COPING with
SEXUAL ASSAULT

A Guide to Healing and Recovery for college students, friends and family

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About this booklet and the "Coping" series

This resource was developed for adult sexual assault victims and their loved ones. It offers information about the emotional healing from a sexual assault, medical concerns, the criminal justice system, victim rights, and additional resources. It is not intended to be a substitute for medical, psychological or legal advice, but it does offer information about sexual assault and the options for victims after a sexual assault.

This booklet is one in a series on topics related to coping with trauma. The original booklet was written by Terri Spahr Nelson and Julie Campbell-Ruggaard in 2000. It was developed as a national resource with the assistance and expertise of many individuals and organizations across the United States with a grant from the Violence Against Women Office, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Dept. of Justice.

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This guide is a culmination of the existing information available at the time of publication. We strive to keep this resource current and welcome new information or comments. Note: Specific information may vary depending on your state laws. Professional consultation should be sought for specific medical, psychological or legal advice.

Remember, there are many people who are here to support you.

You do not have to cope with this by yourself.

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“Sugati” comes from the ancient Pali language and refers to a “happy destination.”
May you find peace on your journey.
National resources

Contact these national agencies for general information about sexual assault or interpersonal violence or to find a crisis helpline or counseling program nearest to you.

- National Center for Victims of Crime
  1-800-FYI-CALL; TTY 1-800-211-7996. www.ncvc.org

- National Domestic Violence Hotline
  1-800-799-SAFE; TDD 1-800-787-3224 www.ndvh.org

- National Sexual Violence Resource Center
  1-877-739-3895. www.nsvrc.org

- Office of Justice Programs, Violence Against Women
  Office www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo

- RAINN Line (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network)
  1-800-656-HOPE (4673). www.rainn.org

- Victim Law www.victimlaw.info

Crime Victims’ Compensation Programs

Economic compensation for losses resulting from the sexual assault may be available to assist you with costs associated with the crime that are not covered by other sources (e.g., insurance). Costs which may be reimbursed (depending on your state’s program) include: medical bills; counseling bills; transportation and mileage expenses to court, medical or therapy appointments; time missed from work; prescriptions and other expenses.

These benefits are available to victims who have reported the crime to law enforcement. Requirements vary from state to state.

Every state, including the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico, offers crime victim compensation benefits. Victims apply in the state where the crime occurred. The U.S. Department of Justice also has a program for U.S. citizens who are victims of international crime outside the U.S. For more information and to find a link to your state, go to the National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards at www.nacvcb.org or contact them at 703-780-3200.

Coping with Sexual Assault

Some important things to know

Chances are, you are reading this because you or someone you care about has been sexually assaulted. This booklet is for any college student who has ever been the victim of sexual assault. It is also a good resource for family, friends, partners or spouses to learn more about supporting their loved one through this time. To begin, here are a few facts that may be helpful to know.

- **Sexual assault can affect many lives in many different ways.** Rape is a crime that hurts people from all backgrounds. Victims can include: women and men; heterosexuals and homosexuals; persons of any age or from any racial, ethnic or social background; persons with disabilities; and persons who are homeless or in hospitals, institutions or prisons. No matter what your background or situation, rape is a personal violation. You did not deserve for this to happen to you.

- **Sexual assaults occur in many different situations.** No matter what the situation or circumstance, it is never the victim’s fault that the assault happened. You may choose to leave your window open on a summer night, go for a walk alone, get drunk at a party, go home with someone you just met, or say no to your date or partner about sex. None of these actions gives anyone the right to have sex with you without your consent. However, some rape victims will blame themselves. It is important to remember, just like any other crime—the offender is responsible and to blame for what happened. You did not cause this to happen by anything you did or said.
Everyone deserves support after a sexual assault.
You do not have to deal with this alone. There are many different
resources available to help and to answer your questions. This
booklet offers information about some of the medical, emotional,
and legal issues that you might face. This information can be
useful whether you were recently sexually assaulted or if it
happened a long time ago. We hope this will be a helpful guide to
address some of your concerns and to serve as a link to other
resources if you need them. However, since services and laws vary
from state-to-state, you may want to check with a rape crisis center, victim-
and witness program or law enforcement in
I am thankful for
the crisis counselor.
It helped me a lot
to talk about it.

Survivors of sexual assault should be treated with respect
when seeking help. There are many issues to consider after a
sexual assault. Seeking medical care, crisis counseling or
reporting the crime are often first responses for many victims.
It is important to be informed about your options in medical care,
the criminal justice system and counseling. Consider talking to a
rape crisis counselor or victim advocate to learn more about your
choices and your rights. With this information you will be able to
make informed decisions that are best for you and your future.

Deciding what to do and who to tell
These are probably the most important decisions you will make
soon after the sexual assault. The decisions of who to tell and
what to do is up to YOU. Telling someone about the sexual assault
can be very difficult. Often, victims are reluctant to do so because
they have some concerns about telling. Sometimes victims blame
themselves or they think that they will not be believed. Some
rape victims feel ashamed to tell anyone. They wonder if people
will see them differently. These are all very normal and common
concerns. If you are feeling this way, you are not alone.
Remember, this was not your fault. It is generally a good idea to
tell someone who can help you through this difficult time.

Remember, you do not have
to deal with this by yourself.

Where to go for help,
more information and support

Whether it's been days, months or years since your sexual assault,
you do not have to deal with this alone. There are many resources
available if you need more information, have a question or want to
pursue counseling. Most larger communities have rape crisis
programs with free 24-hour crisis counseling. They may also
provide support at the hospital, police department or courtroom.
Some prosecutor's offices and court programs also have victim-
and witness advocates. They are available to assist you with the
criminal justice process. If you are a college student, most
universities have counseling services for sexual assault victims.

If you have other special needs or concerns, such as visual or
hearing impairments, concerns about marital rape or elder abuse,
call your local rape crisis program or the RAINN line for more
information. The RAINN line (Rape, Abuse and Incest National
Network) is a national resource that connects callers to the
nearest rape crisis center in their area. The toll-free number is
1-800-656-HOPE (4673) and website is www.rainn.org.

Many rape survivors do not get assistance immediately after the
rape. Some will rely on a friend or family member for help. Other
women and men have found that the support of a therapist or rape
crisis counselor can be very helpful. The choice of whom to call
and when to call is up to you. Wherever you are, support is
available if or when you need it. It is never too late to get help.
It can make all the difference in your recovery.

The most helpful response was people listening to me
and not giving me mounds of advice or telling me
how I should be or how I should feel.
Other warning signs

If you notice any of these warning signs in yourself, please contact a professional counselor or a crisis help line.

- A depression that doesn’t go away and seems to get worse
- Injuring yourself on purpose (e.g., cutting or burning)
- Significant weight loss, especially in a short amount of time (from depression, laxatives, pills, vomiting/throwing up)
- Nightmares or flashbacks about the sexual assault
- Remaining in an abusive, controlling or violent relationship
- Drug or alcohol use, especially as a means of coping
- Suicidal thoughts or plans or regular thoughts about death
- Serious thoughts or plans to hurt the offender or anyone else

Pay attention to any of these warning signs and take good care of yourself. You can heal from this trauma.

