

Acquaintance rape

Acquaintance rape, or date rape, happens when someone is forced to have sex by someone they know. Acquaintance rape can happen anywhere, any time, and to anyone. Most often, however, it happens to college students, particularly freshmen. Twenty-seven percent of all girls who are between 14 and 19 years old are victims of rape or attempted rape, usually while on a date. Not only are the young women in this age group the most vulnerable to rape, but they are also the least likely to report the crime. It's estimated that for every reported rape, 10 to 20 rapes go unreported.

Acquaintance rape is a traumatic event. Victims of rape often feel fear, guilt, shame, anger, helplessness, or a sense of betrayal. These feelings can be particularly strong after being raped by someone you know, who you may have trusted. Particularly in acquaintance rape, the perpetrator will often blame the victim by denying that she or he said "no" to sex or by saying, "You really wanted it." The rapist may threaten the victim's reputation or integrity.

It is important to understand that false reports of rape are uncommon, even when a spouse or a boyfriend/girlfriend is accused. This is true no matter what the relationship or how long the victim and perpetrator have known each other. If a spouse forces intercourse with his or her mate, it is still rape, not sex.

Tips to protect you from acquaintance rape

1. Avoid being alone with someone you don't know well. If you think you might want to date a particular person, get to know this person first and consider double dating. This is especially recommended for women dating men.
2. Set your sexual limits. Be clear in your own mind about what you do and don't want to do and speak up if you don't feel comfortable. If you are a woman dating a man, remember that men may interpret silence or being passive as permission.
3. Pay attention to the signals in a person's behavior that raise red flags. If you are a woman dating a man, he may constantly put you down or ignore your opinion. He may talk negatively about women. He may appear to want power and control over you. Or he may drink heavily or use drugs, or try to make you do so. Trust your instincts. If something feels wrong, it probably is.
4. Be aware that being drunk, high, sick, or tired can decrease your ability to set limits and to protect yourself.
5. If you find yourself in a situation that feels dangerous, try to get away or try to talk your way out of it. If these approaches don't work and you are raped, remember that it was not your fault. You had no choice. Even if you thought you knew the person, you are not to blame.
6. Men are also raped. This is more common than you may think. Male rape is under reported. It is just as important for men to get medical and emotional help following a rape. These services are not just for women.

How to create a safe environment and respect those around us

1. Never force anyone to have sex or any unwanted physical contact. Respect a person's limits. Ask if what you are doing is okay with the person.
2. Acquaintance rape happens mostly under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Being drunk or high can increase your aggression level and decrease your ability to control yourself. When you're intoxicated, you may see yourself as seducing a willing partner even though this is not the case. Be aware that in court, the alcohol level in your blood is no defense against committing rape.
3. Remember, when a person says "no," they mean it. This person is not rejecting you as a person, they are saying "no" to sex. You don't have to have sex to have a successful date.
4. If you have sex without your partner's consent, you are committing a crime even if you have had sex with this person before. Remember, your partner can change her mind at any time.
5. If you're in a group where a rape is about to happen, try to stop it. Report the incident to the police.

What to do if you've been raped

If you're a person who has just been raped, remember it is not your fault, and you are not to blame. Take time to take care of yourself and find support through loving family and friends. However, there are other important things we recommend you do. It is important that you find a safe place and then tell someone, such as a family member, a friend or neighbor, or call the rape crisis hotline. Call for an urgent appointment or go to the emergency room so that you get immediate medical attention as well as support and counseling. Even if you believe that you were not physically hurt and even if you know the rapist well, a medical examination is important. You will need help in preventing sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy, if you're a woman. If you want to press charges or may want to do so in the future, it is important not to wash, shower, bathe, or change clothes before you see a physician.

It is okay to be scared about seeking medical care and pressing charges. It is often difficult to handle this situation alone, and we strongly recommend that you do not try to do so. There are many people who can help you at this painful time, including your physician or other medical professionals. Ask your doctor if you would like a referral to a mental health professional.

If you are a woman

Seeking medical attention soon after a sexual assault will allow you to talk to your physician about preventing pregnancy. If you seek medical attention within 3-5 days, the doctor may be able to prescribe the morning after pill to prevent pregnancy. The sooner you take the morning after pill after having had unprotected sex, the better it will work to prevent pregnancy.

If you are a man

If you had a sexual response (such as an erection or ejaculation) during the sexual assault, these are just physiological reactions and do not mean that the assault was wanted or enjoyed. As long as

there was no consent, it is sexual assault and it is traumatic. Just like women victims of rape, you have the right to ask for help, seek medical attention, and report it to the authorities. Being raped does not change your sexual orientation.

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Other resources

- Call the National Sexual Assault Hotline: Open 24 hours 1-800-656-HOPE
- Connect to our Web site at **kp.org** to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.