

Avoiding Rape

The Facts

What is Rape?

Rape forces sexual relations against a person's will. It is an act of aggression, power, and violence, not sudden sexual passion.

Who is The Rapist?

The rapist may be an acquaintance, neighbor, friend, relative, or stranger. *In fact, the rapist might be someone with whom you might have a date.* He is usually of the same race as the victim and does not necessarily look peculiar or act strangely.

Why Does He Rape?

Rapists want to control, hurt, and degrade victims.

Who Is The Victim?

Anyone can be a victim — children (girls and boys), mothers, wives, grandmothers, students, men, and women; but most reported rape victims are females.

How Is The Rape Victim Chosen?

The victim is chosen according to her availability and vulnerability, not her dress or "sex appeal." The rapist looks for someone who is alone and not acting aware of her or his surroundings. The rapist is looking for someone who will probably be easy to control and/or intimidate.

How To Avoid Rape

At Home —

- ✓ When moving into a new home or apartment, change all locks on outside doors. This practice prevents former tenants from entering with old keys.

- ✓ Install a chain lock inside your door. Be sure that the chain is short enough to prevent an intruder from removing it and that the screws are long enough to prevent a sudden violent push from pulling them out.
- ✓ Install a peephole. A peephole device is easy to install and inexpensive.
- ✓ Install a lock on every window that a burglar or intruder can reach.
- ✓ Consider installing an electronic security system in your home. Many types of burglar alarms are listed in the yellow pages.
- ✓ Consider asking the telephone company not to list your street address in the phone book. This will enable your friends to find your number and prevent unwanted visitors.
- ✓ Do not leave keys in a "secret" hiding place (i.e., under the mat, on a windowsill, in the mailbox). Much safer, leave your keys with a trusted neighbor.
- ✓ Keep house keys on a different key ring from car keys. Many successful burglars conspire with parking lot attendants to have keys duplicated while a car is parked.
- ✓ Keep your draperies and shades drawn at night, especially if your home is easily accessible from the street. If a potential assailant sees you alone, he's more likely to enter the house.
- ✓ Keep lights on in at least two rooms.
- ✓ Have doorways and driveways lit at night.
- ✓ If you return home to find doors or windows open or you suspect a burglary, *don't* go into the house — call the police from a neighbor's house.

Telephone Calls —

- ✓ Never give personal information to a caller you don't know.
- ✓ If a phone call is becoming obscene or frightening, hang up immediately.
- ✓ If the caller persists, blow a whistle loudly into the mouthpiece.

- ✓ Never give a caller a reason to suspect you are alone in the house.
- ✓ Advise the caller that this call is being monitored.
- ✓ If threatening or obscene calls persist, report them immediately to the phone company.

On The Street —

- ✓ Be aware that walking alone at night may be hazardous to your health.
- ✓ If you are being followed or you see a man or group further down the street who makes you feel uncomfortable, cross the street, walk in another direction, or ask other people walking if you may walk a short distance with them.
- ✓ Walk near the curb, in the middle of the street, and away from buildings, trees, and shrubbery, which can hide potential assailants.
- ✓ When walking near the car to your home or apartment, carry your house keys in your hand, not in your purse. Don't stand in a doorway and fumble in your purse or pocket for your keys. Have them ready to use.
- ✓ Be aware, at all times, of your surroundings. Look over your shoulder and behind you several times while walking. Better to look and/or feel foolish or suspicious than to be raped.
- ✓ Don't give friendly answers to men who attempt to strike up conversations on the street. Walk briskly and with purpose — keep walking.
- ✓ Use a grocery cart when you have many packages. You make a good mark when your arms are full.
- ✓ Always dress so that movement is not restricted and your clothing does not make you more vulnerable.
- ✓ Try to vary your routine routes of travel. Most rapists have been found to study their victim's habitual patterns.

- ✓ While waiting for public transportation, keep your back against a wall (or pole) so that you cannot be surprised from behind.
- ✓ Know your routes. Notice lighting, alleys, abandoned buildings, and street people.
- ✓ Pick out places that you consider safer, places where you can either make a stand or reassure yourself that you are not being followed or watched (i.e., lit porches, bus stops, stores, etc.).
- ✓ If you are going somewhere in a city with which you aren't familiar, check a map, know where you are going. Looking lost increases vulnerability.

