



Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is defined as a sexual act committed against someone without that person's freely given consent. Anyone of any gender can experience sexual violence including children, teens, adults, and elders. Nearly 1 in 4 women in the United States have experienced attempted or completed sexual violence.

The CARE Office understands that every survivor's experience is unique. If you or a friend has experienced sexual violence, regardless of when it occurred, our Campus Advocate is available to provide free and confidential support services. The Campus Advocate can help survivors review their options; assist them in seeking medical care, counseling, housing accommodations, and academic accommodations and provide them with any additional referrals and resources they may need.

Impact of Trauma

Survivors can often feel fearful, confused, guilty, ashamed, and isolated. These reactions are understandable and normal and survivors do not have to deal with these feelings alone. Every survivor responds to trauma differently, and it is never the survivor's fault. Below are some examples of responses to trauma, some survivors experience some of these or even none at all.

- Changes in normal sleeping pattern
- Changes in appetite
- Headaches, stomachaches or other physical symptoms of stress
- Mood swings, including crying more easily
- Difficulty with sexuality
- Difficulty in handling their classes
- Difficulty in concentrating

Understanding a Survivor's Reactions

If a survivor discloses to you an experience of sexual violence, keep in mind that survivors don't always behave the way we expect. Just because someone acts differently than how you think they should act doesn't mean they haven't been a victim of sexual violence. Often a survivor can experience different responses during the attack:

- Not Resisting the Attacker- Tonic Immobility (or rape-induced paralysis) is an automatic response where the body freezes in situations that provoke extreme fear. Resisting or escaping is literally impossible for a victim of rape-induced paralysis, whose body has decided that the safest course of action is to play dead.
- Emotionless Response- During the assault the body releases opiates to block the physical and emotional pain of the attack. The natural painkillers are the body's equivalent of morphine that might be used to for a surgery patient. They mask pain and can lead to monotone response that strikes some people as suspicious.
- Blurred Memory- The flood of hormones triggered by a sexual assault can lead the survivor's memory of the trauma being fragmented and difficult to recall, especially in a linear fashion. This leads to the confusion and hesitancy that can be interpreted as clues of dishonesty.

Forms of Sexual Violence

- Rape or sexual assault
- Child sexual assault and incest
- Sexual assault by a person's spouse or partner
- Unwanted sexual contact/touching
- Sexual harassment
- Sexual exploitation and trafficking
- Exposing one's genitals or naked body to other(s) without consent
- Masturbating in public
- Watching someone in private acts without their knowledge or permission

Survivors often know the person who assaulted them. Perpetrators of sexual violence usually target someone they know- a friend, classmate, neighbor, coworker, or relative.