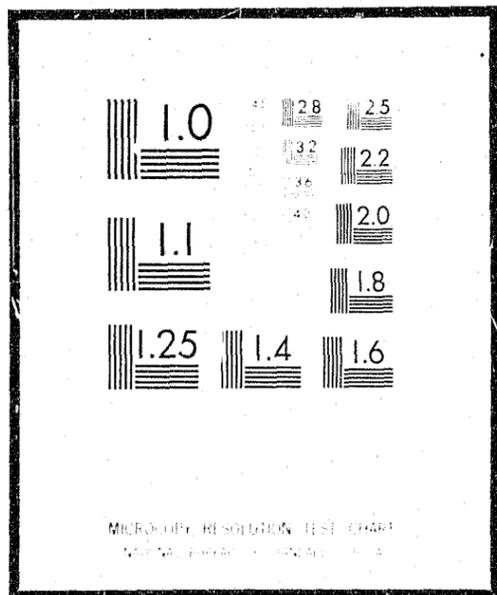


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SEXUAL ABUSE--GUIDELINES FOR TEENAGERS
by Muriel Solomon, Director
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RAPE--it's that four-letter word you've read stories about, seen ^{television} newscasts about, and been warned about. And, probably, a lot of what you've read, seen or heard was misleading or incorrect. It's the sensational case that makes the headlines. But what's the whole story?

COULD IT HAPPEN TO YOU?

Here are a few figures to consider:

.Youngsters from two months to 15 years compose one-third of the sexual assault cases coming to the Rape Treatment Center at Jackson Memorial Hospital.

.One-fourth of the victims are between 13 and 17 years old.

Victims are male as well as female; White, Black and Latin; skinny, fat and well-proportioned; ugly, beautiful and ordinary; and from poor, moderate and rich families. Yes, it could happen to you. That's why it's important for you to be aware of potentially dangerous situations so that you can learn how to avoid becoming a victim.

WHAT IS SEXUAL ASSAULT?

Legally, we no longer have "rape" in the State of Florida. The law, since 1974, defines the crime as "involuntary sexual battery." This means that the victim, without her/his consent, is forcibly penetrated through the mouth, anus or vagina by the sexual organ of another, or through the anus or vagina by any other object. Both victims and offenders may be either male or female. The punishment for conviction depends upon the severity of the assault and the ages of the persons involved. The statute also is concerned about victims who are coerced into submitting by anyone having "familial, custodial or official authority over the victim."

ARE MOST VICTIMS HURT?

The child-victim is seldom violently attacked--offenses are mostly petting, fondling, kissing the genitals, and finger insertion--but when they are penetrated, it can be extremely painful.

Assaults upon teenage victims are more similar to adult cases. Fortunately, murder is rare, but there is physical injury about a fourth of the time. The victim almost invariably suffers emotional trauma. Weapons are involved in half the rape cases; in the rest, fists, choking, coercion or other threats are used.

WHY DOES THE RAPIST RAPE?

It's pure myth that the way a female dresses or swings her hips provokes rape. A federal study confirms that in only four per cent of the cases is the female's behavior "precipitous." Most rapes are planned in advance, with the target being either a specific person or just anyone who happens to be vulnerable. The prime motivation for sexual assault is not sexual gratification, but to express hostility, anger, frustration and insecurity.

WHO IS THE SEX OFFENDER?

The non-related offender is usually between 15 and 30 years old. You couldn't pick him out in a crowd. He's often average-looking, clean-cut, and looks like the guy next door. Sometimes he is the guy next door. The child-victim knows the offender about 80 per cent of the time. With older victims, this is reduced to 50 per cent.

When the victim knows the offender, the relationship may be close or casual. He could be a member of the immediately family, other relative, friend of the family, neighbor, babysitter, classmate, date, acquaintance, or the fellow you say hello to every morning in the elevator.

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WHEN & WHERE DO ASSAULTS OCCUR?

Sexual assaults occur around the clock and in every area of Dade County. Half of them happen in the homes of victims or assailants. But it can begin anywhere you can imagine as well as at anytime--when you're walking down the street, waiting for a bus, hitch-hiking, in your car, on a date, at a party, at school, at work, or while you're shopping or babysitting.

