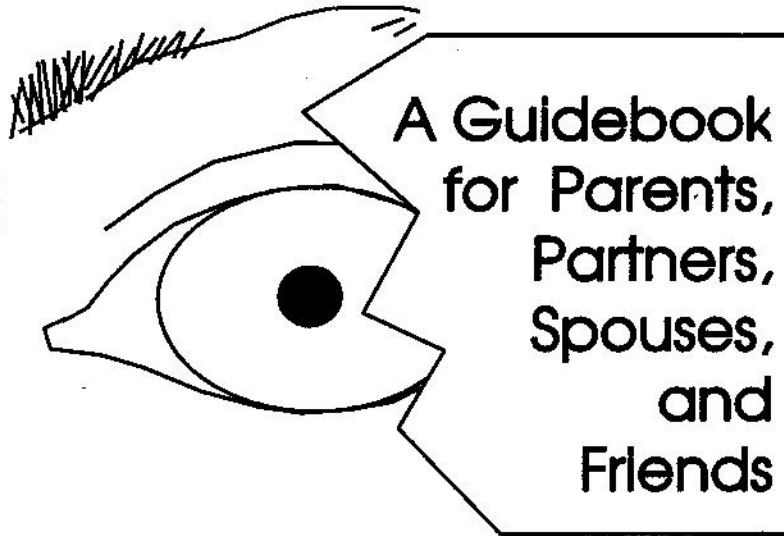


If He Is Raped

Revised



A Guidebook
for Parents,
Partners,
Spouses,
and
Friends

Abridged
Edition

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1

Understanding the Basics

What if you learn that your son has been sexually molested, or that your husband suffered the pain and humiliation of forced anal penetration by several men, or that a close male friend was forced to place another man's penis in his mouth or be shot? How would you react? Could you help him recover, or would you become part of his problem?

Rape can happen to anyone, including males. The way you respond to a male who is raped is extremely important because your reaction could make the difference in how well he recovers from the sexual assault. How you respond could facilitate his recovery or continue his victimization. Because you are important to his recovery, you need to know what to do and what not to do if a loved one, a friend, or even a male stranger, tells you that he has been raped.

The focus of this abridged book is on males who are raped by other males. Although there are rare instances of female perpetrators and male victims, the vast majority of cases of male rape involve males assaulting other males. This abridged book outlines the most important things you should know when confronted with an incident of male rape.* In order to know what you should and should not do, however, it is critically important to first understand what male rape is all about. It also is important to consider the similarities and the unique implications of male rape as compared to female rape in this culture.

When you hear the word "rape," your mental image probably is that of a female victim and a male perpetrator. True enough, most rapes involve female victims and male assailants. But there are exceptions. We know that a substantial number of rape victims* are male, though

*For a more detailed discussion of the ideas presented here, please see the unabridged edition of this book.

no one knows for certain how many. Some recent estimates suggest that perhaps 5 percent or more of all rapes involve male victims.** The lack of an accurate reporting system for male rape (including rapes in prison) and the reluctance of males to divulge their victimization means that we will probably never know the full magnitude of the problem.

Because understanding the nature of rape is critical to your role in helping the victim, we want you to be clear about what happened to him. Rape is *not* about sex. Rape is about *power, control, and domination*. Rape is a *violent crime*. The victim of rape has not "asked for it" and does not "enjoy it." In the case of male rape, the victim has been *forced* to endure anal penetration, or *forced* to perform fellatio, or *forced* to touch another male's genitals. The victim often is terrorized with threats of extreme bodily harm or even death. This means that rape is life-threatening and life-altering. Rape severely traumatizes the victim. Knowing the nature of rape now, however distressing and shocking the words might be to you, will help you to gain the most benefit from this booklet.

Most of our knowledge about rape reflects studies of female victims. To date, few studies have paid attention to males who are raped. Even so, we know that important similarities and differences exist between female and male rape victims. For example, for both males and females the experience of being sexually victimized is traumatic. In both cases, recovery from the rape is affected by the support, or the lack of support, received from family and friends. And in both cases, the perpetrator is nearly always a *male*.

