

Important Numbers for Help (Always dial 9 first from on-campus phones)

Emergency 911

Heidelberg University Counseling - (419) 448-2041

Heidelberg University Security - (419) 448-2211

Heidelberg University Dean of Student Affairs - (419) 448-2062

Tiffin City Prosecutor's Victim Assistance Program - (419) 448-5413

Seneca County Prosecutor's Victim Assistance Program – (419) 448-5070

Firelands Counseling and Recovery Services - (419) 448-9440

Seneca County Job and Family Services - (419) 447-5011

Mercy Tiffin Hospital - (419) 447-3130

Seneca Community Chaplain Corps – (419) 618-0165

First Call for Help - (419) 448-4357

[Click here for the University Sex Discrimination Policy](#)

What to Do If You Have Been Sexually Assaulted

Disclaimer: We acknowledge that there are many different words that individuals use to describe themselves after experiencing sexual assault. In this article we use the term "survivor" for the sake of consistency. We acknowledge that there are many different ways of processing sexual violence, and believe each individual person should choose the language that they are most comfortable with.

Defining Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is defined as any nonconsensual sexual contact involving force upon a person without consent.¹ Assault does not have to be penetrative: it includes both fondling and molestation.⁶ Sexual assault is considered rape when it involves oral, anal, or vaginal penetration.⁶ The contact is also illegal if inflicted upon a person who is incapable of giving consent, because of age, physical incapacity, or mental incapacity.¹ A person may experience sexual assault from a friend, romantic partner, or family member, but regardless of relation, unwanted sexual contact is not okay. Consent should be very clear in a sexual encounter. If the person you are with does not obtain an enthusiastic yes, there is no consent. Silence cannot be considered consent in any situation. About two thirds of survivors know their attacker, and few attacks occur from complete strangers.³ If you think you may have been sexually assaulted and you're not sure what to do, you can begin by reading this article.

Immediately After the Assault

If possible, go to a friend's house, an open restaurant, or a well-lit, public location. We encourage you to consider calling the police at this stage, because the earlier you report the assault, the more likely authorities are to catch the attacker. If you want to call a friend or loved one, go ahead. Take however long you need to tell them the full story. Request that they come and stay with you, or consider asking to stay with them if that makes you feel safer or at ease. If you find yourself in shock, continue to breathe deeply until you are able to process your thoughts. You don't need to make any immediate

decisions about reporting the crime or pressing charges, but remember that sexual assault and rape are serious crimes that are punishable by law.

Go to the Emergency Room

A trip to the emergency room may be emotionally difficult, especially after the trauma of a sexual assault, but we highly recommend you make the visit. Evidence can be collected, internal and external injuries can be assessed, sexually transmitted infections can be treated, and any possibility of pregnancy can be eliminated.³ If you don't want to talk to a counselor at the hospital when you visit the ER, you don't have to. An ER professional will also collect any semen left in the vagina or anus, look for clothing fibers, soil, or grass from the scene of the crime, and take clippings of your fingernails to examine any possible residue from your attacker or the scene.² The evidence is marked, stored, and can be accessed if you choose to prosecute the attacker.

Deciding to Report the Crime

Regardless of whether you decide to report the crime, you should seriously consider going to the emergency room, or asking a friend or loved one to escort you there, as soon as possible after the assault. Some survivors fear being judged by ER staff, or fear that others will find out about the assault from their visit. Remember, medical professionals are there to help you. Even if you feel shame, guilt, or if you are simply still in shock from the assault, try your best to be seen in the emergency room. ER staff will perform a forensic medical exam, also known as a "rape kit," which will collect possible evidence against the perpetrator. We understand the urge to wash off the remains of the assault, but do not to bathe or shower, brush your hair, douche, or change your clothes or shoes before you arrive at the emergency room.² The exam includes vaginal and/or anal inspection and blood tests, and emergency contraception may be prescribed if a possibility of pregnancy is suspected.²

You are not legally obligated to report the crime, as we mentioned above. It is entirely your decision.³ Many victims say that reporting is the very last thing that they want to do after being attacked, and this is understandable.³ Just over half of rape victims don't report the crime.³ Reporting of sexual assault has increased substantially in the last decade. We hope that survivors report their assaults, because sexual assault is wrong and attackers should be punished for their actions. However, we understand how difficult it can be. If you do not feel like you can report the crime immediately, we encourage you to write down as many details as you can remember about the assault, as soon as possible. As traumatic as the experience of writing these things down can be, the details could also serve as evidence or a statement to the police in the future. If you aren't comfortable doing this alone, ask a friend to write down the story for you, or consider seeing a counselor or other support figure. Writing down the details of the attack may be difficult, but some survivors find it cathartic.

