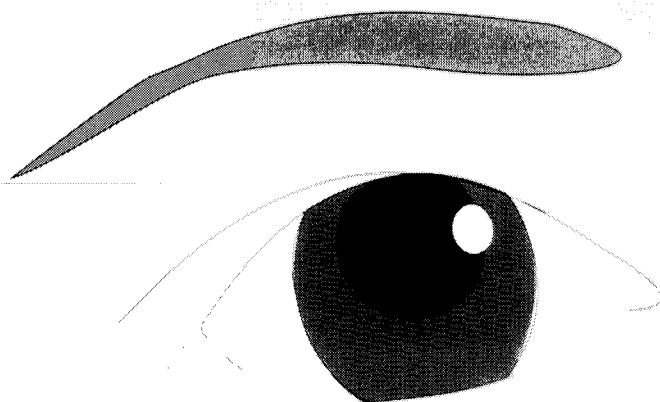


Sexual



Assault



WORDS TO KNOW

rape

trauma syndrome

sexual assault

marital rape

acquaintance rape

rationalization

OBJECTIVES

As a result of this lesson you should be able to:

- define rape
- identify reasons why men rape
- classify myths and realities of sexual assault
- explain the importance of holding the victimizer accountable for his or her actions
- explain the impact of sexual assault on victims
- identify strategies to prevent sexual assault
- describe ways that you can help friends or family members who are sexually assaulted.

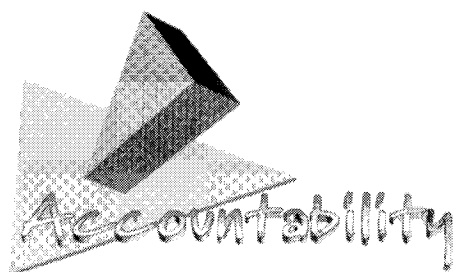
DEFINITIONS

There are many types of **sexual assault** including rape, forced sexual intercourse, sodomy (forced anal intercourse), and oral copulation (forced oral-genital contact).

Force, threats and fear are used to overpower and control the victim. She* may be grabbed, hit, or held down; or she may be forced to submit by threats that if she does not do what she is told, she or someone she loves will be injured or killed.

Rape is very different from voluntary sex between two consenting partners. Consenting to an activity, is willingly agreeing to participate.

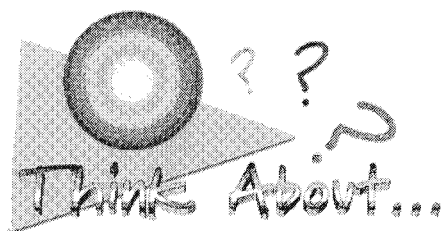
(* While men are also victims of rape, the majority of rape victims are female.)



Sexual assault is a crime of violence, having more to do with control and inflicting injury upon the victim than the sexual act itself. Sex becomes the weapon through which violence is perpetrated. The emotional trauma suffered by victims of sexual assault is severe. Her privacy and control over her life is violated. Her trust in human beings is seriously damaged. Her mind, body and soul are degraded and dehumanized. Dreams and flashbacks of the assault may continue indefinitely. Many times the victim's own sense of self-worth is seriously damaged.

Forcible rape represents the ultimate form of violation of self, second only to homicide. The victim is deprived of autonomy, control of self, and privacy by a hostile intruder. Severe physical injury, fear of death, psychological devastation, long recovery, increased anxiety, financial problems, and loss of independence are all likely concerns of older women following a rape.

Put yourself in the place of a sexual assault victim and imagine how you would feel if you had been assaulted in this manner. **No one has the right to use sex to control, have power over, obtain personal sexual gratification, or punish another human being.**



Read the following statements and place a T or F in the margin to the left indicating whether you think the statement is true or false.

_____ 1. Women secretly want to be raped and invite or provoke it.

_____ 2. Rape is a non-violent crime infrequently committed.

_____ 3. Men cannot be rape victims.

_____ 4. Fear can paralyze the bravest of us.

_____ 5. Eighty percent of all rapes are premeditated and thought out.

_____ 6. Hitchhiking is not an invitation to be raped.

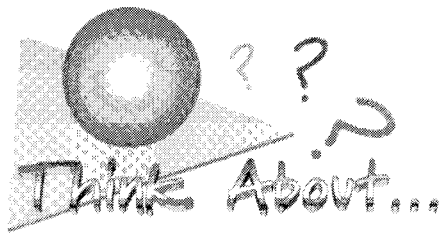
_____ 7. Only older women are raped.