Yet, as we shall see, this last point is also the basis for understanding important differences between male and female victims of rape. For males, being raped by a person of the same sex has significant implications for how they:

*Rape experts often use words such as "victim" or "survivor" to describe a person who has been sexually assaulted. Generally speaking, a "victim" is a person who suffers severe injury from another, and a "survivor" is a person who lives beyond a traumatic event. In this sense, the term "survivor" implies that a person has achieved a state of recovery from the trauma, whereas "victim" suggests that the person who has been harmed is still struggling to recover. A victim remains a victim until he or she decides to cease being a victim. This book attends to the needs of male victims on their way to becoming survivors.

**For more information on male rape, we highly recommend that you read *Male on Male Rape: The Hidden Toll of Stigma and Shame* by Michael Scarce, New York: Plenum 1997, as well as the unabridged version of this book.

- ★ perceived their rape
- ★ behave after the rape
- ★ view their sexuality
- ★ are judged by others
- ★ recover from the assault

Whether you are a parent, sibling, partner, friend or advocate, there are practical ways to talk with and support the male victim. Your part in his recovery is important because the way in which you treat him after the assault can affect how he views you, himself, and the experience for the rest of his life. Because the stakes are so high, this booklet challenges you to *believe in the victim*. It encourages you to validate his emotional and social concerns, and to empower him to accept and to cope with the attack without becoming consumed by it. You can help if you reassure him that:

- ★ you believe he is not permanently impaired
- ★ you are optimistic about his ability to put his life back in order
- ★ he can heal his wounds, even if the rape is never forgotten
- ★ he has the strength to resist the stigma associated with being a rape victim
- ★ he can achieve recovery by turning his anger into the motivation for regaining control over his life and moving forward, despite what has been done to him

The immediate concern is how to help the victim believe that he can recover. In some communities, there may be professionals in rape-crisis centers, law enforcement, and counseling facilities who can provide immediate, short-term assistance to male victims. In other areas, however, there may be no one with the experience or resources to help. In either case, many victims will need help for a much longer duration than is provided by emergency services. That leaves you, one who is important to the victim, to remain constant and consistent over the long-term. This means that, over an extended period, you must balance your needs with his. As you learn what it means for him to be sexually victimized you will gain confidence in responding to his needs, while addressing your own.

Always remember that it took courage and trust for him to reveal to you that he has been raped. He wants to recover and needs your support. You are to be commended for standing beside him.

Facts and Myths

Understanding people's mistaken beliefs gives us insight into what is unique to males as opposed to females who are raped. For males in our culture, there are constant pressures to believe that "to be a man" one must never be out of control, always be strong, not be overly emotional, never be effeminate, and not be gay. To be raped by another male causes the victim — adult or child — to have great self-doubt about being a man or becoming a man. Being raped can lead to corrosive self-blame, and it can cause others to target the victim with harsh judgments. These harsh judgments of others often center around perceptions of the victim's sexual orientation. Unfortunately, misplaced concerns about the victim's sexuality may confuse him and reduce his willingness to report the rape.

For a male rape victim who *is not gay*, the comments and the actions of others may make him think that the reason for the rape is that he was perceived as gay or effeminate. This increases the likelihood that he will blame himself for being raped, rather than placing responsibility where it belongs, on the rapist. For a male rape victim who *is gay*, the tendency also is to place the blame on self because of one's sexual orientation rather than on the actions of the rapist. Regardless of a male victim's sexual orientation, he may blame himself for being weak, vulnerable, and not in control — characteristics that our culture says are not desirable for a "real man." In other words, if a boy or man is raped, he blames himself for not being "manly." It is, of course, a myth to believe that "real men" are never vulnerable, weak, or out of control.

There are other reasons why the male rape victim feels blame for being raped. One is the belief that we live in a fair and just world where people "reap what they sow," or "get what they deserve." The implication for the victim is that others may think, "He must have had it coming." This happens even during rape trials where the victim is asked not only to testify about the facts of the case, but also to defend his innocence.

Even if your friend or loved one believes that he made poor decisions in the circumstances leading to the rape, ask him this: Does making a poor decision constitute an offense deserving of rape? The answer, of course, is no it does not — not ever. There is never justification for someone to sexually assault another.