A final message on coping

The following are examples of what others have used in coping:

Examples of coping that are less healthy and possibly hurtful
- Alcohol or other drug use (to numb feelings or escape)
- Sexual risk-taking or having multiple partners
- Eating disorders (over/under-eating, vomiting, using laxatives)
- Self-mutilation by harming/hurting oneself (cutting, burning)
- Internet overuse (more time with computer than people)
- Isolation/withdrawal (less involvement with friends or family)

Examples of coping in more healthy and adaptive ways
- Therapy/counseling (individual counseling or support groups)
- Medication (as needed for depression, anxiety, PTSD)
- Meditation, relaxation and breathing exercises
- Physical activities (yoga, walks, exercise, sports)
- Hobbies/activities (gardening, reading, writing/journaling)
- Finding meaning/helping others (volunteering, donating)
- Spirituality (religious activities, community-faith events)
- Realizing your happiness (family, friends, gratitude.)

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- **Overly sensitive:** Is easily hurt or offended. Often guarded or defensive. Judges and is critical of others. Quick to become irritable, angry, depressed or overreact.
- **Mood shifts and quick tempered.** May go from happy to angry in seconds. Irritability and rage happen very unexpectedly and for no reason. May shift to depressed, tearful and remorseful quickly after a rage or outburst.
- **Verbally and emotionally abusive:** Makes critical, hurtful and cruel remarks to you. Calls you names, degrades you, says you’re worthless and humiliates you in public and in front of friends/family.
- **Hurts animals or is cruel to children.** Intentionally harms or tortures animals. May tease or put down children. Acts like a bully toward others
- **Forceful about sex:** Pressures you for sex or forces you to do things you don’t want to do. Acts like he’s playing, but uses physical force, such as throwing you on the bed or saying degrading things to you during sex.
- **Threatens to hurt you, himself or someone/something else.** He may threaten to kill himself or you if you ever try to leave him. He may make threats toward others.
- **Apologizes and tries to make up for his rage** or hurtful behaviors. After an argument or an abusive episode, he will try to convince you how sorry he is and how much he loves you (until the next episode...and it will happen again, despite promises he will never hurt you again.)
- **He acts like two different people.** Sometimes he is the most caring, loving person—making you feel lucky to have him in your life. Other times, he’s hurtful, cruel and unpredictable, making you question your future together or be afraid for your life.
- **Your self-esteem keeps falling the longer you are with him.** Your confidence in yourself and your sense of who you are and what you want to be is constantly challenged while you are in this relationship.

*Even if you have loving feelings for each other, it does not make this a healthy relationship.*

*You deserve to be treated with respect.*
**Warning signs of an unhealthy or harmful relationship**

The following are some red flags to a potentially abusive or unhealthy relationship. Abuse can be physical (pushing, hitting, slapping…), emotional (name calling, put downs, controlling, threatening…), or sexual (forcing sex, pressures for sex or drugging you to have sex). If you notice any of these things happening in your relationship, consider ending the relationship before you feel too trapped to leave or before it gets worse. Don’t keep it to yourself. Talk to someone. You deserve better.

The following applies to both females and males:

- **Gets serious in the relationship really quick.** Wants a commitment right away. Says he’s “never loved anyone like you or he can’t live without you.” “You are his life.”
- **Very jealous.** Checks on you all the time. Doesn’t like for you to have friendships with other guys and may be jealous of your time with friends or family.
- **Very controlling.** Wants to be in charge and make the decisions. Tries to influence what you do, who you are with and other issues. Wants to know where you are and who you will be with when you’re not with him. May not want or ‘let’ you spend time with others.
- **Has strong beliefs about men and women’s roles.** Believes women should serve their man and stand by their man; the man comes first and makes the decisions.
- **Tries to keep you for himself.** He may try to limit your time with friends and family. Wants you to spend all of your time and his free time with him. Threatens to leave you or to hurt himself if you tell him you want to spend time with your friends.
- **Has demanding expectations:** Has unrealistic needs and blames you when things go wrong.
- **Blames others for his problems.** Difficulty taking responsibility for his actions. Blames friends, family, teachers or you for the problems. It’s never his fault.

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**Understanding rape and other types of sexual assault**

When most of us hear the words sexual assault, we think of rape. However, rape is not the only type of sexual assault. These words are often used but they are defined differently by state laws.

Sexual assaults generally include any type of sexual conduct or sexual contact that is not consensual and is forced, coerced or when the victim could not give consent.

Sexual conduct can be oral, vaginal or anal penetration, even if only slightly entering the body with any body part or an object. Sexual contact is usually considered sexual touching, such as: touching the breasts or outside of the vagina or touching the penis. If there is no consent and penetration of any kind occurs no matter how slight, most state laws refer to this as rape.

Other kinds of sexual offenses can happen when the personal space or safety of a person is violated. For example, if a sexual video or nude photo of a person is made and used in pornography or distributed on the Internet without that person’s consent, it is illegal. Any type of sexual victimization can be hurtful.

Sexual assault occurs any time a person is forced into a sexual act. However, force is not just physical violence. Force can happen in many different ways, such as: verbal threats, overpowering the person, using a weapon, drugging the person, abusing their authority or taking advantage of someone or their situation. For example, a person who is passed out or in a black out from drugs or alcohol or is under anesthesia cannot consent to sex. A person who does not mentally understand what is happening cannot give consent to sex. Taking advantage of someone’s vulnerable state involves another kind of force (e.g., when someone is too drunk to know what is happening).

I never thought this would happen to me. I trusted him and he took advantage of me. How could he hurt me in this way?
These different types of force can happen in any relationship. They can happen with friends, family, co-workers, or an intimate partner (e.g., spouses and gay or lesbian partners). It can also happen between doctors and patients, students and teachers, clergy and parishioners, parents and their children and between strangers. However, most sexual assaults occur between people who know each other—often by someone the victim trusted.

**Some other examples of sexual assault**

- Touching a person’s breast, vagina or penis without permission
- Making someone give (or receive) oral sex by pressuring them
- Touching a person on their vagina, penis, breasts or buttocks while they are asleep or passed out
- Threatening or coercing (making) someone to have sex
- Using an object to touch a person’s breasts, vagina, penis or anus (on the inside or outside of their body) against their will or without their consent
- Having sex with someone who is unable to give or to deny consent if they are mentally incapable, drugged or severely intoxicated with alcohol (e.g. passed out or in a black out)

> I didn’t consider what happened to me was rape because I was drinking and I passed out. Then a friend told me that he didn’t have the right to have sex with me just because I was too drunk to say no. I never thought of it that way because this kind of thing happens all the time at our school.

**Helping family and friends to understand**

If your family and friends know about the sexual assault, they might be having a difficult time too. It can be hard for them to know that you went through such an experience. They want to help and support you, but may not know what to do. They may also have different ideas of when and how you should recover. Here are some suggestions to ‘help them to help you’ better.

- **Tell them what you want or don’t want.** The best chance to get your needs met is to tell people what you want or need. For example, they may not know when you need time alone or when you want company. It’s important to tell them or they might not how you feel.

- **Help them to understand about sexual assault.** Give them information, such as this booklet. The more they know, the better they will understand how to support you.

- **Set your own limits and boundaries.** Your friends and family will have different ideas about what you need or what is best for you. It’s important to be honest with them about your limits. Take care of yourself—say no when you need to.

- **Ask for help or support.** If you need to talk to someone, reach out to them. Call, write, e-mail, instant message, or go to them. Don’t wait for them to come to you. They may not know when or how you need them until you tell them.

- **Be patient with yourself and with them.** Recovering from a sexual assault and moving on with your life takes time. There may be days when you’re ready to fully go back to your life and some days, you may have set backs. This is a normal part of healing. Understand that your family and friends are also trying to cope with what happened and they will have some ups and downs too.

