

The Realities of Sexual Assault on Campus / BESTCOLLEGES.COM

Campus safety concerns all students, and one of the most disquieting dangers young adults must face is the risk of sexual assault. The White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault released their first report (<https://www.justice.gov/ovw/protecting-students-sexual-assault>) in April 2014, leading with a chilling statistic: **one in five college students experiences sexual assault during their college career.**



The ACLU estimates that 95% of U.S. campus rapes go unreported. The problem of under-reporting reflects an extreme need for increased campus prevention and support systems. The federal government has stepped up to the task. The Not Alone (<https://www.justice.gov/ovw/protecting-students-sexual-assault>) project, backed by President Obama and Vice President Biden, strives to break the silence about sexual violence on college campuses and reach out to provide victims with the supports and avenues they need to reclaim justice, security and a sense of well-being after an attack.

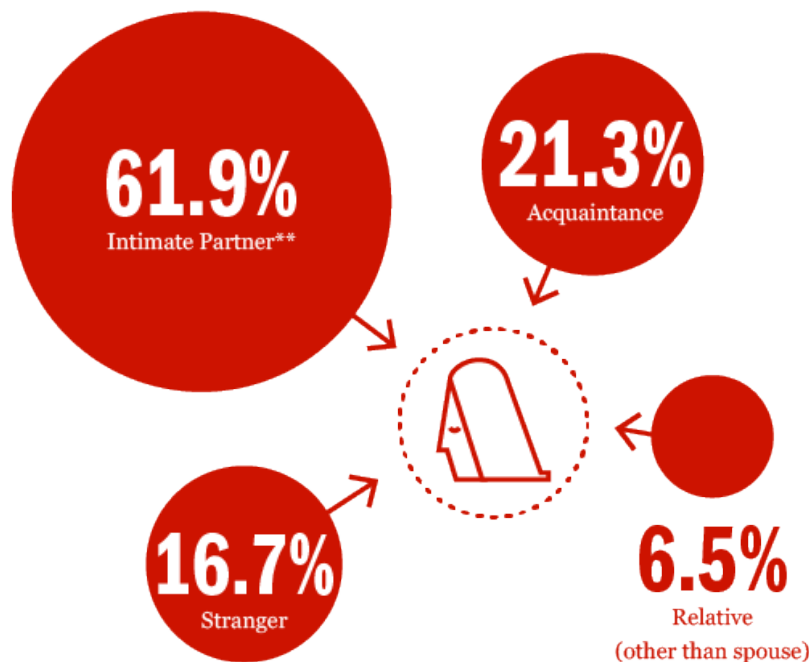
In the spirit of the Not Alone campaign, our guide aims to increase awareness about sexual assault and abusive partner relationships. We'll also address tactics to prevent attacks on campus and cover the immediate steps that should be taken if you or someone you know is victimized.

What is Sexual Assault?

Sexual assault is an umbrella term used to describe a wide range of forced and unwanted sexual activity, including kissing, exhibitionism, groping, and rape. Victims might be coerced into sexual acts through verbal or non-verbal threats or through the use of substances, such as alcohol or drugs. Sexual assault doesn't always involve physical contact – acts such as voyeurism and exhibitionism can still count as unwanted sexual attention.

Many victims know their assailant or rapist. Approximately two out of three sexual assaults are committed by an attacker that the victim knows, according to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) (<https://www.rainn.org/>). About 38% of rape incidents are committed by a friend or acquaintance of the victim. These trends are reinforced by Department of Justice (DOJ) statistics shown below, revealing that most attacks are perpetrated by someone close to or known by the victim.

Victim Perpetrator Relationship



**Total percentages exceed 100 because some victims had multiple assailants.*

***Intimate partners include current and former spouses, opposite-sex and same-sex cohabiting partners, boyfriends/girlfriends, and dates.*

Location and time can play a role in sexual assault and rape trends. The homes of victims or perpetrators are the most likely location of a rape or sexual assault, according to the DOJ report, (<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf>) which also identifies the summer as the peak season for attacks.

