

What is Sexual Violence?

Sexual violence occurs when you are forced, threatened, or manipulated into sexual contact against your will.

Sex without consent is sexual assault, whether the offender is a stranger or someone you know. It can happen to anyone at any age, place, or time. The way a person dresses or acts does not cause sexual assault. No one “asks” or “deserves” to be raped.

Sexual assault is a crime of violence and power. It is caused by the decision to control someone in the most personal way. It is not typically motivated by sexual desire.

Sexual Violence Includes:

- Sodomy – forced anal or oral sex
- Forcible object penetration – penetrating someone's vagina or anus, or causing that person to penetrate her or himself, against that person's will
- Unwanted sexual touching
- Child sexual abuse
- Sexual contact with a person who lacks the capacity to give consent
- Incest
- Any unwanted sexual contact



How Can Someone “Force” You to Have Sex?

Most sexual assaults involve some type of force, but force is not always physical. Some ways someone can force you to have sex without using a weapon or physical violence include:

- Using threats to intimidate you
- Threatening to harm a friend, family member, service animal, or pet
- Using a position of authority/trust (such as a caregiver or teacher) to get you to agree to do something sexual
- Having sex with you when you are too drunk or medicated to say “no” or otherwise unable to consent
- Overpowering you physically
- Not taking “no” for an answer
- Manipulating you or tricking you by not telling the truth
- Implying that something worse will happen if you don't give in (e.g., placed in a nursing home)

Reactions to Sexual Assault

A person may experience a few, many, or none of the following emotions and behaviors after a sexual assault.

- Depression
- Shock, disorientation, and difficulty concentrating
- Unwanted and/or intrusive memories and flashbacks
- Being afraid and on guard
- Anger
- Self-blame/guilt and shame
- Suicidal thoughts
- Emotional withdrawal/numbness
- Negative beliefs about self, family, friends, and the future
- Problems with relationships
- Sleep disturbances/nightmares
- Physical symptoms (stomach aches, migraines, etc.)
- Problematic coping behaviors (avoidance of memories, denial, alcohol/drug abuse, etc.)

Trauma caused by sexual violence may worsen conditions related to a person's disability (e.g., a person with a disability that affects speech may find that emotional distress makes it more difficult to communicate with others). A disability may also influence a person's sense of safety after an assault (e.g., a physical disability may make it difficult to quickly flee a situation if needed).

If You Are Sexually Assaulted...

- Call 911 if imminent danger exists
- Tell someone about the assault — a family member, friend, caregiver, service provider, or other trusted individual. Call the local rape crisis center; a victim advocate is trained to help you understand your medical and legal options and provide emotional support. The advocate can also assist you in identifying accommodations you might need to access services.
- Go to a hospital emergency department for a medical exam. You may have suffered injuries, contracted a sexually transmitted infection, or become pregnant. Discuss with hospital staff what accommodations you might need to be comfortable during an exam.
- Forensic evidence may be on your body and clothing that can assist with case investigation and prosecution. To preserve this evidence until it can be collected at the hospital, do not bathe, change your clothes, comb your hair, urinate, or douche. If you cannot wait to urinate until arrival at the medical facility and you suspect you were drugged, save your first urine in a clean container and take it with you to the hospital for drug testing. If you have already changed clothes, put the clothes you wore during the assault in a paper bag and take them with you to the hospital.

If Someone You Know Has Been Sexually Assaulted...

- Encourage them to talk. Listen without judging.
- Tell them you believe them, no one deserves to be sexually assaulted, and it is not their fault.
- If imminent danger exists, call 911.
- Offer to go to the hospital with them. Even days or weeks after an assault, medical care may be needed.
- Give them contact information for the local rape crisis center.
- Support their right to make their own decisions (e.g., about reporting the crime or seeking help), to the extent possible.
- Ask if they need any accommodations to access help.
- Do not tell others without permission unless it requires a report of suspected abuse, neglect, or an emergency situation involving an adult who is incapacitated or a minor. Reports should be made to the Department of Health and Human Resources at 800-352-6513 (24 hour hotline).

Protective Strategies

Sexual violence is never the victim's fault, but the following tips may help reduce your risk of sexual victimization.

