

What To Do If You Are Raped

- ?? **Get medical attention.** Do not shower or clean yourself first. As soon as possible, go to a hospital or Student Health Services to be examined and treated for possible venereal disease. You may have internal injuries that you are not aware of. If you decide to press charges, physical specimens collected soon after the rape will be valuable evidence.
- ?? **Go to a friend's.** This is not the time to be alone. At the very least, you need emotional support. If there is no one to go to, then call someone you can talk to, no matter how late it is.
- ?? **Report the attack to police and UTPA officials,** whether or not you plan to file charges. (Reporting a rape does not commit you to filing charges. You can make that decision later.) Have someone go with you. You can go the next day, but the sooner the better. Rarely do date rapists attack one woman only; they get away with it and so they continue to do it. If you turn him in, you may break that pattern and save someone else from being attacked.
- ?? **Consider whether you want to file charges with the police** and/or with the campus authorities if the attacker is a student. If you do decide to press charges, the chances of conviction with acquaintance rape are low, although police, judges, and schools are increasingly more sympathetic than in the past. Some states now have rape shield laws, so that the past sexual behavior of a woman cannot be brought up. In addition, victims need not fear reporting the rape because they had been drinking or using a substance at the time the rape occurred.
- ?? **Get help and support, such as counseling.** At the very least, call a rape or crisis hotline. Mujeres Unidas is such a resource, and have trained staff available 24-hours a day to help you. UTPA's Counseling Center or Student Health Services also may be of help. All of these services are free and confidential. You have been through a trauma and need help to deal with the situation and with your feelings. Women who get counseling get over their experiences faster and with fewer lasting effects than those who get no help.

Do not blame yourself. Many people assume that the man is expected to ask for sex and the woman is responsible for giving permission for sex. Thus the woman may feel it is her fault for not having said "no" more clearly or for having trusted the man in the first place. Some men and women may also blame the victim and offer little or no sympathy. Men may believe you must have somehow "led on" the rapist; some women may suggest you either used poor judgment or have a bad reputation, so it is your own fault. In both cases, they are trying to distance themselves from what happened. Remember, alcohol abuse does not legally justify anyone's behavior, and cannot be used as an excuse in a court of law. If

you find that you are being blamed for what happened, it is helpful to go to a counseling center, a rape crisis center, or call a hotline. You need to be reassured that you are not to blame; the rapist is. Even if your body responded sexually to the rapist, it does not mean you "enjoyed" the experience or that it is your fault. Even if you believe you were naive, not cautious, or even foolish, it is not your fault. Your behavior did not *cause* the rape; the rapist caused the rape. Don't give the rapist the satisfaction of ruining your life. It's not ruined. Pick up the pieces, get well, and carry on. You owe it to yourself.