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# Survivor

A resource to help victims, their families, friends, and significant others **pick up the pieces**



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## Introduction

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*A note to victims, survivors and their significant others -*

*This booklet is a resource for you. It is a good first step; however, we can't share everything you might want to know within these pages.*

*If you have questions, if you want to talk, if you want someone with you at the hospital or to support you while you report or in court - we can help. You are not in this alone.*

*You are our priority. We are here to listen to you, to encourage you and to support you. Someone is available by phone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Our office is open during normal business hours, Monday through Friday 9am—5pm.*

*All of our services are free and confidential.*

*When you are ready, we will be here for you.*

*Sincerely,*

*RCIS Staff and Hotline Volunteers*

## Getting the Facts

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**SEXUAL ASSAULT CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE**

**1 in 6 women**

**1 in 33 men**

**HAVE BEEN THE VICTIM OF AN ATTEMPTED OR  
COMPLETED RAPE**

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**MOST RAPES ARE COMMITTED BY SOMEONE  
KNOWN TO THE VICTIM**

**73%**

**OF RAPE VICTIMS  
KNOW THEIR ASSAILANT**

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**ONLY**

**2 - 4%**

**OF REPORTED RAPES ARE FALSE**

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**VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT ARE**

**13 times** more likely to abuse alcohol

**26 times** more likely to abuse drugs

**6 times** more likely to suffer from  
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Source: RAINN.org

## Common Reactions to Sexual Assault

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*It is important to remember that being sexually assaulted is a traumatic experience and anything that you are feeling is normal.*

### Physical:

- Headaches
- Nightmares
- Change in appetite
- Insomnia
- Stomach aches
- Muscle tension

### Emotional:

- Disbelief
- Fear
- Depression
- Guilt
- Shame
- Flashbacks
- Anxiety
- Anger

### Behavioral:

- Fear of being alone
- Difficulty trusting
- Trouble with physical intimacy
- Withdrawal from others

## Concerns for Specific Populations

### Adolescents

- **Fear of parental response.** A common reaction of adolescent sexual assault victims is an overwhelming concern about their parents' reaction.
- **Fear of being in trouble.** Fear that they may get in trouble or the expectation that the parents will be disappointed in them for having been in the situation which made them vulnerable is also common. Attending a party where drugs or alcohol were being used is one such situation.
- **Date rape.** If a victim has had an intimate relationship with the rapist in the past, the issue of sexual exploration and the parental reaction becomes important.
- **Fears about personal sexuality.** When the offender is the same sex as the victim (especially in a male-to-male-assault), the confusion is worsened and may lead to questions about one's sexual identity.
- **Social ramifications.** Peers may learn of the survivor's assault and word may travel quickly through schools or neighborhoods. Victims may be blamed, ostracized and harassed by peers, adding to the difficulty of surviving a sexual assault.

## Concerns for Specific populations

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### **Male Victims**

- **Exaggerated sense of self blame.** He may feel that he should have been able to fight off the perpetrator, and may question his masculinity following an assault.
- **Questioning their sexuality.** Heterosexual victims may fear the assault means they are homosexual, or will “turn homosexual.” Homosexual males may feel they are being “punished” because they are homosexual.
- **Extreme fear of how others will judge them.** He may worry that he is “less of a man” or that people will think he is more likely to become a predator.

### **Adults Molested as Children**

- **Setting boundaries.** Their personal boundaries were invaded by someone they trusted. They have trouble understanding that they have the right to control what happens to them.
- **Grieving.** They suffered the loss of many aspects of a healthy childhood and must be allowed to name and grieve those losses.
- **Self esteem.** Negative messages may have been received and internalized, leaving victims with a low self esteem.
- **Sexuality.** Many victims have to deal with the fact that their first sexual experience came as a result of abuse.

### **Family and Friends**

- **Difficulty understanding their own reactions.** Loved ones are secondary victims and can have many of the same reactions commonly found in primary victims.
- **Neglecting their own care.** It is essential that secondary victims take care of themselves as well. They should follow the same suggestions found in this booklet.

## Stages of Recovery

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While reactions to sexual assault are varied, there are generally five stages victims move through on the path toward recovery. It is important to remember that recovery is not a linear process and that victims may move through these stages in different orders. They may move from one stage and back again, and the length of time it takes to move through each stage is as individual as the victim.

- **Stage 1: Initial Shock**

Shock can be experienced physically and/or emotionally. The victim may be controlled and seem distant or expressive (crying and/or shaking).

- **Stage 2: Denial**

Victims may try to forget the assault ever happened and attempt to go on with regular daily routines.

- **Stage 3: Reactivation**

Memories from the assault may cause re-experiencing of feelings from stage one. Victims may have flashbacks, feel more depressed and anxious and/or have physical complaints.

- **Stage 4: Anger**

Victims begin to feel angry, sometimes misdirected toward themselves, friends and loved ones.