The majority of sexual assault incidents go unreported, partially due to different social stigmas experienced by men and women who are victims of these crimes. Survey results published by RAINN show that about 60% of victims do not go to police, and only 25% of reported assaults actually lead to an arrest. The National Institute of Justice (<https://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/rape-sexual-violence/Pages/rape-notification.aspx>) (NIJ) describes other factors that prevent women from reporting attacks, including distrust of authorities and fear of blame.

Men can also be victims, with about 10% of sexual assault incidents involving attacks against males (<https://www.rainn.org/articles/sexual-assault-men-and-boys>), according to statistics provided by the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault. The support organization, Male Survivor, describes how male victims face different types of stigma (<http://www.malesurvivor.org/facts/>) involving stereotypes of machismo, toughness, and a lack of vulnerability. These societal misconceptions can prevent men from reporting unwanted sexual activity.

Recognizing Abuse

College provides an environment for many students to explore intimate relationships with casual partners or serious relationships. In the confines of these relationships, however, inexperienced partners may not have the tools and experience needed to identify troubling behaviors. The earliest expressions of abuse aren't always physical. Controlling habits can begin with manipulative comments or angry outbursts either in-person or over phone, text or social media.

It is extremely important for young adults to be able to recognize warning signs of a problematic relationship, before an abusive situation escalates. The most common indicators of high-risk emotional or physical abuse are below:

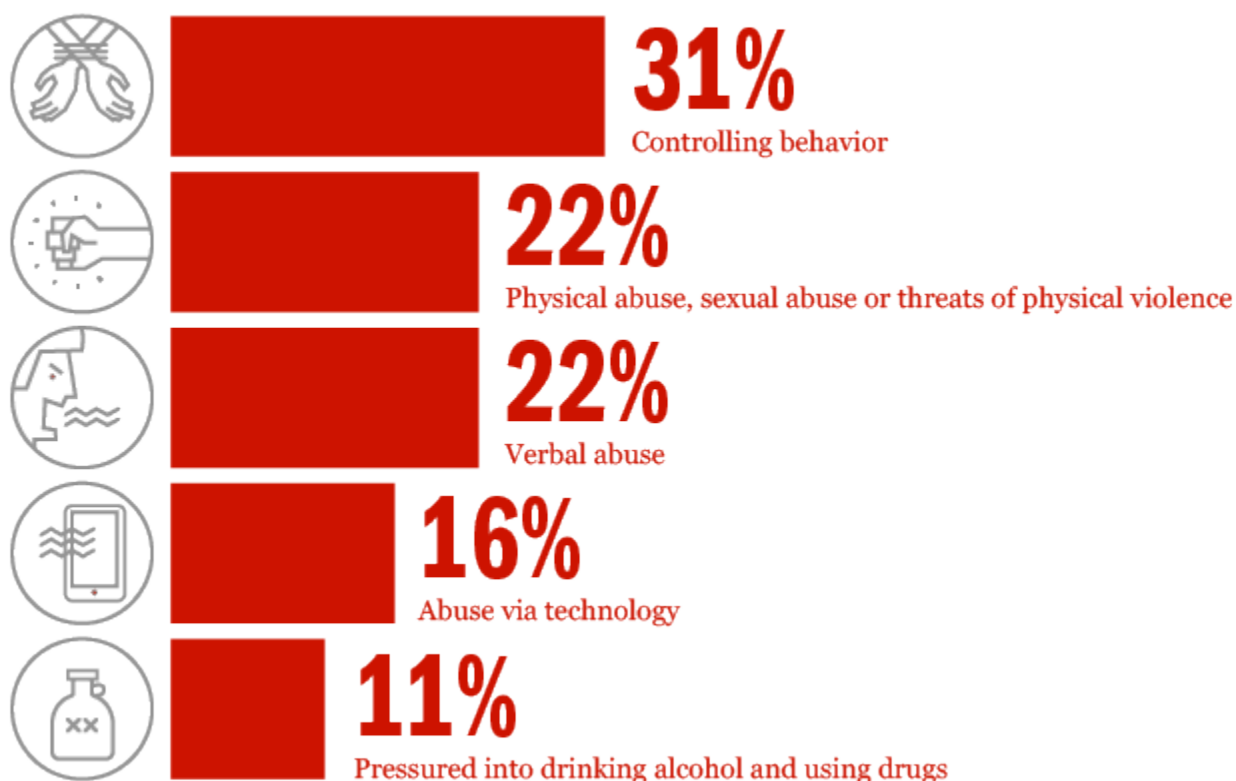
Emotional Abuse

- **Tone:** Seemingly harmless statements can transform into threats or insults if your partner uses a disparaging or aggressive tone.
- **Language choice:** A partner blames you for things or uses coarse language, such as swear words, while speaking to you.
- **Jealousy:** Your partner seems suspicious of your interactions with other people. Your partner attempts to control your interactions, isolate you, or monitor your communications with others.
- **Controlling statements:** Your partner issues commands or often says you “must” or “have to” do something.
- **Pejorative language:** Your partner addresses or describes you with insulting names or adjectives, such as “stupid” or “idiotic.”
- **Threats:** Your partner attempts to control you with “or else” statements or negative consequences if you don't comply with their wishes. Your partner might threaten you with physical, emotional, or verbal abuse.

Physical Abuse

- **Violence:** Your partner uses unwanted and forceful contact. This can include anything from wrist grabs to strikes against your body.
- **Threatening body language:** Your partner uses forceful movements, such as lunging toward you, glaring at you, or aggressively invading your personal space.
- **Damaging property:** Your partner has lost their temper and damaged items around the house, such as smashing dishes.
- **Violence during sex:** Your partner is extremely forceful or even violent during sex.

Accordinging surveys from the National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence (NCDSV) (<http://ncadv.org/learn-more/statistics>), over 40 percent of college women reported experiencing some form of violent or abusive behavior while dating:



Prevention

There are a number of ways to both reduce your chances of becoming a victim. For instance, a report by the National Institute of Justice (<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/211201.pdf>) reveals that self-protection actions such as weaponless attacking, running, hiding, getting help, or struggling seem to decrease the risk of rape completion by 80%. Many colleges offer personal development courses in basic self-defense. If you can't find one on campus, explore your local Y, nearby gyms, and dedicated martial arts studios to learn about their training options.

Basic Safety Guidelines

- Know your alcohol limits:** Over half of sexual assaults committed against college students involve alcohol (<https://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/supportingresearch/journal/journalstudiesalcohol.aspx>), according to researchers at Wayne State University. Intoxication can make you significantly more vulnerable to assaults by impairing your judgment or inhibiting your physical ability to fight off an attacker. Binge drinkers are at a particularly high-risk of suffering incapacitation, blackout or unconsciousness.

- **Watch your drinks:** Take your drink to the restroom with you. Never drink a beverage that has been given to you by someone else or taken from a communal alcohol source (like a punch bowl).
- **Trust your gut:** If you get a bad feeling about a location or a person, leave immediately. We often subconsciously process body language and other danger indicators without realizing it. If something feels very wrong or you feel pursued, head in the direction of the nearest crowd, lighted area or building. Start talking loudly on your phone. Many attackers are unwilling to pursue victims who are aggressive or loud, which draws attention to the crime.
- **Stick with your friends:** Attend social gatherings with a group of friends that you trust. Look out for each other and help each other arrive home safely. If you do go out alone, always tell someone where you are going and avoid walking in unlit or un-trafficked parts of town or campus.

