mean the trauma has been erased. Be sensitive to the survivor's well-being and recognize that you cannot understand their healing process.

If someone tells you that sexual abuse or trafficking has happened recently, encourage them to seek medical attention as soon as possible. Proper medical care can address any injuries the survivor may have suffered and also protect them from any sexually transmitted diseases. Recognize that it is a survivor's choice whether to report the abuse to law enforcement, but encourage them to consider it. Many survivors have found freedom and healing from the trauma of a sexual assault by reporting it, despite the difficulty of the prosecution process.



# resources

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There is hope and healing for survivors of sexual violence, and every one of us can be a part of that process by staying on the lookout for the signs and symptoms in our friends, family, and acquaintances. Become familiar with the resources you can recommend to a survivor.

For more information about how to help someone who has experienced sexual violence, visit:

- [National Sexual Violence Resource Center - Friends & Family](#)
- [RAINN \(Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network\) - Tips for Talking with Survivors](#)
- [RAINN \(Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network\) - Self-Care for Friends & Family](#)
- [Columbia Health - Supporting a Survivor of Sexual Assault](#)
- [Center for Prevention of Abuse - Helping Human Trafficking Victims](#)
- [Blue Campaign - How to Talk to Youth About Human Trafficking](#)

For more information about sexual violence, visit:

- [Safe House Project Resources](#)
- [CDC Sexual Violence Prevention](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention - Statistics](#)
- [Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative](#)
- [OnWatch Sex Trafficking Training](#)
- [National Center for Missing & Exploited Children](#)
- [National Human Trafficking Hotline](#)
- [National Center on Sexual Exploitation](#)
- [RAINN \(Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network\) - Statistics](#)

For professional resources for a survivor of sexual violence, visit:

- [National Center of Missing & Exploited Children](#)
- [Safe House Project Survivor Support Team](#)
- [National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.HOPE \(4673\)](#)
- [National Suicide Hotline at 988](#)
- Law enforcement resources:
  - Call 911 for emergency situations
  - Contact a local police department
  - Visit a medical center and tell a medical professional
- Professional counselors and therapists specializing in sexual trauma

