



Sugati Publications Product 6--Booklet
Coping with Sexual Assault, For Teens (41 pages)

A Guide for Teens (and Their Parents)

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What are the ways someone can ‘force’ you to have sex?

Most sexual assaults involve some type of force, but force does not always mean physical violence (such as hitting or using a weapon). Force can happen in many different ways. Here are some ways someone can ‘force’ you into sex without using a weapon or physical violence:

- ❖ Using threats to scare or intimidate you.
- ❖ Manipulating or tricking you by not telling the truth or leading you on.
- ❖ Overpowering you physically because their body size is so much larger.
- ❖ Giving you alcohol or other drugs to impact your judgment or your memory.
- ❖ Using their power over you to make you agree even if you don’t want to do it.
- ❖ Using their position of authority and trust (e.g., a teacher, doctor, coach or priest) to get you to agree to do something sexual with them.

Taking advantage of someone is another type of force used in sexual assaults.

Most sexual assaults happen between people who know each other, not between strangers.

Sexual assault or abuse can happen in relationships that you would least expect it. This could be someone you know or trust. It can happen in any type of relationship, including:

- ❖ friends, classmates or co-workers
- ❖ boyfriends and girlfriends
- ❖ internet friends and contacts
- ❖ teachers and students
- ❖ coaches and athletes
- ❖ religious leaders and parishioners
- ❖ doctors and patients
- ❖ parents and children or between other family members

A message to parents if your teen has been sexually abused

It can be very difficult and painful for parents when they find out that their child has been sexually assaulted, abused by an adult, or involved in an abusive dating relationship. You will probably experience many different feelings and concerns. You might feel: angry, hurt, betrayed, ashamed, powerless, guilty, confused, afraid or numb. You will probably react to what happened much differently than your teen. As the adult, your role and responsibilities will be focused on the best interest of your minor child, but your teen will have other ideas about what they want or need. The following are some suggestions on how you might help your daughter or son through this difficult time. Find what works best for you and for your child and be prepared for some ups and downs along the way.

Remember to take care of yourself too. Coping with this type of trauma can affect you in ways that you never expected. This is a crisis for you as well. Be gentle with yourself and take the time to take care of your needs. Seek counseling if you need some extra support—regardless of whether or not your child wants counseling, it's still an option for you.

Believe your child. It's hard enough for teens to talk about such issues, especially to their parents. It is encouraging that your teenager has confided in you. Don't doubt your daughter or son when you find out this has happened. Let them know you support them

Listen to your teen. Hear their concerns. Don't assume anything. Listen to what your teen needs or wants. Let them know that it's okay to talk to you about what happened—no matter what.

Be supportive and non-judging. No matter what your teen tells you about what happened, do not judge, blame or criticize them (even if your son or daughter was doing something they should not have been doing at the time of the assault e.g. drinking alcohol.) Your teen is probably feeling some shame and guilt anyway. Don't make it worse by criticizing or blaming. This is not the time to prove a point or teach a lesson.

Tell your teen that it wasn't his/her fault. Your child did not deserve to have this happen. No one ever deserves to be hurt in this way—not for any reason—ever.

Learn more about teen victimization and dating violence. If your teen was involved in an abusive relationship, it may be difficult to understand why he/she did not tell you sooner or leave the relationship. Understand that power and control are key factors in such relationships, where the victim often feels or has little power. The abuser is often in control and is to blame for what happened. However, your teen may still have feelings for the abuser or feel an emotional connection to him despite the hurt and psychological trauma. This is one of the reasons why it can be difficult for someone to leave an abusive relationship. Don't blame your child for not getting help sooner. Often teens will not tell their parents for fear of repercussions, getting punished or losing their privileges. Or, they don't think their parents will understand.

Educate yourself about the options and community resources. There are agencies in most communities that offer counseling or assistance with the criminal justice system (if the case goes to court). Contact the local rape crisis program, victim-witness program or crisis help line to get more information for yourself and your teen.

Give your teen information about their options and ask them what they want. As the parent, you can provide some important information about their options (getting medical care, making a police report, obtaining protective orders, etc.). Realize that your teen might not want to do what you think is best. If it involves issues of health and safety, you may need to intervene on their behalf however.

Be patient. Healing from sexual assault or an abusive relationship takes time. It may also take some time before your teen is ready to leave an abusive relationship. It may also take time before they are ready to talk to you about what happened.

Encourage your child to talk to a counselor. Sometimes it's hard for teens to talk to their parents, no matter how close they are to the family. These are difficult and very personal issues. Recommend your teen speak with a professional counselor or a school counselor. Or, give them the number to the local crisis line as another option.

If your teen talks about suicide, take them seriously. Let your son or daughter know that you care enough to get help. Then do it--right away. Contact a local 24-hour crisis help line, or the Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network helpline at 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) or tell your teen's counselor about your concerns. Take it seriously--act quickly. You could save your child's life.

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