



Defenses Against Sexual Assault and Rape

Almost every suggestion made throughout the **Living Safely** program is applicable to men or women. This portion is devoted to a crime primarily occurring against women: Rape. Statistically, one in six women (17%) and one in thirty-three men (3%) reported experiencing an attempted or completed rape at some time in their lives (www.cdc.gov/ncipc).

There are few crimes more devastating for the victim than rape. The assault survivor often feels humiliated and ostracized. More than any other type of crime, the physical and psychological effects of sexual assault or rape tend to be long lasting. A rape carries with it the immediate dangers of being beaten, injured, or killed as well as the possibility of pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease.

Sadly, rape is a crime misunderstood by many people...men and women alike. Attitudes towards rape vary greatly. Men tend to have a considerably different view of rape than women. Far too many people still believe that

Rape is a “sex” crime motivated by words, clothing or behavior. In reality, rape is a crime of violence where the perpetrator seeks power and control, sex is simply the “weapon”. During 2004, approximately 94,635 females nationwide were victims of forcible rape. This estimate represents a small increase of 0.8-percent from the 2003 number and a 4.9-percent rise from the 2000 figure(www.fbi.gov). Available data greatly underestimates the true magnitude of the problem. Rape is one of the most underreported crimes. In 2002, only 39% of rapes and sexual assaults were reported to law enforcement officials (www.cdc.gov/ncipc). Rape has traumatic lifelong effects. The loss of self esteem and a sense of inability to continue on with life may carry over to feeling uncomfortable or unable to return to work. Often times, there is difficulty in trusting men or fostering romantic relationships with men.

Some rape survivors continue to feel unsafe and will not leave their home while others may feel the need to move from their home. Unfortunately, for most, there is an overwhelming feeling of shame and dirtiness.

Myths About Rape

- Myth: Rape is an interracial crime.
- **Fact:** Studies have concluded that in as many as 90% of cases, victims & suspects were of the same race.
- Myth: A healthy woman can avoid being raped.
- **Fact:** Studies have shown that threats of death or injury easily immobilize many women, and they are terrorized into cooperation.
- Myth: Rape will never happen to a decent woman.
- **Fact:** A women does not control whether or not she will be raped. The rapist does. Rape victims are of all ages, social strata, ethnic backgrounds and appearances.
- Myth: The majority of rapes are inflicted by strangers in back alleys.
- **Fact:** Recent research has indicated that about **80%** of the rapists are friends, family members, acquaintances or social companions of the victims. About one-third of all rapes occur in the victim’s home.

None of these statistics should be construed to mean that you have no options...no control. There are methods which may help you prevent being a victim of which may help shorten or break-off an attack should one occur.



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A number of the suggestions offered in the *Personal Safety* portion of these presentations are directly or indirectly applicable to rape risk reduction. The following guidelines are also important. The more you learn about the crime of rape, the better prepared and the greater your chances of preventing an attack.

It is our desire to provide you the tools and information to help you to **LIVE SAFELY!**

Probably more than any other crime, opinions regarding the prevention of rape appears to be varied. A review of different materials from a variety of sources seems to support the following information. Understand that there are no absolutes! Incidents vary and the best approach to prevention in one case may not be the best approach in another. The more information you obtain and incorporate into your daily activities, the better able you will be to prevent a sexual assault as well as improving your chances of stopping an assault if one is attempted.

Some Common Safety Tips

Many women (and men) are interested in the subject of self-defense tactics. While the proper use of tear-gas, personal alarms, offensive/defensive weapons (firearms, knives, etc.), stun guns and martial arts training may have application in some cases, it should be noted that all of these techniques or devices have their limitations and come into play because a situation was not avoided in the first place. This is where your focus should be directed: **PREVENTION**, not reaction. However, once you have learned some of the methods of prevention and should you wish to obtain information and/or training about other self-defense methods, you should contact professionals. At **NO TIME** should you consider carrying a deadly weapon without extensive training. Without a thorough knowledge of the weapon you carry and the potential legal ramifications, you may actually increase the risk to yourself or your loved ones. Weapons may be taken from, and used against you.

- Recognize it could happen to me. Realize that you are always vulnerable, whether in your home or just because your pattern of activity doesn't fit those of another victim doesn't mean a rapist will not change his method of operation. Additionally, while attempting to avoid a known

serial rapist through cautious behavior, do not forget there are always other potential rapists out there.