_____ 8. Women enjoy being raped.

_____ 9. A woman cannot be raped by her husband.

_____ 10. Only three percent of rapes occur between members of different races.

Sexual violence is now of epidemic proportions in the United States. It is estimated that one female child out of every three will be sexually abused before she is eighteen years old. In addition, one male child out of every eleven will be sexually abused as well. The family is the setting for at least half the occurrences of sexual abuse of children and adolescents. This age-old problem and society's general lack of response to sexual abuse is rooted in social, cultural, and religious attitudes about sex roles, family life, sexuality, and violence.



Read the following case example and answer the questions.

Jackie is asleep in her bed. She wakes up and finds a man near the bed. The man shows her a knife and tells her not to scream or he will kill her. He orders her to remove her clothing, and while still holding the knife, he rapes her. He tells her if she calls the police, he will return and kill her. He then leaves.

1. What should Jackie do first?
2. Should she call the police?
3. Do you think the rapist will return if she does?
4. Should Jackie have screamed?

5. Should Jackie have tried to fight the man? If so, what could she have done?
6. Do you think Jackie will ever feel safe in her home again?
7. What emotional impact do you think the rape will have on Jackie?
8. How may the rape affect Jackie's relationships, especially with men?

Resistance

Some people think if a rape victim does not physically resist her attacker she has consented to the assault.

What do you think?

Karen is a 26 year old magazine editor who was raped by an assailant who broke into her apartment while she slept. *"I woke up to find this guy pinning me down. I started to scream, but he told me that if I didn't do what he said, he would beat me until I passed out. I was afraid that if I fought back, I'd be really badly hurt. I decided right then that I would do exactly what he told me to do to save my life."*

Sometimes the victim can fight off an attacker before the actual rape takes place. Sometimes she can escape by distracting the rapist and running away. Sometimes she can scare the rapist off by screaming or shouting at him to "Get away!". Sometimes, however, she may find that the more she resists, the more violent the rapist becomes. She may be threatened with death or other serious harm. In order to save her life and avoid injury, she decides not to resist further. In other words, she chooses to follow the rapist's orders to protect herself.

Other victims are so terrified that they find they cannot resist even though they may want to. One victim said, *"There was a moment when the guy who attacked me loosened his hold on me. I thought right away about making a run for it, but I was so scared by his threats I couldn't move. I was literally scared stiff."*

It is important to understand that in some situations, non-resistance is the safest strategy. Deciding to no longer resist, however, does not mean consent.

REMEMBER: No one wants to be raped.

Facts About Rapists

Most rapists are young. They are not "dirty old men." The majority of convicted rapists are between the ages of 12 and 24.

Many rapists know their victims, especially if the victim is a teenager. Eighty percent of teenage victims (4 out of 5) know their attacker. The rapist is someone in their neighborhood, peer group, family, or school.

Most rapists choose a particular type of person to attack. Rapists don't look for victims who are physically attractive or provocatively dressed. Instead, they tend to look for situations in which they feel they can get away with the crime.

Rapists are not "crazy." Rape is not normal behavior. Anyone who commits such a crime has serious problems. But to think of the rapist as crazy or psychotic and therefore not responsible for his actions is a mistake. In other areas of their lives, rapists may act normally. They may be married, hold down jobs, and have children.

Rapists are not "oversexed." Men do not rape for sexual gratification. Rapists are not "desperate for sex," or so "horny" that they are driven to use force to get sex. They use sex as a weapon to abuse and humiliate their victims.

Some men rape to express anger and aggression. These men may have strong feelings of rage which they have kept bottled up over a long period of time. They express their anger by attacking and humiliating their victims.

Men rape men for the same reasons they rape women- - to gain a sense of control or to express anger.

They are not looking for sexual satisfaction. In most cases of male rape, the attacker and his victim are both heterosexual.

Patterns of Rape

Power Rape:

1. The assault is premeditated and preceded by persistent rape fantasies.
2. The rapists uses whatever force or threat necessary to gain control of the victim and overcome resistance.
3. The victim may be physically unharmed; bodily injury would be inadvertent rather than intentional.
4. The rapist's language is instructional and inquisitive: giving orders, asking personal questions, inquiring as to victim's responses.

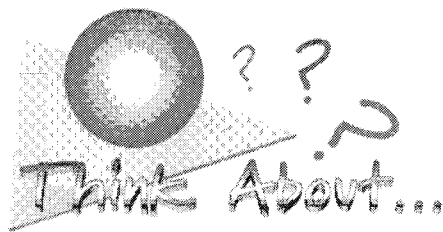
5. The person rapes to compensate for deep-seated insecurities and feelings of inadequacy.
6. The assault may be of an extended duration. The victim may be held captive for a period of time.
7. The offenses are repetitive and may increase in aggression over time.

Anger Rape:

1. The assaults are more impulsive and spontaneous.
2. The rapist uses more physical force than is necessary to overpower the victim.
3. The victim suffers physical trauma to all areas of her body.
4. The rapist's language is abusive: cursing, swearing, obscenities.
5. The assault is of relatively short duration.
6. The offender rapes as a pay-back for perceived wrongs, injustices, or "put-downs" experienced earlier in life.

Sadistic Rape:

1. The assault is calculated and pre-planned.
2. The rapist's (anger and power) is linked with distorted sexuality.
3. The offender's is intensely excited about the rape.
4. The rape is ritualistic, typically involving bondage, torture, or bizarre acts, and are interspersed with other, non-sadistic sexual assaults.
5. The rapists language is commanding and degrading.
6. Assault may be of an extended duration. The victim is kidnapped, assaulted, and disposed of.
7. The victim suffers physical trauma to sexual areas of the body; in extreme cases murdered and mutilated.
8. The rape is symbolic of destruction and elimination. The rapist may tell the victim he will eventually kill her, but it may or may not be now.



Watch the video segment of the sexual assault victim from "How It Feels" and answer the following questions:

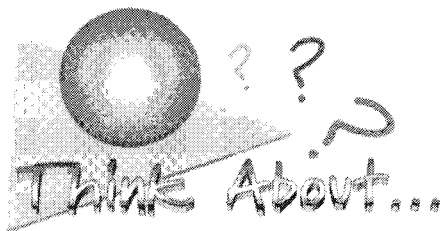
1. The victim said, "What happened after is just as bad, if not worse than the rape itself."

Describe the impact of sexual assault on this victim.

2. How was the victim's childhood taken away?

3. How would you feel if your sister or mother was raped?

4. What could you do to help your family through this victimization?



Situation #1

Susan is walking to a mall to go shopping. She has taken a shortcut through an alley. As she gets near the end of the alley she is attacked by a man. He grabs her, throws her to the ground, beats her face, and steals her purse.

List five emotions Susan may be feeling.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Do you think she will report this to the police?

Situation #2

Susan is walking to a mall to go shopping. She has taken a short cut through an alley. As she gets near the end of the alley she is attacked by a man. He grabs her, throws her to the ground, beats her face, removes her underwear and rapes her. **List five emotions Susan may be feeling.**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Situation #3

Susan is out on a date with a man. She goes to the man's apartment for a cocktail. He kisses her and Susan kisses him back. He begins to remove her clothing and she responds with "No!". He continues to proceed against her repeated requests to stop and forces her to have sex.

List five emotions Susan may be feeling.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Do you think she will report this to the police?

Situation #4

Susan is out on a date with a man. She has decided that she wants to have a relationship with this man. At the end of the evening, they decide to spend the night together and they both choose to have sex. **List five emotions Susan may be feeling.**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Reactions Frequently Felt By Rape Victims

Rape victims may cry, shake and be extremely tense. Feelings may be masked or hidden under a calm, composed and subdued effect. A controlled front may also indicate exhaustion, shock, or an attempt to deny or repress the violent attack.

Crisis Pattern: Rape Trauma Syndrome

I. Three Phases

A. Acute Phase

1. From immediately after attack to 5-6 weeks
2. Behavioral reactions:
 - a. expressed - outwardly tense, fearful, restlessness
 - b. controlled - outwardly calm
3. Emotional reactions may be:
 - a. initially - shock, disbelief, dismay
 - b. followed by fear and anxiety
4. Physical reactions:
 - a. soreness, bruising
 - b. muscular tension
 - c. sleep pattern disturbances
 - d. gastrointestinal disturbances
 - e. genital-urinary discomfort
5. Disruption of life style

B. Pseudo-Adjustment Phase

1. From approximately six weeks post rape through months or years
2. Denial
3. **Rationalization** (an attempt to make sense of the rape)
4. An attempt to return to "normal" behavior
5. Problems with relationships
 - a. sexual dysfunction
 - b. problems performing normal activities

C. Integration and Resolution Phase

1. Crisis state is reactivated by:
 - a. an event
 - b. break through of suppressed emotion
2. Unexpected recurrence of thoughts about the attack or the rapist
3. Defense reaction:
 - a. phobias
 - b. free floating anxiety
 - c. depression

II. Silent Reaction

The victim:

- A. Tell no one
- B. May talk about the rape as if it happened to a friend
- C. Displays sudden behavior and personality changes
- D. Experiences sexual dysfunction
- E. Feels increasing anxiety
- F. Has nightmares/flashbacks
- G. Loses self-esteem, self-confidence, etc.

