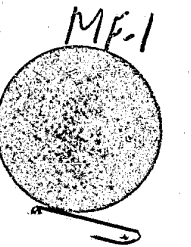


Sexual Assault



81910

Attorney General's Office



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The Capitol
Tallahassee, Florida 32304
904/488-5804

U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

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INTRODUCTION

Sexual assault is an act of violence and hostility, and the records in Florida show that this crime has been committed on females of all ages...from under one year to over 90 years of age...and on males, particularly younger males.

Based on these records, a progressive Sexual Battery Statute was enacted in 1974 covering all forms of sexual assault, whether or not penetration occurs. Under this law, the rights of the victim have been expanded in that certain questions cannot be asked of her during the trial unless it has been established by the court...in the absence of the jury...that these are relevant to the issues involved.

So while this booklet concerns itself primarily with sexual assault against females (you should always bear in mind it could happen to you), it also contains basic information for everyone in helping to reduce the reader's chances of being a vulnerable target for rapists as well as suggestions and recommendations that could prevent other crimes such as burglary.

Families and friends should also read this booklet to better help them understand sexual assault.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Among the myths about sexual assault, several continue to prevail without basis in fact. Two concern the victim, another the rapist.

According to one myth, the victim is always young and attractive. Unfortunately, movie and television dramatizations have reflected this fallacy. The truth is that there is no stereotypic victim.

Another myth asserts that the woman provokes the attack. The truth is that the rapist selects his victim on the basis of opportunity and initiates the attack—usually selecting as his victim a female who appears vulnerable and appears to be alone.

The belief that rape is an act that is perpetrated for sexual gratification is also a myth. Studies and interviews indicate that rapists often have consenting sexual relationships but choose to rape both because they enjoy overpowering and degrading their victims and as a vent to their feelings of hostility, aggression and inferiority. Sex is not the motivating factor, only the chosen mode of expression.

In reality, the crime of rape bears a closer resemblance to violent crimes such as robbery and aggravated assault than it does to sexual intercourse with a consenting woman. This is a fact that all potential victims, their families and prospective jurors should know.

Who is the victim?

Every female is a potential victim of sexual assault. Reported victims in Florida range in age from two months to 91 years. No age group stands immune.

All females...regardless of race or age...regardless of social or economic status...regardless of lifestyle...are potential victims for the rapist.

The most vulnerable target is the woman alone; alone at any time of day or night, alone for whatever reason...at home, baby-sitting, shopping, walking, in a car, at a bus stop...alone. Often the assailant is someone you know either closely or by sight alone.

While a relatively large number of reported victims fall into the 13-25 year old age bracket, indications are that this is due to an increased reporting rate in this age group. Studies do not indicate any age preference by rapists, nor do they support the myth that sexual assault is provoked by either a woman's mode of dress or her mannerisms.

Vulnerability and opportunity are the key factors, regardless of all else, that cause females of all ages to be potential victims.

Who is the rapist?



The rapist, in the main, is a man who is emotionally unstable yet deals with life on a day-to-day basis in a reasonably normal and competent manner.

In fact, he is often an apparently normal individual but one who has difficulty relating to others in a permanent or lasting fashion and, according to the reported cases of sexual assault, the assailant is often a friend, date, relative, co-worker or casual acquaintance.

It is important to remember, too, that exhibitionists and "peeping toms" should be considered as potentially dangerous since these acts may be only a part of a fantasy which includes rape.

Why does this crime occur?

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that sexual assault is a crime of violence; that rapists are emotionally unstable persons; that rapists view their victims as objects upon which to vent their hostility, aggression, frustration or insecurity. They obviously do not view their victim as a fellow human being at that moment, and sexual gratification is not a motive for their crime.

They wish to humiliate and degrade their victims, to make them lesser beings than they are...and, too often, the fantasy which they are acting out carries with it the danger of physical harm in addition to the act of rape itself.

Where does sexual assault occur?

It can and does occur virtually anywhere, but the largest single grouping of reported incidents is either in the home of the victim or in the home of the assailant...a fact which should be kept firmly in mind when reading the section on "Preventive Measures...In Your Home."

