



Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine

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ACQUAINTANCE RAPE

“Acquaintance rape” refers to sexual assaults between people who know each other. Many people ask us how to prevent “date rape”. There are no easy answers to this question. Typically people know, like, and trust the person that sexually assaults them. There are never any guarantees against acquaintance rape. However, there are some things that may be helpful to know.

Behavior Description:

- **Explore your feelings about sex.** Knowing what you think about sex before being faced with a decision whether to engage in sexual activity will help you to be clear with your partner.
- **Establish boundaries.** It is your body, and no one has the right to force you into any type of sexual activity. If you do not want someone to touch you, you might say, “Take your hands off me.” “Don’t touch me.” or “If you don’t respect my wishes right now, I’m leaving.” Stopping sexual activity means that you respect and know yourself.
- **Decide if you want to have sex with a specific person.** The sooner you communicate your sexual intentions, the easier it will be for your partner to hear and accept your decision.
- **Be clear, forceful, and firm in communicating.** Say “yes” when you mean “yes” and say “no” when you mean “no.” Sex is not a game. It is a myth that “no” means “yes”. Always get a “yes” before proceeding. Do not worry about being impolite. Some interpret passivity as permission; they may ignore or misunderstand “nice” or “polite” approaches. Some statements might include “Stop this. I’m not enjoying it,” or “I don’t want to do this.”
- **Trust your instincts.** Unwillingness to acknowledge a situation as potentially dangerous and a reluctance to appear oversensitive often hold us back from responding in the interest of our own safety. Listen to that little voice that says, “I’m uncomfortable.” If things start to get out of hand, be loud in protesting, leave, and go for help. Do not wait for things to get better. If it feels uncomfortable, leave quickly.
- **Avoid excessive alcohol and drugs.** Alcohol and drugs are often related to acquaintance rape. Consumption of alcohol and drugs can make a person more vulnerable to an attack. Always keep an eye on your beverage (do not leave it unattended while going to the restroom). Watch your beverage being poured. There are colorless, tasteless and odorless drugs that can be added to drinks that render a person helpless to an attack.
- **Equal participation.** Both people in a relationship should have equal opportunities for decision making. Have opinions on where to go. Think about appropriate places to meet, and if possible, pay your own way or suggest activities that do not cost money.
- **It is always better to make a scene than to be raped.** Many of us have been socialized to be polite. In an effort to be nice, we may be reluctant to yell or run while being assaulted by someone that we know. A person who ignores your feelings or wishes by pressuring you to have sex does

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not care about you or your needs. Trusting your instincts and reacting quickly may reduce the likelihood of being sexually assaulted.

- **Force usually takes the form of emotional pressure, not physical strength.** Statements like “You would if you loved me.” or “Come on, what’s your problem, everyone else is doing it.” are all too common. A healthy relationship is free from pressure. Respect and love mean respecting your feelings and waiting until you are ready.
 - **If you are unsure of a new acquaintance, go on a group or double date.** If this is not possible, meet in a public place and have your own transportation home. Be aware that many sexual assaults do not happen on the first date. The person wants to establish trust with you before the assault. Remember, rape is about power and gaining control.
 - **Sexual assaults most often happen in the victim’s home.**
 - **Consider the pros and cons of dating much older people.** Although they may be sophisticated and have more money to treat you well, they may also be more sexually experienced and may therefore expect more sooner.
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Danger Signals

Unfortunately, a seemingly nice, normal individual can be a rapist. However, there are some individuals who are more likely to be sexually manipulative than others. While most sex offenders are male, we also recognize that women can be offenders and that many men are victims of sexual assault and abuse. What follows are some examples of behaviors that may be warning signs and should be taken seriously.

Those who:

- Do not listen to you, ignore what you say, talk over you or pretend not to hear you. Such people generally have little respect for others and would be more likely to hear “no” as meaning “convince me.”
- Ignore your personal space boundaries.
- Easily express anger or aggression toward others. Hostile feelings can easily translate into hostile acts. This trait is more common in men.
- Do what they want regardless of what you want. Examples include: making all decisions about what to do or where to go, and making decisions about sex without asking your opinion or honoring your decisions.
- Try to make you feel guilty, or accuse you of being “uptight” if you resist their sexual propositions.
- Act excessively jealous or possessive.
- Have wrong or unrealistic ideas about women (for example, “women are meant to serve men”). Such men are not likely to take objections to sex seriously. Be wary of individuals who drink heavily. A “mean drunk” can more easily become sexually aggressive, angry, or violent when rejected.

Remember...

Rape is not about sex. It is about power and a need to control someone else. No one ever asks to be sexually assaulted. If you or someone you know has been sexually assaulted, please call. We are here to listen.