

# Teen Sexual Assault: Information for Teens



As a teen you make important decisions about what—if any—sexual activity is right for you. Agreeing to sexual activity with someone (saying “yes”, or giving “consent”) means that you have freely decided to engage in that activity. If you are pressured emotionally or physically, if you go along because you don’t feel you have a choice or because you don’t know how to get out of the situation (“coercion”), you are not giving consent. Any sexual contact that you do not consent to is sexual assault. You have the right to say “no” if you do not want to do something sexual. We use the term “sexual assault” when the person who committed the assault—the perpetrator—is someone outside the family, and the term “sexual abuse” when the perpetrator is a family member. Sexual assault does not always include intercourse. Sexual assault can include any contact with private body parts (e.g., breasts, genitals, buttocks) that you don’t want, don’t agree to, or are forced to do.

## **Consent**

Consent means actively saying “yes” or agreeing. You don’t have to have a reason to say “no.” If someone tries to convince you to do something sexual, even if you have done it with that person before, but now you really don’t want to, you have the right to say “no.”

## **Coercion**

If you’re feeling pressured to do something sexual and you don’t know how to get away from the situation, or if you’re afraid that saying “no” will break up your relationship, it may be a sign that you are being coerced or emotionally forced to do something you don’t want to.

*For more information go to  
[www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org)*

## **What is teen dating violence?**

Teen dating violence is a type of violence that occurs between two people in a romantic relationship. The violence can be sexual, physical, or emotional, and can occur in person or electronically by texting or posting threatening messages or images on social media. Teen sexual assault can occur as part of dating violence, but also occurs outside of a romantic relationship—with a friend, classmate, acquaintance, or stranger.



### **Why do teen sexual assault and teen dating violence happen?**

Individuals who perpetrate sexual assault and/or dating violence may have a variety of problems, but the core cause of these events is the perpetrator's misuse of power and control. This can take many forms, including using physical force or by threatening, intimidating, manipulating, stalking, or isolating you from friends or other supports.

### **Who experiences teen sexual assault?**

Sexual assault can happen to any teen no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation: female, male, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning or queer (LGBTQ), or straight.

### **How common is teen sexual assault?**

Unfortunately, teen sexual assault is very common. Studies have found that:

- One in four teen girls was verbally or physically pressured into having sex during the past year.<sup>1</sup>
- One in 10 high school girls—and one in 20 high school boys—reported being forced into sex.<sup>2</sup>
- More than one third of acquaintance rape victims are between the ages of 14 and 17.<sup>3</sup>
- One in three teens is a victim of sexual or other abuse by a dating partner each year.<sup>5</sup>
- About 9% of high school students are physically hurt—on purpose—by a boyfriend or girlfriend.<sup>4</sup>
- Almost 20% of college women reported experiencing sexual assault on campus.<sup>8</sup>

### **What if we've been in a relationship for a long time?**

It doesn't matter if you just met or are in a long-term relationship. You always have the right to say "no" to any sexual activity. You have the right to be free from violence. Being somebody's girlfriend or boyfriend does NOT give them permission to sexually assault you—or hurt you physically or emotionally.

### **What if I'm LGBT?**

Sexual assault occurs because of the perpetrator's misuse of power and control, not your sexual orientation, appearance, physical size, or strength. However, LGBTQ youth are at higher risk for dating violence than heterosexual youth. Twenty-three percent of LGBT youth reported sexual dating violence compared to 12% of heterosexual youth.<sup>7</sup> Stigma about being LGBTQ might partly explain this difference. For example, an LGBTQ partner might misuse his or her power by threatening to "out" the other.



## How do drugs play a part in teen sexual assault?

If you drink at a party or with others, someone could slip drugs into your beverage without your knowing it, making it easier to perpetrate sexual violence against you. Being drugged without your knowledge makes it impossible for you give legal consent to a sexual act. ANY drug, even alcohol, can increase your risk for sexual assault by a stranger or by someone you know (acquaintance rape). Drugs commonly used in sexual assault include the following:

- *Rohypnol*\* (pronounced row-HIP-nal; also called roofies) is a sedative that can cause sleepiness, slurred speech, difficulty walking, black-outs and amnesia.
- *GHB*\* is a depressant that may cause nausea, vomiting, dizziness, heart problems, seizures, black-outs, and, in some cases, coma.
- *Ketamine*\* (pronounced keet-ah-meen; also called Special K) is an animal tranquilizer that can cause delirium, loss of memory, depression, and long-term memory and cognitive difficulties.
- *MDMA*\* (also known as the club drug “ecstasy”) is a stimulant that causes feelings of peacefulness, acceptance, and affection towards another, as well as depression, confusion, anxiety, and paranoia.
- *Alcohol*\* is a sedative and is the substance most commonly used to commit sexual assault.

## What does the internet have to do with teen sexual assault?

Cell phones and social networking sites such as FaceBook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube are new ways teens experience sexual assault, as well as bullying. Online sexual predators—pretending to be someone they are not—trick teens into meeting them in person, increasing the chance for sexual assault or even kidnapping. In some instances, teens have been forced into sexual slavery (commercial sexual exploitation also known as sex trafficking) by someone they have met on the internet. Sometimes perpetrators post videos of a teen’s sexual assault for everybody to see. If unaware they were drugged, teens may not find out until the assault has been posted online.

In a dating relationship, a romantic partner’s constant texting can be a way to monitor and control your actions and a way of sharing embarrassing and hurtful sexual pictures and information. For example, your partner may video you during sexual activity and post those images online to control or manipulate you.