However, it is important to be aware of all potentially hazardous areas:

- remote areas, vacant lots
- public parks
- on the street
- alleys
- deserted buildings
- stairwells
- parking lots, garages
- school campuses
- beaches at night
- school playgrounds
- shopping centers
- laundromats

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

The precautions contained in this booklet are suggestions for minimizing your chances of being attacked by reducing the opportunity for crime...in your home, in your car, on the street.

Remember, sexual assaults can and do occur in conjunction with other crimes such as burglary so the more effective preventive measures and common sense precautions you take, the less your chances are of becoming a victim. But regardless of how many or how few prevention measures you follow, *you* are not provoking the attack.

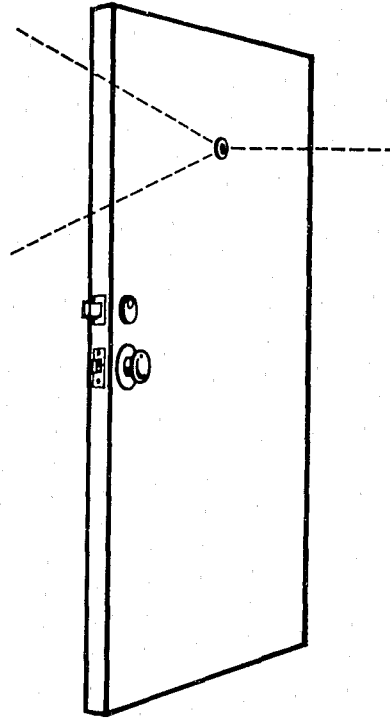
In Your Home:

1. Ideally, all exterior doors should be of solid wood core construction.
2. Use good quality deadbolt locks on all exterior doors...including the door from the garage to the house. For specific information on what comprises good security hardware, check with the crime prevention unit of your police department or sheriff's office.
3. Have the locks on all exterior doors re-keyed when you move into a new house or apartment. This can be done by a licensed locksmith at little cost.
4. Install a peephole viewer with a minimum 180 degree angle in the front door. It is inexpensive and easy to install. Use it to

check who's there—don't automatically open the door to a stranger—and don't rely on a chain lock. It is NOT a security device.

5. Unless actually in use, keep your garage door closed at all times.

6. Sliding glass doors usually come equipped with inadequate locks. However, you can secure them with inexpensive key locks, by a hole drilled through the overlapping frames and pinned with a nail and with anti-slide blocks...plus having screws protruding in the track to prevent the door from being lifted out.



7. Sliding glass windows can be secured in the same fashion as the doors.

8. Use key locks or pin the frames on all double hung windows.

9. Remove operator handles from awning windows, but keep nearby in case of fire.

10. Replace all jalousie doors and windows if possible. However, if this is not feasible, you can secure them by using a heavy gauge mesh or grillwork...but be sure they have a quick release feature on the inside for use in case of fire.

When considering these two alternatives, you should be aware of the fact that the cost of installing a heavy gauge mesh or grillwork is comparable to replacing the jalousies themselves.

11. Good lighting is a deterrent to crime. Install adequate exterior lighting at all vulnerable entrances to the house. In an apartment, join with other tenants in demanding good lighting around the entrances and in hallways, parking areas, courtyards and laundry and game rooms.

12. Don't open the door to strangers. Check the identity of callers through the 180 degree peephole in the door, and instruct your children to get you if the caller is someone they don't know.

13. If someone comes to the door asking to use the phone for an emergency, offer to make the call for them but don't let them in your house.

14. Request identification by all repairmen and maintenance men. Check their credentials by calling the company using the number in the phone book, not the one on the I.D. card. In an apartment, call the apartment manager.

15. Be alert to suspicious phone calls. Do not give out personal or family information...or information about your neighbors...regardless of who the caller says he represents. Instruct your children to do the same.

16. Don't advertise that you live alone. When answering the door call out a "fake" name like... "I'll get it, Joe." List your last name and first initials only on the mailbox and front door and in the telephone book. Consider adding a "dummy" name or names on your mailbox to give the appearance of having roommates.