- **Stage 5: Integration**

In this stage, thoughts and feelings about the assault are integrated into life experience and the victim will begin to feel their life is getting back on track.

# Taking Care of Yourself

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Healing from the effects of sexual assault takes time, so taking care of yourself is especially important.

## **Physical Self-Care**

- Adequate Nutrition
  - Eat healthy meals
  - Avoid stimulants such as caffeine
  - Avoid depressants such as alcohol
- Exercise
  - 30 minutes five times a week is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
  - A quick walk outside during lunch
- Stay Busy
  - Get involved in a sport or hobby you enjoy
  - Get together with a spouse or friend
- Sleep:
  - Get plenty of rest
  - 7—10 hours a night is adequate for most people

## **Emotional Self-Care**

- Counseling
  - Talk to a trusted friend
  - Seek professional help
- Stress Reduction
  - Journal
  - Meditation
  - Relaxation exercises
  - Deep breathing
- Surround yourself with positive people
  - Nurture relationships with people that make you feel good about yourself
  - Be wary of friends who leave you feeling tired or depressed when you see them or dismiss your experience as a survivor
  - Spend time with people who really care about you



## Entering Counseling

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This booklet is intended to be a resource for victims and concerned others. The trauma of rape and sexual assault may be overwhelming. Your friends and family may not know or understand how to offer support.

**A trained counselor or therapist can assist victims by:**

- Being an objective, confidential outlet for sharing your feelings and concerns
- Helping you understand and work through your reactions to the assault
- Teaching you healthy coping skills
- Empowering you to take the steps necessary for you to feel in control of your life again

**A trained counselor or therapist can assist friends and family by:**

- Helping you understand the feelings you are having as a result of the victimization of your loved one
- Giving you information
- Providing support
- Being a place you can talk openly about your feelings regarding the assault

**Licensed therapy at RCIS is free and confidential. Available by appointment only.**

*It is never too late to call for help, even if the assault happened years ago. Our services are available to you regardless of the length of time that has passed.*

## Regaining Control

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After an assault, the victim, as well as their friends, may feel the world is not as safe as they once thought. While there is no way to guarantee protection from violence, there are several ways that you can feel more secure and safe.

- **Be aware.** Pay attention to your surroundings. Know where you are and who is around you. Park and walk in well lit areas.
- **Avoid isolated areas.** Try to avoid isolated areas as well as being isolated with someone you don't trust or know well.
- **Walk with purpose.** Even if you are not feeling completely confident or sure of where you are going, try to look like you are.
- **Trust your instincts.** If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't.
- **Keep your cell phone with you.** Make sure it is charged before you go out.
- **When you go to a party, go with a group of friends.** Arrive together, check in with each other and stay together.
- **Practice safe drinking.** Watch your drink. Don't let someone else get you a drink without you seeing where it came from and don't leave your drink unattended. Don't drink from large, common open containers.
- **Have a buddy system.** Don't be afraid to let a friend know if you are feeling uncomfortable or that you are worried about their safety.
- **Use a code word.** Have a code word you can use to let family or friends know if you feel threatened so you can communicate your discomfort without anyone else knowing.
- **Date safely.** Go to a public place or out with a group when you are just getting to know someone new.

## Helping a Friend or Loved One

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The presence of support is one of the most important factors in healing from a traumatic incident. The value of your presence and kindness cannot be underestimated.

- **Take Care of Yourself.** Seeing a loved one through a traumatic experience can also be traumatic for friends and family. Make sure you get support and counseling if needed.
- **Listen.** Let them know you are willing to listen whenever he or she wants to talk. Don't ask a lot of questions. This may be difficult, but it is important to let them decide how much, or how little, to share.
- **Believe.** Understand that people in crisis can be confused and memories may come in pieces. This does not mean that they are being dishonest.
- **Be Patient.** Expect setbacks and know that they are normal. Healing can be a slow process.
- **Encourage.** Help your friend remember the importance of getting medical attention and taking care of themselves.
- **Educate.** Learn what you can about reactions and share the information with your friend. Help them understand that what they are feeling is normal.
- **Do NOT Blame.** Reassure your friend that they are not to blame and that they did what they needed to in order to survive.
- **Empower.** Give them options, and allow them to decide what choice is best for them.

### ***Uh-Oh!!***

What if you slip up? Even with the best intentions, sometimes you can say the wrong thing. The key to repairing mistakes is communication. Simple words, when sincere, will do wonders. Phrases like "I'm sorry I said that. I was angry, but I am not angry at you. That isn't really what I wanted to say" can help.

