



Victim Services of Waterloo Region

Fact Sheet on Sexual Assault

Definition

Sexual assault is any forced or unwanted act of a sexual nature. It can happen to people of any gender, by a stranger or, more likely, by someone the victim knows.

Consent

Consent is based on **choice**. Every person has the right to refuse any sexual act at any time, even if they have participated in the act with the person at an earlier date. It is not passive or based on fear, and requires equal power within a relationship to be possible. It is not based on guilt or peer pressure. It should be **MANDATORY** before proceeding with any sexual act!

Possible Effects of Sexual Assault

Physical

- ❑ Hyperactivity (mainly in children).
- ❑ Fatigue.
- ❑ Loss of appetite.
- ❑ Sleeping/eating changes.
- ❑ STDs/AIDS.
- ❑ Pregnancy.
- ❑ Acute injury (includes internal injuries).
- ❑ Somatic complaints (presence of physical symptoms not explained fully by a medical condition).

Behavioural

- ❑ Self-destructive behaviour.
- ❑ Self-mutilation.
- ❑ Anti-social behaviour.
- ❑ Delinquent behaviour (in adolescents).

- ❑ Aggressive behaviour.
- ❑ Obsessive or compulsive behaviours.
- ❑ Compulsive sexuality or masturbation.
- ❑ Substance abuse/dependence.
- ❑ Suicide attempts.

Sexuality

- ❑ Avoidance, fear or lack of interest in sex.
- ❑ Approaching sex as an obligation.
- ❑ Negative feelings with touch, such as guilt, anger and disgust.
- ❑ Difficulty becoming aroused or feeling sensations.
- ❑ Emotionally distant or "not present" during sex.
- ❑ Intrusive/disturbing sexual thoughts and images.
- ❑ Vaginal pain or orgasmic difficulties.
- ❑ Erectile or ejaculatory difficulties.

Emotional/Mental Health

- ❑ Impaired self-esteem.
- ❑ Negative perceptions of self, others, the future.
- ❑ Depression.
- ❑ Suicidal thoughts, threats or gestures.
- ❑ Post-traumatic stress.
- ❑ Anxiety and phobias.
- ❑ Flashbacks and nightmares.
- ❑ Concentration and memory problems.
- ❑ Feelings of guilt, helplessness, anger, humiliation and hopelessness.
- ❑ Reduced ability to feel emotions, especially those connected with intimacy.
- ❑ Disassociation (disruption in a person's consciousness, memory, identity or perception of the environment).
- ❑ Developmental delays.
- ❑ Eating disorders.
- ❑ Psychiatric hospitalization.

Relationships

- ❑ Difficulty starting and keeping intimate relations.
- ❑ Feeling detached or isolated from others.
- ❑ Tendency towards isolation.
- ❑ Difficulties with parenting/attaching to children.
- ❑ Difficulty trusting others

Legal Procedures after an Assault

Steps to take

- ❑ Write down every detail you can remember, no matter how small it seems.
- ❑ Write down a description of the attacker.
- ❑ Leave everything the way it is.
- ❑ Get support from a friend, relative, counselor or someone you trust.

What happens when you make a report?

If you have been sexually assaulted you may wish to report the crime to the police. The officer will interview you about the assault.

Although many of the questions might seem rather personal or painful to discuss, you should answer them to the best of your ability. If you don't want to answer a question inform the officer conducting the interview. If you do not understand ask them to explain.

The police will tape record, videotape or take notes of everything you say. This is your statement. The officer will prepare this statement for you to sign. Change any mistakes you find before signing it. This will be the basis for your case and if you go to trial you will be questioned on it. Get a copy of the statement before you leave.

The police interview may take a long time, which may be difficult as you will likely be tired and emotionally drained to begin with. If you were assaulted by a stranger the officer may ask you to examine a set of "mug shots" or, if they have a suspect in custody you may be required to identify the suspect in a police line-up. Remember, the attacker will be unable to see you during the line-up. Many more interviews may be conducted before your case will be ready to go to court. Whenever an officer interviews you ask for their name and write it down, in case you have any questions or concerns at a later time.

Medical Procedures after an Assault

If you have been sexually assaulted it is important to make your own decisions about medical attention.

No one should pressure you into receiving medical attention, but consider the possible side effects listed above. Doctors can treat injuries, administer antibiotics to prevent some sexually transmitted infections and offer you the morning after pill to prevent an unwanted pregnancy.

Reporting and the Sexual Assault Evidence Kit

Medical attention is also useful if you want to report the assault to the police. Special procedures must be followed within 72 hours of the assault in order to collect evidence. After 72 hours there is little medical evidence that remains. You can get medical attention and decide not to report the assault.

You have many choices and should discuss them with a doctor, a sexual assault worker or a friend. The Sexual Assault Evidence Kit can be stored for up to six months. At any time during these six months you may choose to report the assault and release the kit to the police or have the kit destroyed. In this region, The Sexual Assault Treatment Centre, which is available in the emergency rooms of St. Mary's and Cambridge Memorial Hospitals, can perform the Sexual Assault Evidence Kit exam. You can choose to see your own doctor or go to a health clinic if you want medical care only.

The Sexual Assault Evidence Kit

- ❑ You must consent to this procedure, it is not mandatory.
- ❑ Try not to shower, douche eat, drink, brush your hair/teeth, go to the washroom or change clothes.
- ❑ Bring a complete change of clothing to the hospital.
- ❑ Feel free to ask questions before, during or after the exam.
- ❑ The exam involves various internal and external tests to your body to check for any injuries. It is a lengthy and difficult process and you may feel exposed or intruded upon.
- ❑ You can stop the exam at any point or refuse any parts of the exam. This is your right but it may be used against you if you go to trial.
- ❑ Don't give permission for blood to be taken for HIV testing during the forensic exam as this will become public property. Have an anonymous HIV test done at a later date. Call Victim Services for anonymous testing locations in the Region.
- ❑ Call the police in the area where the assault happened.
- ❑ Once you decide to use the kit it becomes the property of the Crown Attorney's Office. You are then considered a witness to a criminal act and may be required to testify (you can be charged with contempt of court if you refuse to testify).



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