On its website, the United States Department of Justice highlights a chilling statistic: one out of every four female undergraduates will be victim to some form of sexual assault before graduation.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) estimates that at least 95% of campus rapes in the U.S. go unreported. This statistic reflects a dire need for increased campus prevention and support systems at our nation's colleges and universities. Our guide aims to increase awareness about sexual assault and abusive relationships. We 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*, a type of sexual violence, is a term that applies to a broad range of forced and unwanted sexual activity. It includes attempted rape — unwanted fondling or sexual touching — and rape, generally defined as penetration of a victim's body against their will. Sexual assault can involve forcing someone into non-consensual sexual acts by way of manipulation, physical or emotional coercion, or psychological force, including threats or other means of intimidation. Whatever form sexual assault takes, it's important for victims to realize that it's not their fault.
Sexual assault is a far too common problem in our country today; RAINN (the Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network) recently reported that someone in the U.S. is sexually assaulted every 98 seconds. But sexual assault shouldn't be regarded as ordinary or inevitable — by understanding and addressing the problem, we can do something about it. According to RAINN, rates of sexual violence in the U.S. have dropped by more than half since 1993. That's encouraging, but our society still has a lot of work to do before we can list "sexual autonomy" among our national virtues.

**Underreporting**

The vast majority of sexual assaults go unreported and unpunished. RAINN reports that nearly 70% of victims don't inform the police and that a mere 25% of reported assaults eventually result in an arrest.

According to the National Institute of Justice, factors that commonly prevent women from reporting attacks include distrust of authorities and fear of blame. About one in six men suffered sexual abuse in childhood, according to statistics provided by 1in6, an organization dedicated to providing resources and support services for victims. Male Survivor, another organization that provides support for sexual assault survivors, explores how male victims face different types of stigma stemming from stereotypes about machismo, sexual desire, and what it means to "be a man." These antiquated notions, prevalent in today's society, can prevent men from reporting unwanted sexual activity.
**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.**

Most victims of sexual assault know their assailant on some level. As reported by RAINN, approximately seven out of ten sexual assaults are committed by someone the victim knows. This could be another factor contributing to underreporting; a victim who, out of fear they'll be ostracized or won't be believed, refuses to tell anyone they were assaulted by a stranger is even less likely to report abuse from a significant other, a family member, a teacher, or a classmate. This unfortunate truth stems from victims' ill-founded assumption that they are less likely to be believed in such a situation ("your dad/coach/English professor would never do that") coupled with the fact that the survivor will likely have to endure further interaction with their assailant by virtue of their relationship.
In light of the fact that most victims know their attacker, it makes sense that most incidents of sexual assault occur in victims' homes. According to RAINN, at the time of the incident, victims are most often "sleeping or performing another activity at home." People often feel safest when they are at home with family and friends, but these statistics reveal a different, much more disturbing story.

Prevention

Colleges and universities around the country are taking steps to prevent incidents of sexual violence on campus. By increasing the presence of security officers, initiating bystander intervention programs, and educating students on the meaning of "consent," schools are working to ensure the safety of their students, faculty, and staff on campus. Although responsibility for an attack lies solely with the perpetrator, there are ways you can reduce your risk of becoming a victim. Check out our list of basic safety guidelines below for things you can do to help protect yourself from sexual assault.

BASIC SAFETY GUIDELINES

**Know your limits:** Alcohol intoxication can make you significantly more vulnerable to assault by impairing your judgment or inhibiting your ability to physically fight off an attacker. Binge drinkers are at a particularly high risk of suffering from incapacitation, a blackout, or unconsciousness.