Rape myths distort how people see the crime and they impede the victim's recovery. He needs to know that you do not subscribe to the myths about rape that unfairly blame him. Rape can destroy the very core of a person's well-being. Therefore, it is important to help every male who is raped, regardless of his age or his sexual orientation, to regain his dignity and integrity by dispelling the myths that cause him self-doubt and shame.

Myth One: "He Asked for It"

Any implication that a male rape victim "asks for" or secretly enjoys rape is a myth. Victims *never* seek this terrible experience. This is true whether a victim is gay, bisexual, or heterosexual. Unfortunately, this myth is often reinforced if a victim exhibits no *visible* injuries. The absence of injuries suggests to others that the victim failed to resist and, therefore, must have consented. Rapists use violence or the threat of violence to overpower and control their victims. Rapists also may use drugs such as Rohypnol to incapacitate their victims and to impair their memories.

Consent is based upon the ability to freely choose, and the rapist does not offer his victim a choice. By its very definition, rape is a *non-consensual* act. *Submitting* out of fear is never consent.

Despite being forced to submit, many male victims of rape feel guilt and self-doubt. For example, if the victim had an erection while being forcibly fondled sexually, he may struggle with the paradox of being aroused during an act that was done against his will. Because an erection usually is associated with sexual desire, this can create great confusion and guilt among victims. Bear in mind, adolescent and adult males may experience erections (and ejaculation) in very frightening circumstances, such as on the battlefield or in a fight. Remind him that anyone placed in a life-threatening situation may respond with involuntary physical reactions, but that these reactions do not, in any way, imply consent or that he enjoyed the experience.

Myth Two: “Men Should Be Able to Prevent Their Rape”

We mistakenly believe that any male could have prevented the sexual assault by putting up a fight — the “manly thing to do.” The message here is that failure to fight off an attack is a sign of weakness or cowardice, which in our society is not “manly.” Little wonder that so many male victims internalize this “deficiency” and feel a deep sense of guilt and shame. Perhaps this is why many male victims endure the private hell of never divulging the truth of the rape, rather than suffer the humiliation and stigma associated with judgments about their masculine identity and sexual orientation.

The belief that a male victim could have prevented the assault, however, ignores a basic reality: the threat of bodily harm or death overpowers the desire to defend oneself. The threat of being beaten or killed is real. Firearms, knives, clubs, and other weapons are used at a much higher rate when men are raped than when females are raped. This is because males who rape other males believe that their victims are likely to have more muscle power to resist, and so they resort to extreme threat and brutality to accomplish their ends. As such, the risk of serious injury to a male victim is very real, especially if he attempts to fight off the attack.

Even if no obvious physical weapon is used, males (like females) can be raped if the rapist uses extortion, subtle forms of coercion, or psychological control. Such tactics by rapists where threat is not based upon use of a weapon may be somewhat more common in two contexts: encounters in the gay community, and encounters involving young male victims and older perpetrators. An effective weapon to force someone into submission need not always be a gun or a knife. The law does not require that a weapon be used for an act to qualify as rape, nor does the law require the victim to physically resist the attack. We should never judge any rape victim — male or female, gay or straight — for failure to physically resist the rapist.

Myth Three: “It Was a Homosexual Act”

A common belief about same-sex rape is that it is a homosexual event (i.e., just another expression of “gay sex”). This belief is false. Same-sex rape is not a consensual sex act between gay men. Rape is

never consensual, and it may or may not involve someone who is gay. In rape, sex is a vehicle through which anger, control, and violence are expressed. Even if the victim is gay, same-sex rape is a traumatic experience that does not in any way represent a desired sexual encounter.

Another negative aspect of this myth is more complex because it is rooted in the fear and hatred of homosexuality (i.e., homophobia). Such fear and hatred have several unfortunate consequences. One consequence, ironically, is that homophobia can be a motive for rape. A person or group motivated by the hatred of homosexuals might sexually assault a person thought to be gay. For some males, sexual violence toward gay men creates social distance between them and their victims. Often the perpetrator is a heterosexual male who seeks to enhance his status among male peers by taunting, humiliating, and controlling his victim. If the victim is thought to be gay, gang rape and other sadistic forms of sexual violation (e.g., forcing objects into the victim's anus) may occur. To the rapist, the assault shows that he could not be "one of them" because he is openly demonstrating that he hates gays. When rape is based upon hatred for gay men, it quite literally constitutes a hate crime.

