



Teen Sexual Assault: Information for Parents

Teen sexual assault is any sexual contact that a teen does not freely agree to (“consent”). Agreeing under emotional or physical pressure (“coercion”) is not consenting. We use the term “sexual assault” when the person who committed the assault—the perpetrator—is someone outside the family, and the term “sexual abuse” when the perpetrator is a family member. Sexual assault does not always include intercourse. Sexual assault includes any contact with private body parts (e.g., breasts, genitals, buttocks) that is unwanted, not agreed on, or forced on someone.

Consent

Consent means making an active choice to agree. If your teen felt they had no good option, it was not consent. If someone tries to convince your teen to do something sexual—even if he or she has done it with that person before, but now really does not want to—he or she has the right to say “no.”

Coercion

If your teen is feeling pressured to do something sexual and does not know how to get away from the situation, or is afraid that saying “no” will break up the relationship, it may be a sign that he or she is being coerced or emotionally forced to do something against his or her will.

What is teen dating violence?

Teen dating violence is a type of violence that occurs between two people in a romantic relationship. The violence can be sexual, physical, or emotional, and can occur in person or electronically by texting or posting threatening messages or images on social media. Teen sexual assault can occur as part of dating violence, but also occurs outside of a romantic relationship—with a friend, classmate, acquaintance, or stranger.



Why do teen sexual assault and teen dating violence happen?

Individuals who perpetrate sexual assault and/or dating violence may have a variety of problems, but the core cause of these events is the perpetrator's misuse of power and control. This can take many forms, including using physical force or by threatening, intimidating, manipulating, stalking, or isolating your teen from friends or other supports.

Who experiences teen sexual assault?

Any teen can be a victim of sexual assault no matter his or her gender identity or sexual orientation: female or male, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning or queer (LGBTQ), or straight. Usually the perpetrator is someone the teen knows and trusts, such as a boyfriend or girlfriend, a friend or acquaintance. The perpetrator could be your teen's age or an adult they trust. But sometimes a stranger has perpetrated the sexual assault.

How common is teen sexual assault?

Unfortunately, teen sexual assault is very common. Studies have found that:

- One in four teen girls was verbally or physically pressured into having sex during the past year.¹
- One in 10 high school girls—and one in 20 high school boys—reported being forced into sex.²
- More than one third of acquaintance rape victims are between the ages of 14 and 17.³
- One in three teens is a victim of sexual or other abuse by a dating partner each year.⁵
- About 9% of high school students are physically hurt—on purpose—by a boyfriend or girlfriend.⁴
- Almost 20% of college women reported experiencing sexual assault on campus.⁸

What if my teens has been in a relationship for a long time?

It does not matter if your teen just met the person or has been in a long-term relationship. She or he always has the right to say “no” to any unwanted sexual activity, and to be free from violence. Being somebody's girlfriend or boyfriend does not give anyone the right to sexually assault—or to physically or emotionally hurt.

What if my teen is LGBT?

Sexual assault occurs because of the perpetrator's misuse of power and control, not because of your teen's sexual orientation, appearance, physical size, or strength. However, LGBTQ youth are at higher risk for experiencing dating violence than heterosexual youth. Twenty-three percent of LGBTQ youth reported sexual dating violence compared to 12% of heterosexual youth.⁷ Stigma about being LGBTQ may partly explain this difference. For example, an LGBTQ partner might misuse his or her power by threatening to “out” the other.



How do drugs play a part in teen sexual assault?

If teens drink at a party or with others, someone could sneak drugs into their beverages, making them vulnerable to assault. Being drugged without their knowledge makes it impossible for them to give legal consent to a sexual act. ANY drug, even alcohol, can increase their risk for sexual assault by strangers or by someone they know (acquaintance rape). Drugs commonly used in acquaintance rape include the following:

- *Rohypnol** (pronounced row-HIP-nal; also called roofies) is a sedative that can cause sleepiness, slurred speech, difficulty walking, black-outs and amnesia.
- *GHB** is a depressant that may cause nausea, vomiting, dizziness, heart problems, seizures, black-outs, and, in some cases, coma.
- *Ketamine** (pronounced keet-ah-meen; also called Special K) is an animal tranquilizer that can cause delirium, loss of memory, depression, and long-term memory and cognitive difficulties.
- *MDMA** (also known as the club drug “ecstasy”) is a stimulant that causes feelings of peacefulness, acceptance, and affection towards another, as well as depression, confusion, anxiety, and paranoia.
- *Alcohol** is a sedative and is the substance most commonly used to commit sexual assault.



What does the internet have to do with teen sexual assault?

Cell phones and social networking sites such as FaceBook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube are new ways teens experience sexual assault, as well as bullying or other threats. Sexual predators posing online as someone who is harmless commonly trick teens into meeting them in person, increasing the chance for sexual assault or even kidnapping. In some instances,

teens have been forced into sexual slavery (commercial sexual exploitation also known as sex trafficking) by someone they have met on the internet. Sometimes one or more perpetrators post videos of a teen’s sexually assault on social media. If unaware of their drugging, teens may not find out until the assault shows up online.

