A GUIDE FOR SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT: WHERE TO GO AND WHAT TO DO WHEN IT HAPPENS TO YOU

“Time has a way of rushing and moving us forward, but also a way of holding and healing us.” – Heather Handler

Sexual assault can happen to anyone. It impacts women, men, and children. You are not alone. In Colorado 1 in 4 women and 1 in 17 men have experienced an attempted or completed sexual assault (Colorado Department of Health, 1998). Most often, the assailant and the victim know one another.

Every person responds differently to sexual assault. Frequent responses include feelings of fear, distress, humiliation, anger, confusion, numbness, guilt, and self-blame. There are many of resources both on and off campus, and in the form of books, movies, and websites, to help you through every step of the healing process. The last pages of this guide list many of these resources.

**What is Sexual Assault?**

- Sexual assault is any sexual contact without consent and may include touching of intimate body areas, intercourse or penetration.
- A violation of a person’s physical and emotional well being.
- A crime prosecutable under Colorado law.
- An act of power and control.
- Sexual assault is NOT an expression of love, passion, or sexual desire.
- Sexual assault is NOT your fault.

**What is Consent?**

- Cooperation in act and attitude. The person must say yes with words and actions. In Colorado, the absence of “no” is not consent.
- Exercise of free will. Consent must be given without coercion or force.
- Knowledge of what is happening. If someone is under the influence of alcohol or drugs to the extent they cannot make decisions, they CANNOT give consent. If someone is asleep or unconscious, they CANNOT give consent.
- Once consensual sexual activity starts, consent CAN still be withdrawn at any point in the process.
- Submission because of fear is NOT consent.
What if it Has Happened to Me?

1. Take the necessary steps to ensure your safety.
2. Call a rape crisis provider or victim advocate. There are 24-hour confidential advocates available both on campus (Victim Assistance Team, 491-7111) and in the community (SAVA, 472-4200). Your advocate will explain to you what choices, resources, and courses of action are available and support you as you walk through them.
3. Talk with someone you trust.
4. Don’t shower bathe or douche after the assault. You may or may not choose to report the assault, but you may not have a second chance for physical evidence to be collected once you have bathed.
5. Seek medical care.
6. Decide whether or not you want to report the assault to law enforcement. Reporting the assault is not the same as moving forward with prosecution. You will be notified and have input at every critical stage of the investigation and/or process. Your advocate will support you in your decision and can remain with you through many phases of the reporting process if you choose.

What lies ahead? The five stages of healing from sexual assault:

Stage One: Initial Shock

Shock following an assault can take on many forms. You may experience emotional as well as physical shock, which could be exhibited in controlled and withdrawn behavior, or highly expressive behavior such as crying, screaming, or shaking. You may not be comfortable expressing these feelings to others.

Stage Two: Denial

Also called pseudo-adjustment, this stage may find you attempting to go on with your normal routine, wanting to forget about the assault. This denial or rationalization of what happened is an attempt to deal with inner turmoil and return to normal life.

Stage Three: Reactivation

This stage involves a re-experiencing of the feelings from Stage One, usually brought on by the triggering of memories of the assault. Feelings of depression, anxiety and shame may increase. Other symptoms can include nightmares, flashbacks, a sense of vulnerability, mistrust and physical complaints.

Stage Four: Anger

You may experience feelings of anger—often toward yourself, friends, significant others, society, the legal system, all men/women, etc. With skillful support this anger can be redirected in ways that are healing.

Stage Five: Integration (Closure)

As you integrate the thoughts and feelings stemming from the assault into your life experience you will begin to feel “back on track.” As a result of support, education, and the passing of time, you will feel strengthened.
Help Healing From Trauma

After experiencing a traumatic event, such as a sexual assault, you might find yourself reacting to situations in ways you would not have before the assault. You may feel numb, like the whole world is just floating by. Or, you may have memories that are so strong you find it difficult to stay in the present moment. These strong memories are called flashbacks, and they can be triggered by a thought, smell, color, or anything that reminds you of the attack.

If you have a flashback, try grounding yourself and reentering the present moment using sensory techniques:

- Focus on the present (not the trauma).
- Take 3 slow, deep breaths.
- Try doing an activity that changes your current experience in any of your five senses:
  - Sight: Name 5 things you see in the room.
  - Taste: Drink something hot or cold, eat some strong tasting candy, or suck on ice.
  - Touch: Run your hand across something highly textured, or pet your dog.
  - Smell: Use scented candles, lotion, bubble bath, aromatherapy, or food.
  - Hear: Listen to music, someone’s voice, or any noise happening around you (cars, barking, etc)

Sometimes you may be in the present moment, but just thinking a lot about the assault. The most important pieces of healing from trauma are to be gentle and patient with yourself. When you need some extra comfort you might:

- Turn on music, light candles or incense, and run yourself a warm bath.
- Drink hot tea or hot chocolate.
- Go to a special place (actually or in your mind).
- Hug a stuffed animal or a person who makes you feel safe.
- Cry.
- Use art, journaling, or other creative outlets.