- General awareness is always the first and best step when it comes to preventing an attack. Consequently, the best defense is to always be prepared and to have thought ahead about what to do. Have a **PLAN!** As with a tornado or fire drill, you must be prepared for a personal attack.
- Be alert to your surroundings and the people around you, especially if you are alone or it is after dark.
- Whenever possible, travel with a friend.
- Try to stay in well lighted areas.
- Walk confidently, directly and at a steady pace. Potential assailants look for people who appear vulnerable.
- Walk on the side of the street facing oncoming traffic.
- Walk close to the curb. Be aware of doorways, bushes and alleys which could provide a hiding place for an attacker.
- If you think you are being followed, walk quickly to areas where there are lights. If a car appears to be following you, turn and walk in the opposite direction and/or cross the street. Assess your options; escape routes, possible weapons and available help.
- Try to be aware of your patterns for coming and going. Do you lock your doors upon entering your car? Do you check doors and windows daily in your home? Do you park in well lit areas? Have you identified potentially "bad" safety habits and are you working on developing "good" safety habits?
- In regard to locks, be certain you have installed effective locks on all doors and windows, and use them!
- Install a peephole viewer in your door. NEVER open your door without first determining who is on the other side. Require salespeople, repairmen, utility company employees and even "plain clothes" police officers to provide identification. If in doubt, personally call the business, utility *or* police agency to insure their legitimacy. Columbus police officers will have a laminated photographic identification with their name and badge number on it. In addition to the photograph, the ID will have a full color rendition of the police shoulder patch with the words "Columbus Police", and an IBM bar code on the bottom of the card.

Remember...**you do not have to open your door**. If you are suspicious of the person on the other side of your door, keep the door locked and telephone the police.

- Women should consider listing telephone numbers in the directory with first initial and last name only. List



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last name only for apartment or condominium mail boxes.

- DO NOT HESITATE TO CALL THE POLICE OR NOTIFY NEIGHBORS if you notice something suspicious or unusual. Many arrests of criminals occur when concerned citizens telephone the police and provide information on suspicious people and/or activity.
- Take time to go through your home and identify potential self-defense weapons. A hammer, a knife, shampoo, a glass object, the pointed handle of a hair brush, car/house keys, a fireplace poker, a spray oven cleaner and many more household items may serve as emergency weapons. Think about it!

Acquaintance (Date) Rape

One Prevalent misconception about rape (as mentioned earlier) is that most rapists are strangers. Some studies have indicated that as many as 80% of all rapes are committed by someone known to the rape survivor (www.cdc.gov/ncipc). So-called “date” rapes are large contributors to the problem. You have an absolute right to say “NO” at any time. Nevertheless, at least be aware of potential “problem” situations or circumstances. Avoidance is always preferable to a need to react. While you may not be able to avoid being raped, there are some things you can do to dramatically lessen the risks.

- Realize you have a right to refuse a date. You need not feel guilty or feel you need to “let him down easily”. Your sense of guilt may be used to manipulate you into going out on a date you didn’t wish to go out on. It is OK to be polite, but be clear in your refusal. Say, “Sorry, but I am not really interested in dating you.”
- Set sexual limits. It is YOUR body and no one has a “right” to force you to do anything you do not wish to do.
- Do not give mixed messages – Be clear. Say “Yes” when you mean “Yes” and “No” when you mean “No”.
- Trust your gut level feelings. If you feel you are being pressured, you probably are and you need to respond. Confront the person immediately and/or leave the situation as quickly as possible.
- Be forceful and firm. Do not worry about being polite! Passivity may be interpreted as permission. Say something like, “Stop this. I do

not like this! Don’t hesitate to be rude and/or make a scene. Make noise, yell or honk the car horn to draw attention. If he doesn’t listen...GET OUT!