17. While at home at night, keep a light on in more than one room to make it appear that you're not alone. While away from your dwelling at night, make it look and sound occupied. Leave a radio on, and turn lights on in more than one room...plus the bathroom.

18. Don't hide an extra key outside. Rapists and burglars know all the best spots.

19. Keep your doors locked even if leaving for only a moment... such as to the neighbors, the pool or gameroom, a store...or even while in the backyard. Rapists and burglars are opportunists.

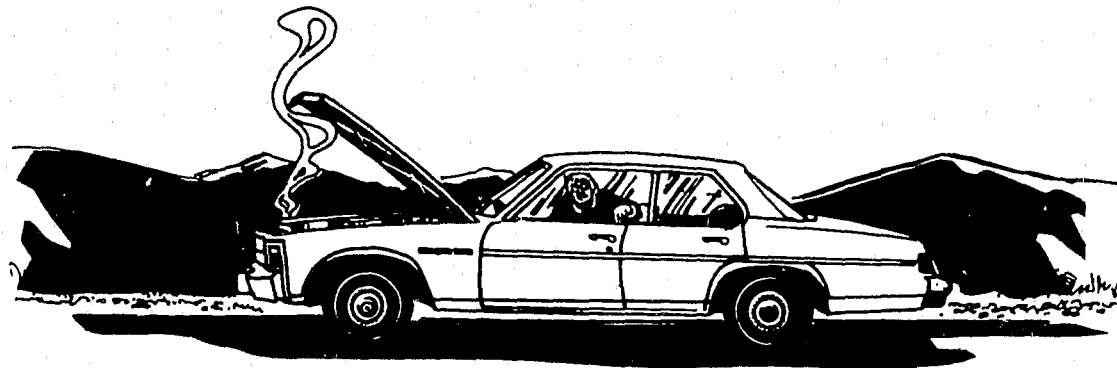
20. Don't leave underwear or bathing suits out on the line, balcony or clothes rack at night. This could attract a rapist or "peeping tom."



21. Be wary of neighbors or casual acquaintances who make it a habit of "dropping in" when no one else is home.
22. Even though it may seem like an obvious point, remember to keep drapes or blinds drawn when changing clothes, undressing, or retiring for the night.

In Your Car

1. Whenever possible, park in a well lighted area.
2. Always lock your car.
3. Have your keys in your hand when leaving home or work.
4. If working late, try to have a friend or security guard accompany you to your car.
5. Before getting in the car, be sure to check the floor of the back seat.
6. When driving, keep your doors locked.
7. If you think you're being followed, do not drive home. Drive to the nearest gas, fire or police station...or to the nearest well lighted area where there are people.



8. If you have car trouble on the road, raise the hood and then wait inside the car with the doors locked and the windows up. If a motorist stops to help, crack your window slightly and ask him to call the police.
9. If you want to help a disabled vehicle, don't get out of your car. Drive to the nearest well lighted area with a phone and call the police.
10. Don't pick up a hitchhiker or hitchhikers under any circumstances.
11. Don't pull over for flashing headlights. If it is an emergency vehicle or the police, there will be flashing red or blue lights on top of the car.