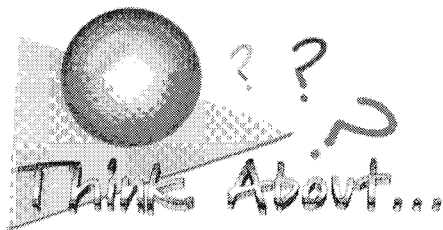
III. Common Long-Term Post-Rape Reactions

- A. Fear:
 - 1. of being alone
 - 2. of crowds
 - 3. of men
 - 4. of anything reminding them of assailant
 - 5. of return of assailant
 - 6. of husband, family, or friends finding out

- B. Embarrassment
- C. Guilt
- D. Suspicion
- E. Anger
- F. Obsession with assault
- G. Disruption of normal sex life
- H. Depression

Contacting the Police

A sexual assault victim who decides to file a police report and receive medical attention must undergo additional violations of her privacy and integrity. She must submit to a thorough physical examination and asked very specific questions about the details of the offense and about her private life by the emergency room physician and police officers. Once again the integrity and privacy of the sexual assault victim is violated, adding to her ongoing feelings of helplessness and vulnerability.



Watch the video segment of the sexual assault victim from "Victims of Crime: A Life Sentence" and answer the following questions:

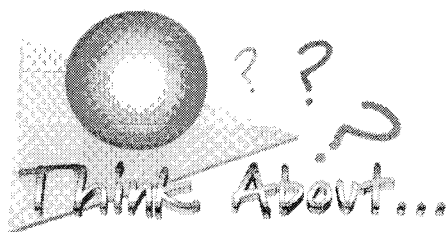
- MADD** **OVC** **CA**

The Impact of Rape on Older Women

The impact of rape may differ for women in different age groups. For example, a 70-year-old widow does not have to deal with the possibility of pregnancy. On the other hand, elderly women are more vulnerable to physical injury and generally suffer more physical trauma as the result of rape than do younger victims.

While some experts believe that older women are more tolerant of stress than their younger counterparts, others feel that the "brave front" of the older woman may give way to depression and fear when the immediate crisis is over.

In addition to the practical and immediate outcomes of rape, there are long-term psychological effects to consider. When an older woman, especially a very frail older woman, becomes the victim of a crime, she is likely to be faced with a strong sense of decreased control over her own life. Once victimized, she may conclude that external factors such as other people, fate, or chance now control her life. This perception of loss of control may have a profound and permanent impact on her lifestyle and relationships with others. Immediate crisis intervention is especially important for the elderly victim, as she is least likely to have an available support system of family and friends to help her through the aftermath of a sexual assault.



Louise Johnson is 72 years old and lives with her husband, Walter, who is 76 years old. Both Mr. and Mrs. Johnson are retired. Mr. Johnson has left the house to go to the laundromat and Mrs. Johnson is making lunch. A man knocks on the front door and Mrs. Johnson answers the door. The man asks her if she has any yard work for him, and Mrs. Johnson tells him that she doesn't.

As Mrs. Johnson is closing the door, the man pushes his way in, knocking her to the floor. He kicks her and demands money. Mrs. Johnson begs the man not to hurt her and tells him all the money is in her purse. The man becomes angry when he discovers only \$13.00 and tells Mrs. Johnson he is going to teach her a lesson. The man beats and rapes Mrs. Johnson. Write down answers to the following questions. You may want to discuss your answers as a group.

1. Do you think older people are too trusting? Why?
2. Will Mr. and Mrs. Johnson feel safe in their home again?
3. How will Mr. and Mrs. Johnson's neighbors feel? (They are elderly also.)
4. Do you think the man would have raped Mrs. Johnson if she had more money? What kind of rapist was he?

5. If Mrs. Johnson was your grandmother, would she be embarrassed to talk to you about what happened? Why?

6. Do you think Mrs. Johnson will tell the police that she was raped?

7. If you were Mrs. Johnson, would you tell the police about the rape?

8. How do you think Mr. Johnson feels?



9. What do you think Mr. and Mrs. Johnson's friends should do to help?
10. What physical, emotional, and financial impact do you think the rape and battery will have on Mrs. Johnson?