- Be aware of your dates. You can set the tone by choosing the place to meet, by paying your own way or by driving yourself when possible. Assertive actions establish your independence and make you appear to be a less vulnerable target.
- Communicate with friends at parties and establish who is watching out for whom. Establish driving arrangements. Create options for yourself. It is OK to arrange phone call “check-ins” to determine where and how friends are and with whom. This is especially applicable when leaving with someone you just met.
- Be cautious when inviting someone to your home, or when you are invited to their home. These are the MOST LIKELY PLACES WHERE DATE RAPE MIGHT OCCUR.
- Alcohol and/or drugs are often related to rape. Be aware of your intake of any chemical. Drugs and/or alcohol may compromise your ability (and that of our date) to make responsible decisions.
- Clearly and firmly let your date know your limits before a situation might get out of hand. If things are getting out of control, leave if you are able. If you feel that force is necessary, it probably is. You can punch, kick or stab at eyes, nose, throat, knees, groin or feet. If using force, do not do it “a little bit”...do it to HURT your assailant! Also, yell to attract attention.
- Contrary to information which is often provided, you should NOT “act crazy”, claim to have HIV or VD. Rapists attack people who they believe are worthless and vulnerable. Do not give an attacker any reason to believe you are anything other than a real, feeling, respectable, important, valuable, strong person. Play on the rapists’ lack of a sense of security.

What If It Happens To Me?

It is important to understand that you didn’t ask to be raped and ***It Is Never Your Fault!*** You have no reason to feel guilty or ashamed. Every rape is a violent attack that has traumatic effects on the victim for months and even years afterward. **You should definitely obtain medical attention including tests for STD, pregnancy, HIV and internal injuries.**

While it is recommended you file a police report, you are not required to. Nor are you required to prosecute should you file a report. However, if you believe you wish to prosecute, you should have a medical examination (within 72 hours



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after the attack) and it is preferable to file a police report as soon as possible.

Most people find talking with police and hospital personnel to be intimidating. Please do not hesitate to contact one of the many support groups (listed at the end) and ask for support. There are people who will assist you through the various stages of investigation and prosecution.

Both Grant and Riverside Hospitals have special Rape Crisis Centers with staff members specially trained to work with rape survivors to attend to your immediate care concerns.

It is also critically important to obtain some follow-up help. Counseling, whether it is through a private or public counselor, at school, through a local church, a support group or a hotline number is *strongly* recommended. Many such services are listed in your telephone book.

It is perfectly normal to feel a loss of control in your life. Due to the association with sex, many people confuse choices such as what we drink, who we go out with and what we wear with the causes for rape. This tends to cause a sense of guilt. Remember, nothing you do allows someone else to violate you. It is also normal to feel angry, confused, depressed, disillusioned and a range of other emotions. The best way to handle these emotions is to get back in charge of your life by talking with sympathetic friends, family members, or counselors from rape crisis centers or support organizations. Be patient with yourself! It will undoubtedly take some time to regain a sense of control in your life. There is no schedule for recovery!

Incest and Pedophilia

Incest has been called the most fundamental violation of trust. It may be one of the most painful subjects for survivors to discuss, yet it happens to well over 100,000 children and teens each and every year! Most commonly, the perpetrator is an older family member... a parent, stepparent, uncle or cousin against a child or teenager. While the majority of the survivors are girls, boys are certainly affected as well.

Beyond the family, pedophiliacs, or those with a morbid, often sexual, interest in children may include members of the clergy, youth group leaders, teacher, baby-sitters (and other care givers) or anyone in a position of real or perceived authority over a child.

Children are often made to feel that attack was their fault and/or responsibility. This makes it very difficult for a young person to report what has occurred. Additionally, many victims depend on their abuser for food, support, and shelter adding to the difficulty (in their minds) in regard to reporting it.

For the adult survivor coming to grips with their abuse, professional counseling can be a necessary part of the healing process. Additionally, it is *very* important to understand that abusers seldom assault only one child.

For that reason, survivors should strongly consider notifying police or other authorities to help protect other potential sexual assault victims.

For the Child Survivor

The best (and probably only) way to stop sexual abuse is to tell someone you trust and **who will believe you**. This can be extremely difficult. The attacker will almost certainly say you are lying or that you were responsible for the assault. The police, a trusted teacher or the parent of a close friend may be able to help you.

Keep reminding yourself that sex is not an expression of love and you have the right to not be touched sexually by **anyone** against your will. You **MUST** keep telling until someone believes you!

Running away, getting married or keeping quiet about it will not solve anything. The problem must be brought out into the open in order for you (and the abuser) to get help. Talk with someone you trust...and soon! You can also contact the Columbus Police Investigative Desk at (614) 645-4624 and they will help you.



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