



Non-Stranger Sexual Assault

What is non-stranger sexual assault?

Non-stranger sexual assault is unwanted, coerced and/or forced sexual penetration or contact that occurs between people who are known to each other. This relationship may be a working relationship, friendship, dating relationship, a blind date or "hook up." They may know one another well or only briefly. The issue is not identifying who the perpetrator is; it is rather identifying how force or coercion is manifested.

Even though more attention is generally given by the media or in communities when a sexual assault is committed by a stranger, it is far more common to be sexually assaulted by someone you know. It does not matter if the perpetrator is known or a stranger, all forms of sexual assault impact the victim/survivor.

Some types of scenarios that are included under non-stranger sexual assault are coined "brief encounter" assault. The assailant may not be a date or even a friend, but the identity of the assailant is not in question. What is in question is how force or coercion was manifested.

Common reactions to sexual assault

Sexual assault of any kind can result in a wide range of reactions – some are immediate, some are long term. The variety of reactions may depend on the victim/survivor's previous life experience, the kind of force used, the relationship of the perpetrator and of the victim/survivor, the age of the victim/survivor, etc. Most victim/survivors experience levels of fear, anger, self-blame, depression and anxiety that can be exhibited both emotionally and physically. Difficulty sleeping and concentrating, nightmares, flashbacks, emotional numbing are all common reactions to sexual assault.

For a more complete discussion of reactions, please see the fact sheet, "Common Reactions to Sexual Assault" on the MNCASA website.

How does non-stranger sexual assault affect the victim/survivor?

In addition to the other usual responses a victim/survivor may have, non-stranger sexual assault may bring the following impact:

- Because victim/survivors of non-stranger sexual assault know their perpetrators, many may have a strong fear reporting the assault. There are various factors that come into play depending on the relationship to the perpetrator as well as the perpetrators social status. If the perpetrator is someone who is well known in the community the victim/survivor may fear they will not be believed or might be ostracized by people within their support network or even by the community.
- Victim/Survivors of non-stranger sexual assault may feel an increased sense of self-blame if they willingly went with the perpetrator or if they consumed alcohol or drugs with the perpetrator.
- Many victim/survivors of non-stranger sexual assault are often afraid to report or disclose an assault because they may have been engaging in behavior (e.g., underage drinking, or being on a date with someone substantially older) that they fear may cause someone to question their “innocence.” This adds to self blame and the victim/survivor may engage in self destructive behaviors in an attempt to cope with this self blame.
- Likewise, victim/survivors of “brief encounter” assault may question their ability to judge character, may feel they did not sufficiently protect themselves, and may fear that the perpetrator knows information about them (where they live, where they go to school, where they work, etc.) that compromises their safety.

What can a victim/survivor do?

It is often difficult for a victim/survivor of non-stranger sexual assault to come forward for many of the reasons listed above. If you are a victim/survivor you can:

- Contact your local advocacy program for assistance. To find your local program, see the “Find Help” page on the MNCASA website.
- Contact local law enforcement. Sexual assault is a crime in Minnesota, regardless of the relationship of the victim/survivor and perpetrator.
- Seek medical attention at the local hospital. If there is evidence of the crime, it can be documented and collected in case you choose to make a report to law enforcement. You have no obligation to report to law enforcement to receive a forensic exam.
- Find someone safe to talk with. You do not deserve to be assaulted by anyone.
- A victim/survivor of non-stranger sexual assault can apply for a Harassment Restraining Order (HRO) or an Order for Protection (OFP) which can order the perpetrator to cease committing acts of violence. This can be accomplished free of charge and can be made effective immediately.

How can friends and family help a victim/survivor?

- Believe them. A victim/survivor has very little to gain by making up a story about sexual assault.
- Listen to them without judgment.
- Provide options instead of making decisions for the victim/survivor.
- Help the victim/survivor access as much information as possible to help them determine the best option to take.
- Contact your local advocacy program for information.
- Reassure the victim/survivor that they do not deserve this.
- Reassure the victim/survivor that they are not to blame for the assault.

For more information, please contact:

