

Some Tips on Acquaintance Rape Prevention

Avoidance Strategies for Women

You can't always avoid date rape. However, there are things you can do to minimize the risk of sexual assault.

1. Be aware of controlling behavior in your date or relationship. Rape is a crime of power and control. Most rape survivors recall feeling "uncomfortable" about some of their partner's behaviors including:

- intimidating stares
- degrading jokes, language about women
- refusal to respond to stated physical limits
- refusal to accept "no" as an answer, whether in a sexual context or otherwise
- insistence on making all of the "important" decisions about the relationship or date
- an unwillingness to interact with women as people rather than sexual objects
- extreme jealousy, possessiveness
- strong belief in sex role stereotypes
- a history of violent behavior

2. Define for yourself your sexual limits. Your sexual limits are yours alone to define. The first step in preventing abuse is to define your limits clearly to yourself and then to act quickly when a date or partner intentionally or unintentionally crosses your stated boundaries.

3. Set clear limits and be firm. It is your body, and no one has the right to force you to do anything you don't want to do. Many women have difficulty confronting coercive behavior because they have been socialized to be "polite." If you do not want to be touched, you can say, "Don't touch me," or "Stop it, I'm not enjoying this." Tell the other person, "If you do not respect my wishes right now, I'm leaving" and then do it if your partner won't listen.

4. Do not give mixed messages. Say "yes" when you mean "yes," and "no" when you mean "no." Be sure that your words do not conflict with other signals such as eye contact, voice tone, posture or gestures.

5. Be independent and aware on your dates. Do not be totally passive. Have opinions about where to go. Think about appropriate places to meet, (not necessarily your room or your date's; these are the most likely places for acquaintance rapes to occur).

6. Examine attitudes about money and power in the relationship. If your partner pays for the date does it affect your ability to say "no?" Does your date have a sense of sexual entitlement attached to spending money on your relationship? If so, then you may consider paying your own way, or suggesting dates that do not involve money.

7. Avoid secluded places where you could be vulnerable. If you are unsure of a new person in your life or if this person has exhibited some of the controlling behaviors listed above, suggest a group or double date. Meet in public places, where there are other people and you are feeling comfortable. This is especially important at the beginning of a relationship until you feel you know the person better.

8. Trust your gut feelings. If you feel you are in a dangerous situation, or that you are being pressured, you're probably right, and you need to respond. Many rape survivors report having had a "bad feeling" about the situation that led to their victimization. If a situation feels bad or you start to get nervous about your date's behavior, confront the person immediately or leave as soon as possible.

9. If you feel pressured, coerced or fearful: protest loudly, leave, go for help. Make a scene! Your best defense is to attract attention to the situation if you feel you are in trouble. In an attempt to be nice or avoid embarrassment, you may be reluctant to yell or run away to escape being attacked. If you are worried about hurting his feelings, remember, he is attempting to hurt you physically and psychologically.

10. Be aware that alcohol and drugs are often related to acquaintance rape. They compromise your ability (and your partner's ability) to make responsible decisions. If you choose to drink alcohol, drink responsibly. Be able to get yourself home, and do not rely on others to "take care" of you.

11. Be aware of inequalities in the relationship. Rape is a violent display of power. Does your partner perceive differences in terms of money, experience and age as entitling him to power over you in the relationship? Someone who rapes chooses to enforce such power imbalances in a sexual context.

12. Practice self-defense. Knowing in advance how you would respond to a physical threat greatly increases your chances of escape. Any woman can learn self-defense and classes are often available free or at a low cost through schools and community centers.

13. Challenge sexist attitudes that make rape acceptable. Along with men, women often deny the assailant's responsibility in a rape by blaming the victim. Women may do this to convince themselves that only "bad" women are at risk for rape and that as long as they live their lives by certain moral standards, they are safe. The truth is that as long as one woman is at risk for rape, every woman is a potential target of violence. Women can resist rape by challenging the attitude that women who are raped "deserve" to be victimized, and by intervening on behalf of women in danger.

REMEMBER: If your prevention strategies do not work, it is not your fault if you are raped. At any point when you are in a vulnerable situation, your partner has a range of choices--if he chooses to rape, that choice is 100% his responsibility.