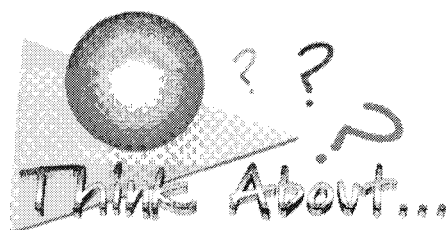
The Male Victim

Sexual assault centers around the country are reporting alarming increases in rapes of males, especially adolescents. The victim is usually in his late teens to mid-20s. Current statistics suggest that one in nine males will be sexually assaulted at some time during their lives. These statistics may be very deceptive, however, since 90 percent of male victims do not report their assaults to law enforcement or seek medical attention.

Assaults on males are usually perpetrated by a single assailant using a weapon or by multiple assailants who use sheer force of numbers to overpower the victim. More than half the reported cases of male sexual assaults, also involve kidnapping and burglary or robbery.

The male victim exhibits the same range and intensity of emotional, behavioral and physical reactions as females. Though free of the fear of an unwanted pregnancy, a man may be plagued by self-doubt about his own sexuality and "maleness," as well as the fear of sexually transmitted diseases.

Most male victims do not seek help out of fear they will not be believed or they will be suspected of being homosexual. Our culture stereotypes men as strong persons who can compete and protect themselves and others important to him. Males who are placed in vulnerable situations are often seen as less than "real men," perhaps as homosexual. The cultural expectation that males should not exhibit vulnerability and the cultural sanction against a homosexual lifestyle result in men not acknowledging their own personal reactions. They may fear that they will be seen as less manly if others know they were raped. These expectations, distortions, and norms not only prevent men from acknowledging a wide variety of normal feelings and behaviors, but also prevent them from reporting sexual assault and seeking help.



Watch the segments from the video "The Rape of Richard Beck". Jot down a few words in response to the questions. Be prepared to discuss your answers.

1. Describe how the victim's privacy and integrity were violated in the video?
2. How could the questioning and medical examination have been more sensitive to the needs of the victim?

Situation #1

A 27-year-old divorced truck driver picked up a woman in a bar, took her to a motel, and fell asleep. He awoke to find himself naked, tied hand and foot to a bedstead, gagged, and blindfolded. During the next 24 hours, he was repeatedly forced to have intercourse with four women, threatened with castration by a knife held to his scrotum whenever his performance flagged, and humiliated with derogatory comments. **List five reactions the man would be feeling.**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Do you think he called the police?

Situation #2

A 37-year-old married man was accosted by two women with a handgun, forced into an abandoned building, undressed, and tied up. He was forced to have intercourse and oral sex, and was then abused genitally and rectally until he fainted. For the next two and a half years he made no sexual overtures and became nauseated whenever his wife approached him. **List five reactions the man would be feeling when his wife wanted sex.**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Do you think he called the police?

Situation #3

A 17-year-old boy in a rural community, while on a picnic with an older woman and two married couples, was held by the men while the three women stripped, masturbated, orally stimulated him, and taunted him as "being not much of a man." **List five reactions the boy would be feeling.**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Do you think he called the police?

1. Are the men's emotional reactions the same or different in these three situations? How do you account for similarity or difference?
2. How does society's attitude about sexual assault impact a male rape victim?
3. When does seduction become rape?

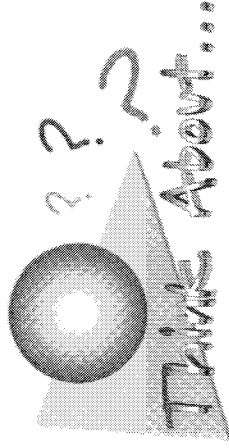
4. What is the difference between someone giving consent versus cooperating?

Marital Rape

Marital rape is forced sexual intercourse with a spouse. Statistics gathered by sociologist Diana Russell in 1987 estimate that one out of every seven women who has ever been married is raped by their husband, and two times as many women are raped by their husbands as by strangers.

- 26 percent of all rapes and sexual assaults against women were committed by an intimate partner or ex-partner (Bachman and Saltzman, 1995).
- Spousal rape is often more violent and repetitive than other rape, and it is less commonly reported (Bachman and Saltzman, 1995).
- American women are more likely to be assaulted and injured, raped or killed by a current or ex-partner than by all other types of assailants combined (Bachman and Saltzman, 1995).
- A survey of women in San Francisco found that 14 percent of women who have been married have been raped by their husbands (Bachman and Saltzman, 1995).