## Seeking Medical Treatment

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### ***“Why do I need it? Nothing hurts.”***

Many victims choose to go to the hospital emergency room after an assault. Getting medical attention as soon as possible after the assault is important for a number of reasons:

- Exposure to sexually transmitted infections, including AIDS
- Pregnancy
- You have external or internal injuries requiring medical attention although you feel no pain and/or are not bleeding
- If you feel unable to go to the Emergency Department for a sexual assault examination, it is still important to seek medical care. Your personal physician is one option, or you might also go to the county health department.
- **Collecting evidence.** Unfortunately, as a victim, your body has become a crime scene. Physical evidence can be collected from you, including the clothes and shoes you were wearing at the time of the assault, and from the crime scene.
- **In order to preserve evidence for the strongest possible prosecution, don't eat or drink anything, don't use the toilet, bathe, douche or alter your appearance in any way.** If you have already done any of these things, it is still possible that evidence can be obtained.

## Reporting to Authorities

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### ***Frequent Order of Events in a Criminal Proceeding***

- A report is filed with law enforcement
- If the assailant is a stranger, you may be asked to assist the police in making a composite drawing or view an array of photographs
- An investigation may be conducted and evidence gathered
- The investigator presents the case to the Prosecutor (an Assistant State's Attorney)
- The suspect may be arrested
- The suspect is taken before a Commissioner at the jail; the Commissioner sets a bail
- If the offender is a stranger, you may be asked to view a line-up
- If the suspect does not post bail by the next business day, there may be a bail review in District Court
- A date for a preliminary hearing in District Court, where a judge decides if the State has probable cause for the felonies, may be set
- The Prosecutor may present the case to a Grand Jury, where a majority of jurors decide if the State has probable cause, in lieu of a preliminary hearing
- The Prosecutor files the indictment (Grand Jury) or criminal information (after preliminary hearing) in Circuit Court
- If the Defendant does not have an attorney, the Defendant may appear for an Initial Appearance in Circuit Court, and be advised of his/her right to an attorney
- A motions hearing may be set in Circuit Court (your attendance may not be necessary) in addition to a trial date
- Anyone who receives a subpoena to testify, from either the State or the Defendant, must testify
- If the Defendant accepts the State's plea offer, there will not be a trial
- Trial
- Conviction or acquittal
- Sentencing of convicted offender
- Post-conviction and parole hearings may be set after Defendant sentenced

## Reporting (continued)

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### ***What to Expect Once a Report is Made***

- The investigator will ask you **a lot** of questions. It can feel invasive and you may not be able to remember everything the first time you talk about it. This is normal after a traumatic event. Let the investigator know if you cannot recall something. It is very important for you to provide accurate information.
- You do have the right to refuse to cooperate with the interview process; however, the investigation cannot continue without your involvement.
- Your offender will only be detained if the facts show that he or she is a danger to the community and/or there is a risk that he will not show up for the trial. Many suspects are released.
- You are **not** required to talk to the defendant's attorney or his representative.
- You can contact the Victim Witness Assistance Office of the State's Attorney's Office if they have not contacted you. They can help you while you are involved with the criminal justice system.
- The Victim Witness Assistance Office can also provide you with information about VINE (Victim Information and Notification Everyday), a free anonymous program that can provide victims of crime with information and notifications regarding their offender.
- For more details about what to expect throughout the criminal justice process, refer to the "Crime Victims and Witnesses: Your Rights and Services" booklet or contact the Carroll County State's Attorney's Office.

You have the right to have an advocate or Rape Crisis Counselor present during a police interview and hospital exam.

## Learning More

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### **Additional Resources**

#### **Rape Crisis Intervention Service (RCIS)**

*All services are free and confidential*

Office: 410-857-0900

24-hour hotline: 410-857-7322

<http://rapecrisiscc.org/>

#### **Carroll County Advocacy & Investigation Center**

410-386-3640

<http://ccgovernment.carr.org/ccg/stateatt/childab.htm>

#### **Carroll County Health Department**

Office: 410-857-5000

<http://www.carrollhealthdepartment.dhmd.gov/>

#### **Carroll County State's Attorney's Office**

Office: 410-386-2671

Victim Witness Assistance Unit: 410-386-2073

<http://ccgovernment.carr.org/ccg/stateatt/index.html>

#### **Family and Children's Services**

Office: 410-857-1233

<http://www.fcsm.org/>

#### **Maryland State Police**

410-386-3000

<http://www.mdsp.org/>

#### **RAINN - Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network**

24-hour hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

<http://www.rainn.org/index.php>

#### **SALI - Sexual Assault Legal Institute**

301-565-2277

<http://www.mcasa.org/index.php?page=sexual-assault-legal-institute>

For more resources or information, contact RCIS. All RCIS services are free and confidential.

## *contact us*

*To learn more about how we can help you, contact us by:*

**Phone** 410-857-0900

**24-hour Hotline** 410-857-7322  
*(TTY users call via MD Relay)*

**Email** [info@rapecrisiscc.org](mailto:info@rapecrisiscc.org)

**Web** [RapeCrisisCC.org](http://RapeCrisisCC.org)

**Stop in** 224 North Center Street, Room 102  
Westminster, MD 21157