Another consequence of fear and hatred of homosexuality is that male victims of rape are viewed as gay, regardless of their sexual orientation. The stigma attached to the label of "homosexual," tends to negatively affect how others treat male victims, thus impeding their recovery. Regardless of whether a male is gay, bisexual or heterosexual, the rape victim's sexuality and "manhood" are called into question. As a result, victims are unlikely to seek help because they do not want their sexual identity questioned by others.

The terror of rape is compounded by the stigma of being emasculated and devalued in the eyes of others. Questions about the victim's sexual identity and about his possible complicity in the act often color how others see him. This results in the tendency for others to distance themselves from the victim when he most needs their support and reassurance. In addition, if the victim believes that the rapist was homosexual, then his own negative attitudes toward homosexuals may become generalized to the point where he blames gay men for the rape and fantasizes about "getting even" with all gay people.

In order to facilitate the victim's recovery, reinforce several basic messages. Tell him you do not believe that same-sex rape constitutes a homosexual encounter. Acknowledge that homophobia has the unfortunate consequence of silencing victims and of causing others to respond

inappropriately. Reassure him that you do not doubt his masculinity. Help him to understand that rape is an act of violence that has nothing to do with his sexuality, even though sexual activity occurred. And tell him that you will consistently convey the messages to others who know of the rape.

It also is important for you to encourage him to question his own self-doubts and to focus on what is true. He did not ask to be raped. He did not enjoy it. He did not consent. His sexuality is not the issue and neither is his "manhood." The issue is clear: *he is the victim of a crime*. Your consistent reassurance that you do not accept homophobic biases and cultural myths about rape, and that you will discourage such biases in others, will help to quell his doubts.

3

Addressing Immediate Concerns

While no two rape victims are alike, there are two common elements in all rapes. First, rape is a traumatic experience for victims and it takes time for them to recover. Second, those personally close to the victim also are profoundly affected by the assault. You can help by:

- ★ believing him and listening to him
- ★ knowing what to expect and helping him to understand what is happening
- ★ accepting his feelings and recognizing his strengths
- ★ communicating compassion and acceptance
- ★ encouraging him to make decisions that help him to regain control
- ★ treating his fears and concerns as understandable responses
- ★ working to diminish his feelings of being isolated and alone
- ★ holding realistic expectations, especially when he becomes frustrated or impatient

- ★ helping him to identify resources and support persons
- ★ being yourself and standing by him

These messages provide what the male rape victim needs — unconditional support by family and friends. These messages help to set the stage for his recovery.

The period immediately after the sexual assault is an emotionally charged, confusing, and anxious time. The victim has been terrorized and totally violated, and now he faces additional worries. For example, he is now likely to ask himself questions such as:

- ★ Am I safe now?
- ★ Do I need medical attention?
- ★ Do I report this to the police?
- ★ Did I contract a sexually-transmitted infection such as syphilis or HIV?
- ★ Should I tell anyone?
- ★ What will my family and friends think?
- ★ What will I do when others find out?
- ★ How does this affect my sexuality?
- ★ How will this affect those I love?
- ★ Will my life ever be normal?
- ★ Am I still a "man?"

In addition to these questions, there are many other concerns. These could include:

- ★ Does he have personal leave or sick days he can use to take time off from work?
- ★ Can he afford counseling?
- ★ When, and under what circumstances, should family and others be told about what happened?
- ★ Will he want to file a civil suit or perhaps initiate a criminal case? Does he need an attorney?
- ★ Will he want to relocate for safety reasons, and what are his options?
- ★ If things were stolen during the attack, does he have the money to replace them?

- ★ If the case has been publicized, does he know his rights with the media?

The emotional consequences of sexual assault continue well beyond the attack. Unfortunately, medical and legal professionals may unintentionally contribute to the victim's trauma as they routinely conduct their investigation. For example, if the victim decides to immediately report being raped, he will be asked (for legal reasons) to undergo an invasive physical exam before he changes clothes, bathes, eats, drinks, smokes, combs his hair, or chews gum, and if possible, before he urinates or defecates.* Most males have never undergone a medical exam such as an endoscopy where an instrument is inserted up the rectum. This can be both painful and terrifying if the victim suffered anal penetration by the rapist. Moreover, he may have to recount the incident several times in detail to the police and to prosecutors, all of whom are strangers.