Marital rape first gained national attention in 1978 when Gretchen Rideout's husband, John, was charged with a rape which occurred when the couple was living together. Media attention had waned by the time of the couple's divorce and John Rideout's conviction for breaking into his former wife's house and harassing her. Since 1978, a majority of states have enacted laws which allow for prosecution of a spouse for rape.



Angie and her husband Bill are getting a divorce. Bill no longer lives with Angie but sometimes comes over to visit his children. Recently Bill has been pressuring Angie to get back together. Today Bill has come over and is telling Angie that he wants to move back in. When Angie tells Bill no, he gets angry and tells her that she is still his wife and she will do what he says. He then tries to kiss her. She tells him to get out. He tells her no and starts hitting her. He then decides to "make love." She tries to get away, but can't. Bill then rapes Angie.

1. **Is what Bill did against the law?**
2. **Can a person go to prison if he forces his spouse to have sex?**

3. Should Angie report Bill to the police? Why or why not?

4. If Angie doesn't report Bill, how can she stop him from doing it again?

5. What do you think should happen to Bill?

Acquaintance Rape

The term **acquaintance rape** refers to a sexual assault where the perpetrator is known to the victim -- a date, steady boyfriend, neighbor, or friend. Acquaintance rape is also known as date rape or "social rape" because it often occurs as part of a social situation. Remember: being forced into having sex against one's will is rape; what makes this type of rape especially difficult is that the victim often trusts the perpetrator or had been personally involved with the him/her.

Because the perpetrator is an acquaintance, some victims do not consider the attack a rape. Criminal law makes no distinction -- rape is rape, even if the attacker and victim know each other. However, knowing the assailant and having trusted that person in the past makes the event all the more painful and confusing for the victim.

Rape Can Happen On a Date

In date rape situations, two people may begin their relationship by choosing to be together, and then something goes wrong. Date rapes occur most frequently in familiar surroundings, such as the victim's or offender's home or car.

Alcohol and drugs usually play a role in date rape. Many people continue to think of rape as a crime committed by strangers flashing weapons and jumping out of dark alleys at three in the morning. Because date rape does not fit this stereotype, people may have trouble recognizing it as a rape.

How Does a Date Become a Crime?

Sometimes date rapists plan their assaults in advance. They spend time building up their victim's trust and confidence. They manipulate her into a situation where she is isolated and alone:

Sally was 18 years old when she was raped by Gary, a guy she met at a high school graduation party. Gary asked her to leave the party with him, but Sally decided to stay with her friends. Before he left, they exchanged phone numbers. Over the next couple weeks, Sally and Gary talked on the phone several times,

and Sally finally agreed to a date. Gary picked Sally up at her apartment, spent a few minutes talking with her mother, and drove Sally to a nice restaurant for dinner. Sally relates what happened next.

"After we left the restaurant, Gary started driving real fast. He drove me up into the hills and parked his car next to the edge of a cliff. I didn't dare open the door; I was terrified that I'd fall out. He started grabbing me and kissing me and said that if I didn't do what he said, I'd be sorry. It was awful, Sally says softly as she remembers the incident. I was all alone on a deserted road. There was nothing I could do. After he raped me, he took me home as if nothing had happened. Looking back now, I realize everything had been a set-up. If I had left the party with him that first time, it probably would have happened then. When I didn't leave with him that night, he just waited for another opportunity."

In other cases, the offender may not set out with the intent to rape. When the date begins, the guy and the girl may be on the same wavelength. The trouble starts when they misinterpret each other's behavior or when they stop paying attention to their own gut reactions. The guy, for example, may think that a girl's behavior in certain situations is an indication that she is interested in sex, even though she has not said so. The girl may have a funny feeling that something is wrong, but may be reluctant to say anything or act on the feeling. If neither the guy nor girl stops to check what the other is thinking, the situation can get out of hand. Date rape occurs when the girl is forced to have sex without her consent.

Ken is a high-school senior whose best friend, Jim, experienced this type of situation last year. Although Jim and his date were able to prevent a rape from actually occurring, some couples in similar circumstances find that they are unable to do so.

Jim met Cathy at a party. She had come with a girlfriend who left the party. Cathy was worried when it got late and her friend hadn't come back. Jim offered to drive her home and she said "Okay."