Assault Prevention in Relationships

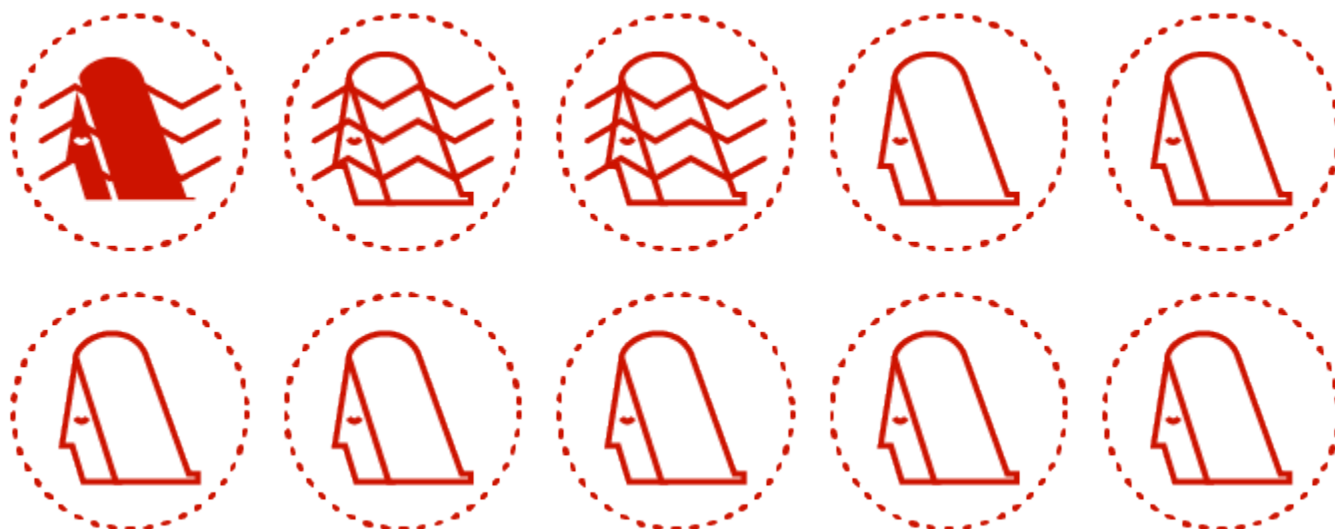
If you've identified that your partner exhibits the controlling or aggressive behaviors listed above and you are too afraid to bring these issues up safely within your relationship, it's time to get help. Victims often realize the dangers of their situation after it's too late; the dynamic between the abuser and abused is strategically created to discourage the victims to acknowledge or address the problem.

Intimate partner abuse and violence is never okay. It is more common than you may think and it is wholly within your power and your rights to get out safely.

- **Contact a support line:** If you're unsure how to get away from an abusive partner, contact a support hotline for assistance. Love Is Respect (<http://www.loveisrespect.org/for-yourself/contact-us/>) and the National Domestic Abuse Hotline (<http://www.thehotline.org/>) both provide 24/7 phone assistance.
- **Try not to blame yourself:** Self-blame is extremely common in abusive relationships. It can be easy to feel trapped in your situation. However, your partner's abusive actions are absolutely not your fault or a sign of weakness on your part. Keep this in mind as you seek help.
- **List safe places:** Know where you can go in case you need to get away from an abusive partner. This might include a campus counseling center, a trusted friends' dorm room, a survivors' shelter, or a residence hall staff office.
- **Document hostile communications:** It can be emotionally painful to save threatening messages that your partner sends. However, voice messages, emails, IMs, and other hostile communications can be immensely useful to demonstrate a history of assault when you speak with counselors or authorities.
- **Get counseling:** Virtually all college campuses have on-site counselors who are trained to help with relationship assault and domestic violence. If you can't find a way to contact a campus counselor directly, ask a residence advisor, professor, or academic advisor to help you explore these resources.
- **Call the police:** If you are being threatened with assault, attempt to reach a safe place and call the police immediately.

After an Assault

Unwanted sexual activity can take an immeasurable toll on the victim's physical and mental health. According to the Student Health Services Department (http://www.sc.edu/about/initiatives/safety/stop_sexual_assault/index.php) at the University of South Carolina, only 25-50% of survivors seek professional mental health help after a sexual assault. The emotional and physical scars of an assault can deeply impact a student's ability to cope with academic, social, and personal responsibilities. While asking for help may feel unbearable, you must take action to ensure your safety.



