



**Know That By Surviving,  
You Did Everything Right!**

**24/7 Help  
from Rape Crisis Centers**

Advocates from rape crisis centers provide victims with free and confidential information, referrals and emotional support. They can help victims identify any immediate and longer-term concerns related to their health and safety.

Advocates support victims at the hospital during a forensic medical exam and during any criminal justice proceedings. An advocate's role is to provide information so victims can make informed decisions. Advocates then support victims in those decisions and connect them with other services as needed. West Virginia's rape crisis centers each serve a region of the state and can be accessed through their local numbers or through the

**National Sexual Assault Hotline at  
1-800-656-HOPE.**

**Call your local rape crisis center.  
Someone is waiting to listen and help.**

**CONTACT Huntington  
Rape Crisis Counseling**  
Huntington ■ 1-866-399-7273

**Family Refuge Center**  
Lewisburg ■ 304-645-6334

**HOPE, Inc.**  
Fairmont ■ 304-367-1100

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

**REACH  
The 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

Or

**The National Sexual Assault Hotline**  
1-800-656-HOPE

**West Virginia Foundation for Rape  
Information and Services, Inc.**  
www.fris.org



**What  
Sexual Assault Victims  
Need  
to  
Know**



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

www.fris.org

This document was printed with financial assistance as a grant from the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources and supported by Grant Number 2007-WVR-AX-0012 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, US Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women or the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources.

## If You've Been Sexually Assaulted

- Go to a **safe place**. If in imminent danger call 911.
- Get **immediate support**, information and referrals. Call your local rape crisis center.
- Seek **medical attention** for health concerns or injuries. Note that not all injuries may be visible. Hospitals can provide emergency contraception and information and treatment for possible sexually transmitted infections.
- A **forensic medical examination** can be conducted to assess medical issues and/or collect potential evidence.
- **Preserve evidence**. If the assault was recent, do not change clothing, shower, urinate, brush hair or teeth or touch anything where the assault occurred.
- Consider **reporting the assault to the police**. You can have a forensic medical exam even if you do not report (if you are not a minor).
- **Seek counseling and ongoing support**. Plan for your ongoing safety. The local rape crisis center can help.

## Sexual Assault and Sexual Abuse

West Virginia law has two main categories of sex offenses.

- Sexual abuse occurs when a person subjects another person to sexual contact without their consent, and that lack of consent is due to physical force, threat or intimidation.
- Sexual assault is vaginal, anal or oral penetration of a person's body by an object or any part of another person's body. The key element in any sex offense is the lack of consent to the sexual activity. The lack of consent is due to force, physical helplessness (which could include being drunk or drugged) or mental incapacitation. West Virginia law also addresses age limitations to consent to sexual intercourse.

Sexual assault can include:

- Rape
- Forcible sodomy
- Forcible object penetration
- Incest (sexual contact between family members)

## What You Need to Know

**Most sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim** (a friend, date, classmate, neighbor or relative) rather than a stranger.

**West Virginia has no statute of limitations on reporting sexual assault.** This means that even 20 years from now a sexual assault can be reported.

West Virginia law allows for victims (who are not minors) to go to a medical facility and **have forensic evidence collected without reporting the crime to the police**. The evidence will be stored for up to two years to give victims time to consider reporting the crime. Consider this as an option, since evidence can only be collected within 96 hours after the assault. Doing this gives you the option of reporting later since your feelings and circumstances may change.

The cost for collecting the evidence is paid by the state. **Expenses incurred from the assault may be eligible for reimbursement from the state's Crime Victims Compensation Fund** if the assault is reported to law enforcement within 96 hours. Rape crisis center advocates can assist with that process.

Many sex offenders use alcohol and drugs to lower their victims' inhibitions and limit their ability to identify and respond to warning signs of sexual violence. Offenders also target individuals who are already using alcohol or drugs. **West Virginia law clearly states that someone who is drunk cannot consent to sex.**

The risk for contracting HIV from a sexual assault is less than 3% (CDC, 2006). Research shows that the pregnancy risk is less than 5% (Holmes, 1996; Wilcox, 2001). Preventive medications are available.

**Legal protection may be available.** A protective order through magistrate court provides protection to victims when the offender is an acquaintance or stranger (through a Personal Safety Order) or when the offender is an intimate partner, family or household member (through a Domestic Violence Protective Order). Rape crisis center advocates can assist in filing protective orders.



## What You Might Experience After the Assault

Everyone reacts differently to a traumatic event. Each individual is unique, with different experiences, coping strategies, and support systems. Other survivors of sexual assault have reported experiencing some of the following reactions:

- Denial
- Guilt, shame and self-blame
- Fear and lack of trust of people
- Lack of energy
- Feeling a loss of control
- Substance abuse
- Grief, sadness and depression
- Anger and irritability
- Shock, disorientation or difficulty concentrating
- Memory loss or flashbacks
- Problems with sleeping or eating
- Openly emotional or emotional numbness
- Thoughts of death or suicide

## Healing From Trauma Takes Time

If you have been sexually assaulted, a rape crisis center advocate can help you understand traumatic reactions caused by sexual violence. A rape crisis center offers free counseling and other support, whether it is immediately following an assault or months or years later.

Be kind to yourself and take care of you.

- Eat a healthy diet.
- Exercise to help relieve stress.
- Get adequate sleep.
- Take time for activities you enjoy.
- Listen to your body. If something doesn't feel right, contact your doctor.
- Get counseling for emotional trauma.
- Consider using journaling to express your emotions.
- Surround yourself with positive, supportive people.
- Be patient. Healing from trauma takes time.