### Are there any tips for staying safe?

- Expect respect from others, and keep away from people who don't show you respect.
- Be clear about your limits: let the other person know what you want and don't want to do. You always have the right to change your mind, to say "no," or to agree to some sexual activities and not to others.
- Don't allow a person to touch you if it makes you uncomfortable. If someone crosses your boundaries or you sense danger, speak your mind and act immediately. Make a scene if necessary.
- Avoid excessive drinking or drugs. They reduce your ability to think and communicate clearly. Remember that being drunk or high does not give anyone permission to assault you.
- Pour your own beverage and keep it in your sight. Date rape drugs can be put into drinks and you can't tell by the taste.
- Don't accept mixed drinks or drinks from punch bowls or other large containers as they could be spiked or drugged. Don't hang out in places that isolate you from others. Although you may feel you can take care of yourself, you should always be aware and be careful.
- Trust your instincts. If you feel that a person is not trustworthy or a situation is unsafe, leave.
- Have a back-up plan. For example, if you're going to a party, make sure someone you trust knows where you're going. Have a person you can call to come get you if you need to leave, or carry money for a car service or a cab.

Don't allow a person to touch you if it makes you uncomfortable. If someone crosses your boundaries or you sense danger, speak your mind and act immediately. Make a scene if necessary.

### What should I do if I'm sexually assaulted?

- Call 911. Sexual assault is a serious crime and you should report it. Do not worry about getting into trouble if you were partying, drinking, taking drugs, or violating curfew. The police are concerned with your health and safety. And remember, calling the police and filing a report does not mean that you have to press charges.
- Go to the hospital. Call someone you trust—an adult or friend—and ask him or her to take you to the hospital. Do not shower, eat or drink anything, brush your teeth, go to the bathroom, or change your clothes before you go. The medical team and law enforcement need to find out if you are hurt and collect evidence from your clothing and your body during the medical exam. If you are female, you may also receive emergency contraception to prevent pregnancy. While the medical exam may be uncomfortable and embarrassing, it will not be painful.
- See a counselor. You may find it difficult to cope with what has happened. A counselor can help you work through your feelings and take steps toward healing. With help and support—and your own strength and resilience—you can get through this and move forward. You can start by talking to your school counselor or school nurse who can refer you to someone who specializes in working with teens who have been raped. The important thing is to talk to somebody about what happened. With help, you can recover fully from the traumatic effects of sexual assault.

## Why am I reacting this way?

The experience of being sexually assaulted—especially if it was by someone you trusted—can bring up a range of complicated emotions—guilt, self-doubt, and worry that the assault was somehow your fault. Working through these feelings is part of the healing process and will help you move forward with your life in a positive way.

Understanding common misconceptions and responses about sexual assault can help you manage or change some of your beliefs about sexual assault.

After a sexual assault you may...	The truth is...
Blame yourself (for example, you may wonder if you were flirting too much or wearing sexy clothes).	It's not your fault, no matter how you acted or what you wore.
Worry that it's your fault for accepting a drink that was drugged.	It's not your fault. You didn't know the drink was drugged.
Worry that you will get in trouble with the police if you were drinking because you are a minor.	The police are more concerned with your health and safety than getting you in trouble.
Feel ashamed, angry, sad, different, lonely, anxious, betrayed, depressed, or as if you will never be able to trust anyone again.	All of these feelings are common after an assault. They will not last forever. Talking to a counselor can help you work through all of these feelings.
Feel guilty or confused because you know your attacker.	Most sexual assaults are committed by an acquaintance. It was nothing you did or didn't do.
Have nightmares about the assault or recurring images of what happened, even when you are trying not to think about it.	This is common and will not last forever. Counseling can help you learn how to deal with these images.
Worry about how your friends will react if they find out (Will they believe you or take sides?).	Your real friends will be supportive and be there for you. Your well-being is more important than what other people think.
Worry about how your family will react if they find out.	This might be hard for them to accept at first, but your family loves you and will be supportive. Counseling can help your family as well as you.
Think that nobody understands how you feel and that you are alone.	Many teens have gone through this, and you have the support of people who care about you.

### Where can I go for more information?

- 911Rape → \* [www.911rape.org](http://www.911rape.org)
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center → \* [www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org)
- Project Respect → \* [www.yesmeansyes.com](http://www.yesmeansyes.com)
- Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) → \* [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)
- The Date Safe Project → \* [www.thedatesafeproject.org/pledge\\_for\\_action.htm](http://www.thedatesafeproject.org/pledge_for_action.htm)
- Safe Space, Inc. → \* [www.safespaceonline.org](http://www.safespaceonline.org)
- Love is Respect → \* [www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org)
- National Center on Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention: <http://m.sapac.umich.edu>
- Futures without Violence: [www.futureswithoutviolence.org](http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org)

### **To Find a Counselor Near You:**

Contact the National Sexual Assault Hotline operated by the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) at 1-800-656-HOPE or visit <http://www.rainn.org/get-help/national-sexual-assault-online-hotline>.

RAINN can direct you to a rape crisis center in your community.

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### **About the National Child Traumatic Stress Network**

Established by Congress in 2000, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) is a unique collaboration of academic and community-based service centers whose mission is to raise the standard of care and increase access to services for traumatized children and their families across the United States. Combining knowledge of child development, expertise in the full range of child traumatic experiences, and attention to cultural perspectives, the NCTSN serves as a national resource for developing and disseminating evidence-based interventions, trauma-informed services, and public and professional education.