- **Remember that they care about you.** Your loved ones care about you and they hurt when you hurt. They want you to be well and to be happy again. Reach out to them for support.
One of the ways that your mind takes care of you is to allow you to move on with life (job, family, household). Yet, while you are trying to "move on" you might come across some reminders of the trauma (situations, smells, familiar sights). These "triggers" can cause some emotional distress. This is a common reaction for survivors of rape or other trauma. The type of distress can vary from a mild, uncomfortable memory, a flashback, or a physical reaction of anxiety or panic. A common example is the one-year anniversary date of the assault. Some people will experience only mild distress when reminded of the rape. Others may have more distressing responses to the triggers. Most rape survivors will learn how to recognize and to cope with their "triggers" over time.

- **Long-term effects (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder):** Some rape victims will experience distress sometimes months or years later. Their responses might include: preoccupation with the trauma; unwanted, intrusive, thoughts or feelings about the rape; flashbacks; nightmares; continued sleeping difficulties; difficulty concentrating; or feeling numb and detached. These are also some of the symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD can affect people who have experienced a life-threatening trauma, such as rape or war. Some rape survivors may develop a shorter form of PTSD--Acute Stress Disorder. Counseling and/or medication from a mental health professional can help.

- **Depression:** Another emotional response to rape trauma can be depression. It can be mild and short term or the depression may last longer. Symptoms of depression can include: tearfulness, sadness, decreased motivation, sleeping disturbances, appetite changes, decreased socialization, withdrawal, concentration difficulties, decreased sexual desire and decreased energy. Some people will have thoughts about suicide when their depression is more severe. If you have a depression that does not go away or if you have thoughts about suicide, contact a mental health professional. Good mental health care can make all the difference in your recovery from the sexual assault.

  *Getting counseling was the best thing I did after the sexual assault. I could tell my counselor anything and I knew she was not judging me.*

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**Emotional concerns and some possible reactions**

**If it happened recently**

If you were recently sexually assaulted, you are probably having many different feelings and reactions. You might feel as though nothing will ever be the same. Or, you might be trying to move on with your life and trying not to think about what happened. People have different ways of responding to crises, including a sexual assault. There is no right or wrong way to react. In fact, your body and your mind will respond in different ways as the days and weeks go on. The following are some reactions that victims of sexual assault have said they have experienced.

*Which ones have you experienced since the sexual assault?*

- Sadness, crying spells or feeling depressed
- Ashamed, embarrassed or blaming yourself
- Angry, irritable or short-tempered with others
- Feeling a loss of control in your life
- Loss of trust in others and in your own decisions
- Difficulty with concentration, forgetfulness
- Changes in sleeping patterns (insomnia, oversleeping...)
- Nightmares or flashbacks about what happened
- Changes in appetite or food intake (more or less)
- Feeling insecure and uncertain about yourself
- Fears about being alone or fears about the offender
- Feeling on-guard, jumpy or easily startled
- Staying to yourself (less time with family or friends)
- Feeling anxious, nervous or scared
- Feeling numb or having difficulty expressing emotions

These can be normal responses for victims after a sexual assault. You may experience, some or all of these reactions. However, if you continue to have these symptoms or if you have any thoughts about suicide, please talk to a counselor to help you to cope with this trauma and to be well again.
Other common coping responses after a sexual assault

Most sexual assault victims have a range of emotions afterwards. Here are some other possible responses you may experience. (This section was adapted from material by the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence and the Assault Crisis Center of Ypsilanti, Michigan and is used with permission.)

- **Shock and numbness:** This can occur right away. It includes feelings of disbelief or denial about what happened. Your body may feel like it is shutting down or withdrawing. You may feel emotionally detached or drained. Life may not seem real— you are going through the motions, but unaware of all that is happening. Other reactions may include: tearfulness, laughing nervously, withdrawing or claiming to feel nothing or to be “fine.” You may be so overwhelmed you do not know how to feel or what to do.

  **What might help:** Understand these are often normal reactions after a trauma. Reassure yourself these feelings will lessen. It may be helpful to ask a friend or loved one to be with you if you want company. Think about what has helped you through a previous crisis. Take some calming breaths and remind yourself you will be okay. The shock and numbness will pass.

- **Disruption of daily life:** During the first few weeks or months it may seem like your life was thrown off course. You may be preoccupied with thoughts about the assault. You may think about the sexual assault when you don’t want to think about it. It can be upsetting to have reminders of the rape when you are trying to “get on with your life.” You may have difficulty concentrating, trouble sleeping with nightmares, appetite changes, anxiety or depression.

  **What might help:** Although these are normal reactions, they can be very distressing. Be gentle with yourself. Do whatever you need to do to feel in control of your life again. It is common after any kind of crisis to need time to grieve, to adjust and to reorganize your life. You will find that the initial disruptions will go away and you can go on with your life. Just take one step at a time.

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If it has been awhile since the sexual assault

Whether it has been weeks, months or years since the sexual assault, recovery issues can be similar among rape survivors. Likewise, if your loved ones know about the assault, it has probably affected them too. It can be difficult for the people who care about you to know that you are hurting. For some victims and their loved ones, the stress may seem to persist. Remember, your healing and recovery should be at your own pace. Trust your instincts about what is best for you. If it becomes too difficult or the reactions do not go away, you may want to consider counseling. Counseling or a support group can help you (and your loved ones) learn ways to cope and move forward.

The following section provides a summary of some common concerns that rape survivors may have in their recovery. Some people experience reactions right after the trauma, whereas others may not have reactions until much later, if at all.

**Emotional recovery and other common concerns**

- **Physical concerns:** Your body could respond to the continued emotional stress with physical symptoms. You might have some difficulties sleeping, headaches, stomach distress, or other illnesses. Changes in sleeping patterns are a common after-effect of trauma. These reactions generally do not last long but some victims do have continued nightmares or other symptoms. Seek medical attention if the symptoms persist.

- **Psychological/emotional concerns:** The impact of a sexual assault can have short term or long term effects. Initial reactions might include: shock or disbelief. Your body and your mind are trying to recover from the crisis as soon as possible. However, some symptoms can come back weeks or months later including: mood swings, irritability, anxiety, crying spells, depression, or difficulty making decisions. Counseling at any time after the sexual assault can be helpful to address these symptoms.
Victims’ rights, your rights

As a victim of crime, you have certain legal rights when you seek care or go through the criminal justice system. You may want to check with your local victim-witness program or prosecutor’s office to find out about the victim’s rights laws in your state.

Many states have laws similar to the federal law which states that crime victims have the following rights:

- The right to be reasonably protected from the accused.
- The right to reasonable, accurate, and timely notice of any public court proceeding, or any parole proceeding, involving the crime or of any release or escape of the accused.
- The right not to be excluded from any such public court proceeding, unless the court, after receiving clear and convincing evidence, determines that testimony by the victim would be materially altered if a victim heard other testimony.
- The right to be reasonably heard at any public proceeding involving release, plea, sentencing, or any parole proceeding.
- The reasonable right to confer with the attorney (prosecutor).
- The right to full and timely restitution as provided in law.
- The right to proceedings free from unreasonable delay.
- The right to be treated with fairness and with respect for the victim’s dignity and privacy.

Sexual assault victims are entitled to receive all rights given to other crime victims in accordance with their state laws or state constitution. In addition, sexual assault victims have other rights under state laws, such as, protected communication between a rape crisis counselor and the victim. This protection varies from state to state and is NOT available in all states. Victims should ask the rape crisis counselor if their information is confidential and protected in their state.

- Loss of control: It might seem like your whole world has just been turned upside down or that you will never have your life back again. Your thoughts may be racing and overwhelming. You might feel anxious, jittery, or scared and not sure what to do. It can be difficult to focus or concentrate. Even minor decisions, like what to have for lunch, may be difficult to make.