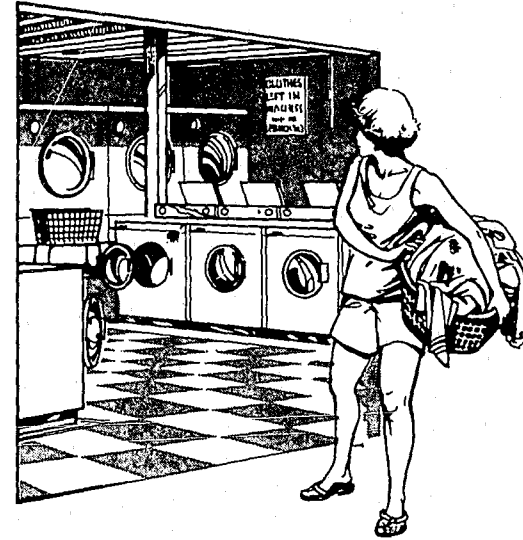
On The Street

1. The rapist is looking for a woman who appears vulnerable...one who is apparently inattentive to her surroundings, one who is daydreaming or looks frightened and unsure of herself. So, keep alert and walk with a purpose. However, you should also keep in mind the fact that there exists a fine line between presenting an air of confidence and what the potential rapist might perceive as "cockiness." This is where you must use your common sense, for a "cocky" attitude or posture may cause the potential rapist to "want to pull you down off your pedestal," down to his level. The thing to remember is to display enough concern with yourself so that you do not appear to be a vulnerable target.
2. If you are being harassed from a vehicle, turn and walk in the opposite direction. Try to head for lights and people. To continue the harassment, the vehicle will have to turn around to follow you.
3. Don't stop to give directions to a driver or pedestrian. However, if you feel you must, maintain enough distance to prevent from being grabbed and dragged into the car or an alley.
4. If you think that you are being followed, don't go home. Head immediately for the nearest area where there are lights and people.
5. Don't hitchhike or accept a ride from a stranger. It is more than risky. It is dangerous. Some rapists use their cars as a way to get a woman alone and, once you are in the car, you've lost control of the situation.
6. If you plan to do some walking, it only makes sense to wear clothing and footwear that give ease and freedom of movement.

General Precautions

1. Be honest with your friend or acquaintance. When you mean "no," be sure that not only your voice but your body language (or non-verbal actions or postures) is saying "no." If you are saying "no," and your body language and other signs of communications are saying "yes," your companion is much more apt to believe your non-verbal "yes" signs.

2. Be aware that it is very risky to accept a ride home or an invitation for a late night snack from someone you've just met.
3. It is particularly important to be careful of whom you are with and where you are when under the influence of stimulants or depressants.
4. Should your car be disabled in a shopping area or parking lot, it is best not to accept help from a stranger. Call a service station or the police.
5. If you are in the habit of using laundromats or apartment house laundry rooms, plan to go with a neighbor or friend. Try to avoid entering one alone if it is empty. These are high risk areas.
6. Tape the correct change for emergency use in pay phones to the bottom of your handbags, and remember to use emergency "call boxes" on expressways and street corners.
7. If you travel a great deal, consider buying an inexpensive "privacy lock" for your hotel or motel room, but be sure you can remove it quickly in case of emergency.



INDIVIDUAL REACTIONS

No one knows how a woman will react when actually confronted with the threat of sexual assault. It is a crisis condition. It is an individual response condition, based on strong interacting factors.

However, you will be able to handle such a situation better if you have complete awareness and understanding not only of all the dangers inherent in a potential rape situation but of the alternative preventive and tactical measures that you can take as well.

Know Yourself!

Every woman is a special individual whose attitudes and reactions are the result of a combination of many factors—family life, religious convictions, social interaction with others, basic personality traits and physical condition.

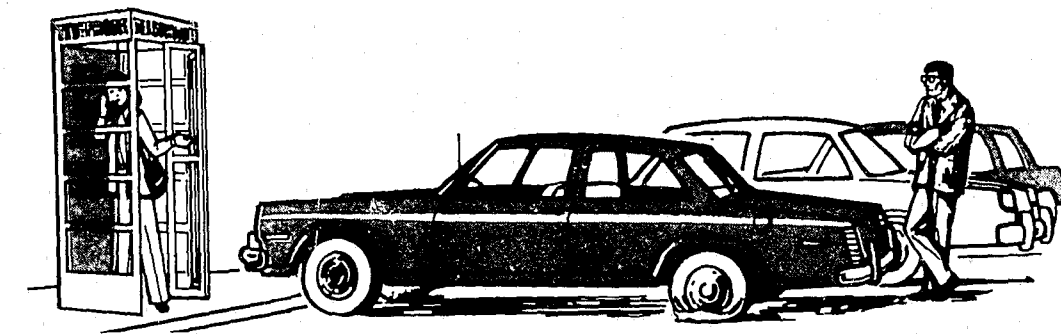
The complexity of the problem of sexual assault is such that you will never really know exactly how you would handle such a situation. This will all depend on what the circumstances are, who you perceive your attacker to be and what your basic personality is.