Jim had a good time with Cathy at the party. He figured she must like him if she agreed to let him drive her home. On the way to Cathy's house, Jim stopped the car and started making the moves. At first, Cathy seemed to be going along. She let him kiss her a couple of times. So, he started really coming on. She tried to push him away. Jim said at first he figured she was just playing hard to get, and he sort of pushed her down onto the seat. Then she started crying and yelling "no." Jim said he realized then she was really upset. It wasn't just an act, and he backed off.

Jim was pretty mad at first. He told Cathy she was a tease and she shouldn't start something she couldn't finish. He asked her why she left the party with him and why she let him kiss her if she wasn't interested.

She told Jim she kissed him because she liked him, but that didn't mean she wanted to go to bed with him.

Jim drove her home and they never saw each other again.

Jim's not a rapist. But, what if he hadn't stopped? Would that have been rape?

Bill and Jennifer have been dating off and on for two years. During these two years, Bill and Jennifer have kissed and fondled but have not had sexual intercourse. Bill expects to take Jennifer to the movies and then go back to his house to spend the rest of the evening and have sexual intercourse.

At the end of the evening, Jennifer thanks Bill for taking her to the movies and asks to be taken home. Bill becomes angry and tells her that he wants her to go home with him. Jennifer says she will go to Bill's house for a little while. When they get to Bill's house, he begins kissing and hugging Jennifer. She tells him to stop. Bill continues and a struggle starts. Jennifer hits Bill during the struggle and he becomes very mad. He strikes Jennifer and tells her that she is going to get what she deserves. He then rapes her.

After the rape, Bill feels bad. He tells Jennifer that he is sorry and he doesn't know what got into him.

He begs her not to call the police and offers to take her home. He is crying.

1. Should Jennifer call the police? If not, why?

2. Should Jennifer forgive Bill and forget it?

3. Should Jennifer let Bill drive her home now?

4. Should Jennifer still be afraid of Bill?



5. What do you think Jennifer did wrong, if anything?
6. Would it make any difference if Bill and Jennifer have had sex before?
7. Can you legally rape a woman you have had sex with before?
8. If you were a law enforcement officer, what questions would you ask Jennifer? (Give at least three questions.) Answers should be based on statute.

9. Do you think Bill would ever rape someone else? Why?
10. What emotional impact do you think the rape attempt will have on Jennifer?
11. How do you think it may affect her future relationship with men?

Acquaintance Rape on College Campuses

In a national survey of college students, one out of four women reported having an experience since the age of fourteen which fit the legal definition of sexual assault or attempted sexual assault in their state.

Half of those experiences occurred on dates.



Communicating about Sexual Relationships

A common characteristic of survivors of date rape is that they trusted the person who assaulted them. In some cases, they blame themselves for not being able to stop what happened, or even for causing it, rather than holding the perpetrator accountable for his behavior.

One out of twelve men questioned in a national survey of college students admitted committing acts which fit the legal definition of sexual assault or attempted sexual assault. Persons who sexually assault their dates are placing more importance on satisfying their own desires than on mutual respect. Such persons feel they are entitled to sex and may ignore indications that their partner does not want to have it. Date rapists generally do not think of what they are doing as rape or as violence.

Date rape may be related to traditional ideas about what it means to be male or female. Boys may be taught (from older boys, adult males, the media, etc.) that dating is a series of encounters in which the goal, stage by stage, is to gain sexual access to girls. Girls, likewise may be taught that boys will try to gain this access, and that a girl's role is to resist these advances while working to maintain the relationship. His role is to advance, her's to resist. Dating becomes a game...a contest.(Texas Department of Health, 1994).

Lack of communication is often a contributing factor in acquaintance rape situations. Poor communication between two dating individuals results in not really knowing each other's expectations, sexual or otherwise. Long-term prevention of date rape will require redefining appropriate male and female roles and behaviors.

It will mean teaching children that relationships should be based on mutual respect, and that we are responsible for our own actions. It will mean removing violence from any sexual behavior.

Couples must tell each other what their sexual limits are on dates, and must be alert to recognizing dangerous signals while it is still possible to get out of the situation. These signals include: the need to be in control most or all of the time, jealousy, angry or aggressive outbursts, possessiveness, ignoring personal space boundaries, not asking what the other person wants to do or ignoring their wishes, and generally not respecting the other person as an individual. Caution in dating is always justifiable, particularly in the early stages of a relationship. Both persons have a right to plan a date and feel some control over what is happening.

Clear communication involves listening as well as speaking up

Listen to your feelings. Trust your instincts. Maybe somewhere deep inside warning bells are sounding. Learn to listen to your gut reactions. Don't try to talk yourself out of them. You may sense trouble on an unconscious level before you know why you're in danger.