- Have a communication device (e.g., cell phone)
- Always maintain access to needed assistive devices
- Avoid isolating yourself. Talk regularly with others to verify your personal safety. Minimize financial dependency on one person
- Trust your instincts. If you feel unsafe in a situation, leave or seek help
- Learn the basics about sexual violence, personal boundaries, safety, and community resources
- Screen caregivers and guardians
- Inform service providers that sexual assault will be reported to law enforcement and follow through with reporting
- Develop a safety plan with a local rape crisis center advocate

The Facts

About 1 in 6 women and 1 in 21 men in West Virginia will be victims of sexual assault or an attempted sexual assault in their lifetimes. These rates are even higher for residents who have a disability — 14% for those with a disability versus 9.6% for those without a disability.¹

The risk of sexual victimization may be even higher for persons with caregivers and persons with certain types of disabilities, such as some physical and intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities, and severe mental illnesses.

¹ 2008 WV Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey

CALL US Someone is here to help

Centers Against Violence

Elkins
800-339-1185
Text line 304-840-SAFE

CONTACT Huntington

Huntington
1-866-399-7273

Eastern Panhandle Empowerment Center

Martinsburg
304-263-8292

Family Crisis Center

Keyser
1-800-698-1240

Family Crisis Intervention Center

Parkersburg
1-800-794-2335

Family Refuge Center

Lewisburg
304-645-6334

HOPE, Inc.

Fairmont
304-367-1100

Rape & Domestic Violence Information Center

Morgantown
304-292-5100

REACH The Counseling Connection

Charleston
304-340-3676

Sexual Assault Help Center

Wheeling
800-884-7242

Stop Abusive Family Environments (SAFE)

Welch
304-436-8117

Women's Resource Center

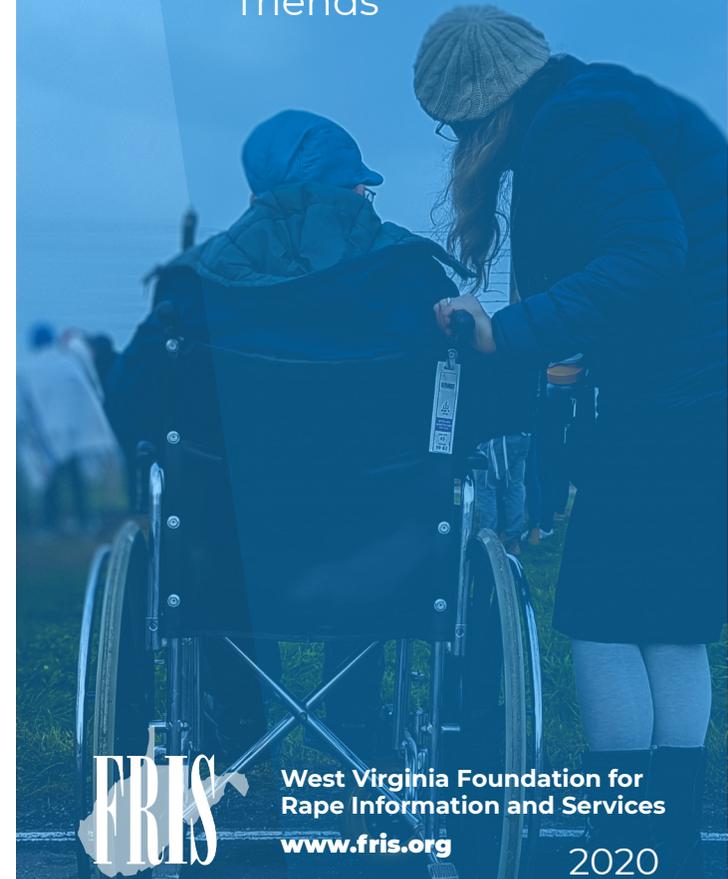
Beckley
888-825-7836

National Sexual Assault Hotline

1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

SEXUAL VIOLENCE and PERSONS with DISABILITIES

Information for victims, their families, and friends



FRIS

West Virginia Foundation for Rape Information and Services

www.fris.org

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