What might help: You may want to make some small changes, such as: rearrange the furniture in your home/room or buy some new bed linens; change your look by cutting your hair; or change your routine by exercising in the morning instead of at night. These small changes can help you to feel that you are taking back control. Try to make as many of your own decisions as possible. Even small decisions can help you regain a sense of control. With big decisions, make a list of pros and cons of how it might impact you. Talk to a trusted friend or a family member. Seek out professional resources such as counseling or legal advice if needed. Trust your instincts to do what is right for you.

Even making small decisions can help you to regain a sense of control.

- Fear: It is not uncommon for rape victims to experience fear after an assault. For example, you might fear that the person who did this to you will return and you may fear for your safety. You may be afraid of seeing the person who did this to you or have anxiety about situations or people that may remind you of the assault. These fears can come and go and can also range from a mild, uncomfortable feeling to an anxiety-producing panic. Most of these fears will go away or lessen over time.

What might help: Make any changes in your life that you need to make in order to feel safe. For example, it is okay if you need to sleep with the light on for awhile, or sleep in a room other than your bedroom (especially if you were raped in your bed). Change your locks, take a self-defense class, or stay with a friend or a family member. If you want or need company, ask people that you trust to stay with you day or night. Keep your phone nearby if you are alone in case you need to call someone—even for some emotional reassurance.
Guilt and self-blame: You may think that you could have or should have done something differently to avoid or to prevent the assault. You might blame yourself for what happened and start to doubt yourself or your ability to make good judgments.

What might help: Remind yourself that you did not cause this to happen. Realize that guilt and self-blame can be efforts to feel some control over the situation. Some survivors think that if they avoid similar situations, it will not happen again. Think about how you might do things differently in the future as a way to feel safer, not to blame yourself about the rape. It can be helpful to read about recovering from rape or talk to other victims (e.g. rape survivor’s group) to know you are not alone and did not deserve it to happen—no matter what the situation.

Anger: You have many different reasons to feel angry. You might be angry toward the person who did this to you, the police, your family, the medical staff, your school or toward yourself. You might also feel angry at society because you no longer feel safe or trusting. If you are religious or spiritual, you may be angry that your faith did not protect you or you might question why God allowed this to happen to you.

What might help: Allow yourself to be angry. It is a natural and common reaction after a sexual assault. You may be more irritable or short-tempered with others for awhile. This is a part of your anger. Some people find physical activity (exercise, walking) can help release the physical tension that often goes along with anger. Writing in a journal, playing music or singing out loud to music are helpful and healthy ways to let go of anger and the sadness that sometimes accompanies it. If you are religious or are struggling with questions about your faith, you can seek out a spiritual counselor (e.g. minister, rabbi, priest or pastoral counselor) who is familiar with sexual assault issues and can guide you through your questions. Find what works best for you to express your anger in a healthy manner that will not hurt you or anyone else.

Protective orders (CPO)

A protection order is a civil court order. It is also known as a Peace Bond, a Protective Order or a Restraining Order. This court order notifies and requires the specified individual to avoid direct or indirect contact with the victim including abuse, harassment or disturbing the peace. It can also prohibit the person from entering the victim’s residence and destroying their property. CPOs are now honored on all military installations.

You might need a protective order if you are concerned or have reason to believe that the offender could further harass or harm you. If so, it is important that you contact law enforcement for more guidance on how to obtain a protective order. Remember: a protective order does not guarantee your safety from the offender. It is a court order for the offender not to have contact with you.

If the offender does violate the order, you should notify the police immediately because the offender can be arrested or confined for violating the order. You should also discuss safety planning with a victim advocate if you are concerned about further violence or harm from your offender to you or your family.

Any violation of a CPO should be reported to a law enforcement agency immediately.

Requesting an HIV test of the perpetrator

Many states have laws regarding HIV testing in sexual assault cases. In most states, the victim must request that the offender be tested. In other states the victim or the prosecutor must file a petition with the court requesting that the offender be tested. Of the states that do require testing, they also require that the victim receive the test results in a timely manner.

IMPORTANT NOTE: A sexual assault victim may request that the alleged offender be tested for the immunodeficiency virus (HIV) "not later than 48 hours after the date on which the information or indictment is presented." The defendant does not have to be convicted in order to be tested. Regardless of the perpetrator’s test results, you should still be tested for HIV and have any other testing that is recommended.
Other legal and criminal justice concerns

You may have many other concerns or questions about what to expect and what your rights are during the criminal justice process. Some of those issues are addressed here. If in doubt, ask your detective or prosecutor or ask for a victim advocate. You have the right to know about the criminal justice process.

Accompaniment and support

You don’t have to go through any of these steps alone. As noted earlier, many communities have rape crisis or a victim-witness programs. They can support and guide you through the process. Rape crisis counselors have received specialized training to assist sexual assault victims. Usually, a rape crisis counselor works or volunteers for a community rape crisis program. Victim-witness advocates have received specialized training to work with crime victims. Some advocates work or volunteer with community-based programs, but many advocates are linked with prosecutor or law enforcement departments. Advocates and rape crisis counselors can be with you in the courtroom (although not in the grand jury room). They will be there to the extent you want them.

Bond and harassment

After the arrest, most defendants can choose to post bond. Posting bond lets the defendant stay out of jail until the trial. The bond is usually a large sum of money that is held to make sure the defendant shows up at trial. When out on bail, the defendant is not allowed to contact or harass you in any way. If the defendant or his family tries to contact you after the arrest, you should report it to the detective right away. Harassing a witness is a crime. You should not have to endure any harassment from the defendant or the defendant’s family after making a police report.

Coping with Sexual Assault

- **Vulnerability and mistrust:** You might feel like your ability to trust others has been taken away. You may wonder who you can trust—especially if the person who hurt you was someone you trusted. Some victims also question their own judgment and become more cautious or guarded in relationships or with others.

  **What might help:** Try to trust your instincts about what you need and with whom you want to share what happened. Turn to friends and family who have been dependable in the past. Select people who are not judgmental and who are good listeners. Take your time re-building trust. If something feels uncomfortable, listen to your instincts. Know that there are many people who do care about you and are trustworthy.

- **Sexual intimacy concerns:** It is common to have different reactions and feelings about sexual intimacy after an assault. For example, you might fear that having sex will remind you of the assault and therefore avoid it or you might wonder if you will ever want or enjoy sex again. You may need reassurance that you are still attractive or desirable and you might use sex as a way of coping. These are all normal concerns after a sexual assault.

  **What might help:** Go at your own pace, in small steps and only when you are ready to resume sex. Be very clear with your partner about your needs and limits when it comes to any type of sexual touching or sexual contact. Your partner may need reassurance that it is okay to touch you. Let your partner know if something reminds you of the rape and causes you anxiety. Tell your partner what kinds of physical touching or sexual intimacy feels comfortable or uncomfortable for you.

  Your interest in sex after the rape can also vary. You may have a need to know that you are still desirable, or you might have less interest toward any kind of physical contact. Be cautious about any extremes in your sexual behavior (e.g., not caring about how many sexual partners you have since the rape.) A therapist with experience in sexual trauma recovery can be helpful if you have concerns or anxiety about sexual intimacy after a sexual assault. If you have a spouse or partner, it might be helpful to have your loved one join you for a few sessions to learn how to best support your healing together.
Additional concerns for college students

What if I see him on campus or if we are in class together? Chances are, if you are both on the same campus, you probably will see him again. Remember, you did nothing wrong and you have every right to be there. Walk with your head held high—without any shame or embarrassment. He is the only one who should be afraid to see you. If you see him, go on with your business. Only you can decide if it’s safe for you to talk to him, but be prepared that he may not give you the response you need. If it is uncomfortable to be in the same class, contact the Dean of Students to try to have your schedule rearranged to fit your needs.

