HELPING A SURVIVOR OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

Human Rights Office
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INTRODUCTION

Sexual assault is an ever present concern on University campuses throughout North America.

You may find yourself in a situation in which a friend, colleague, one of your students, or someone you know has been sexually assaulted and seeks your help.

Most of us do not know what to do or say by instinct, but we can learn how to provide a supportive response.

This brochure explains some of the facts about sexual assault, offers suggestions about what to do or say, and what not to do when someone reveals that they have been assaulted, and finally, lists some of the resources available to the Queen’s community.
THE FACTS ABOUT SEXUAL ASSAULT

- **Survivors are never to blame for a sexual assault.** The assailant is always responsible for the assault regardless of the survivors’ appearance, behaviour or previous actions.

- **It is a myth that men can’t stop themselves when they are sexually aroused.** Men are capable of, and responsible for, controlling their minds and their bodies just as women are.

- **Sexual assault is not an expression of sexual desire** as much as it is an expression of the need to assert control or power over another person, using sex as the method of control.

- **Sexual assault is more than sexual intercourse.** It includes, but is not limited to: any kissing, touching, oral or anal sex that is non-consensual.

- **It can happen to anyone.** Some studies have found that one in four university students are survivors of sexual assault.

- **Sexual assaults are more likely to be perpetrated by a friend or an acquaintance, than by a stranger.** Some studies have found that almost 90% of women in university who were sexually assaulted knew their assailant.
Both men and women may be survivors of sexual assault. Male survivors rarely seek help, in part due to embarrassment and the fear that they will not be taken seriously.

Sexual contact forced by an acquaintance is sexual assault. When someone is forced to have sexual contact with someone they know such as a friend, date or partner, it can be as traumatic as a sexual assault by a stranger. In such cases it is the survivor’s trust in others, and in their own judgement, that can be seriously damaged.

Sexual violence can occur in same-sex relationships. Fear of homophobic responses may prevent LGBTQ1 individuals who are survivors of sexual assault from seeking help.

A person must give consent to any sexual contact. Any forced or coercive contact of a sexual nature is a crime. Neither the fact that the survivor is unable to give consent due to the consumption of alcohol or drugs, nor the fact that the assailant’s judgement was impaired due to the consumption of alcohol or drugs, changes the nature of the crime.

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1 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer
MORE LEGAL INFORMATION ABOUT SEXUAL ASSAULT

- **Forcing** or coercing someone to engage in sexual contact is a criminal offense.

- **The force** necessary can be any amount, or it may be the threat of physical force that causes the person to fear injury to themselves or their family, or to fear for their life or for their family members’ lives.

- **The assailant** does not necessarily need to use a weapon or injure the person to make them fearful of injury or fear for their life.

- **The law** requires a person’s voluntary consent to the sexual act or to any sexual contact.

- **The law** protects individuals from the assumption that a previous “yes” means “yes” for all times. Previous sexual relations do not imply continued permission.
A person’s willingness to engage in one type of sexual activity does not give a partner the right to commit a different sexual act against their will.

A person also has the legal right to change their mind after foreplay or in the middle of a sexual activity. There is no consent if they say “stop”.

A person may withdraw consent at any time.

A person may not be able to give consent if there is an abuse by the offender of a position of trust, power or authority.

There is no consent if a person is incapable of giving it, for example if a partner is too intoxicated to give consent.

A lack of resistance does not mean consent. If a person silently submits to a sexual assault, this will not mean that the legal assumption will be that they have consented.
HOW YOU CAN HELP A SURVIVOR

DO....

- **Believe** the survivor. People rarely lie about sexual assault.
- **Listen** to them. Concentrate on understanding their feelings.
- **Allow** them to be silent. Do not feel that you need to fill in any silences.
- **Let** them know that you care about their feelings and that you are concerned for them.
- **Ask** what you can do to be of help to them.
- **Offer** to accompany them in seeking medical attention, counselling, or in going to the police.
- **Help** them regain a sense of control by supporting their decisions about how to proceed.
- **Remind** them that they are not to blame and that the assault is entirely the fault of the assailant.
- **Offer** to help them find shelter and companionship so that they can feel safe and not be alone.
- **Help** them learn about, recognize, and seek treatment for signs of ‘rape trauma syndrome’. 
DO NOT...

