

SEXUAL ABUSE

What is sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse is a person's taking inappropriate and unwanted sexual actions to another person. These behaviors may range from words with sexual content and/or demands to touch and rape. Rape happens when someone is forced to have sexual intercourse by another person. Forcing may include the use of violence as well as threatening. Forcing someone to have sexual intercourse under circumstances in which the person is unable to consent such as being too young, having been paralyzed by a drug or being disabled is also considered as rape.

It is commonly thought that sexual abuse happens to children; however adults may also find themselves in a powerless state, being abused. When talked about rape, what usually comes to mind is a stranger who you will come upon in a bleak street at midnight. However, in most of the rape cases, there is an acquaintance. These behaviors may take place between peers or even between partners. A lot of students think that being forced to have a sexual intercourse by a boyfriend is normal. Nevertheless, whoever the other person is, any sexual intercourse that is forced, happened without consent is rape.

Abuse/rape can happen to anyone regardless of gender, age, race, religion or culture.

To protect yourself from abuse/rape:

- Try not to be alone at bleak places, especially at night.
- Do not go desolate places with someone you've just met or you don't know very well. Do not get in his/her car or go to his/her house.
- If there is nobody whom you trust with you, do not use alcohol or drugs. These will affect both your and the other person's ability to decide and execute the decision and physical power.
- In order to protect yourself from date rape; openly talk about your sexual expectations and thoughts about sexuality with your date and clearly set your boundaries. When you say "no", say it in a clear and determined way. You have the right to change your mind. You may say "no" to something you have wanted before. To be respected by the other person is your right. Date rape usually happens at the rapist's house. So, do not go to his/her house alone, until you fully know and trust someone.

If you are faced with a rape risk...

- Try to be calm.
- Trust your instincts. If you feel there is a danger, there must be reason for this.
- Assess the situation and immediately do something.
- Try to escape.
- Shout/cry for help.
- If you can't escape, be tough. But, also be aware that if you behave tough, this may make the other person be more aggressive.
- Try to gain some time by talking. Try to talk nicely and even compliment him/her. If s/he gets the idea that you are willing, s/he may think that there is no need to force and release you, thus you may escape using this chance.
- Avoid seeming attractive. Tell that you have a sexually transmitted disease, you are having your period or you are pregnant. Pee on the floor, fart, burp, throw up.

Remember, even if you try all these, you may not prevent rape. Therefore, do not blame yourself.

When you have been raped or abused...

- Quickly go to somewhere safe.
- Call a friend or someone from family. Have them come where you are right away.
- Immediately call the police. The sooner you report to the police, the easier it will be to catch the offender.
- Avoid doing things that will destroy evidence such as changing your clothes, cleaning, taking a shower. Do not change anything at the place where the incident happened, it is important to keep the evidence.
- Go to a hospital and get medical care. Even if you don't have a serious injury, get examined.
- Try to write how the rape happened in detail. If it is someone you don't know, try to describe the rapist as you remember.
- See a lawyer.

- Contact the Psychological Counselors of your school or another mental health professional.

When one of your friends have been abused or raped....

First, open your home to your friend. Provide him/her a safe place. Support his/her expression of feelings. Do not ask about details but mention that you are ready to listen when s/he wants to talk. If you feel uncomfortable about listening, find someone who can listen. Encourage your friend to get medical help, to report to the police, and to seek legal and psychological counseling. Make your friend feel that you believe and trust him/her, and whatever happens, you will be with him/her.

If you had been raped or abused before, what might you experience?

We might not understand the source of our problems, since sexual abuse remains an untouched topic most of the time.

A person who had been sexually abused may experience the following:

- **Loss of self-esteem:** You may feel that you are bad, inferior to others. You may be introvert and sensitive. You may even think about suicide.
- **Anxiety, panic:** In some circumstances you may behave very anxiously, you may panic. You may have flashbacks.
- **Insomnia:** You may have recurrent nightmares; you may be unable to sleep.
- **Inability to maintain relationships:** You may have difficulty especially in sexual relationships.
- **Concentration difficulties:** You may be unable to concentrate. Some things may remind you what had happened.
- **Intention to harm yourself:** You may feel like harming yourself; you may have eating disorders and/or you may abuse alcohol or drugs.
- **Guilt, loneliness, shame, anger:** You may think that what had happened was your fault. You may not notice that other people also go through this, since you are afraid to share. Thus, you may feel lonely. You may feel shame and/or anger.
- **Fear:** You may fear that worse will happen if you talk about it to someone, thus, you may be unwilling to talk. Mostly, it is hard to talk about these things. Especially if the offender is someone you knew, loved, even trusted...

If you had been raped or abused before, what can you do?

- Since you have survived until now, you have a source, a power inside you that helps. When you learn to use this power better, you will be able to overcome troubles more easily.
- You may be ashamed of what you have experienced. Nevertheless, do not hide your feelings. Talk about your concerns to someone you trust, who will listen to you. See the psychological counselors at your school.
- Sometimes it causes a relief to know that it is not only you who had been sexually abused; in fact it is quite common.
- Spend time for yourself. Try to eat well, sleep well and get rest. Develop a strategy that you can employ when you feel bad: calling a friend, walking, listening to music, going to a movie, etc.
- If you had been abused at a recent past, seek help immediately. Talk to a friend, someone from family or school's psychological counselor about the actions to take.
- Take yourself and your experiences seriously and see your school's psychological counselor or another mental health professional.

For More Information

Psychological Counselling Department

(The services are available only to the students and staff of İstanbul Bilgi University.)

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