Since you can't know what the circumstances might be or who your assailant might be, it is of utmost importance for you to think about who you are and how you would respond to different situations before they occur.

- It may be of prime importance to you to come away with the least possible physical injury.
- You may fear the actual rape more than you fear physical injury.
- The very thought of being sexually assaulted may make you so angry that you would rather face the risk of serious injury.
- You might be more concerned about the safety of a member of your family or a close friend in this situation than you are of either rape or injury.
- The way you react may depend on your physical condition.

The list of "ways and whys" of your reaction is infinite and, for this reason, it is important that you understand the different alternatives or tactics on how you could best cope with a rape situation.

However, first you need to know some additional things about rapists in general.



THE ASSAILANT

As mentioned previously in this booklet, the rapist is an emotionally unstable individual who is using you as an object on which to vent his aggression and hostility.

Remember that rape is not perpetrated for sexual gratification. **It is the use of force, not the sex act itself, that seems to relieve the tension within the rapist and satisfy him.** He wants to degrade and humiliate you. Sometimes he sees women as being

on a pedestal and through the sexual assault he feels he is "cutting them down to size."

The woman does not provoke the attack. It is **his** problem with which you are dealing, and which has become an invasion of your well-being. Attempt to reach him as a human being so that you seem less of an object to him.

Moreover, it should be understood that the rapist does not understand or recognize the rights of an individual.

Rapists are opportunists. They look for what they perceive to be vulnerable targets.

All rapists have the potential to be violent. This would be a most important consideration when determining alternatives to choose in any given situation.

ALTERNATIVE TACTICS TO USE IF ATTACKED

No one can tell you what specific tactic to use, for what may have worked for one woman, may not work for you.

You, as an individual, must deal with the rapist as an individual. Moreover, you must also take into consideration the time and place for these, too, will have a bearing on your reaction. Panic and fear are perfectly normal reactions.

Also, you should know what the alternative tactics are and what their positive and negative factors are so that you will have the knowledge and awareness necessary to handle the situation in a manner which is most likely to avert the sexual assault.

A Diverting Noise

This is probably a better tactic to use when you have some advance warning of a situation. It is only useful if there is someone nearby to hear the noise and be willing to come to your aid or frighten off the assailant.

Sometimes screaming "Fire" or "Call the police" (not "Rape" or "Help") or blowing a whistle which you have readily available may frighten away your assailant and call attention to your problem. But it may antagonize him. Screaming could make him angrier and he may beat you or strangle you to keep you quiet. You must weigh the odds, depending on the situation, of this tactic being successful.

Running

The risk with this tactic is whether he can and will run faster than you and overpower you. Unless you are reasonably certain you

can get a good lead and reach safety before he overtakes you, this may be a risky tactic.

Make sure you have a place to run where someone will help you. Keep in mind that your running from him may be part of the rapist's fantasy and it may make him angrier should he overtake you.

Gaining a Psychological Advantage

Panic and fear are perfectly normal responses; however, if you have mentally prepared yourself (in advance) by accepting the fact that you could someday find yourself in a rape situation and have thought about what you might do, it may decrease the trauma and allow you to react more quickly in coming to grips with the problem.

This is an intermediate tactic when you need that precious time to get over the initial panic or fear. Quickly survey your predicament so you can begin to defuse your assailant's anger.

This tactic can take many forms—going limp, sinking to the ground and eating grass, hiding your face in order to stick your finger down your throat and cause yourself to vomit, making yourself belch, even urinating on your attacker. You can act as if you are responding to his demands (starting to unbutton your blouse)—until you can find a point to safely react. **Your own ingenuity is your best guide.** Crying might be effective in some instances.

Doing something he doesn't expect may stop or delay him because the rapist wants to be in control and finds it difficult to cope with something he hadn't anticipated. It is doing the unexpected **convincingly**, so that he doesn't become more antagonistic.

Remember that the rapist is a con artist so you have to be extremely believable.

Anything that won't threaten or antagonize him while you look for a way to get out of the situation should keep you from being hurt.

Talking

The first few moments you may be too terrified to utter a sound. That's perfectly normal. But if you have thought in advance about the possibility of sexual assault, the shock will not be as great.

The key to this tactic, which can be successful in aborting an attack, is to **speak calmly and sincerely as one human being trying to reach out to another human being.** You should not

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The key to this tactic, which can be successful in aborting an attack, is to **speak calmly and sincerely as one human being trying to reach out to another human being.** You should not

beg, plead, cower or make small talk. Many times this is what your assailant expects to hear and it may antagonize him further.

As to the subject you select to talk about, it should be something in which you are interested, something about which you can talk comfortably. It could range from your pet, a recent movie you've seen, a book you are reading, to a recent death in the family. The range of subject matter is limitless. The important thing in the use of this tactic is to attempt to relate the feeling that you are seeing him as a person.

Hopefully, convincing him that you are seeing him as a person instead of some sort of monster will make him perceive you as an individual offering your concern and not as his enemy. You need to make him see that you are not an object on which to vent his anger.

You should make an effort to reduce his rage by enhancing his ego. Try to gain a psychological advantage over him. Don't give a sermon. He may be trying to rape you because he thinks women are too uppity and it would give him great satisfaction to knock a moralizing female down. To his way of thinking, if he can pull you down it raises his self-esteem. That's why it is extremely important to try to reach him in a way which will break his fantasy and allow him to see you as an individual (not an object) with honest feelings and concerns.

If something you are saying is antagonizing him further, switch to another topic, as quickly and smoothly as you can.

Fighting

When considering this tactic you should keep in mind that **all rapists have the potential for inflicting serious harm—they are all potentially violent.**

This is probably the last tactic to try if all the others have failed. If you start out by fighting you will have little or no opportunity to try any other way because you have already committed your behavior.



If using this tactic you must be willing and able to inflict serious injury on your assailant. **Surprise and speed of reaction should be used to your benefit.** If you use a fighting tactic which will not completely incapacitate, you are probably going to be in worse shape.

If you try to fight him and he has a weapon, always assume that he won't hesitate to use it. (Most studies show that approximately half the number of reported rapists approached their victims with a weapon of some type.)

Your risks of receiving serious injury from your assailant are greatly increased when using such tactics as biting, scratching, pounding his chest with your fists, trying to spray mace or hair spray into his eyes or using any other weapon which will not completely incapacitate him.

Even victims with extensive training in martial arts are not always successful with quick chops or kicks to vital spots on the body. The struggle itself could arouse or further enrage your assailant.

Remember, if you are going to fight your attacker use surprise and speed to your advantage. For instance, gently put your hands on the assailant's face and get your thumbs near his eyes, then press his eyeballs suddenly with your thumbs as hard as you can. This will put the assailant into shock and could blind him. Or grab his testicles (not his penis, since it will not be effective), squeeze as hard as you can and jerk or pull to inflict immobilizing pain.

Both of these tactics can be accomplished in such a way so that the assailant is not aware of your plans for a physical attack. If used, they must be sure and quick and you must be willing to follow through to insure the disabling injury of the assailant.

The precautions on the preceding pages are meant to be suggestions and guidelines. The prevention material presented can reduce your chances of being sexually assaulted and through awareness and understanding, increase your chances of avoiding or surviving a sexual assault.

There is no universal prescription for avoiding a sexual assault. You will have to decide which tactic will be most likely to be effective depending on the situation, what type of person you are and who you perceive your assailant to be.

POST-ASSAULT PROCEDURES

Your immediate concern will be in obtaining proper medical and psychological help. This help is available. To get the help you'll need immediately, call the police...whether or not you decide to later prosecute. As soon as possible the police officer will take you to your local hospital or rape treatment center.

If you do not want to call the police, at least contact a physician or crisis counselor immediately. These persons can offer you some objective professional advice about the situation to help you decide how to proceed. It is also important that "significant" others... husband, fiancé, family, boyfriend... get counseling so they can better help support you and be more sensitive to your coping with the trauma at hand.

Police sensitivity to the trauma of the victim and the investigative procedures to enhance the possibility of conviction of the suspect have improved greatly over the last few years.

- Even though it may be your initial impulse, DON'T douche, shower, change your clothes or disturb the crime scene.
- At first, prosecution may be the last thing on your mind, but after your immediate needs have been met, you'll probably want to assist the police. So be sure you don't destroy any valuable physical evidence.
- Most victims feel strongly about wanting to see the offender caught so that he will not be able to harm another person. Rapists are repeaters, but records indicate that they also very rarely retaliate against their victims.
- If you decide to call the police and report the crime, they will ask you some initial questions regarding the identity and location of the suspect, his direction of flight and whether he had a weapon. These questions may be asked en route to the hospital.
- Procedures differ among hospitals. Generally, the victim will be asked her name, date of birth, brief medical history and perhaps some other general questions. You will first be checked and treated for any visible physical injuries. It should be pointed out that any treatment you receive will be strictly at your option.

If necessary, a complete internal examination will also be performed by a qualified physician. This is to establish the extent of any injuries as well as collect any specimen should you

decide to prosecute. When appropriate, you will be offered medication to prevent venereal disease or pregnancy. You will not be given any medication to which you object.

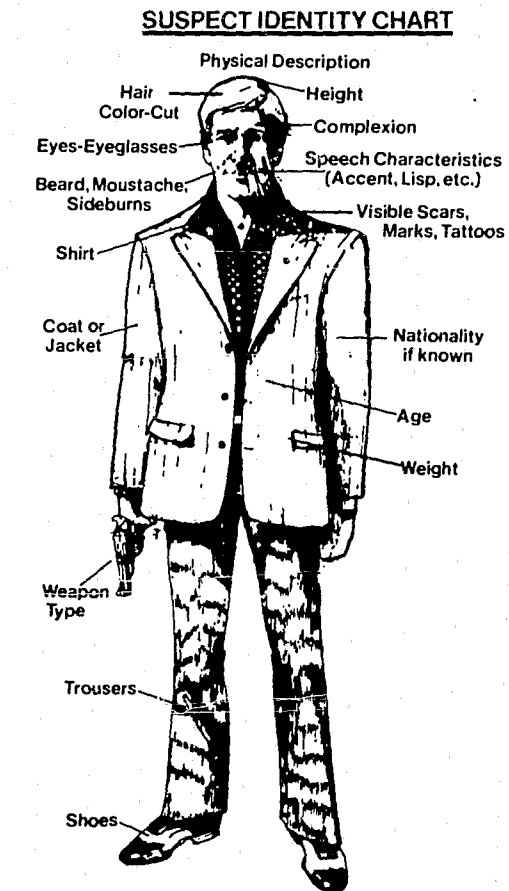
- Usually, if your physical and mental condition permit, you will be asked to give a formal statement as soon as possible after the medical examination.

The police officer will ask only questions which are relevant to the investigation such as: What you did prior to the assault. Who you were with. Where you were going. What your activities were that could have exposed you to the subject. Where the actual assault took place. What the suspect may have touched (such as a bedspread or chair) or left behind. How long the suspect was present. How he left, and other questions along these lines. You will be asked the details of the assault which will more than likely elicit very painful emotions. These are necessary to establish all the facts of the case and will only be asked when you feel you are ready to handle them.

- A suspect identity chart is included to help the reader understand what things to look for and remember in identifying a sexual assault suspect...as well as burglars, robbers or any other criminals.
- Should you decide to pursue the prosecution process, the State Attorney's Office will handle the case. They will prosecute if they feel they have enough evidence for a case. Prosecution is usually a long and complicated process.

Remember that you are not on trial—the defendant is. But under the criminal justice system he is assumed innocent until proven guilty.

The prosecuting attorney will inform you of what to expect in the trial and may go over certain questions again. The prob-



ability of conviction may vary depending on such things as quality of evidence and your testimony. Most sex offenders are repeaters. Your decision to prosecute may save others from suffering.

- In many areas, help is available for victims with questions or doubts about prosecution from: State Attorney's Office, Victim Advocate Programs, Victim Witness Liaison, Rape Crisis Centers, Rape Treatment Centers and women's groups.