We have mutual friends and belong to the same groups. Some people believe me and some believe him. Others try to be friends with both of us. How should I deal with this?
This is common because acquaintance rape usually involves two people who have come to know each other often through friends or social groups. People will take sides. Usually, those who were closer to him before will remain aligned with him. Likewise, your true friends will support you. For those who try to remain ‘neutral’ it can cause greater conflict because you may wonder if they believe you or if they are telling him about you. Surround yourself with people who support, respect and believe you. Trust your instincts about whether or not to stay in the same social groups with the person who raped you and which friends you can trust to talk to about this issue. It is your choice. Remember, you did nothing wrong—he did.

I'm not sure I'm ready to start dating again. I don't know if I can trust other guys not to move too fast or try to hurt me in the same way. Many rape survivors have this concern because they trusted the person who hurt them. They didn't expect this to happen and they wonder if it can happen again. Your instincts will be more tuned it to situations and you will be more likely to trust your inner voice. Take your time with dating. Start in social situations and slowly move to one-to-one when you feel safe and comfortable. At first, you may want to avoid situations if you feel isolated or with less control (e.g., a guy's bedroom or being intoxicated). When you're ready, be clear about sexual limits before the date and reinforce those limits on the date.

The sentencing hearing

You are entitled to be notified and to be present during the sentencing hearing. This hearing is usually short. The judge will hear comments from the defense attorney, the offender, and sometimes from the offender's family. You or your representative should also be allowed to give comments if you want to. You may have already given the prosecutor or the judge a written victim impact statement. The judge will consider all of this information and the law when sentencing the perpetrator. The sentence can include prison, probation or court ordered treatment. If the sentence is prison or jail, the offender will likely be sent away immediately. In some cases, there can be exceptions or delays for the offender going to prison immediately after sentencing is over.

The victim-advocate was a great support and help. I really do not think I could have gotten through the trial and the sentencing hearing without her.

After the trial

You might feel you are at a turning point in your life after the trial. This might be especially true if you believe justice was served. However, the offender could choose to appeal the guilty verdict and ask for a new trial. This can be hard to accept. If the defendant is found not guilty and set free, this might be a very difficult time for you. Counseling during and after the trial can be useful. It can help you to cope with the effects of the trauma, the outcome of the trial and to learn how to move on with your life.

If there is an appeal of a verdict, you have the right to be notified. Additionally, some offenders request an early release after they have served only a few months in prison. You also have the right to know about any action pertaining to the parole or the release of the prisoner. Notify your prosecutor in writing if you want to be informed of any requests for probation, appeals, early release or parole review boards. You have the right to be present or to have an advocate present at these proceedings.

You have the right to be informed of the criminal justice proceedings.
Victim impact statement

A victim impact statement allows you to give a written summary to the court about the physical, emotional and financial effects of the crime on you and your family. A victim impact statement is a good way to ensure that your concerns are heard at sentencing.

The following offers some guidelines on preparing a victim impact statement which might be helpful. Your letter to the judge should be sent after the guilty verdict but in advance of the sentencing. You might also choose to read it to the court. Some victims send a written statement and also make a verbal statement. The verbal statement to the court should only be about five minutes long, highlighting the important points. Talk with the prosecutor to find out what to include as a sentencing request. Some other helpful tips on victim impact statements:

A victim impact statement should NOT be:

- An opportunity to vent anger at the judicial system
- A time to review the entire case
- A time to expect a confession or to ask why

A victim impact statement SHOULD be:

- A letter that respectfully and clearly states the financial, emotional and physical impact of this crime on you
- A time to request reasonable restitution for expenses incurred
- An opportunity to recommend reasonable sentencing
- A chance to make suggestions, such as: the defendant receive counseling, psychiatric evaluation or no early release
- A time for you to say what you need to say in front of the offender for your own closure

A victim impact statement is considered a most effective way to ensure that your concerns are heard at sentencing.

- Vulnerability and mistrust: You might feel like your ability to trust others has been taken away. You may wonder who you can trust—especially if the person who hurt you was someone you trusted. Some victims also question their own judgment and become more cautious or guarded in relationships or with others.

  What might help: Try to trust your instincts about what you need and with whom you want to share what happened. Turn to friends and family who have been dependable in the past. Select people who are not judgmental and who are good listeners. Take your time re-building trust. If something feels uncomfortable, listen to your instincts. Know that there are many people who do care about you and are trustworthy.

- Sexual intimacy concerns: It is common to have different reactions and feelings about sexual intimacy after an assault. For example, you might fear that having sex will remind you of the assault and therefore avoid it or you might wonder if you will ever want or enjoy sex again. You may need reassurance that you are still attractive or desirable and you might use sex as a way of coping. These are all normal concerns after a sexual assault.

  What might help: Go at your own pace, in small steps and only when you are ready to resume sex. Be very clear with your partner about your needs and limits when it comes to any type of sexual touching or sexual contact. Your partner may need reassurance that it is okay to touch you. Let your partner know if something reminds you of the rape and causes you anxiety. Tell your partner what kinds of physical touching or sexual intimacy feels comfortable or uncomfortable for you.

  Your interest in sex after the rape can also vary. You may have a need to know that you are still desirable, or, you might have less interest toward any kind of physical contact. A therapist with experience in sexual trauma recovery can be helpful if you have concerns or anxieties about sexual intimacy after a sexual assault. If you have a spouse or partner, it might be helpful to have your loved one join you for a few sessions to learn how to best support your healing together.
Medical care and related concerns

Soon after the sexual assault, most victims will have medical concerns or questions. This next section offers some general information that could be useful to know about your options.

It is important to get medical care after a sexual assault. General aches, pains and distress (physical and emotional) are normal. However, you may not be aware of an underlying problem that needs medical attention.

Other reasons to get medical care

- Treat physical injuries and ensure there are no internal injuries
- Test for pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Receive preventive treatment or medication for STIs
- Receive treatment to prevent a possible pregnancy
- Collect evidence for the police investigation (if the crime is reported, or in the event you decide to report it later)*
- Talk to a medical professional about questions and concerns

Where to go for medical treatment after a sexual assault

- A hospital emergency department
- Student health clinic or local clinic (e.g. Planned Parenthood)
- Family doctor or a gynecologist

There are many places to get medical care after a sexual assault. A hospital or emergency department is often the first choice if the rape has just occurred. An emergency department is one of the few places that provide the sexual assault evidence collection examination. This exam is very important if you want to pursue criminal charges. However, going to an emergency department does not mean you have to make a police report. You deserve medical care whether you choose to make a police report or not. This medical examination is now provided at hospitals free of charge to sexual assault victims if you choose to report to the police or not (see next section on new options). The exam can also include treatment to prevent STI’s or pregnancy, if you want.

Testifying in court

Before you have to testify in court, you will receive a subpoena (an order to appear in court). Do not ignore the subpoena. If you do not show up for court, a warrant can be issued for your arrest since you are in contempt of court. Your role as a witness is very important to the case. Here are a few suggestions to prepare you.

Before the trial:

- If you have questions or if you want to visit the courtroom before testifying, contact the prosecutor assigned to the case.
- If you want an advocate to be with you at the trial or at any of the hearings, contact the victim-witness program.