- **Ask** questions that imply that they are in any way at fault for the assault, for example, “Why did you go to his room?”
- **Touch** or hug the survivor unless you are sure they are comfortable with physical contact.
- **Act** in ways that may add to the survivor’s distress such as suggesting, “If I find the creep, I’ll kill him”.
- **Tell** anyone about the assault without the survivor’s permission.
- **Tell** the survivor what they should do. Rather, help them explore their options. There are many difficult and complex decisions that a survivor will have to make such as whether to report the assault to the police, and whether to pursue charges. Sexual assault counsellors, human rights advisors, and others who work with sexual assaults within the judicial system can be helpful in discussing the options.
STEPS TO TAKE AFTER A SEXUAL ASSAULT

Call (613-544-6424) the 24 hour crisis line of the Sexual Assault Centre Kingston. The Centre can provide an advocate who is knowledgeable about the needs of survivors of sexual assaults, and who is available to provide support and assistance.

Consider seeking medical attention as soon as possible. The survivor will benefit from being examined for physical injury and sexually transmitted infections and from discussing options for pregnancy prevention when appropriate. Kingston General Hospital has a special unit devoted to survivors of sexual assault (SA/DV unit).

Consider contacting the police. It is the police rather than the survivor who have the ability to press charges for sexual assault. The survivor may wish to discuss their options with an Officer, but if the survivor wishes to report a sexual assault that happened within the context of a past or current dating or live-in situation, police policy designed to protect victims of domestic violence may result in charges being laid without the survivor’s consent.
WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE SA/DV PROGRAM

Services offered include: emergency medical and nursing care in a private setting, testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, testing for pregnancy and HIV, forensic evidence collection and documentation in the form of the Sexual Assault Evidence Kit and forensic photography, crisis counselling, safety planning and follow-up nursing care, follow-up social work services, and referral/coordination with community resources as requested.

Sexual assault victims who present to the SA/DV Program within 7 days of the assault, and who believe that they have been subjected to some form of non-consensual sex, will be offered the opportunity for the DFSA (Drug Facilitated Sexual Assault) test – at no cost to the survivor.

If the survivor thinks they may want to contact the police about possibly reporting the assault, the survivor should ideally proceed with the collection of medical evidence and thus not shower before being examined. Clothes worn during the assault should be brought to the hospital.
RAPE TRAUMA SYNDROME

Even after the actual assault is over, a survivor may suffer from “rape trauma syndrome”, a variety of difficulties commonly experienced after a sexual assault.

This may include any, or all, of the following reactions:

- Emotional shock
- Denial
- Nightmares
- Sleeplessness
- Intrusive memories or thoughts about the assault
- Inability to study/work or make decisions
- Difficulty connecting with people in relationships
- Feelings of guilt, despair, depression, fear, anxiety, self-blame, or anger

Some of these reactions may be short-lived, while others can be present for months or years. Some of the reactions may only manifest themselves after a period of time, and particularly stressful events may trigger the symptoms. It is important to know that information and help are available.
ROHYPNOL is an illegal drug that is colourless, odourless, tasteless, and dissolves easily in any drink to produce an enhanced high.

- It can be used to knock out potential victims of sexual assault.

- It can cause blackouts of 8-24 hours.

- It can also cause respiratory depression, coma and even death.

People are encouraged to go to the SA/DV clinic mentioned above for any drug related sexual assault.

And remember...

- Alcohol represents the No. 1 method of drug facilitated sexual assault. Don’t leave your drink unattended.
HELP FOR THE HELPER

Despite your best intentions, it is important to realize that there are limits to what an individual can do to help.

- At times the survivor may not want to deal with the sexual assault, and, as a result, may even avoid you.
- If you need to express your feelings about helping, find a confidante and counsellor you can trust.
- There will also be times when you need time off from helping.
- Know your limits and do not overextend yourself if you are feeling overwhelmed.
OTHER RESOURCES AVAILABLE ON CAMPUS

There may be other options a survivor may wish to explore on campus.

One might contact the Sexual Harassment Prevention Coordinator at the Human Rights Office for more information, or for assistance in liaising with any offices, departments at Queen’s, or off-campus resources in the Kingston community.

Similarly, one might seek emotional support and academic assistance from Health, Counseling and Disability Services.

Alternatively, one might find it helpful to consult a don in residences, or to contact Campus Security.
Following a sexual assault, confidential advice and assistance are available from the following places:

- Sexual Assault Centre Kingston 24 hour Crisis Line
  (613) 544-6424
- Kingston City Police
  (613) 549-4660
- Your nearest hospital emergency department (ask to see the SA/DV nurse on call)

At the University, one may also seek assistance from:

- Queen’s Department of Campus Security
  (613) 533-2552 or 36111
- Queen’s Health, Counselling and Disability Services
  (613) 533-2506
- Queen’s Human Rights Office
  (613) 533-6886
- A Don or Residence Life Coordinator

Alternative formats of this booklet are available on request