

DATE RAPE

“Date rape” is an often heard phrase on college campuses. Date rape is the act of forcing sex on a date or acquaintance, and it unfortunately occurs with alarming frequency. It is estimated that 1 in 4 women has been a victim of rape or attempted rape. Of those who are raped, about 85% report that they know their attacker. Sexual assault occurs anytime a person is forced or coerced, physically or verbally, into any type of sexual contact with another person. Date rape is sexual assault. Although men are sometimes the victims of rape, most victims are women; most perpetrators are men.

Rape is a serious crime. It is not a crime of sexual passion, or lust, or of love, but rather a crime of violence against another. Most people imagine a rapist as someone who lurks in the bushes, awaiting an unsuspecting stranger. Although this scenario does happen, rape is more often committed by a seemingly “nice guy” that the woman thought she knew well & even trusted. That is what makes this crime all the more devastating.

The effects of date rape are both emotional and physical. After effects can include loss of trust in oneself and others. A woman who knew her assailant may lose confidence in her ability to judge a person’s character. She may become fearful of many situations, particularly those that are new to her. She may go out of her way to avoid interactions with men, potentially causing difficulty for her in her daily routines and responsibilities, such as going to class, or speaking to professors and acquaintances. She may even feel the need to avoid her attacker, who may be a part of her daily life. Depression and anxiety are common after effects of rape, adding to the feelings of helplessness that a woman may already be experiencing. She may feel guilty or ashamed, blaming herself for the attack. Sexual problems may occur as a result of the woman and her partner being uncertain about how to relate to one another sexually after the assault.

If you have been raped, there are a few things you should know. First, the rape is never your fault and you have nothing to feel guilty or ashamed about. Beliefs that women want to be raped, or that men cannot control themselves, are myths. Rape is the perpetrator’s responsibility, not yours. You have the right to dress as you please, and you have the right to be treated with respect at all times. You have the right to refuse sex **AT ANY TIME** – even if you have previously consented. **NO ALWAYS MEANS NO.**

If you have been raped, there are immediate steps you may take to get help. Seek friends who may provide you with emotional support. Secondly, seek medical attention at Bryn Mawr Hospital. The hospital staff there is specially trained to help in sexual assault circumstances. You may also contact Public Safety at 610-902-8245 to report that you have been assaulted. They will take a report and help you to get the medical attention and the support that you may need. Making a report immediately after the assault is recommended, in case

you decide at any point to pursue charges against the assailant. For confidential counseling, the Cabrini College Counseling and Psychological Services Office may be contacted at 610-902-8561.

If you have a friend who has been sexually assaulted and comes to you for support, there is a lot you can offer. Provide support by listening without judging your friend. Let her express her feelings; don't pry into the details of the assault by asking questions. Be nonjudgmental by just listening and giving your support. Be encouraging of your friend to seek the medical and counseling attention that can help her through this difficult time. Help her to make the contacts for these services. Remind your friend that sexual assault is never her fault – and that you don't in any way blame her or find her responsible. Finally, offer her tangible support, such as giving her a ride to the hospital or offering to have her spend the night at your place.

There are steps that men and women may take to reduce their risk of becoming involved in sexual assault. Women may reduce their risk by talking openly about their sexual expectations and limitations. Women should strive to be clear about where you stand regarding sexual intimacy. Being assertive about how you feel can clear up any ambiguity, so don't be afraid to say "no" early and without hesitation. Be aware of anyone who ignores your wishes, even in small ways. Communicate your wishes clearly and openly. If you are in a situation in which you feel uncomfortable, it is okay to leave. Finally, monitor your consumption of alcohol, which dulls your senses and can make it difficult to get out of a situation that is dangerous or that makes you feel uncomfortable.

Men may also reduce their risk of becoming involved in a sexual assault. First, men should be aware that when a woman says "no," or even is reluctant to go further sexually, this means "no." To protect oneself, you should take this as a no and stop immediately. A man never has the right to pressure a woman for sex, even if he has paid for the date or if she is dressed provocatively or has been flirting. A man does not have the right to pressure or force a woman to have sex even if she agrees at first but later changes her mind, or even if he's had sex with her before. In short, a man never has the right to pressure or force a woman to have sex or vice versa. Finally, monitor your consumption of alcohol, which may cause you to behave in ways that you might otherwise not act. Intoxication is not a defense for having assaulted someone.

If you or a friend has been sexually assaulted, help is available. Call Counseling and Psychological Services at 610-902-8561 for confidential counseling.