- Usually the victim who prosecutes for revenge gives up, while the victim who prosecutes to save others sticks with it.

Above all, remember that there is no more reason for you to feel guilt, shame or embarrassment than if you had been the victim of a mugging or other crime. You were the innocent victim and there are a great many people who are sensitive to your needs and are anxious and able to help you.

WHAT IF YOUR SON WAS SEXUALLY ASSAULTED?

Almost all that has been written about and for girls and women rape victims applies to young boys who are often sexually assaulted and to men who are occasionally (outside of prisons) sexually assaulted. Boys and men should report the assault to the police and seek medical attention. They, too, should talk to some sympathetic person about their mixed emotions and fears.

AN AFTERWORD TO FAMILIES AND FRIENDS OF RAPE VICTIMS

You have the most important role in helping the victim of sexual assault in her recovery by giving her the reassurance, love, comfort and support she needs.

Often people have questions about what is the best way to support a woman or child who has been raped. It is best to give her the same kind of support that you would give if she were the victim of any other kind of crisis—if she were injured in a car accident, for example.

Immediate medical attention is extremely important, to find and heal any damage, to prevent venereal disease, to prevent pregnancy if she wishes and to provide evidence for the trial if she chooses to press charges.

Immediately after the assault she may be in tears, highly emotional—she may be in mild shock or she may appear calm. She will probably have feelings of anxiety, anger, insecurity, guilt and fear. She may hate men, have trouble sleeping, lose her appetite, have nightmares or be depressed. But she is not "permanently damaged" or changed. These are normal responses that will pass with your understanding, care and support.

This is probably a painful experience for you as well as for her. You may want to forget that it ever happened and not want to talk about it. But don't try to make her forget. It is important that she be able to talk it out with someone who understands. Whenever she wants to talk, listen. And if she remembers any new information, it should be reported to the police. However, she should not be forced to talk when she doesn't want to. Sometimes a rape victim is afraid to tell her family and friends for fear that they will change toward her.

You or she may think, "What should I have done to prevent it?" or, "If I had done such and such it wouldn't have happened."—but really neither of you did anything wrong. There are no fool-proof precautions—women are raped at all times of the day and night, in all kinds of dress and in all places—including their own homes. It is easy to look back and think of what you might have done, but it is impossible to look ahead and predict what will happen. Obviously, if any of you had known what would happen, you would have prevented it.

If anyone accuses her of "asking for it" or "enjoying it," they

should know that in spite of the mythical stories in some books and movies, nobody wants to be raped or enjoys it. Rape is not normal sex, not lovemaking, but brutal assault, and rape victims are not participants, but victims of the crime. If anyone tries to make her feel guilty for not having fought harder, they should know that rape victims are in fear of death, and they should be glad that she is still alive.

If you want to take revenge against the rapist on your own, that's perfectly natural. But it won't help her. If you wind up in jail or in the hospital or dead, it won't do her a bit of good. Her well-being is what is most important. What you can do is help her work through her feelings about the rape and help her through the court process, if she decides to prosecute.

If she wants to press charges, that is the most constructive way to direct her anger. It may get the rapist off the street and behind bars and it will give him a police record. Only by more women pressing charges can the justice system be improved. However, if she doesn't feel up to taking it to court, she shouldn't be forced to. Pressing charges involves telling the details of the rape to a room full of strangers and in defending herself against the accusations of the defense attorney. It forces her to relive the experience, and still there may be no conviction. The decision about pressing charges should be her own. In any case, it is best to give the police all the information and evidence she can. This helps them track down and watch the criminal even if she doesn't take him to court. And if she ever decides to prosecute, this way she will be able to have more evidence.

Mates sometimes ask how they should approach women sexually after rape. It is best to be neither too aggressive in sex since this is too much like rape, nor too passive since this could make her feel that she is no longer desirable. It is best to let her know that she is desired but not until she is ready.

The experience of rape can be extremely painful, and a woman may require your understanding and support. The rape experience is a crisis that she must work through—and most women do work through this crisis and return to their normal routine. Most women have a great deal of inner strength, and your support can help a victim regain her feelings of personal strength and self-worth.

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