WHAT PRECAUTIONS & TACTICS CAN HELP YOU?

The R.A.P.E. office has compiled a pamphlet, "Precautions & Tactics To Avoid Rape." Details for obtaining a copy are on the last page. Here we want to add or stress potentially dangerous situations that you, the teenager, might be faced with, along with tactics you can use to prevent your getting hurt physically and psychologically.

.Dating:

It's downright risky to accept a date, or a ride home, or an invitation to go for a snack or a drink from someone you don't know anything about. That person who promises to be a dream could turn out to be a nightmare. So do some checking up first. When you accept a blind date, it's safer to be with another couple or to remain with a group of friends.

Even when you're out alone with someone you thought you knew, you could find yourself in the middle of a hassle if you're not communicating. When you mean no, say so with both words and actions. Non-verbal body language signals can be misinterpreted. Be honest. Level with each other. Both of you have the right to decide what you are going to do with your own bodies and to state this matter-of-factly without feeling guilty or embarrassed.

Now suppose you've made yourself perfectly clear. But he still won't stop. If there's no one around to come to your aid, and if you can't reach him by reasoning, then resort to some drastic action. Realistically act out a feigned illness. Or, as Frederic Storaska, author of How To Say No To A Rapist--And Survive suggests, make yourself as repulsive as possible: Continuously belch; urinate on him; turn your face away, stick your fingers down your throat, and then vomit all over him.

.Walking and Riding:

Not always, but usually, there's safety in numbers. So use the buddy system--go with a friend to school or work or shopping. Don't shortcut through vacant lots or parking lots, and walk away from doorways and shubbery where assailants could be lurking.

Walk facing the traffic so that you're aware of approaching cars. Should a car pull along side of you, walk behind it and cross the street. If you spot some suspicious-looking characters up ahead, or if you think you're being followed, cross the street and reverse your direction. If you need help; for example, someone starts walking beside you or making suggestive remarks, avoid a confrontation. Keep your cool and head immediately for the nearest store. In a residential area at night, look for a house with lights on, bang on the door and yell "Fire!" Most people will respond to that.

Hitch-hiking can be hazardous to your health. We won't say "Don't" because you are smart enough to draw your own conclusions. Even in cases where there are two or more females and only one male, if he threatens one with a knife, the others are in trouble, too.

Deserted bus stops can be particularly precarious if you're alone. Walk to the next stop if you think there will be others waiting there. Carry a police-type whistle on your key chain or a mini screech-alarm in your hand that can be heard for blocks. And once on the bus, sit as near as you can to the driver.

If you are driving a car, keep the windows rolled up and the doors locked. Purse-snatchers, robbers and rapists have been known to get into cars that were stopped for traffic lights. Leave a car's length in front of you when you stop so that you have room to swing out if you feel threatened. If someone tries to break into your car while you're waiting for the light to change, blow your horn with short taps to attract attention. If no car is in front of you, keep your hand on the horn, check for the intersection to clear, then step on the gas. If another car follows yours, drive to the nearest busy and well-lit business area and call the police.

Park in well-lit areas. Make certain that all the windows are rolled up and all the doors locked. Before getting back into your car, check the back seat and floor to be sure no one is hiding there.

At Home:

Keep your doors locked and don't admit anyone you don't know. If you're expecting a repairman, carefully examine the identification before opening the door. If you were not expecting a service call (for example, someone claiming that there's trouble on your telephone line) make him wait outside while you check this out with the company. Or if someone wants to come in to use your phone in an emergency, again make him wait outside while you offer to make the call for him. Don't give strangers information over the telephone and, especially, don't indicate that you are home alone.

At night, be sure to pull down the shades or close the draperies. If you come home to an empty house--at any hour--and you get the feeling that it's not exactly the way it ought to be, don't go inside. Go to the nearest neighbor and call the police.

Baby-Sitting:

Be prepared with phone numbers--where the child's parents and doctor may be reached, and the numbers of the rescue squad, fire and police department to call for emergency help. Or dial "0" and the operator will assist you. Also, have the name and number of a nearby neighbor to call in case you are having difficulty. Leave your family the phone number and address of the place where you are sitting and the time that the parents expect to return.