1 in 10 rape victims currently suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder; 3 in 10 will develop PTSD over their lifetime.

After an Assault: Immediate Steps

- **Get to a safe place:** Get away from your assailant to a location where you can call for help. Ideally, find a secure place where you aren't alone. This can include a campus health center, or the home of a nearby friend or family member.
- **Contact the authorities:** Call 911 to report the incident right away. Provide the dispatcher with the time, place, and description of your assailant. Wait for the police to arrive so that they can collect your statement.
- **Get medical attention:** Even if you do not feel like you need to, seek medical attention at a doctor's office, urgent care clinic or a hospital as soon as possible. Doctors can help collect vital evidence and treat your injuries directly after an assault. These are some of the specialized care options to ask for:
 - **Advocacy:** RAINN suggests calling the National Sexual Assault Hotline to request hospital referrals and check for the availability of an emergency advocate (<https://www.rainn.org/articles/steps-you-can-take-after-sexual-assault>), who can help you through the medical examination.

- **Sexual Assault Nurse / Forensic Examiner (SANE or SAFE):** These professionals are trained to conduct victim examinations, document injuries, and collect DNA evidence that can prove useful in identifying an assailant. Potential evidence includes hair, skin, and bodily fluid samples.
- **Emergency Contraception:** Victims can prevent the risk of pregnancy by taking Plan B up to 120 hours after an attack.
- **STD Testing:** Get screened for possible infections that can be transmitted during unwanted sexual contact.

To preserve evidence of threats or assault, RAINN (<https://www.rainn.org/>) advises victims to write down details about the attack and the attacker immediately. This information will help doctors, police and campus authorities do their utmost to help you in the hours and days after an attack. Do not change your clothes, shower, brush your teeth, or clean the scene of the crime until you can see a medical professional. If you think you may have been drugged, the Federal Office of Women's Health (<https://www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/date-rape-drugs.html>) advises you to ask for a urinalysis during your examination.

After an Assault: Moving Forward

- **Make safe arrangements:** If you live with an abusive partner, make arrangements with your dorm staff, a safe home, or friends to relocate to a new residence. To prevent future incidents, do not let your assailant know where you will be living.
- **Seek counseling:** Contact your campus health service office and inform them you need a crisis counselor who specializes in sexual assault. You can also contact the [National Sexual Assault Hotline](#) at 1-800-656-HOPE to speak with a counselor over the phone immediately.
- **File a civil protection order (CPO):** If you know the identity of your assailant, you can pursue a protection order, also known as a restraining order. A court can order your attacker to stay away from you and not communicate with you. An assailant who violates a CPO can face criminal charges. The American Bar Association has put together a resource regarding Sexual Assault CPO procedures (<http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/migrated/domviol/docs/SACPOChartJune07.authcheckdam.pdf>) for all 50 states.