At the trial:

- It might be helpful to have other support persons (family or friends) with you while you wait to testify. If they are also going to testify, you will not be able to wait with them since the court does not want witnesses talking about the case.
- Get there early for extra time and to avoid additional stress.
- When your are called to testify, take a slow, calming breath.
- Speak up clearly, especially if there is no microphone.
- Always tell the truth to the best of your recollection.
- If you don’t understand a question, tell the attorney.
- Pause if there is an objection and wait for the judge’s response.
- Only answer the specific question you have been asked.
- Be ready for delays and postponements. They are common.
- Ask the prosecutor or victim advocate if you have any questions or if you have any specific needs to be addressed.
- If you do have specific needs related to a disability or language barrier (e.g., needing an interpreter) please tell the prosecutor or victim advocate early on in the case. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that any public agency serving persons with disabilities must make accommodations for you to be able to fully participate in the process.
The trial

A trial may not take place until months or years after the assault. The scheduling of the trial depends on many factors. Some of the delays could depend on: when the perpetrator was arrested; when the grand jury hearing was scheduled; if the judge ordered a psychiatric evaluation of the defendant; and the continuances (delays) requested by the prosecutor or defense attorney.

The trial is usually in an open courtroom. This means the public can attend. However, witnesses must stay outside the courtroom except when testifying. This includes the victim. The defendant is in the courtroom at all times. A judge, jury (if one is requested), defense attorney and prosecutor are also in the courtroom during the entire trial. The decision to have a jury is up to the accused. In some jurisdictions, the prosecution can also demand a jury trial.

Rape trials can last anywhere from one or two days to several weeks depending on the number of victims, witnesses and the evidence. During the trial you will be asked to tell what happened. You will be questioned by the prosecutor and defense attorney.

IMPORTANT NOTE ON RAPE SHIELD LAWS

The United States federal government and all 50 states currently enforce some version of a "rape shield" law. Rape shield laws prevent the defense attorney from asking you questions about your past sexual experiences unless the defense can successfully argue that it fits under one of the recognized legal exceptions.

After all of the evidence has been presented, the judge or jury will consider a guilty or not guilty verdict. If the verdict is guilty, the sentence will likely be set at a later date. In some cases, the judge will order a pre-sentencing investigation of the offender. This could include a psychiatric evaluation, a review of the offender’s past record or an evaluation to determine any sexual predator status. State laws vary on sexual offender classification. Your prosecutor has information on your state’s predator laws. If you have any questions about the courtroom or the trial, call the prosecutor. In addition, many prosecutor’s offices have victim-witness advocates available to help and to assist you through the criminal justice system from start to finish.

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you have other injuries (in addition to the sexual assault) that require testing or treatment, this part of the medical care is not free—only the sexual assault exam. However, you can request reimbursement of any additional medical or counseling costs from your state crime victims compensation program—if the crime was reported to police for a possible investigation. See ‘resources’ for more information.

The hospital emergency department process

- When you check in at registration, tell the nurse at the front desk that you were sexually assaulted. You will be taken to a private area for an initial assessment of your medical needs. There may be a wait if there are other medical emergencies.
- At most hospitals, a SANE or advocate will meet with you.
- You have the option to consent to any or all of the following: --Rape Crisis Counselor or Victim Advocate support --Medical exam for injuries and/or preventive treatments --Preventive treatment for STIs and possible pregnancy --A forensic exam by a SANE or doctor to collect evidence --Making a report to law enforcement for investigation.

The sexual assault (forensic evidence) exam

Note: If you want evidence collected for a possible prosecution, you should sign the consent to have the evidence collection exam. If you are unsure about reporting the crime, indicate you would like for the evidence to be stored to give you time to make this decision. This is called a ‘Jane Doe’, anonymous or blind report.

- The evidence collection exam is a physical exam of your body (including genitals). Samples are collected as evidence.
- The exam includes: medical history, information about the assault, samples of bodily fluids (e.g. blood, saliva, urine) and pubic hair.
- You have the right to refuse any part of the medical exam and/or the collection of any evidence. However, if you might want the crime investigated for a possible prosecution, the sooner evidence is collected, the better for the case.
- The entire exam with documentation can last 2-3 hours.
- You may be given medication and instructions for follow up.
- Discuss any concerns or questions with the SANE or advocate.
NEW options for medical care and reporting*

If you decide to get medical care, it is in your best interest to go to a facility experienced in treating rape trauma (if possible.) Many facilities now offer specialized treatment for rape victims through sexual assault response teams or sexual assault nurse examiners (SANE). These are professionals who have received additional training in working with sexual assault victims.

A law under the Violence Against Women Act now gives sexual assault victims the option to get the sexual assault forensic exam at no cost without having to make a police report. The forensic examinations are generally only performed at hospital emergency departments.

Sexual assault victims are NOT required to cooperate with law enforcement nor to participate in the criminal justice system to receive the forensic exam at no cost to them.

This allows victims to get the needed medical care and the evidence collection in case they decide later to make a police report for investigation. It gives victims time to make this important decision without potentially losing any of the evidence.

IMPORTANT NOTE: You can have evidence collected and held until you decide if you want to make a report. However, the time evidence is held varies from state-to-state. You may be able to make an anonymous report to let the authorities know about the sexual assault, but not give your name. However, some states, such as California, have mandatory reporting for healthcare providers. Please be aware that the anonymous reporting may not be available in your state. Your local rape crisis center should be able to advise you on your state laws pertaining to reporting.

The decisions about your medical care are fully up to you.

The preliminary hearing

In some jurisdictions, the preliminary hearing is the first hearing in which an overview of the case is presented to a judge in an open court room. All concerned parties are usually present. There is no jury. This hearing is for a judge to determine “probable cause” (to decide if there is reason to believe a crime did occur and that the defendant may have committed this crime). Other states use a grand jury to determine if the accused should be indicted. If the judge finds probable cause, the case will be held over to a trial. If there is no probable cause, the case is dismissed. In some states, the preliminary hearing comes before arraignment or the case may go directly to the grand jury. In other states there are no preliminary or grand jury hearings for sexual assault cases.

The grand jury hearing

This is a private hearing held before a grand jury and the prosecutor. The witnesses are called one at a time to give their sworn testimony. They will also answer questions from the jury. The defendant is not present but may be called to give testimony in front of the grand jury. After hearing from the witnesses, the grand jury has three choices: the case should proceed to trial; the charges should be dropped; the charges should be reduced and the case sent back to a lower court. Sometimes, a grand jury may ask for additional testimony. Like the preliminary hearing, the grand jury must determine if there is reason to believe a crime did occur and if the accused the person(s) committed the crime.

Plea bargaining

There is a possibility that there may not be a trial if a plea bargain occurs. This is when the defendant pleads guilty to a lesser charge to avoid a trial. The plea bargain and terms are discussed between the prosecutor and defense attorney. The prosecutor might ask for your input. However, the prosecutor decides whether to take the plea bargain request to the judge. If it is accepted by the judge, there will be no trial. Tell the prosecutor early on in the case if you want to be consulted about plea bargaining.
The court process

The court process begins when the state takes legal action against the alleged perpetrator. The prosecutor or district attorney (title varies) will make this decision in part based on the detective’s investigation. If the prosecutor determines there is not enough evidence for a possible prosecution, the case will not go to trial. This can be hard to understand and it might feel like a setback to you.

However, according to the Model Rules of Professional Conduct for Prosecutors (Rule 3.8(a)) the prosecutor must not prosecute a charge that is not supported by probable cause. In addition, the National Prosecution Standards (Section 43.6) states that a prosecutor shall file only those charges consistent with the interests of justice. There are 17 factors that may be considered and the probability of a conviction is only one of them.

