

What is Sexual Assault?

Everyone has the right to choose when or if they engage in sexual activity. Sexual activity without consent is sexual assault and is a crime.

Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual act forced by one person on another. It includes a wide range of behaviours, from unwanted touching to forced penetration.

- Most sexual assaults are committed by partners, family members, friends and acquaintances of the victim
- Sexual assault can happen to people of any age, gender, social class or sexual orientation
- Most cases of sexual assault go unreported

What is Consent?

You give consent when you agree to take part in sexual activity. No consent is given if:

- A third party consents for you
- You are not capable of giving consent (ie. you are unconscious or passed out or unaware of what is happening to you; or you have a mental or physical disability that prevents you from giving consent)
- You communicate, in words or actions, a lack of consent to take part in or continue with the sexual activity
- The other person is in a position of trust, power or authority over you
- There are specific laws concerning the age when you are considered able to give consent. In Canada, persons under the age of 16 are not considered mature enough to give consent. There are exceptions for teens who are close in age

Common Reactions of Victims of Assault

There is no “right” way to act after a sexual assault. How a person responds to a traumatic event such as a sexual assault is unique. It can depend on factors such as the severity of the crime, whether the person has been a victim of assault in the past, the support systems available to the person, and whether or not there are other life stresses occurring at the same time.

People who have experienced a sexual assault may go through several stages in their recovery. The initial phase is often accompanied by intense physical and emotional reactions such as:

- feelings of fear, anger, anxiety, depression, self-blame, numbness and moodiness
- a desire to avoid or withdraw from people or places.
- intrusive memories, flashbacks, confusion and poor concentration
- nausea, changes in sleeping and eating patterns, muscle tension and headaches.

After the initial shock, a person **will try to deal** with their feelings and understandings about the assault and attempt to put their life back together. Support **can be helpful** during this stage, either from family, friends or professionals. Some people learn that, although they can't change what happened, they are able to function again, grow stronger, and gain control over their life and feelings.

How Do I Know if I Need Professional Support?

If you are having intense reactions long after the assault, you may wish to call the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre. Some signs that extra support may be needed include:

- Continuing to experience intrusive memories and flashbacks about the assault
- Using more than your usual amount of drugs and alcohol
- Feeling numb and spaced out a lot of the time
- Often feeling fearful
- Having difficulty in your relationships with others

How Talking to a Therapist May Help

Many people benefit from talking about the assault. A therapist can provide you with information about sexual assault and can help you to put your feelings and reactions in perspective. Therapy can help you make sense of the event and re-gain feelings of self-control. Experience has shown that talking can help even years after an assault has occurred.

Our Therapy Services are:

- For women and men survivors of sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse.
- Free and Confidential
- Provided by professionals who are trained in trauma recovery

Accessing our Services

Reaching out for help, even making that first phone call, can be difficult. You are not required to share any personal information or details until you feel ready to do so. For more information or to make an appointment, please call our therapy line at 368-8055. A voice message will ask you to leave your name and contact number. One of our therapists will return your call and gather some basic information from you. From there, you will either be contacted directly by a therapist to schedule your first appointment. If you have experienced a recent assault, we will arrange to see you as soon as possible.

Our waiting room is private and your therapist will greet you in the wait room at your scheduled appointment time. Usually you will not have to wait long.

What to do if you have been sexually assaulted:

- Tell someone you know and trust and/or call the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre
- Get medical attention to test for sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy
- Save any evidence of the assault
- It is your choice to report to the police