About two thirds of survivors know their attacker, and you may know or even be friends with your attacker.³ This may deter you from reporting them in fear that they will be angry with you. If you are worried, call your local rape crisis center, and take shelter with a friend or loved one. Many survivors of sexual assault choose to wait to report it, using the evidence collected with the rape kit at the ER to

press charges months later. There is no time limit, and no law that keeps you from reporting your attack even months after it occurred.³

If you do want to report the sexual assault to police, call 911 or your local emergency services number, or ask a friend to call. A doctor at the emergency room can also call for you. You can report sexual assault to the police even if you have no physical injuries. If the attacker attempted sexual assault, and then fled before finishing the attack, you can still report it.³ Once you report the crime a police officer will visit you and take your statement.³ Police will also collect physical evidence, and refer to evidence from the ER visit such as hair, fluids, and fibers. The interview may take several hours, and some questions will likely be difficult to answer.³ Be prepared to provide extensive details of the event, and to repeat your statements. It's not that the police don't believe you—it's that they need as much information as possible to make the best possible case against the perpetrator.³ You do not need to attend the interview alone. Ask a friend or trained volunteer from your local rape crisis center to go with you.

Don't Blame Yourself

Many survivors often feel guilt and shame after the attack. You may feel guilt in wondering if there is something that you could have done to prevent what happened, and if you feel shame, you may feel that you deserved what happened. Please try your best to avoid these thoughts. Guilt and shame only elongate your healing process, deepen the trauma, and perpetuate the myth that the victim is responsible for the perpetrator's actions. If you wish you had said "NO" aloud, or you wish you hadn't invited the person over, stop wishing. Remember that sexual activities without consent are sexual assaults. Regardless of what you said, did, wore, or what drugs or alcohol you consumed, it does not matter. If you would like to explore these feelings further, call your local rape crisis center and consider arranging to speak to a counselor there. Although scary at first, speaking with a professional who has an unbiased and outside perspective might be extremely helpful.

Short and Long-Term Healing

Some survivors of sexual assault face a long and complicated healing process, dealing with a number of different emotions in the coming months and years. Many survivors of sexual assault report feeling fear in the aftermath of the trauma.⁵ You may be afraid to be alone, outdoors, or around men or women in general. You may specifically fear seeing your assaulter again. Give yourself time, and don't expect to feel completely comfortable with anyone in the near future. You will begin to trust people again, but it may take the help of your friends, your loved ones, and/or a counselor. Flashbacks are unfortunately very common as well.⁵ If you experience a flashback, tell yourself that it is normal, and that you are in a safe place now. Feel for the space around you: the chair you're sitting in, the sounds of the people speaking in the next room.⁵ Recognize that you are not in the place where the assault took place. Take deep breaths, and if you are comfortable, call someone supportive who you can speak to. If the flashbacks continue, consider trying to re-associate the event with a different, positive memory. If you start to have a flashback, try to divert your focus to remembering a birthday party, a childhood memory, or a beautiful landscape view.

Anxiety is also reported by survivors of sexual trauma—many individuals feel “on-guard,” expecting an assault at any time.⁵ Other survivors feel panicked, which can be accompanied by physical symptoms (shortness of breath, sweat, or heart palpitations.) Others feel anger- against their assaulter, themselves, and others.⁵ As a survivor, you have every right to feel angry, but if you are lashing out at those who care about you, consider seeking further help from a counselor or supportive figure. Exercise, meditation, and deep, abdominal breathing are great ways to release negative feelings. Writing in a diary or journal about your life, your healing process, and your post-trauma self can also be extremely cathartic and helpful. Remember, however, that the sexual assault was not your fault.

References

1. "Sexual Assault." Merriam-Webster. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 25 Jan. 2015.
2. Larson, Nancy. "After Rape, Getting a Medical Exam Is Essential." About.com. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Jan. 2015.
3. "Reporting Rape | RAINN | Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network." Reporting Rape | RAINN | Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Jan. 2015.
4. "What To Do If You Are Raped | Rape Treatment Center." What To Do If You Are Raped | Rape Treatment Center. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Jan. 2015.
5. "Rape and Sexual Abuse Survivors Message Board and Chat Room - After Silence-Recovering -." Rape and Sexual Abuse Survivors Message Board and Chat Room - After Silence- Recovering -. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 Jan. 2015.
6. "What Is the Difference between Rape and Sexual Assault?" What Is the Difference between Rape and Sexual Assault? N.p., n.d. Web. 04 Feb. 2015.