At other times you might need to just get your mind off the assault, and that’s okay too. You can watch TV, clean the house, go for a walk, or play cards with a friend. Just know that healing from trauma is possible. It will get better with time.
Campus Resources and Options

Victim Assistance Team
PH: (970) 491-7111 *ask to speak to an advocate

Trained Advocates are on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to provide confidential emotional support and information to survivors of sexual assault. Advocates are volunteers (students, staff, and faculty) who complete an extensive training program. They understand the complexity of the aftermath of sexual assault and can assist students in making decisions and obtaining resources. They are educated about legal, university, medical systems, and the psychological ramifications of sexual assault. Advocates can help you navigate decisions about reporting to police or university authorities. Ultimately, the decision is yours unless there is an identifiable threat to another person.

Medical Concerns - Hartshorn Health Services
Medical Clinic (970) 491 – 7121  Women’s Clinic (970) 491 – 1754

Taking care of medical concerns is an important part of the recovery process for survivors. Medical options to consider include: medical evaluation and treatment, emergency contraception, and medications to lower the risk of contraction and/or treatment of STDs. In addition, if you decide to report the sexual assault, police may authorize a medical forensic examination, which must be performed at the local emergency room. Usually a forensic exam is only an option for 72 hours after a sexual assault.

Emotional Healing - University Counseling Center
PH: (970) 491 – 6053  After Hours: (970) 491 – 7111 *ask to speak to a UCC counselor

The University Counseling Center offers a number of programs including individual therapy and 24-hour emergency services. These services are free of charge for students. During office hours, you may call or stop by Hartshorn Health Services to speak with on-call counselors.

Academic Concerns
One of the common after affects of sexual assault is the loss in the ability to concentrate. Don’t be surprised if you have difficulty fulfilling your academic commitments. Consider contacting an advocate in the Office of Women’s Programs and Studies about your options.
University Disciplinary Options - Conflict Resolution & Student Conduct Services

PH: (970) 491-7165

The Colorado State University Student Conduct Code applies to all students and persons residing on university property. Sexual misconduct, including sexual assault is a violation of the Code of Conduct. If the perpetrator of the crime is a student (or lives in university housing), you may choose to make a report to the Conflict Resolution & Student Conduct Services office. A Hearing Officer may determine there is sufficient reason to conduct an additional investigation into the sexual assault and disciplinary sanctions may be taken against the perpetrator.

Legal Options

Choosing to report sexual assault crimes is not an appropriate option for everyone, and a trained advocate can help you navigate through your options. Investigations are often very difficult, long, and painful processes for survivors. Some survivors find they want to seek resolution through the legal system, and others do not. Deciding to report does not mean agreeing to testify; you can always make the decision about testifying later. In Colorado, victims don’t “press charges” – they are considered witnesses to a crime. They can decide not to participate at any point in the investigation and, upon choosing to make a police report, have rights as a crime victim under Colorado law.

If you choose to report the sexual assault, the investigation can take from several weeks to several months. To ensure the success of the investigation, the offender should have absolutely no contact with you. Do not tell the offender that the investigation is in progress. When the investigation is complete, it will be sent to the District Attorney’s Office for a decision about filing charges. You, as the victim, have the right to be informed about this decision and to share your feelings and wishes with the District Attorney’s office. A victim advocate through the DA’s office will be assigned to each crime victim. This person is an excellent resource for information about the legal process.

Police Resources

Police Emergency (on or off campus) – 911
CSU Police Department - Non-Emergency (970) 491-6425
Fort Collins Police Department Non-Emergency (970) 221-6540
Fort Collins TTY (Deaf Accessibility Line) Emergency (970) 221-3490
Larimer County Sheriff's Department Non-Emergency (970) 498-5141
Larimer County District Attorney’s Office Victim/Witness Division (970) 498-7285

Other Community Resources

- Non-profit agencies such as Sexual Assault Victim Advocate Center in Fort Collins also provide community advocates and counseling to survivors of sexual assault. 24-hour hotline (970) 472-4200; office (970) 472-4204.
- Medical Center of the Rockies Emergency Room (970) 624-2500
Suggested Readings and Resources

Books Available for Checkout in the OWPS Library

Recovering from Rape (2nd Ed). Linda Ledray. (1994)
I Never Called it Rape. Robin Warshaw (1994)

Other Suggested Readings for Parents & Friends of Survivors of Sexual Assault.

If it Happens to Your Child, It Happens to You! A Parents Help Source for Sexual Assault. Christine A Golderg (1987)

Videos Available for Checkout in the OWPS Library

Breaking the Silence (2002) 20 mins
Men, Sex, and Rape (Peter Jennings Reporting) (1991) 50 mins
Rape Is... (2003) 32 mins
Sex Without Consent- "When a Kiss is Not Just a Kiss"(1994) 36 mins
Someone You Know- Acquaintance Rape (1986) 30 mins

Websites

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network: http://www.rainn.org
Resources for Allies and Partners: http://twhj.com/allies.shtml
Friends and Family Allies Support: http://incestabuse.about.com
Parents and Loved Ones of Sexual Abuse and Rape Victims: http://www.geocities.com/Hot Springs/2656

Hotline:

National Sexual Assault Hotline (24-hour, confidential): 1-800-656-HOPE,
National Online Sexual Assault Hotline (confidential live chat) www.rainn.org