If the case is accepted for prosecution, there will be many steps before the trial. Although the criminal justice process varies from state to state, this section offers a brief overview of what to expect.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The time that it can take for a case to go through the criminal justice system varies from county to county. For some cases, the time frame from the initial report of the crime to the trial can be over a year (or more if the accused is not identified or charged promptly.) However, not all cases will take that long—depending on many factors. Keep in mind, each step of the criminal justice process is important and will take some time.

The arraignment

This usually happens within one or two days after the accused is arrested. It is a brief hearing before a judge. The charges are explained to the defendant (the person accused of the crime). The defendant responds to the charges by pleading guilty or not guilty. If there is a “not guilty” plea, bail is set for release until trial or the defendant stays in jail. You do not have to go to this hearing but you are allowed to be present or let the prosecutor know your concerns about the defendant posting bail.

Concerns regarding sexually transmitted infections (STI)

In addition to treating your physical injuries, you can also request medications to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, Trichomoniasis, Syphilis and HIV. Below is more important information to know about STIs.

- Anyone can get an STI from sexual assault, even without intercourse. This includes any sexual contact (e.g. oral sex).
- If preventive medication is taken soon after a sexual assault, it can help to treat some types of STI’s, but not all of them.
- Some STI’s do not have any symptoms but can cause serious health effects or be life threatening. It is important to be tested. It can take days to weeks after exposure for tests to detect an STI. Earlier tests indicate if you had an STI prior to the rape.
- HIV (which can develop into AIDS) should be tested at 3 and 6 months after a sexual assault. HIV does not show up right after being exposed. The Center for Disease Control reports that HIV is detectable 3 months after exposure in 95-97% of persons infected and 99.9% at six months after the exposure.
- HIV tests can be confidential and/or anonymous. HIV can be tested with a drawn blood sample or with a special rapid test which gives results in 20 - 60 minutes. Rapid tests can be taken from blood drawn from a vein or saliva on a mouth swab.

IMPORTANT NOTE: In 2005, the Center for Disease Control recommended that rape victims who have been exposed to the AIDS virus should receive treatment within 72 hours of exposure. Persons who have been knowingly exposed to the AIDS virus are usually given a 28-day medication plan as a preventive measure.

If you test positive for any STI, you can get more information about your treatment options from a doctor or health clinic. If you use the Internet as a resource, choose sites that are reputable with accurate information (e.g. The Center for Disease Control or the National Institute of Health).
Concerns regarding possible pregnancy

Pregnancy can occur from a sexual assault, although it is not common (an estimated 5% of rapes of child-bearing women resulted in pregnancy). However, you can request medications to prevent a pregnancy after a rape. It can be taken up to five days after sexual contact, but the sooner they are taken, the more effective in preventing pregnancy. These options are addressed in this section. If you miss period, it is important to be tested to determine if you became pregnant as a result of the sexual assault. Here are some other important points to know about pregnancy:

• You can become pregnant from a sexual assault even if there was only slight penetration or ejaculation near your vagina.

• It might take a few weeks to know if you became pregnant from the sexual assault. The doctor may recommend a pregnancy test right away to find out if you were pregnant before the assault. Pregnancy tests can be done at home, at a clinic or doctor’s office with a urine sample, however, blood tests can provide more accurate results.

• If you are concerned about a pregnancy resulting from the sexual assault and you want to stop the pregnancy from developing, there are two very different options now available. They are the ‘morning after pill’ to prevent a pregnancy and Mifepristone--RU486 to end an existing pregnancy. Below is more information about these options so that you can make an informed decision that is best for you.

Facing a pregnancy from a rape will involve a very difficult decision that will require support without judgement.

Polygraph and voice stress tests

The term “polygraph” means an instrument that—
(A) records continuously, visually, permanently, and simultaneously changes in cardiovascular, respiratory, and electrodermal patterns as minimum instrumentation standards; and (B) is used, or the results of which are used, for the purpose of rendering a diagnostic opinion regarding the honesty or dishonesty of an individual.

(Used with permission from “Anti-polygraph statutes: State of the Nation” by Diane Moyer and Ilse Knecht)

Some law enforcement departments still use the polygraph or other ‘truth-telling’ tests (e.g. computerized voice stress analysis—CVSA) on sexual assault victims as a part of their investigation. Only a few states allow police to use these tests with rape victims. Even in those states, they can only be used with victim consent. Although many law enforcement departments still use these tests as an “investigative tool,” it has been recommended by many professional groups, including the International Association of Chiefs of Police that these tests should never be used with victims of sexual assault during the course of the investigation — even if the victim requests it.

You do not have to take the polygraph or the voice stress analysis test if you do not want to do it. The decision to take either of these tests is up to you.

There are many reasons why these types of tests should not be used with rape victims. First, the results of these tests are not allowed in court except in specific situations. They are often not accurate with rape victims because of the physical and mental effects of the trauma. There is a high likelihood of ‘false positive’ results indicting the victim is not telling the truth, when in fact, the victim was more likely experiencing the normal physical reactions of post-trauma stress or anxiety. These responses can be falsely read by the examiner as an indicator of deception.

Whatever your decision about taking one of these tests, it should in no way limit or stop the criminal investigation as you are now protected by federal law.
Evidence collection

Evidence collection is an important part of the investigation since the prosecutor will need to prove that the crime occurred. There are many different types of evidence, such as: the clothes you were wearing, or items at the crime scene (e.g. your bedsheets). However, the most important evidence will likely come from the sexual assault forensic evidence collection exam.

Most clinics and private doctors do not have “rape evidence collection kits” or the specialized training to collect this evidence. This is why it is important to go to a hospital as soon as possible after a rape so that the evidence can be collected (even if you are unsure about making a police report.) Many hospitals will collect the evidence up to 48 hours after a rape.

However, it may still be possible to make a police report even weeks, months or years after the assault. Keep in mind, if you wait, it means that there may not be any physical evidence. Also, a long delay in reporting may make the investigation or the prosecution harder. However, since rapists often repeat the same patterns with other victims, your police report and testimony could strengthen another case with the same offender.

"Some victims are unable or unready to decide whether they want to cooperate with law enforcement in the immediate aftermath of the assault. Because evidence is lost as time progresses, such victims should be encouraged to have the evidence collected immediately and decide about reporting the crime at a later date."

—US Department of Justice Violence Against Women, 11/07

Emergency contraception: “Morning after pill”

These options are not designed to terminate an existing pregnancy.

1. PLAN B One-Step
- Contains levonorgestrel, a progestin hormone used in lower doses in birth control pills to prevent ovulation or fertilization of an egg. It is medically classified as a form of contraception.
- Must be taken within 72 hours after the sexual assault.
- Available over-the-counter at pharmacies with no prescription to anyone over 17 years old and at most hospitals. In 2009, FDA approved 17 year olds to purchase the morning after pill over-the-counter without a prescription or parent’s consent.
- Persons under 17 years old can get Plan B with a prescription.

Ella (non-hormonal)
- Contains ulipristal, a non-hormonal drug that blocks the effects of key hormones necessary for conception. Approved in 2010 by the FDA as a form of emergency contraception.
- Can be used within five days of the sexual assault.
- It is taken as one tablet in one dose.
- Available only by prescription at a pharmacy.

Mifeprex (RU486)
- Used for the purpose of stopping an existing pregnancy.
- Prescribed up to 49 days after last menstrual period.
- This must be prescribed by a physician.
- Controversial option for some people, since these pills are used to stop an existing pregnancy.

