

ACQUAINTANCE RAPE: CAN I REDUCE MY RISK?

Sexual assault is any sexual activity that is forced. Sexual assault is an act of control, aggression, and anger. The force used against you can be physical such as hitting, being held against your will, or being threatened by a weapon. It also can be emotional or psychological, such as being pressured into sex through guilt, being given money or gifts in exchange for sex, or being taken advantage of while you are under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs.

Someone they know, such as a family member, friend, date acquaintance, or neighbor assaults more than 85% of sexual assault victims. Men and women, boys and girls can be victims of sexual assault.

Most sexual assaults are planned in advance with the offender seeking an opportunity to find someone who may be vulnerable to his/her tactics. Offenders seek victims who they believe are easy targets. There is no guaranteed way to prevent sexual assault, but we can identify tips for decreasing our vulnerability to offenders. The following are some suggestions to deter a sexual assault:

- Be careful of your use of alcohol and drugs. Vulnerability increases when one is intoxicated or high
- Know your sexual intentions and limits. You have the right to say “no” to any unwanted sexual contact
- Communicate your limits firmly and directly. You have the right to expect your limits to be respected
- Listen to your feelings. If you feel uncomfortable or think you may be at risk, leave the situation immediately and go to a safe place
- Don’t be afraid to “make waves” if you feel threatened. If you are being pressured or coerced into sexual activity against your will, don’t hesitate to state your feelings and get out of the situation. Better a few minutes of social awkwardness or embarrassment than the trauma of sexual assault
- Attend large parties with friends you can trust. Agree to “look out” for one another. Try to leave with a group rather than alone or with someone you don’t know well
- When starting to date a new acquaintance, have the first few dates in a public place. Avoid becoming isolated with someone you don’t know well
- For the first several dates, insist on paying your own way or taking turns with “treating”. Sometimes offenders use the “you owe me” line to try to guilt someone into sex

- As a relationship may progress, avoid becoming physically, emotionally or socially isolated from friends and family. Assaults within ongoing relationships do happen
- Even if we take many precautions or steps to make ourselves less vulnerable, there is no guarantee that we can prevent a sexual assault. Remember:
 1. sexual assault is never the victim's fault
 2. victims do not cause their assaults
 3. offenders are responsible for their actions