In a dating relationship, a romantic partner’s constant texting can be a way to monitor and control your teen’s actions. He or she might seek control by shaming your teen with embarrassing sexual pictures and information. Your teen’s romantic partner could take videos of them during sexual activity and post them online as a way to threaten or manipulate her or him.

Are there any tips for staying safe?

You can help your teen stay safe by giving the information and support he or she needs to make smart choices. Educate your teen about sexual intercourse, how to be protected from sexually transmitted disease and pregnancy; misuse of alcohol and drugs, including date rape drugs such as Rohypnol and GHB. Also teach your teen—and model for him or her—the qualities of healthy and respectful relationships.

Talking about these topics can be hard, but the more open and honest you are with your teen, the more likely it will be that he or she will turn to you with any questions and concerns. In fact, in a recent survey of American high school students, 9 out of 10 teens said it would be easier to delay sexual activity if they were able to have “more open, honest conversations” with their parents about sexual issues.⁶

Here are some more things you can do:

- Teach your teen to decide what limits he or she wants in relationships and how to express those limits to dating partners. Tell your teen, that if someone crossed those boundaries or if he or she senses danger, to speak out and act immediately.
- Let your teen know that teens or adults have the right to change their mind, to say “no,” or to agree to some sexual activities and not to others.
- Educate your teen about risks of excessive drinking or drugs use, and how they reduce a person’s ability to think and communicate clearly. However, remind them that being drunk or high does not give anyone permission to assault or hurt them.
- Teach them party safety, like pouring their own beverage and keeping it in sight. Date rape drugs can be put into drinks and are often undetectable.
- Tell your kids to be aware of where they are hanging out. Teach them not to hang out in places that keep them isolated from others. Although they may be able to take care of themselves, it is always wise to be careful.
- Teach teens to trust their instincts. If they feel that a person is not trustworthy or a situation is unsafe, they should leave.
- Tell your teen to always have a back-up plan. For example, if they’re going to a party, make sure someone they trust knows where they’re going. Teach them to have a person they can call to come and get them if they need to leave without their original ride.



What if my teen is sexually assaulted?

The experience of being sexually assaulted—especially if it was by someone your teen trusted—can bring up a wide range of complicated emotions, including guilt, self-doubt, and worries that the assault was somehow his or her fault. Working through these feelings is an important part of the healing process, and will help them move forward in a positive way.

Understanding common misconceptions and responses about sexual assault can help you and your teen manage or change some of your beliefs about this topic.

After a sexual assault your teen may...	The truth is...
Blame themselves (for example, they may wonder if they were flirting too much or wearing sexy clothes).	It's not her or his fault, no matter how they acted or what they wore.
Worry that it's her or his fault for accepting a drink that was drugged.	It's not their fault. They didn't know the drink was drugged.
Worry that they will get in trouble with the police if they were underage drinking .	The police are more concerned with your teen's health and safety than getting them in trouble.
Feel ashamed, angry, sad, different, lonely, anxious, betrayed, depressed, or as if they will never be able to trust anyone again.	All of these feelings are common after an assault. They will not last forever. Talking to a counselor can help your teen work through these feelings.
Feel guilty or confused because they know your attacker.	Most sexual assaults are committed by an acquaintance. It was nothing they did or didn't do.
Have nightmares about the assault or their mind may be filled with images of what happened, even when he or she is trying not to think about it.	This is common, too and will not last forever. Counseling can help them learn how to deal with these images.
Worry about how their friends will react if they find out (Will they believe them or take sides?).	Your teen's real friends will be supportive and be there for them.
Worry about how you and your family will react if you find out.	This might be hard for you and your family to accept at first, Counseling can help your family as well as your teen.
Think that nobody understands how she or he feels and that they are alone.	A lot of teens have gone through this and your teen has the support of people who care about them.

Where can I go for more information?

- 911Rape → * www.911rape.org
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center → * www.nsvrc.org
- Project Respect → * www.yesmeansyes.com
- Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) → * www.rainn.org
- The Date Safe Project → * www.thedatesafeproject.org/pledge_for_action.htm
- The Safe Space → * www.thesafespace.org
- Love is Respect → * www.loveisrespect.org
- National Center on Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention: <http://m.sapac.umich.edu>
- Futures without Violence: www.futureswithoutviolence.org

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About the National Child Traumatic Stress Network

Established by Congress in 2000, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) is a unique collaboration of academic and community-based service centers whose mission is to raise the standard of care and increase access to services for traumatized children and their families across the United States. Combining knowledge of child development, expertise in the full range of child traumatic experiences, and attention to cultural perspectives, the NCTSN serves as a national resource for developing and disseminating evidence-based interventions, trauma-informed services, and public and professional education.