

The Facts

About 1 in 6 women and 1 in 21 men in West Virginia will be victims of sexual assault or an attempted sexual assault in their lifetimes. These rates are even higher for residents who have a disability—14% for those with a disability versus 9.6% for those without a disability.¹

The risk of sexual victimization may be even higher for persons with caregivers and persons with certain types of disabilities, such as some physical and intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities and severe mental illnesses.

¹ 2008 WV Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey.

Protective Strategies

Sexual violence is never the victim's fault, but the following tips may help reduce your risk of sexual victimization.

- Have a communication device (e.g., cell phone).
- Always maintain access to needed assistive devices.
- Avoid isolating yourself. Talk regularly with others to verify your personal safety. Minimize financial dependency on one person.
- Trust your instincts. If you feel unsafe in a situation, leave or seek help.
- Be assertive. Firmly say "no" and "stop" if someone is trying to intimidate you.
- Learn the basics about sexual violence, personal boundaries, safety, and community resources.
- Screen caregivers and guardians.
- Inform service providers that sexual assault will be reported to law enforcement and follow through with reporting.
- Develop a safety plan with a local rape crisis center advocate.

Call us.
Someone is here to listen and to help.

CONTACT Huntington, Inc.
Huntington
304-399-1111

Family Refuge Center
Lewisburg
304-645-6334

Hope, Inc.
Fairmont
304-367-1100

Rape and Domestic Violence Information Center
Morgantown
304-292-5100

REACH Family Counseling Connection
Charleston
304-340-3676

Sexual Assault Help Center
Wheeling
304-234-8519

Shenandoah Women's Center
Martinsburg
304-263-8292

Women's Aid In Crisis
Elkins
1-800-339-1185

Women's Resource Center
Beckley
304-255-2559

National Sexual Assault Hotline
1-800-656-HOPE



**West Virginia Foundation
for Rape Information and Services**

www.fris.org

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Sexual Violence and Persons with Disabilities

Information for
victims, their
families and
friends



What is Sexual Violence?

Sexual violence occurs when you are forced, threatened or manipulated into sexual contact against your will.

Sex without consent is sexual assault, whether the offender is a stranger or someone you know. It can happen to anyone at any age, place, or time. The way a person dresses or acts does not cause sexual assault. No one “asks” or “deserves” to be raped.

Sexual assault is a crime of violence and power. It is caused by the decision to control someone in the most personal way. It is not caused by sexual desire.

Sexual Violence Includes:

- Rape—forced sexual intercourse
- Sodomy—forced anal or oral sex
- Forcible object penetration—penetrating someone’s vagina or anus, or causing that person to penetrate her or himself, against that person’s will
- Unwanted sexual touching
- Sexual contact with minors, whether consensual or not
- Sexual contact with a person who lacks the capacity to give consent
- Incest—sexual contact between family members
- Any unwanted sexual contact

How Can Someone “Force” You to Have Sex?

Most sexual assaults involve some type of force, but force is not always physical. Some ways someone can force you to have sex without using a weapon or physical violence include:

- Using threats to intimidate you
- Threatening to harm a friend, family member, service animal or pet
- Using a position of authority/trust (such as a caregiver or teacher) to get you to agree to do something sexual
- Having sex with you when you are too drunk or medicated to say “no” or otherwise unable to consent
- Overpowering you physically
- Not taking “no” for an answer
- Manipulating you or tricking you by not telling the truth
- Implying that something worse will happen if you don’t give in (e.g., placed in a nursing home)

Reactions to Sexual Assault

A person may experience a few, many or none of the following emotions and behaviors after a sexual assault. There is no “typical” way to respond to sexual violence.

- Depression
- Shock, disorientation and difficulty concentrating
- Unwanted and/or intrusive memories and flashbacks
- Being afraid and on guard
- Anger
- Self-blame/guilt and shame
- Suicidal thoughts
- Emotional withdrawal/numbness
- Negative beliefs about self, family, friends and the future
- Problems with relationships
- Sleep disturbances/nightmares
- Physical symptoms (stomach aches, migraines, etc.)
- Problematic coping behaviors (avoidance of memories, denial, alcohol/drug abuse, etc.)

Trauma caused by sexual violence may worsen conditions related to a person’s disability (e.g., a person with a disability that affects speech may find that emotional distress makes it more difficult to communicate with others). A disability may also influence a person’s sense of safety after an assault (e.g., a physical disability may make it difficult to quickly flee a situation if needed).

If You Are Sexually Assaulted . . .

- Go to a safe place, if possible. If you are in danger, call 911.
- Tell someone about the assault—a family member, friend, caregiver, service provider or other trusted individual. Call the local rape crisis center; a victim advocate is trained to help you understand your medical and legal options and provide emotional support. The advocate can also assist you in identifying accommodations you might need to access services.
- Go to a hospital emergency department for a medical exam. You may have suffered injuries, contracted a sexually transmitted infection or become pregnant. Discuss with hospital staff what accommodations you might need to be comfortable during an exam.
- Forensic evidence may be on your body and clothing that can assist with case investigation and prosecution. To preserve this evidence until it can be collected at the hospital, do not bathe, change your clothes, comb your hair, urinate or douche. If you cannot wait to urinate until arrival at the medical facility and you suspect you were drugged, save your first urine in a clean container and take it with you to the hospital for drug testing. If you have already changed clothes, put the clothes you wore during the assault in a paper bag and take them with you to the hospital.

If Someone You Know Has Been Sexually Assaulted . . .

- Encourage them to talk. Listen without judging.
- Tell them you believe them, no one deserves to be sexually assaulted and it is not their fault.
- Ask if they are safe. If there is imminent danger, call 911.
- Offer to go to the hospital with them. Even days or weeks after an assault, medical care may be needed.
- Give them contact information for the local rape crisis center.
- Support their right to make their own decisions (e.g., about reporting the crime or seeking help), to the extent possible.
- Ask if they need any accommodations to access help.
- Do not tell others without their permission unless you are a mandatory reporter. If you are, and the situation meets the mandatory reporting requirements of suspected abuse, neglect or an emergency situation involving an adult who is incapacitated or a minor, contact your local Department of Health and Human Resources or call 800-352-6513 (24-hour hotline).