Tell your date how you feel and what your limits are. Once you know how you feel, or once you know you're not sure exactly how you feel, tell your date.

Say it loud. Don't rely on ESP to get your message across. Don't assume that the other person will automatically know how you feel, or will eventually "get the message" without spelling it out.

Listen carefully. Make sure you take the time to listen to what the other person is saying. If you suspect the other person is not being direct - is saying one thing, but really means something else - ask for a straight answer.

Make sure how you say it is consistent with what you say. Communication involves three things: Words, tone of voice and body language. Studies show that people pay more attention to factors such as tone of voice and body language than to our actual words.

If you don't back up what you say with an appropriate tone of voice and body language, you may end up giving the other person a mixed message. For example, if you want to say "no", but you don't want to hurt the other person's feelings, you may try to soften your refusal by giggling, looking down, or using a soft voice. These behaviors discount your words. You are much more likely to get your message across if you look the person directly in the eye and say "What you're wanting to do right now may be something I want to do later, but right now I don't want to." If the behavior continues, pull away or stand up and repeat, "I said no."

Say something like, "Look, I'm a little confused. You're saying you respect me and we've had a good time so far. But you're trying to do something I don't want to do now. What's going on?"

Why is it so hard to communicate clearly?

Two barriers which come up frequently in dating situations are PEER PRESSURE and SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPING.

Peer pressure can make us ignore our feelings. Peer pressure is a very powerful force in our lives. We all want to be liked and accepted by others. However, peer pressure can cause us to do what we think others want us to do rather than act in accordance with our own values and feelings.

Kristen, a 17 year old high-school junior, talks about peer pressure. *"My best friend met this guy. He was in a band, and he asked my friend to come listen to him play. A group of us went. We used fake i.d.'s to get into the club, and we dressed up to look a lot older than we really were. He asked us to go to a party with the rest of the guys. A few of them looked okay, but I felt funny about some of them. I tried to convince my friends not to go. I told them we didn't really know these guys or where they were taking us. But my friends talked me into it."*

"You know, everybody says that peer pressure is over-rated, that it's not that hard to resist. But it's not easy to tell when it's happening. At the time, it was just my friends telling me everything would be okay and asking me not to spoil their fun. I wasn't afraid to stand up to them. I just didn't want to mess up their good time. So, I went.

"As soon as we got to the party, I knew we had made a big mistake. Everybody there was a lot older. It was pretty wild. I had no idea where we were. One of the guys kept coming on pretty strong. I told him I wasn't that type of girl, and he just laughed and kept on pushing. Fortunately, I convinced my friends to leave, and we managed to get back home. I know I was pretty lucky. Now I'm more willing to stick up for myself. I'm more confident that I might be able to make better decisions in some situations than some of my friends."

Sex-role stereotypes can make us assume the wrong things about people. Society creates expectations about what is appropriate behavior for men and women. As we grow up we get messages from our family, our peers, and the media about how guys and girls should behave. These expectations are called sex-role stereotypes.

Most of these attitudes and stereotypes are unconscious. We learn them at such an early age that we are no longer aware of them. Often, we don't recognize the ways in which they influence our values and behavior.

Stereotypes cause us to over-generalize, to make such statements as, "All guys ever think about is sex," or "All girls say 'no' when they really mean 'yes'."

Stereotypes can be dangerous because they cause us to overlook individual differences. For example, a guy may not be able to hear "no" when a girl says it, if he was taught that all girls say "no" even when they really mean "yes." He may assume she does not really mean what she is saying and attempt to force himself on her.

Paul is a 24-year-old graduate student who has become more aware of the ways in which sex-role stereotypes influenced him and his friends. In high school, Paul says, "there was enormous pressure on all of us to score. We were the track stars. We were supposed to live up to this 'jock' image. Looking back, I know there were guys who pushed pretty hard just because they thought they had to. I was still a virgin in my senior year and thought there just had to be something wrong with me. It was something I worried about all the time."

It is important to pay attention to your own feelings and values and to act on them, rather than acting in accordance with a stereotyped idea of how guys or girls should behave. It is also important to listen to others and to check out how they really feel. Do not assume that every guy or girl fits the social stereotype.

PERSONAL SAFETY

The next time you are having a conversation with your friends, listen carefully for comments indicating male and female stereotypes. Are they positive, degrading, extremely traditional? Are you willing to share your newly acquired knowledge with your friends when you hear them stereotyping?

GUEST SPEAKER NOTES

