

## what is relationship violence?

Violence in relationships is any pattern of behavior used to coerce, dominate, or isolate one's intimate partner, ex-partner, or family member. **It can involve physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse.** Relationship violence typically cycles: from a *tension-building period* (abused partner works harder to avoid escalation of conflict, anxiety increases), to an *explosive period* (physical, sexual, verbal assaults), to a *honeymoon period* (violent partner apologies, promises never to do it again, showers the abused partner with affection). Because of the isolation, fear, and denial that often accompany an abusive relationship, it can be very difficult for an abused partner to leave a relationship.

### Legal Definitions:

Maryland law defines partner violence as involving "deliberate physical injury" or the "fear of imminent deliberate physical injury." The University Code of Student Conduct forbids "intentionally or recklessly causing physical harm to any person on University premises or at University-sponsored activities, or intentionally or recklessly causing reasonable apprehension of such harm."

## issues of race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status

Individuals with less power/status in their families and cultures may risk loss of social support and additional physical or psychological harm as a result of reporting sexual assault or relationship violence. They also may find it difficult or threatening to access available resources. It is critical that family members, friends, colleagues, and service providers be sensitive to these issues as they support victims/survivors.

## not just a women's issue

In recent years, men's groups and individual men, recognizing the high personal and societal costs of sexual and relationship violence, have become active in sexual assault and relationship violence prevention work. Only through the joint efforts of men and women will it be possible to stop these crimes. (See resources: Education/Prevention)

## a word about self-blame

While it is important for individuals to take responsibility for protecting themselves, it is critical to note that errors in judgment (e.g., not sizing someone up accurately, getting drunk) or the failure to stop an attack are NOT the CAUSES of assault or abuse. Persons who assault or abuse other individuals are legally responsible for their actions, even if they themselves are under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

## warning signs of a potential abuser may include

- pushes for romantic involvement/exclusive commitment almost immediately
- calls/emails constantly or visits unexpectedly
- expects partner to be perfect, obedient, and dependent
- isolates partner from friends and family
- blames others for his/her problems or feelings
- constantly criticizes, uses demeaning language, or curses at partner
- switches moods suddenly (e.g., from sweet to violent in minutes)
- uses force during sex
- threatens violence and then denies the threats
- admits to violence in past relationship, but blames ex-partner

## what to do if you think you are in an abusive or controlling relationship

**1. Talk with a friend, counselor, staff member, or the Victim Advocate.** It can be difficult to recognize an unhealthy relationship if you're inside it. Getting other perspectives can help if you're having some concerns or need support.

### 2. Make a safety plan.

Plan what you will do if your abuser becomes verbally or physically violent, or tries to make unwanted contact with you. Inform others about your situation.

**3. Report the violence to the Police or the Office of Judicial Programs.** (See what to do if you think you have been sexually assaulted: #5)

### 4. Get an order of protection.

A protective order/peace order can be obtained 24-hours/day at your local courthouse (e.g., Hyattsville). This order requires the abuser to cease contact and to stay away from where you live/work/attend school. The decision to obtain an order should be weighed against the possibility of increased danger to yourself as a result of making the report.

### 5. During an attack:

Defend yourself if you can, scream for help repeatedly, get away to a safe place, and call 911.

### 6. After an attack:

Seek medical attention immediately. Tell medical staff what happened and ask to have pictures taken of any injuries. Save any evidence of the violent behavior. Seek counseling.

## common reactions to sexual assault and relationship violence trauma

Individuals who undergo traumatic events or ongoing violence in their lives experience various emotional, physical, and cognitive reactions. These reactions sometimes occur in stages. Symptoms may last for short periods of time and then resolve, or they may become more chronic (e.g., as in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD).

### Typical Symptoms Include:

- shock ● numbness ● disbelief ● fear ● anger ● shame ● phobic avoidance of places or things associated with the trauma ● wanting to get on with life and forget the event(s) ● flashbacks ● sleep disturbances ● heightened startle responses ● trouble concentrating or remembering
- depressed mood and/or dramatic mood swings ● withdrawal from relationships ● health problems ● changes in eating patterns.

## healing from trauma

The mind and body integrate traumatic memories in order to heal. Unprocessed traumatic experiences can manifest for some individuals in physical, cognitive, and emotional symptoms up to months or years later. **Treatment options include:** cognitive-behavioral strategies, individual counseling, support groups, medications, and holistic bodywork. Later in the healing process, some survivors find it empowering to engage in advocacy and prevention work.

Sources: Barnes, *American Bar Association Journal* (February 1998); Koss, M.P. (1988). *Hidden Rape: Incidence, Prevalence and Descriptive Characteristics of Sexual Aggression and Victimization in a National Sample of College Students*; *Project for Victims of Family Violence, Fayetteville, Arkansas*; *University Health Services Tang Center, UC Berkeley*.

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## what to do if someone you care about has experienced sexual assault or relationship violence

1. Listen to the victim/survivor and take what s/he says seriously.
2. Reassure the person that the assault or violence was not her/his fault.
3. If you want to touch or hug the victim/survivor to show support, ask first.
4. Don't judge or ask questions that could be interpreted as blaming, such as "Why didn't you fight back?" or "How can you stay in that relationship?"
5. Don't press for details. Allow the person to share information when s/he is ready.
6. Encourage the victim/survivor to get help and volunteer to go with her/him.
7. Respect the person's right to make her/his own decision about whether to report the assault/the abuse.
8. Maintain confidentiality.
9. Offer to accompany the victim/survivor to classes, meals, parking lots, social gatherings, etc.
10. Get support for yourself. Hearing about or witnessing events that are hurtful to those for whom we care also can produce posttraumatic symptoms.

# sexual assault

# relationship violence



## resources

### Crisis Response

- Victim Advocate / Sexual Assault & Relationship Violence InfoLine (301-314-2222)
  - ~ information, referrals, support through reporting process
- Local Police (911)
- Department of Public Safety (emergency: 301-405-3333)
  - ~ crime-reporting, threat assessments for relationship violence/stalking
- Resident Life (contact residence hall service desk)
- HELP Center (301-314-HELP)
  - ~ peer counseling and referrals
- DC Rape Crisis Center (202-333-RAPE)
- Montgomery County Crisis Center: Victim Assistance Sexual Assault Crisis Line (240-777-4357)
- Rape, Abuse and Incest Network: RAINN (800-656-HOPE)
- PG County Family Crisis Center Hotline (301-731-1203)

### Medical

- PG Hospital Center: Sexual Assault Center (301-618-3154)
  - ~ 24-hour medical care, official evidence collection by forensic nurse examiners, counseling services
- University Health Center
  - ~ Urgent Care (301-314-8161)
  - ~ Women's Health Clinic (301-314-8190)
    - follow-up medical care, STD/pregnancy testing, emergency contraception
  - ~ HIV testing/counseling (301-314-8128)

### Counseling/Mental Health

- Mental Health Service, University Health Center (301-314-8106)
  - ~ individual counseling; psychiatric evaluation; survivor support group
- University Counseling Center, Shoemaker Building (301-314-7651)
  - ~ free individual, group, couples counseling; educational/psychological assessment; telephone consultation service
- Faculty/Staff Assistance Program, University Health Center (301-314-8170/8099)
  - ~ free assessment, referrals, counseling
- Campus Chaplains (301-405-8450)

### Judicial/Legal

- Department of Public Safety (non-emergency: 301-405-3555)
- Office of Judicial Programs & Ethical Development, Mitchell Building (301-314-8204)
- Office of Human Relations Programs, Shriver Laboratory, East Entrance (301-405-2839)
  - ~ sexual harassment complaints, campus compliance officer

- Student Legal Aid Office, Stamp Union (301-314-7756)
  - ~ free legal consultation/referrals
- PG County District Court (Hyattsville: 301-699-2789/2651)
  - ~ filing of protective orders/peace orders
- Sexual Assault Legal Institute, Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (301-565-2277)
  - ~ free legal consultation/representation

### Education/Prevention

- Student Advocates for Education about Rape (SAFER): peer education programs (301-314-8227)
- Rape Aggression Defense (RAD) courses for women, Department of Public Safety (301-405-3555)
- Outreach presentations/workshops:
  - ~ Sexual Assault Prevention Coordinator (301-314-8227)
  - ~ Victim Advocate (301-314-2222)
  - ~ Mental Health Service, University Health Center (301-314-8106)
  - ~ University Counseling Center (301-314-7651)
  - ~ Office of Human Relations Programs (301-405-2839)
- Men Can Stop Rape (202-265-6530)
- Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault: MCASA (800-983-RAPE)
- Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (800-MD-HELPS)

### Academic

- consultation with faculty/staff re: academic consideration and accommodation for students
  - ~ Victim Advocate (301-314-2222)
  - ~ Mental Health Service, University Health Center (301-314-8106)
  - ~ University Counseling Center (301-314-7651)

### Selected Web Sites

#### Campus

- Victim Advocate [www.health.umd.edu/services/victimadvocate]
- Department of Public Safety [www.umpd.umd.edu]
- Office of Judicial Programs & Ethical Development [www.jpo.umd.edu]
- University Health Center [www.health.umd.edu]
- University Counseling Center [www.inform.umd.edu/CampusInfo/Departments/Counseling]

#### Off-Campus

- PG Hospital Center: Sexual Assault Center [www.dimensionshealth.org/pghc\_pro\_sac.shtml]
- Maryland State Law [www.lawlib.state.md.us/screens/mdgen.html]
- Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault [www.mcasa.org]
- Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence [www.mnadv.org]
- National Center for Victims of Crime [www.ncvc.org]

## introduction

Sexual assault and relationship violence are serious crimes. The University of Maryland is committed to educating the campus community about the nature and consequences of these offenses. University resources are dedicated for both prevention and response. These include educational outreach programs; medical, counseling, legal, judicial, and academic support services for victims/survivors; and judicial/law enforcement personnel who adjudicate cases in accordance with campus, state, and federal statutes. University sanctions for sexual or physical assault may include expulsion, suspension, and/or termination of employment. Criminal charges for these crimes may involve imprisonment.

## what to do if you think you have been sexually assaulted

### 1. Call 911 if you are in immediate danger.

Emergency telephones throughout campus are identified by a blue light.

### 2. Get to a safe place.

After an assault, you may be in a state of shock. Wrap yourself in something warm. *To preserve evidence:* DO NOT bathe, eat/drink, smoke, brush your teeth or hair, urinate, or wash your clothing; put the clothes you were wearing into a paper (not plastic) bag.

### 3. Call someone you trust.

Receiving comfort and support helps restore a sense of safety and contributes to better decision-making.

### 4. Seek medical attention.

You may have injuries of which you're unaware; you also should get tested for sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy (if applicable). A medical exam for *evidence collection (by a qualified forensic nurse examiner) is strongly recommended within 72 hours* if there is any possibility that you may want to file charges in the future (*See resources: PG Hospital Sexual Assault Center*).

### 5. Report the assault promptly.

Reporting an assault does not commit you to filing charges and you can decide at any time not to pursue the case. While it is important that perpetrators be held accountable and prevented from doing this to others, you should *never let anyone pressure you if you know you do not want to report*. If you do choose to report, ask a friend or the Victim Advocate to go with you for support.

#### Reporting Options:

- a) Campus or Local Police: You can ask for a male or female officer.
- b) Office of Judicial Programs and Student Ethical Conduct: to file a complaint against a University student
- c) Anonymous report through Victim Advocate office

### 6. Talk with a counselor.

Working with a counselor can speed recovery and help you manage posttraumatic symptoms.

### 7. Take care of yourself.

Rest, eat well, seek social support, and engage in activities that are healing for you/your body.

## what is sexual assault?

Sexual assault is a fundamental violation of a person's right to control his or her own body; it takes away an individual's ability to make a sexual choice.

The University recognizes two levels of sexual assault:

#### Sexual Assault I:

any act of rape, forcible sodomy, or forcible sexual penetration, however slight, of another person's anal or genital opening with any object by a stranger or acquaintance.

#### Sexual Assault II:

any act, by a stranger or acquaintance, of touching an unwilling person's intimate parts (defined as genitalia, groin, breast, or buttocks or clothing covering them) or of forcing an unwilling person to touch another's intimate parts.

These acts must be committed by force, threat, or intimidation or through the use of the victim's mental or physical helplessness of which the accused was aware or *should* have been aware.

(*See resources: Selected Web Sites for Maryland state law re: rape/sex offenses*).

## please remember

• Sexual assault and relationship violence are widespread—but widely underreported—in communities of every race, culture, religion, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class.

• “Acquaintance rape” and “date rape” are just as serious as sexual assaults committed by strangers.

• An individual incapacitated by alcohol or drugs cannot legally give consent; the legal responsibility for sexual or physical assault rests completely with the assailant.

• Men can be victims of sexual assault and relationship violence; women can be perpetrators of these crimes; and sexual assaults and relationship violence can occur when the assailant is the same sex as the victim.

• Victims/survivors of *attempted* sexual assaults/physical violence are entitled to the same legal, emotional, and medical resources.