Keep all the doors locked. Don't admit anyone you don't know and don't allow the child to answer the door. When answering the telephone, don't say you're the baby-sitter and there's no one else in the house except you and the child. If anything unusual happens; for example, you think someone might be prowling outside, call the police.

Don't advertise your phone number and address on a bulletin board saying that you are available for baby-sitting jobs. You want to know the people for whom you are sitting or, at least, have a reliable reference.

WHICH DEFENSE TECHNIQUES ARE SAFEST?

Should you find yourself in a situation in which you are afraid that you might be sexually assaulted, there are five basic tactics to keep in mind:

1. A Diverting Noise. Screaming, blasting on a whistle, or releasing a screech-alarm may help you if you have some advance warning, if you're not being threatened by a weapon, and if there's someone near enough and likely to come to your aid.
2. Running. If there's some place to run to before you are likely to be overtaken.
3. Stalling. Doing the unexpected--convincingly, so that the assailant doesn't become more antagonistic--to get him to stop doing what he's doing until you can figure out a plan.
4. Talking Calmly. Trying to get him to see you as a person caught in a bad situation instead of as an object on which to vent his anger. By trying to see him as a human being with problems, you may be able to reduce his rage.

5. Fighting. If you fight and fail to stop him, you could be very seriously injured. But if you think your life is being threatened and you're unable to use other tactics, then fight to really hurt him--like squeezing and pulling his testicles with all of your strength to inflict excruciating pain--so that you can get away.

We strongly advise against your trying to spray mace or hair spray in the eyes of your assailant. Even if you had it out ready to use, it's doubtful you could hit the target--more likely, the wind would blow it back at you. If you succeeded in spraying him in the eyes, it wouldn't stop him, but sting him, and make him even more abusive.

Half of the offenders are unarmed, but usually much stronger than the victims. If you tried to use a weapon against an armed assailant, chances are you'd be injured because he wouldn't hesitate to use his weapon whereas you might. If you try to use a weapon against an unarmed assailant, he could probably get the weapon away from you--now you'd have an armed assailant to contend with.

WHEN IT HELPS TO TALK TO SOMEONE:

Each family is different and sexual practices vary among families, even among those in the same cultural and economic grouping. If, however, you feel uncomfortable about the way your family is living together, or if you are being taunted to engage in activities you don't feel right about, or if you're worried about a situation at home but afraid of getting someone in trouble, it would help you to discuss this with an adult who can assist you, such as your school counselor.

Teenagers are sometimes perplexed by problems and see no way to cope. A few months ago, for instance, you may have seen a plea for help in Ann Lander's column from a 14-year-old girl who was being sexually abused by her uncle during the nights her mother worked. When she told her mother about the uncle's behavior, the girl was accused of being a trouble-maker.

Adolescent girls have reported being aware of their fathers peeking at them as they got undressed, or bestowing lingering french kisses upon them, or coming home drunk and trying to seduce them. And the professional journals are filled with examples of incest. Such as the victim of sexual abuse who began having intercourse with her father when she was 13 years old. She didn't tell her mother because the woman had a terminal illness. When her mother died a couple of years later, the victim ran away from home to avoid any further incestuous relationship. But the girl suffered considerable psychological damage. As an adult, when she finally went to a doctor for help, she required long-range treatment. Victims of childhood rapes, if untreated or mistreated, may become adults with serious sexual problems ranging from abstinence to promiscuity.

Hopefully, everything is fine at your home. But you might be called upon to help someone else. If your friend tells you that she/he was sexually abused, or hints that there was sexual abuse, or confides in you about her/his "friend" who was sexually abused or assaulted, you can best assist your friend by suggesting the right source of help.

In the meantime, be a good listener. Lend comfort and support by allowing your friend to talk without pressing for details. And try not to show any embarrassment, panic or annoyance (don't say, for example, "You know you brought this on yourself") that you may be experiencing. If your friend was raped, there could be any variety of immediate effects--shock, fright, hysteria, vomiting, laughter to cover up anxiety, anger, guilt (often expressed by "the trouble I've caused the family"), shame, embarrassment, loss of self-esteem. It's important for the victim to know that others have experienced these same feelings and that there are agencies with staff ready and anxious to help.

