

Protect Yourself – Know the Facts About Date Rape

By Robyn Coombs, Psy.D. & James R. Oelschlager, Psy.D.

What Is Date Rape? It is a type of rape in which the individuals involved have agreed to social engagement. Rape is defined as vaginal, oral and/or anal penetration using force or threat of force. It is an act of violence motivated by power and control. The assailant may be someone you have recently met or someone you have been dating. In many cases, however, the assailant does not believe that what took place constitutes rape and perceives his behavior as justifiable. Further, the majority of these rapes go unreported, as women are fearful they will not be believed or will somehow be blamed.

What Factors Contribute To Date Rape?

Women can be made vulnerable to rape when they spend time alone with a man. This includes his dorm room, apartment, car or even in a quiet room at a party. This is particularly important as 71% of rapes are planned. Some men expect sexual activity if they spend money on the date, if the woman is dressed provocatively or if the couple has had sex before. Thus, on the first few dates, consider using your own transportation, participate in the planning of the date and discuss who will pay for the date beforehand. You will not only be asserting your independence, but ensuring your safety as well.

Miscommunication between men and women can also contribute to date rape. Men may misinterpret or overestimate a woman's interest in them as a sexual partner based on friendliness or flirtatiousness, such as when a woman becomes interested in kissing and/or touching. Men may also interpret a woman's protests incorrectly, such as translating her "no" to mean "maybe," or even "yes." Further, if she does not protest strongly, he may believe that he is coercing her, but not forcing her against her will.

Similar to miscommunication, misconceptions about male and female sex roles can lead to date rape. Traditionally, men are socialized to be aggressive and to "score" in their pursuit of women. Conversely, women are socialized to be polite, passive and unassertive. Therefore, these differences in the socialization of men and women often lead to misperceptions regarding gender roles and may set the stage for date rape.

Finally, alcohol and drugs can play a significant role in date rape. Statistics show that approximately 75% of date rapes involve alcohol and/or other drugs. Excessive

use of these substances often leads to poor judgment, miscommunication, increased aggression and a decrease in sensitivity to others. For many victims of date rape, women under the influence of drugs or alcohol report being unable to accurately assess or realized too late, what was happening. Also, men who have consumed too much alcohol or other drugs report difficulty in interpreting a woman's messages.

Thus, women can protect themselves by knowing and assertively communicating their own sexual limits beforehand in a clear and straightforward manner, rather than making hasty decisions about their limits while the situation unfolds. The better educated you are on the subject of date rape, the less likely you are to find yourself unprepared or in a compromising situation.

Following is a list of preventative measures to consider when involved in dating relationships.

Prevention Tips:

- > Examine what you want from a relationship, set your sexual limits and communicate your expectations in a clear and assertive manner by establishing that any sexual action will be a mutual decision.
- > Avoid mixed messages by saying "yes" when you mean "yes," and "no" when you mean "no."
- > Try group and/or double dating until you know your date well enough to feel comfortable spending time alone with him/her. Also, consider having your own transportation and avoiding secluded places.
- > If possible, let a friend and/or roommate know who you are with and where you will be and leave an address and/or phone number.
- > Avoid excessive use of drugs and/or alcohol, and monitor how much your date is drinking. Also, do not leave your drink unattended. Order your drink and open it yourself.
- > If you are feeling uncomfortable or pressured sexually, be direct and firm by protesting and either assertively ask the person to leave or leave the situation. Do not worry about hurt feelings.
- > When meeting individuals through the Internet, avoid offering personal information such as your home address and exercise caution when agreeing to meet in person, such as meeting in a public place with your own transportation and with a friend.

- > Be aware of individuals who:
 - Ignore your wishes or personal boundaries.
 - Attempt to make you feel guilty or accuse you of being uptight.
 - Act excessively jealous and/or possessive.
 - Do not listen or disregard what you are saying.
 - Are under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs.
 - Have a short temper or become hostile when you say "no."

Overall, take care of yourself! Do not assume others will take care of you or protect you from harm. However, not all date rapes can be prevented. Most of the assaults are planned well in advance, and the assailant usually has a history of forcing women to have sexual relations. A woman may also be unsuspecting, as she may have spent significant time with the man, learned to trust him and does not feel she is in a vulnerable position. However, whatever the case, if date rape occurs, it is not the victim's fault. Though victims may engage in behaviors that increase their vulnerability, they are not to blame if date rape occurs.