Visitors, Repairmen, Deliverymen —

- ✓ When alone and answering a door ring, call out "I'll take it, Bill," or "I'll go, Tom." Make sure the call is loud and clear. Never reveal either in person or on the phone that you are alone.
- ✓ Never let small children answer the door.
- ✓ Repairmen who represent utility companies carry identification cards. If a man has none, get his name and telephone the company he claims to represent before you admit him.
- ✓ A large number of attacks occur because women allow unidentified strangers into their homes. Never say to a repairman, "Come in," then check his identification card. Make him wait outside the door until you are satisfied it is safe to let him enter.
- ✓ Many assailants gain entry into homes or apartments by pretending to be visitors, repairmen, or deliverymen. You can avoid such deceptions by installing a peephole. If you don't have a peephole, make sure your safety chain is hooked before you open your door.
- ✓ Ask any deliveryman to leave packages outside the door. Wait until you are sure he's gone away, then go for the packages.

In A Car —

- ✓ Picking up hitchhikers is never safe, but if you feel compelled to do so, pick up a woman alone. You may be saving a woman from a rapist.
- ✓ When alone in a car, keep the doors and windows locked and up. If you must keep a window open, make sure it is the one nearest to you so that you can raise it quickly if necessary. Keep windows open only enough to admit breathing space — but not to admit a hand.
- ✓ Do not travel on deserted roads, especially at night. Better to drive on a well-lit highway — even though it may take a little longer to reach your destination.
- ✓ When driving, don't let your gas indicator fall below the quarter full mark. If you feel you are being followed, head for the nearest police station, gas station, shopping center, or home with lights.
- ✓ Do not enter a car without checking to see if someone is hiding on the rear seat or on the rear floor. Do not enter a car in which a man or group is leaning or loafing. Turn around immediately and go back to safety.
- ✓ If you carry a small weapon on the front seat next to you, be sure you know how to use it and that it is easily accessible. Weapons carried in glove compartments or under seats may mean nothing if you must hastily search or struggle for them. Road flares are very good weapons to keep in the car.
- ✓ If you run out of gas or have an accident, lock all doors and stay inside the car. Accept no rides from men — wait for the police. If a man wants to help, ask him to send the repair truck or police from the next exit or nearest phone.
- ✓ If you see an accident or stranded motorist, before stopping, consider that it might be a trap set by a rapist. It is probably more helpful to hurry to report it from the nearest phone.
- ✓ Parking lots and garages are particularly dangerous. When parking your car, note your position carefully, so that you can go directly

to it. When returning to your car, look around. If you notice anything or anyone suspicious, alert the attendant.

Hitchhiking Is Never Safe —

Try to arrange rides with friends or take public transportation whenever possible.

- *No one deserves to be raped. You did nothing wrong. The rapist, not you, is responsible for the attack. You are the victim of a violent crime.*
- *Follow your intuition — trust your feelings. If you feel that a situation is not right, move out of the situation.*
- *Be aware of your surroundings. In social situations, including dates, be alert to places and situations that make you vulnerable.*
- *Develop an attitude of confidence to be a survivor.*
- *If you are attacked, resist. Resisting may allow you the opportunity to get away. Not resisting is no guarantee that you will not be injured.*

What You Should Do If You Are Raped —

- ✓ Do nothing that will change your appearance or the appearance of the place of the rape. Do not take a bath or shower or douche. Don't even wash your hands.
- ✓ Get medical attention to check for venereal disease, internal injuries, or the possibility of pregnancy. Take a change of clothes with you to the hospital.
- ✓ Report the crime to the police. Reporting the crime does not mean that you must press charges. But it does allow the police to keep accurate records for future reference and will provide the necessary evidence and information needed if you later decide to press charges.
- ✓ As soon as possible, write as much as you can remember about your attack and the circumstances.

Rape crisis centers or the police department can provide transportation to the emergency room. A volunteer counselor from the center will stay with you throughout the examination and will provide follow-up support for you.

Rape crisis centers offer confidential, non-judgmental, emotional support to victims of rape whether it happened 10 minutes or 10 years ago.

Rape Crisis Centers 24-Hour Hot Lines

Biloxi228/435-1968
Columbus662/327-2259
Greenville662/ 332-5683
Hattiesburg601/264-7777
Jackson601/982-RAPE
Meridian601/485-2828
Natchez601/446-8668
Oxford662/234-9929
Tupelo662/841-CARE

"Turn to us if it happens to you"



Mississippi State Department of Health
Bureau of Women's Health
Rape Intervention Program
Post Office Box 1700
Jackson, Mississippi 39215-1700
601/576-7470

Equal opportunity in employment/services

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