WHOM TO TURN TO FOR HELP:

In addition to sharing problems with your parents or other close relatives--or, in the event that a relative is the problem, here's a list of community resources available to you. On the last page, you'll find a resource list with the phone numbers.

.School Counselor or Teacher:

The Dade County Public School Administration has advised the staff of each school on the proper procedures for assisting a student who has been the victim of a sexual assault or abuse. Questioning will be kept to an absolute minimum. If you go to your teacher or counselor, his/her role will be to listen to you, and to comfort and support you.

.Victims Advocates Program:

This is a County program established to give emergency assistance to victims of violent crimes, such as sexual assault, robbery or mugging. If you're a victim who needs help; for example, getting transportation to the doctor or dealing with the emotional effects, call the Advocates.

.County Health Department or Your Family Doctor:

If you think you have any symptom of venereal disease, don't just sit there and stew about it. Get examined immediately and begin whatever treatment is prescribed.

.Protective Services:

This is a State agency established to protect and support persons under 18 years old. Florida's Abuse of Children law requires agencies and individuals to report cases of child abuse (including sexual abuse) to them. Protective Services, in turn, investigates and then makes a recommendation to the court, or takes whatever action they determine to be in the best interest of the child. All records are confidential. For emergency situations, see the hot-line Child Registry number listed.

.The Rape Treatment Center:

This is located at Jackson Memorial Hospital, in a separate trailer near the emergency room, off N. W. 10 Avenue and 17 Street. The Center is for victims of actual or attempted sexual assaults. All information is kept in strictest confidence. Services include a medical examination by a gynecologist to determine external and internal injury; medication offered to prevent venereal disease and pregnancy; and counseling for the victim and the family. There's no charge for this initial treatment. Advise victims not to douche, shower or change clothes before coming into the Center. Medical evidence is carefully preserved should the victim want to assist the prosecution. Treatment is offered whether or not the victim wishes to report to the police.

.The Police:

The choice is with the victim whether or not to report to the police. About 90 per cent of those treated at the RTC decide that they want to. Most feel very strongly about doing what they can to keep the offender from returning, or from hurting others as they have been hurt. Some victims don't want to report at first and then a day or two later change their minds. The police departments that handle rape investigations have given sensitivity training to the officers, stressing the type of questions that are appropriate and those that are inappropriate to ask the victim. A victim who is not suffering from a physical injury may decide to call the police first in order to increase the possibility of catching the assailant while he's still in the neighborhood. The police officer will drive the victim who needs transportation to the Rape Treatment Center.

ABOUT FEMALES WHO "CRY RAPE":

Not often, but once in a while, we hear about a teenager who told a doctor or a police officer that she had been sexually assaulted and then, upon examination or questioning, admitted she had made up the entire story. The girl had a problem. Maybe she suspected that she was pregnant, or she was afraid that she had contracted V.D., and was too scared to tell her parents the truth.

This solution she chose was devastating to everyone. The girl could have received counseling, for example from the Center For Dialog, and been helped to understand her legitimate alternatives. Instead she broke the law and ran the risk of being prosecuted for filing a false report. She also may have caused an innocent male to be arrested. Furthermore, she has made life much more difficult for the vast majority of victims who truly suffer. They need all the compassion and understanding everyone of us can give them. If her deceit destroyed any desire to help or believe real victims, the cost is too high to measure.

SUGGESTED READING

Susan Brownmiller, Against Our Will: Men, Women & Rape; Simon & Schuster; N.Y., 1975 (pages 271-282)

Carol V. Horos, Rape; Tobey Publishing Co., Inc.; New Canaan, Conn., 1974 (pages 108-109)

Andra Medea & Kathleen Thompson, Against Rape; Farrar, Straus & Giroux; N.Y., 1975

Frederic Storaska, How To Say No To A Rapist--And Survive; Random House; N.Y., 1975 (pages 204-216)

Other Pamphlets from Metro's Rape Awareness Public Education Program,
1515 N.W. 7 Street, Suite 215, Miami, Fla. 33125. Telephone 547-7810

"Precautions & Tactics To Avoid Rape"

"Guidelines for Teenagers"

"Guidelines for Professionals"

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