If Someone You Know Is Assaulted

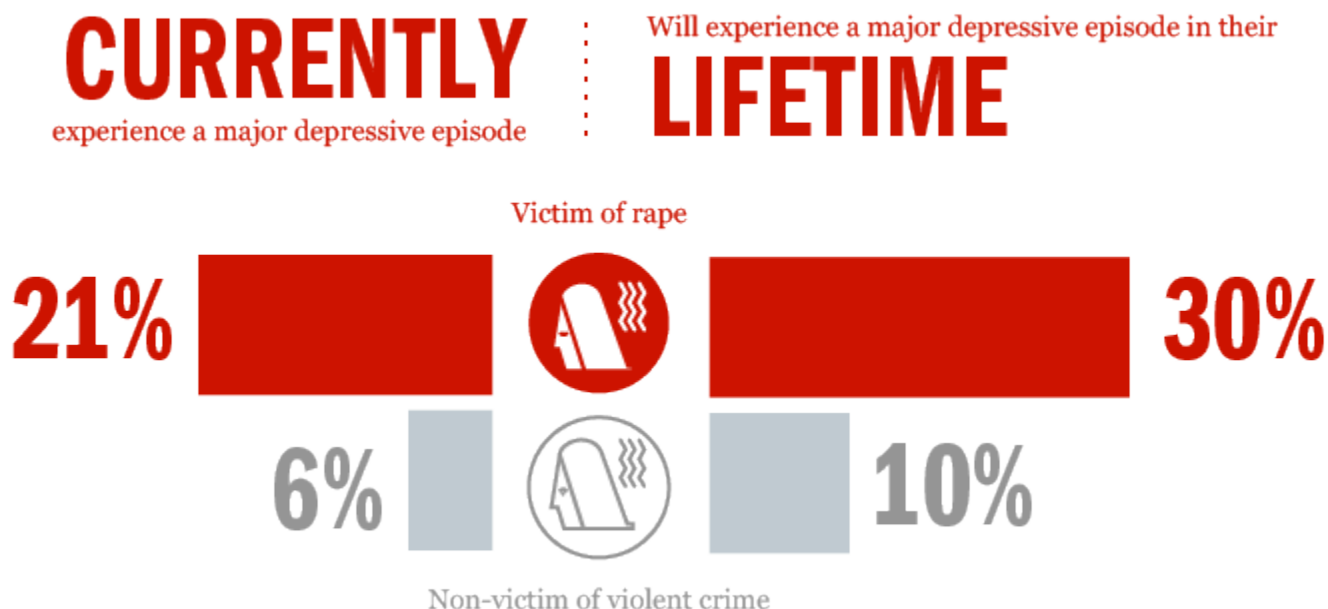
- Help the victim reach a safe location away from the assailant. Make the victim feel as safe and listened to as possible.
- Many victims blame themselves for an attack. Inform the victim that the sexual assault was not their fault.
- Be a supportive listener. Thank the victim for telling you about this. Avoid phrases that evoke powerlessness at first, including "I'm sorry."
- If you saw the attacker or witnessed any part of the assault, take detailed notes regarding the incident.
- Encourage the victim to Contact the University Police Department, The Title IX Coordinator, the Director of Student Development, or the University Health Center.

- Accompany the victim to the hospital and ensure they meet with medical professionals who specialize in sexual assault trauma.
- Follow up with the victim. Encourage participation in counseling sessions and support groups.

After an Assault: Recovery

Survivors often struggle with resuming their normal daily activities in the aftermath of a sexual assault. Work with your physicians, counselors, and instructors to take the appropriate time off from classes and other academic responsibilities and heal. Even after physical wounds heal, survivors suffer the risk of chronic emotional distress. The Mental Impact of Rape (<https://mainweb-v.musc.edu/vawprevention/research/mentalimpact.shtml>) a report by the Medical University of South Carolina, shows that compared to other victims, rape survivors are 6.2 times more likely to develop PTSD, 3 times more likely to have a major depressive episode, 26 times more likely to abuse drugs, and 13 times more likely to abuse alcohol.

Frequency of major depressive episodes by victimization status



Physical Aftereffects

- Jitteriness
- Disrupted sleep patterns
- Muscle cramps or spasms
- No libido
- Aching at injury sites

Emotional Aftereffects

- Anxiety
- Self-blame or guilt
- Rage
- Helplessness
- Emotional outbursts
- Constant worry

Mental Aftereffects

- Inability to concentrate
- Depression
- Denial
- PTSD
- Suicidal ideation

Due to the seriousness of trauma that often comes with the fallout of an attack, it is extremely important for victims of sexual abuse to get professional help. You might not feel like you need counseling, however the emotional and mental aftereffects can suddenly catch up with you, especially during periods of high stress in your life as a student. There are many support systems in place to help you through this difficult period.

Additional Information and Resources

Fortunately, at the prompting of victim and victim advocacy movements, colleges, local community organizations, and the federal government have begun to take serious steps toward curbing the incidence and stigmatization of sexual assaults on college campuses. In fact, according to the DOJ survey results, (<https://www.rainn.org/statistics/scope-problem>), awareness campaigns, campus training, law enforcement protocols, and legislative strategies have already lowered the rates of assault a full 50% since 1993.