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Reduce Your Risk

As with any violent crime, there's nothing you can do to guarantee that you will not be a victim of sexual violence. But there are steps you can take to help reduce your risk of being assaulted.

Who are the Offenders?

- It is not always the stranger hiding in the bushes. In fact, approximately two-thirds of victims know their perpetrators. It could be a social acquaintance, friend, neighbor, family member, coach, etc.
- Many rapists show no evidence of psychological disturbance. Most are in control of their behavior and know it is illegal.

Avoid Dangerous Situations

- **Be aware** of your surroundings. Knowing where you are and who is around you may help you to find a way to get out of a bad situation. Learn a well-lit route back to your place of residence and avoid putting headphones in both ears, especially if you are walking alone.
- Try to **avoid isolated areas and becoming isolated with someone you don't trust or someone you don't know well**. It is more difficult to get help if no one is around.
- **Walk with purpose**. Even if you don't know where you are going, act like you do. **Try not to load yourself down** with packages or bags as this can make you appear more vulnerable.
- **Trust your instincts**. If a situation or location feels unsafe or uncomfortable, it probably isn't the best place to be.
- **Make sure your cell phone is with you** and charged and that you have cash money.

In a Social Situation

- **When you go to a party, go with a group of friends**. Arrive together, check in with each other and leave together.
- **Practice safe drinking**. If someone offers to get you a drink from the bar at a club or party, go with them to the bar to order it, watch it being poured, and carry it yourself. Don't drink from punch bowls or other large, common open containers. Don't leave your drink unattended while talking, dancing, using the restroom, or making a phone call. Watch out for your friends, and vice versa.
- **Have a buddy system**. Don't be afraid to let a friend know if something is making you uncomfortable or if you are worried about your or your friend's safety.
- If someone you don't know or trust asks you to go somewhere alone, let him or her know that you would rather **stay with the group**.
- **Be aware** of your surroundings. Knowing where you are and who is around you may help you to find a way out of a bad situation.

If You Are Being Pressured

- **Be true to yourself**. Do what feels right to you and what you are comfortable with. **Don't feel obligated** to do anything you don't want to. "I don't want to" is always a good enough reason.
- **Have a code word with your friends or family** so that if you feel threatened you can call them and communicate your discomfort without the person you are with knowing.
- **Lie**. If you don't want to hurt the person's feelings it is better to lie and make up a reason to leave than to stay and be uncomfortable, scared, or worse.

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- Try to **think of an escape route**. How would you try to get out of the room? Where are the doors? Windows? Are there people around who might be able to help you? Is there an emergency phone nearby?
- If you and/or the other person have been drinking, you can say that you would rather **wait until you both have your full judgment**.

Online Safety

- **Never give out any personal information** when you are online. If you post details about your life, people may be able to figure out your full name, where you work or go to school, and even where you live. Use privacy settings on MySpace, Facebook, and blog sites so only people you trust can read your personal info.
- If you decide to meet up with someone you meet online (assuming that you're of legal age), **take sensible precautions**. Take a friend with you, meet in a public place and make sure someone knows where you are going and when you will be back.
- If you don't already use up-to-date anti-virus and anti-spyware programs in order to keep your computer safer, we recommend that you either **buy or download a free program that will help to protect you and your computer**.
- If you have any reason to think that your computer may not be safe due to spyware, keystroke logging, viruses, or someone monitoring your computer usage in some other way, please **consider using an alternate computer**. **If you can't borrow a friend's, you may be able to access a free computer at your local [public library](#) or [local community center](#).**
- **Avoid websites with which you are unfamiliar**. If you feel uncomfortable, log off.

Travel Safety

- If you are **walking**— remain mentally alert, carry a small noisemaker (like a whistle) and/or flashlight on your keychain, take major streets and paths rather than less-populated shortcuts, keep some change accessible just in case you need to use a pay phone
- While in the **car**— keep your doors locked, have extra car necessities (oil, jumper cables, etc.), try not to wait until the last minute to fill your gas tank, plan your route before you start driving
- When taking a **cab**— if possible, talk to someone on your cell while you are in the cab to let him or her know where you are until you reach your home
- When riding the **bus or subway**— consult a schedule to avoid waiting for a long time at a stop, use the busiest and best-lit stop possible, tell the driver or use the emergency signal if someone is bothering you

Protecting your Child

- Abusers will sometimes tell a child that the abuse is a secret. **Talking openly and directly about abuse-related issues** teaches children that it is okay to talk to you when they have questions.
- **Teach children that it is not ok to be touched if they do not want to be touched — Â whether it's by a stranger or someone they know or trust**. Let children know that other people should not be touching them, and if such a situation does occur, the child should tell a trusted adult as soon as possible.
- Ask your child about the people they go to school with or play with; **get to know the other parents and adults around your child**.
- **Create a code word** so that if your child feels uncomfortable for any reason, they can indicate discomfort or fear discretely.

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- **Role-play:** Practice with your child about what to say and what to do in an uncomfortable situation. You may even try role-playing, so that they know what to do if they are uncomfortable.
- **Talk about the media.** If your child watches a lot of television or plays video games, watch or play with them. Use examples from TV or games that you have watched or played together to start conversations about sexuality and sexual abuse.
- **Make time to spend with your child.** If your child comes to you with concerns or questions, make time to talk to them.

Intervening to Help a Friend

- If you see someone in danger of being assaulted, step in and offer assistance or create a diversion (ex. spill a drink, cut in on a dance, or interrupt the conversation) to make it easier for the prospective victim to walk away. **NOTE:** Before stepping in, make sure to evaluate the risk. If it means putting yourself in danger, call 911 instead.
- There is evidence that the mere presence of bystanders reduces crime and that criminals try to avoid being observed while committing crimes. If you are witnessing an uncomfortable situation, don't leave the room and keep your eyes indirectly on the interaction.
- If you believe someone is dangerously intoxicated or has been drugged, do not leave them alone for any reason, get them immediate medical attention, and keep their beverage for drug testing.
- If someone you know has been assaulted, **listen, be there, encourage your friend to report the crime** to law enforcement (call 911 in most areas), and let them know that professional help is available at this website or by calling us at 1.800.656.HOPE (press ONE at the menu).
- Become knowledgeable about the issue and **share your knowledge with others.** Let friends know what to look for in a potential offender and how to react if ever in a dangerous situation.

Sexual assault is a crime of motive and opportunity. Ultimately, there is no surefire way to prevent an attack. If you or someone you know has been affected by sexual violence, it's not your fault. You are not alone. We are available 24/7 to help you — just call us at 1.800.656.HOPE (press ONE at the menu). You can also get live help through the [Online Hotline](#).

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