**Watch your drinks:** Take your drink to the restroom with you, or pour it out before you step outside. Never drink a beverage that has been given to you by someone else or taken from a communal alcohol source (like a punch bowl). Drugs used to incapacitate sexual assault victims can be odorless, colorless, and tasteless, so you can't rely on your senses to tell you that someone slipped something into your drink. Various products are now available to help you discover if your drink has been tampered with, like color-changing nail polish and drink coasters.
**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 unsafe, start walking in the direction of the nearest crowd, well-lit area, or building. Start talking loudly on your phone. Many attackers are unwilling to pursue victims who are aggressive or loud because it draws attention to the crime.

**Stick with your friends:** Attend social gatherings with a group of friends whom you know and trust. Look out for each other and make sure everyone gets home safely. If you do go out alone, always tell someone where you are going and avoid walking in unlit or unfrequented areas.

**Assault Prevention in Relationships**

If you've identified that your partner exhibits controlling or aggressive behaviors and you're afraid to address these issues within your relationship, it's time to get help. Victims often don't realize the dangers of their situation until it's too late — the dynamic between the abuser and abused is strategically designed to discourage the victims from acknowledging or addressing the problem.

Intimate partner abuse and violence are never okay. They're more common than you might think, and it's 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. [Loveisrespect](https://www.loveisrespect.org) and the [National Domestic Abuse Hotline](https://www.ndahotline.org) both provide 24/7 phone assistance.

**Don't 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 result of weakness on your part. Keep this in mind when you seek help.
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 in demonstrating a history of abuse when you speak with counselors or authorities.

Get counseling: Virtually all college campuses have on-site counselors who are trained to help with domestic violence and other forms of sexual assault. 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, find a safe place and call the police immediately.

After an Assault

Sexual assault can take an immeasurable toll on the victim's physical and mental health. The emotional and physical scars of an assault can deeply impact a student's ability to cope with academic, social, professional, and personal responsibilities. While the idea of asking for help may feel scary, overwhelming, or even impossible, it's an important first step on the road to recovery. On its website, RAINN suggests a variety of methods for survivors to cope with their trauma and its aftereffects, including professional therapy, strategies for exposure to media representations of sexual assault, and even advice for dealing with airport security screenings.

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: The most important thing is your safety. Get away from your assailant and get 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 and place of the incident, and a description of your assailant. Wait for the police to arrive so that they can collect your statement.

Get medical attention: Even if you don't think it's necessary, 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.

Advocacy: RAINN suggests calling the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800-656-HOPE to request hospital referrals and check the availability of an emergency advocate who can help you through the medical examination.

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE): 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 reduce their chance of pregnancy by taking Plan B up to 120 hours after an attack.

STI Testing: Get screened for possible infections that can be transmitted during unwanted sexual contact.

To preserve evidence of threats or assault, RAINN advises victims to write down details about the attack and the attacker as soon after the incident as possible. This information will help doctors, police, and campus authorities 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 have seen a medical professional. If you think you may have been drugged, the federal Office of Women’s Health advises you to ask for a urinalysis during your medical examination.
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 refrain from any communication with you. An assailant who violates a CPO can face criminal charges. The American Bar Association has put together resources regarding sexual assault CPO procedures for all 50 states.

If Someone You Know Is Assaulted

Safety is more important than anything else. Help the victim reach a safe location away from the assailant. Make the victim feel as safe as possible.

Many victims blame themselves for an attack. Tell the victim that the sexual assault was not their fault.

Be a supportive listener. Thank the victim for telling you it happened. Tell them you believe their story, and that they won't have to deal with this alone.

If you saw the attacker or witnessed any part of the assault, take detailed notes about what you saw.

Accompany the victim to the hospital and ensure that they meet with medical professionals who specialize in sexual assault trauma.

Follow up with the victim. Encourage them to seek counseling and support groups.
Survivors often struggle with resuming their normal daily activities in the aftermath of a sexual assault. Victims should work with their physicians, counselors, and instructors to take the appropriate time off from classes and other academic responsibilities to recover from their trauma. Even after physical wounds heal, physical and emotional scars can serve as painful reminders of the incident; survivors suffer the risk of chronic emotional distress.