



Common Misconceptions

MYTH: Sexual assault is often the result of miscommunication or a mistake.

FACT: Sexual assault is a crime, never simply a mistake. It does not occur due to a miscommunication between two people. Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual contact obtained without consent through the use of force, threat of force, intimidation, or coercion.

MYTH: Sexual assault won't happen to me or to anyone I know.

FACT: Men, women and children of all ages, races, religions, and economic classes, and can be and have been, victims of sexual assault. Sexual assault occurs in rural areas, small towns and larger cities. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, a rape or attempted rape occurs every 5 minutes in the United States.

MYTH: Sexual assault is provoked by the victim's actions, behaviors, or by the way they dress.

FACT: Sexual assault is NEVER the victim's fault. Sexual assault is a violent attack on an individual, not a spontaneous crime of sexual passion. For a victim, it is a humiliating and degrading act. No one "asks" for or caused their assailant to commit a crime against them.

MYTH: Most sexual assaults occur between strangers.

FACT: Most sexual assaults are committed by someone the victim knows: a neighbor, friend, acquaintance, co-worker, classmate, spouse, partner or ex-partner. Studies show that approximately 80% of women reporting sexual assaults knew their assailant.

MYTH: Sexual assaults only occur in dark alleys and isolated areas.

FACT: A sexual assault can happen anywhere and at any time. The majority of assaults occur in places ordinarily thought to be safe, such as homes, cars and offices.

MYTH: Women falsely accuse men of sexual assault or "cry rape."

FACT: Reported sexual assaults are true, with very few exceptions. FBI crime statistics indicate that between 2% and 10% of reported rapes are false. This is the same rate of false reporting as other major crime reports.

MYTH: Men cannot be sexually assaulted.

FACT: Men can be, and are, sexually assaulted. In Colorado one in seventeen men are sexually assaulted in their lifetime. Sexual assault of men is thought to be greatly under-reported. Any man can be sexually assaulted regardless of size, strength, sexual orientation, or appearance.

MYTH: Most sexual assaults are interracial.

FACT: Almost all sexual assaults occur between members of the same race. Interracial rape is not common, but it does occur.

MYTH: People who commit sexual assaults are mentally ill, abnormal perverts.

FACT: Sexual offenders come from all educational, occupational, racial and cultural backgrounds. They are "ordinary" and "normal" individuals who sexually assault victims to assert power and control over them and inflict violence, humiliation and degradation.

MYTH: Victims who do not fight back have not been sexually assaulted.

FACT: Anytime someone is forced to have sex against their will, they have been sexually assaulted, regardless of whether or not they fought back. There are many reasons why a victim might not physically fight their attacker including shock, fear, threats or the size and strength of the attacker.

MYTH: A rape survivor will be battered, bruised, and hysterical.

FACT: Many rape survivors are not visibly injured. The threat of violence alone is often sufficient cause for a woman to submit to the rapist, to protect herself from physical harm. People react to crises in different ways. The reaction may range from composure to anxiety, depression, flashbacks, and suicidal feelings.

MYTH: "If you wouldn't have been drinking, you wouldn't have been sexually assaulted."

FACT: Alcohol is a weapon that some perpetrators use to control their victim and render them helpless. As part of their plan, an assailant may encourage the victim to use alcohol, or identify an individual who is already drunk. Alcohol is not a cause of rape; it is only one of many tools that perpetrators use.

MYTH: Serial rapists are uncommon.

FACT: Most every perpetrator is a serial rapist, meaning that they choose to use coercion, violence, threats of force, etc., to assault people on a repeated basis.

MYTH: When women say no, they really mean yes.

FACT: Yes means yes! When someone says yes, s/he is explicitly giving consent. Silence does not equal consent. It is the responsibility of the person initiating or escalating sexual activity to gain consent at each and every level. If you are ever unclear about your partner's wishes, ask for clarification. If your partner says no or seems unsure, respect that person and her/his wishes.

MYTH: If a person is aroused when s/he is assaulted, then it is not really sexual assault.

FACT: Orgasm does not mean that someone "enjoyed" the sex, or that they wanted it. Orgasm can be a natural biological reaction that someone can't control; it does not mean that forced or coerced sexual activity was consensual and often this is used to silence the survivor.

MYTH: The reason that men get raped is because homosexual men are raping them, and lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender individuals rape more or are more likely to be sex offenders than heterosexuals.

FACT: There are no statistics that support the idea that lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender individuals are more likely to commit sexual assault or be sex offenders than heterosexuals. In fact, sex offenders are disproportionately likely to be heterosexual men.

MYTH: It is OK to pressure or talk someone into sexual activity.

FACT: No! This falls into the category of coercion. Coercion is a tactic used to intimidate trick of force someone to have sex with him or her without physical force.