If You Are a Victim of Date Rape:

- > **Tell someone**—Contact a friend for emotional support. Victims are also encouraged to contact one of the following agencies, Sexual Assault Victims Services (617-7533) or the 24-hour hotline (784-HELP). Both can provide an advocate to assist you through this difficult experience.
- > **Seek medical attention**—Medical care is necessary to document evidence of the assault, test for sexually transmitted diseases and provide medication for pregnancy prevention. Be sure not to shower or change clothes prior to receiving medical care. The Health Center at Florida Tech, a local hospital or a private physician may provide these services.
- > **Report the assault**—You are encouraged to report the rape, although this is entirely your decision. The reporting process can be initiated by calling Sexual Assault Victims Services (633-1761), the State Attorney's Office (255-4470), the Police (911) or Florida Tech Security (674-8111).
- > **Seek counseling**—Whether or not you decide to report the incident, you should seek counseling services to deal with the emotional impact of the assault. Those who receive counseling are able to come to terms with their experience and heal more quickly than those who choose not to get help.

Every six minutes in the U.S. a woman is raped.

Alarming, the majority—approximately 66%—of these women know their assailant!

Female college students need to be educated on this topic because women between the ages of 16 and 24 have a four times greater risk of being sexually assaulted than that of all women.

In a recent survey of college campuses across the country, one in four women were victims of rape or attempted rape.

Of these incidents, 84% of the victims knew the person who assaulted them and 57% of the assaults took place while they were on a date.

In addition, 82% of the victims stated that the experience permanently damaged them.



Further Resources on Date Rape

Books

- > *I Never Called It Rape* by Robin Warshaw
- > *Recovering From Rape* by Linda Ledray
- > *The Other Side of Silence: Women Tell About Their Experience With Date Rape* by Christine Carter
- > *Sexual Assault: Will I Ever Feel Okay Again* by Kay Scott

Web Sites

- > National Organization for Victim Assistance:
www.try-nova.org
- > National Criminal Justice Reference Service:
www.ncjrs.org
- > Higher Education Center Against Violence and Abuse:
www.mincava.umn.edu
- > Sexual Assault Facts and Education:
<http://rivervision.com/safe/ar.html>

While the majority of rape victims are women, men have also been the victims of rape by both women and men.

Although this brochure is focused on the woman's reaction and protection from rape, the information applies to anyone who has been victimized in this manner.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

CAPS is a counseling facility operated by Florida Institute of Technology's School of Psychology. Its goals are to promote the best possible academic, vocational and emotional health. Our services are available to students and their immediate families.

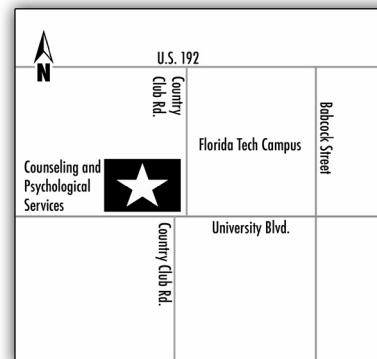
Counseling services are available on campus at Counseling and Psychological Services (674-8050), off campus at the Women's Center (727-2200), or through your private health care provider.

Center Hours

Monday–Thursday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Location

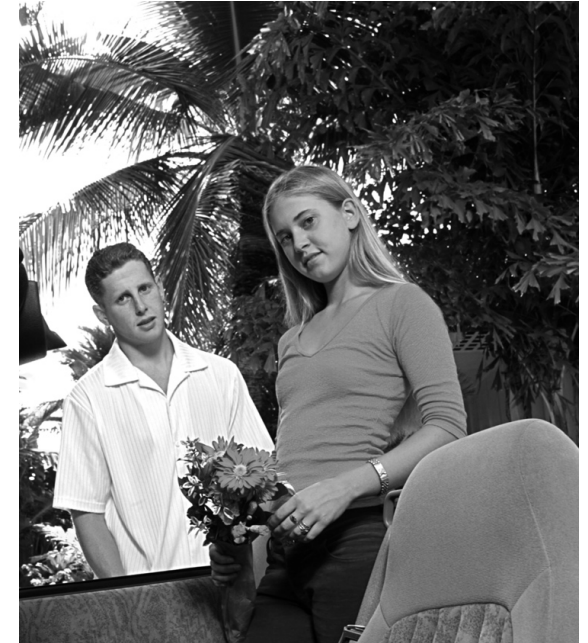
CAPS is located at the intersection of Country Club Road and University Boulevard, west of Babcock Street.



For additional counseling and academic success resources and helpful articles, access the CAPS Web site at www.fit.edu/caps or contact CAPS at 674-8050.

PY-279-506

Date Rape



Knowing the Facts and Protecting Yourself



*Florida Institute of Technology
Counseling and Psychological Services*