

MYTHS & FACTS ABOUT SEXUAL ASSAULT

MYTH: Victims provoke sexual assaults when they dress provocatively or act in a promiscuous manner.

FACT: Rape and sexual assault are crimes of violence and control that stem from a person's determination to exercise power over another. Neither provocative dress nor promiscuous behavior are invitations for unwanted sexual activity. Forcing someone to engage in non-consensual sexual activity is sexual assault, regardless of the way the person dresses or acts.

MYTH: Most sexual assaults are committed by strangers. It's not rape if the people involved know each other.

FACT: Most sexual assaults and rapes are committed by someone the victim knows. Among victims aged 18-29, two-thirds had a prior relationship with the offender. Sexual assault can be committed within any type of relationship, including in marriage, in dating relationships, or by friends, acquaintances or co-workers. Sexual assault can occur in heterosexual or same-gender relationships. It does not matter whether there is a current or past relationship between the victim and offender; unwanted sexual activity is still sexual assault and is a serious crime.

MYTH: All sexual assault victims will report the crime immediately to the police. If they do not report it or delay in reporting it, then they must have changed their minds after it happened, wanted revenge or didn't want to look like they were sexually active.

FACT: There are many reasons why a sexual assault victim may not report the assault to the police. It is not easy to talk about being sexually assaulted. The experience of re-telling what happened may cause the person to relive the trauma. Other reasons for not immediately reporting the assault or not reporting it at all include fear of retaliation by the offender, fear of not being believed, fear of being blamed for the assault, fear of being "revictimized" if the case goes through the criminal justice system, belief that the offender will not be held accountable, wanting to forget the assault ever happened, not recognizing that what happened was sexual assault, shame, and/or shock. In fact, reporting a sexual assault incident to the police is the exception and not the norm.

Victims can report a sexual assault to criminal justice authorities at any time, whether it be immediately after the assault or within weeks, months, or even years after the assault. Criminal justice authorities can move forward with a criminal case, so long as the incident is reported within the jurisdiction's statute of limitations. Each state has different statutes of limitations that apply to the crimes of rape and sexual assault. Statutes of limitation provide for the time period in which criminal justice authorities can charge an individual with a crime for a particular incident. If you have any questions about your state's statutes of limitation, you can call your local police department, prosecutor's office, local sexual assault victim services program, or state sexual assault coalition.

MYTH: It's only rape if the victim puts up a fight and resists.

FACT: Many states do not require a victim to resist in order to charge the offender with rape or sexual assault. In addition, there are many reasons why a victim of sexual assault would not fight or resist her attacker. They feel that fighting or resisting will make their attacker angry, resulting in more severe injury. They may not fight or resist as a coping mechanism for dealing with the trauma of being sexually assaulted. Many law enforcement experts say that victims should trust their instincts and intuition and do what they think is most likely to keep them alive. Not fighting or resisting an attack does not equal consent. It may mean it was the best way they knew how to protect themselves from further injury.

MYTH: There is a statute of limitations on bringing charges for major sex offenses in Illinois.

FACT: Starting in January, 2020 prosecutors in Illinois no longer face a time limit on bringing charges for major sex offenses, regardless of the alleged victim's age. The new law removed the statute of limitations on criminal sexual assault, aggravated criminal sexual assault and aggravated criminal sexual abuse. Previously, prosecutors had 10 years to bring charges if an offense was reported to law enforcement within three years after it occurred.



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