These options may not be agreeable with your religious beliefs or values. Be aware that some doctors will not prescribe these options because of their own religious beliefs or because the medications are controversial.
The police interview and the criminal investigation

IMPORTANT NOTE: The amount of time that the evidence will be kept varies greatly from state to state. A "Jane Doe" report is a police report made by a detective who will pursue an investigation without knowledge or participation of the victim.

The detective will contact you soon after the interview for you to sign a statement about what happened. Read it carefully to make sure everything is correct before you sign it. This statement will be a part of the investigation and may be used in court. You can have a copy of your statement and police report.

It is important that you tell everything you can remember. Some details may be embarrassing, but you need to tell the detective everything right away. Tell the detective if you remember anything new later. The investigation can involve different aspects depending on the case. It may include evidence such as photos or a police line-up, a composite drawing with the police artist, and possibly, a picture of the offender. Other parts of the investigation are described on the following pages.

Facing a rape is a very difficult decision for a rape victim. It will involve a very difficult decision that will require ongoing support. You should be provided with support by someone who can help you deal with this issue, such as a therapist or a loved one.

Rape victims deserve to know all of their options and what to expect from medical procedures. You can refuse any treatment, including any part of the rape evidence collection exam. It is important to know that not completing the entire rape evidence collection exam could affect the criminal case if you decide to file a police report at a later date. Remember: no one can make you have any treatment you do not want. It is your decision.

The decisions about your medical care should be fully left to you, but it is important to have all the information you need to make an informed decision.
More reporting options for sexual assault victims

It is important that you have all of the information you need when considering whether to report the sexual assault.

The following information might be helpful in your decision.

A Federal law (under the Violence Against Women Act) now gives victims options without having to report the crime immediately. The following is a summary of this law:

1) Any victim of sexual assault (females and males, adults and teens) can have the sexual assault forensic exam at NO COST.

2) Victims do NOT have to report the crime to police, cooperate with law enforcement nor participate in the criminal justice system to receive this medical exam at no cost.

3) Victims have the option of reporting the crime at a later date for a criminal investigation. (However, the sooner that law enforcement is contacted, the better for a possible prosecution).

4) States have different approaches such as an: “Anonymous report,” “Blind report” or “Jane Doe report.” Check with your local hospital or rape crisis center to find out which option is used in your state. Following is a summary of each approach:

Blind or Anonymous reporting:

An ‘anonymous’ sexual assault can be reported by the hospital staff (SANE) to the police WITHOUT identifying the victim. This allows the police to accept evidence for secure holding in case the victim later decides to make a report for investigation. Evidence is coded or labeled, but does NOT identify the victim. IMPORTANT NOTE: Some states, such as California, have mandatory reporting for their healthcare providers. This option may not be available in your state. Check with your local rape crisis program if you are uncertain about your state laws.

Alcohol and sexual assault

Alcohol or other drugs are involved in many sexual assaults. However, even if you were drinking or using other drugs, you did not deserve to be raped. You are not to blame for what happened. No one has the right to sexually violate you at any time. Rape is a crime, regardless of whether you were under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. You still have the option to report the rape to the police, but be prepared for questions about your alcohol use.

I didn’t think that anyone would believe me because I was so drunk.

I did not remember everything that happened—but I know I did NOT consent to having sex.

Some victims may not remember parts or all of what happened if they were very intoxicated. When someone consumes a large amount of alcohol (beer, wine, liquor) or other high proof alcohol, especially over a short period of time, they may pass out or experience a blackout due to the level of alcohol in their body. This can be very dangerous because it can lead to a medical emergency and it also makes the person more vulnerable to sexual assault.

The majority of sexual assaults of college students involve someone taking advantage of the person when they were too drunk to give consent. This does not make the event any less traumatic nor any less of a crime. If someone has sex or sexual contact with another person who is unable to give consent, it is a crime and it can result in significant trauma to the victim. The emotional effects of sexual assault after being drugged or while in a black out can be especially distressing because the victim does not remember what actually happened to them.

If you were drinking a lot of alcohol, you could have “blacked out” and might not remember everything that happened. If you think you were drugged or in a black out and you believe someone had sex with you, consider talking to a victim advocate, a rape crisis counselor or a counselor at your school.

Remember, you don’t have to deal with this by yourself.
**Drug-facilitated sexual assault and "Date-rape drugs"**

Sexual offenders often use drugs and alcohol to impair their victims. Some of these drugs are put into alcohol, soda, or other drinks. Some drugs (e.g. Benadryl) are put in food to cover up the taste. However, many are tasteless and odorless. You may not know you have been drugged until you feel very drowsy or intoxicated. This can happen soon after ingesting the drug. You may blackout or pass out or not remember anything under the influence of the drug.

Two drugs commonly used to commit rape are Rohypnol and GHB. Rohypnol (roofies) is a strong tranquilizer. GHB or Gamma-Hydroxybutyrate looks like a clear liquid. It was used originally as an anesthetic. GHB goes by many names such as “G,” “Grievous Bodily Harm,” “Easy Lay.” Another drug which is used is Ketamine, an animal anesthetic. Ketamine, also in liquid form, is called “Special K,” “Vitamin K” or “Bump.”

The effects of these drugs may last several hours depending on the amount given and if alcohol was also used. When used with alcohol, some of the drugs can have a very serious or lethal result.

**Symptoms that may indicate you were drugged include:**
- suddenly and unexpectedly becoming very drowsy;
- feeling very agitated, jittery or nervous for no known reason;
- having hallucinations (seeing/hearing things);
- suddenly getting sick or vomiting soon after having a drink;
- experiencing a memory loss for several hours;
- waking up and not remembering what happened hours earlier.

The only way to know for certain if you were drugged is to be tested. If you suspect that you were drugged, save your first urine of the day in a clean container and take it to the hospital right away or go to the hospital so that you can be tested. Some drugs are tested though blood or hair samples. Many drugs will not be found in the body after 4-12 hours, so testing within 8-12 hours is best, but the sooner the better. The police can provide information about testing and reporting a suspected drug-facilitated rape.

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**Reporting the crime-- The criminal investigation**

The following section offers some general information about the criminal justice system. However, since state laws and procedures of individual courts and police departments vary, it is best to check with local law enforcement for information specific to your area. Also note, you have the option to report the crime to your school's campus safety/law enforcement if the crime occurred ON campus. Or, you can report the incident to the school judicial affairs for a possible disciplinary hearing with the offender. You can choose both options, but the school judicial affairs is not a criminal hearing. Check with your school handbook for specific information about the judicial affairs/disciplinary board process and your rights.

**Your decision to report the crime**

The decision to make a police report to on or off campus law enforcement can be one of the most difficult decisions you will make after the rape. Uncertainty about reporting the rape is common among survivors, especially if you know the offender. If the offender is your partner, classmate or friend of friends, you might feel pressure not to report the crime. You might wonder if reporting the sexual assault will cause additional problems in your relationship with the offender or with others who know both of you. Or, you might be afraid of the person who did this to you and how they will react or if they will hurt you further. There are many reasons why this is a difficult decision for most victims.

There are also many reasons why victims do make a police report. Some victims feel a sense of justice and want to see their offender face the criminal justice system. Some victims find this to be an important part of their healing--especially if the rapist is found guilty. Some victims want to prevent the offender from doing this to anyone else. Some are afraid for their safety or for others. In addition, some victims make a police report because they feel pressured to do so by someone else. This is not a good reason to make a police report since you will be a witness and could have to testify in court if the case goes to trial.