While it is true that rules of evidence require detailed questioning by the police, this examination may appear to the victim as both unnecessary and as another personal attack. He may be especially reluctant to discuss certain elements of the rape, such as suffering anal penetration or being forced to place the perpetrator's penis in his mouth. At the very moment he needs sympathetic understanding, these impersonal but necessary procedures can add to his fears and his humiliation. The following illustrate the kinds of problems he may confront:

- ★ *Callous responses* from law enforcement or medical personnel.
- ★ *Scrutiny of his sexual orientation* by those taking the report and by others.
- ★ *Stigma* associated with the myth that "males are not victims" or should be able to "put up a fight."
- ★ *Value conflicts* if his lifestyle and conduct clash with the religious beliefs of others.
- ★ *Loss of independence*, especially if he is an adolescent.

*Because physical evidence does not stay viable for long, rape exams ideally should be conducted within 24 to 48 hours of the attack. If a person who is raped is unsure about reporting the crime to law enforcement, you might inform him of the limited time he has before the evidence is permanently lost. It is usually better to have such evidence collected early, in case he later chooses to help prosecute.

- ★ Do not tell him that everything is all right when everything is *not* all right. Avoid minimizing the gravity of what has happened because this suggests that you cannot deal with the situation.
- ★ Do not touch or hold him without asking permission or unless he shows signs that such comfort is welcome.
- ★ Do not try to lift his spirits by making jokes about what has happened.
- ★ Do not tell him you know how he feels. Only he truly knows.

No one response is typical. Initially, most (not all) male rape victims experience deep shame and self-doubt that may reduce their willingness to speak openly. Additionally, most feel that they should be able to "handle it themselves" without "burdening" others. By being patient, approachable, tolerant, and nonjudgmental, you will create a climate in which he feels safe to share his pain.

Long-Term Communication Strategies

Discussing the assault can be a source of anxiety for males who are **raped**, yet effective communication is important to his long-term adjustment and to the survival of valued relationships. Unfortunately, many relationships undergo severe strain in the aftermath of an assault. Communication is disrupted, people feel frustrated and helpless, and there may be mutual feelings of resentment. Despite the emotional turmoil, there are several steps you can take to promote effective communication.

- ★ *Respect his fear.* Offenders commonly threaten to seriously harm the victims if their victims do not comply or if they tell anyone what happened. Although this fear remains long after the sexual assault, male victims especially are reluctant to admit that they are afraid. Tell him that fear is a normal and understandable reaction; being fearful does not make him a coward.
- ★ *Accept his strong feelings and his mood swings, and remain consistent in your support.*
- ★ *Be patient.* Listen without being critical and without giving unsolicited advice. Let him express his feelings at a pace that is comfortable to him. If he is reluctant to talk, do not become angry.

- ★ *Respect* the victim's wishes for confidentiality. He alone should decide with whom and under what circumstances to discuss his feelings. Remember, in the aftermath of rape, victims tend to be reluctant to discuss their feelings about the attack. Others, however, may interpret such reluctance to talk as unhealthy withdrawal. In a well-intended effort to be helpful, others might then solicit *without the victim's permission* assistance from co-workers, clergy, or mental health professionals. Such attempts to intervene, unless requested by the victim, should be discouraged.
- ★ *Empower* the victim; do not try to control or overprotect him. Apart from security needs of young children, there should never be the equivalent of twenty-four hour surveillance of the rape victim. Such monitoring could unintentionally reinforce his feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness.
- ★ *Let the victim decide* when a "distraction" is appropriate and necessary. The rape victim will not recover from an attack simply because others do things to "take his mind off of it." Engaging in a "friendly conspiracy" with others to keep the victim's mind off the rape by acting as if it never happened, is counterproductive. The victim could mistake these diversions to mean that his family and friends regard the assault as too awful to discuss or too trivial to acknowledge. True, there are times when the victim might want to engage in distracting activities, but it should be at the victim's request.
- ★ *Remind family members* and friends that the rape victim has privacy needs. When he expresses the desire to be alone, this desire should be respected. Sometimes a constant stream of well-wishers will be an emotional drain. In respecting the victim's wish for privacy, you will send two empowering messages: he is the best judge of what he needs, and he has the strength to help himself get better.
- ★ *Remind others* that they should never imply that the attack was caused by what the victim did or did not do. Such second-guessing is a form of "victim blaming" that reinforces guilt and self-blame.
- ★ *Encourage* discussions about the nature and negative consequences of homophobia. Viewing same-sex rape through the distorted lens of homophobia only harms victims.

To encourage his full recovery, there are several things that supporters should and should not do.

- ★ *Do not* tell him that he "shouldn't think about the incident," or "shouldn't feel that way," or that he "should be over it by now." He cannot will himself to ignore troublesome images or to bury powerful feelings. Suggesting that he attempt to do so will undermine communication and will hinder his recovery.
- ★ *Do not* become irritated because he has needs that place additional demands on you. He is reaching out to you, not because he wants to burden you unnecessarily, but because you are a person upon whom he can rely for understanding and support.
- ★ *Do not* be upset if he refuses to accept help that you or others may offer. For many male victims of rape, accepting help seems to be an admission of weakness. Many males will absolutely refuse to go through counseling, even though this may be beneficial to them. Do not demand that the victim "get help" or constantly badger him about the counseling option. A better strategy is to provide him with helpful materials that he can read or view on his own. Most rape-crisis or counseling centers have such materials available.
- ★ *Do not* become angry if his recovery seems too slow. Remember, rape victims recover at different rates and in different ways. Try not to impose your terms of recovery on him. Such an imposition communicates a lack of understanding rather than compassion, and is likely to cause resentment.
- ★ *Consider* doing joint activities that brought you closer together in the past. For most rape victims, a sharp dividing line now exists between their pre- and post-assault memories. Engaging in joint activities gives *both* of you opportunities to rediscover those positive experiences that constitute the *preassault* foundations of your relationship.
- ★ *Seek* the companionship of friends who are healthy and upbeat, when it is appropriate and mutually agreed upon. The good cheer you experience from being around positive people provides a brief (and needed) respite for both of you.
- ★ *Do not* act in violent ways in the mistaken belief that violence is a good release for pent-up anger. Similarly, turning to alcohol does not eliminate feelings of anger. If anything, violence and alcohol consumption harm the relationship and are de-

structive. Furthermore, because the victim may recoil from anything or anyone associated with violence, violent behavior on your part will serve only to isolate him from you.

- ★ *Find a trusted person* with whom you can talk without fear of being judged. For some, it is especially useful to locate support groups where members discuss their experiences and strategies for healing. Such groups are often available through rape-crisis centers. Knowing that others have endured what you are going through can provide hope.

These suggestions should help you to realize two things. First, each person has a unique way of coping with stress, and each person needs the opportunity to recover on his own terms. Second, with patience, mutual support, and openness, you will *both* recover and may succeed in building a relationship that is even *stronger*, because you endured a crisis *together*.

7

Guidelines for Partners

One major consequence of your partner's rape is feelings of anxiety about sexual activity. His being raped may result in a long-term fear of sexual involvement, diminished sexual desire, a feeling that he has been rendered "asexual," or the rape may aggravate sexual difficulties that already existed between you. Such difficulties may be especially acute if the attack was extremely violent or involved multiple assailants. Moreover, problems in resuming sexual activity can be experienced by any male victim, *regardless of his sexual orientation*.

Caution is in order if the two of you are to resume a satisfying sexual relationship. Being insensitive to his needs may make the resumption of sex seem rape-like or uncaring. The male victim may equate intimacy with being vulnerable, and he may wish to avoid being vulnerable. In addition, it is not uncommon for a rape victim to have flashbacks of the rape during *consensual* sexual relations, though he may be

reluctant to reveal these flashbacks to you. The following suggestions will help:

- ★ Give your partner every opportunity to regain a sense of personal control, especially in the area of sexual decision making. Do not pressure him into sexual activity. A return to sexual activity may *seem* like a behavioral indicator that things are back to normal, even though they are not. If he is not ready to resume sexual relations, the act of love-making may diminish his sexual desire and complicate your relationship.
- ★ Do not be angry if your partner appears less sexually responsive than he was before the rape. It may be that certain cues during intimacy remind him of the rape (e.g., the smell of alcohol). The willingness to talk honestly about such troubling associations and the willingness to alter patterns which remind him of the attack will help your relationship.
- ★ Just as you should not pressure him into an early resumption of sex, neither should you avoid any display of intimacy. Understandably, you may assume he has a diminished interest in sex, and you may, therefore, be tempted to step back out of consideration for him. But it is important that the victim not interpret your behavior as a sign that you feel he is "tarnished" by the rape or less appealing than before. Many victims fear that their partners will see them as "damaged goods." There are ways to express intimacy (e.g., hugging, nonsexual touching) without consummating sexual activity. Honest communication, and your willingness to take cues from him and to alter your behavior, will help.
- ★ Be patient. Sexual disruption following an assault usually is temporary. If problems persist, counseling may be helpful.

One other issue is worth noting. In the aftermath of rape, some male victims become insensitive to the needs and feelings of their partners. Some may even become violent toward their partners. For some heterosexual males who are rape victims, there may be a tendency to "prove their manhood" by engaging in callous sexual conduct with females. Such conduct may include frequent sexual encounters with other women. Because we do not believe that being the victim of a sex crime is justification for exploiting others, counseling may be needed for his successful recovery. It is important that you be honest about your willingness to be supportive of him, but at the least, it also is important that

you clarify boundaries so you do not place yourself in a position of potential harm.

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Guidelines for Parents

Sexual abuse of a child or adolescent involves perpetrators using any combination of deception, trickery, physical force, bribery, and abuse of authority. Almost without exception, the perpetrator will manipulate the situation so that the child or adolescent feels that he is to blame for the abuse. Although a comprehensive discussion of the sexual victimization of children is beyond the scope of this booklet, remember this: the young male victim was violated physically and psychologically, he was lied to by a person whom he may have trusted, he was made to feel responsible for the sexual violation, and he probably blames himself for what has happened. In general, the longer the abuse continued and the closer the perpetrator was to the victim, the more severe the emotional turmoil.

As a parent, who has a strong sense of responsibility for the safety of your child, you may experience particularly intense reactions, such as rage and self-blame, if your son is raped. When you first learn of the sexual assault, however, it is absolutely critical that you consider the stresses on your son and do everything you can to reassure him *without losing your control*. A persistent state of intense anger will not let you focus on your son's recovery. The following should be kept in mind:

- ★ The sexual assault may cause him to have exaggerated fears about intimacy. Your son, regardless of his age, needs to know that he is not "tarnished," that his capacity to have close relationships will not be diminished, and that what he experienced was a crime of violence, *not* an expression of intimacy.
- ★ If your son is an adolescent, the attack may aggravate communication problems. *Do not force* your son to talk, but if he shows a willingness to discuss the assault with you, be prepared to do so. If you avoid talking about the assault, it may

give your son the impression that you are ashamed and hold him responsible. If he is unwilling to discuss with you what happened, then it is important to make sure that a professional who is trained in child sexual victimization be available to provide assistance.

- ★ Young male victims of sexual violence usually have significant confusion about their sexual identity. Such confusion is seldom something that male victims want to discuss with their parents. Honor that need and help your son select sympathetic and knowledgeable persons who can respond appropriately to his sexual concerns.
- ★ If your son was assaulted by someone he knows, he may fear you think that he used poor judgment, particularly if he is an adolescent. He also may fear that you will punish him or restrict his freedom. He needs to know that you believe him, that you do not second guess his judgment, and that there will be no unnecessary restriction of his activities. The latter is especially important. Restricting his activities will reinforce his doubts about his judgment and could complicate the communication between you.
- ★ Encourage your son to resume a normal lifestyle, such as playing sports and seeing friends. It also is important that he continue his involvement in extracurricular events at school and his responsibilities at home. Being overly protective of him will make his adjustment more difficult.
- ★ A decline in school performance may occur after the revelation that your son was sexually victimized. If there are academic difficulties, it is appropriate to consult with the school counselor. Academic tasks can be modified in ways that support your son's recovery. If you do consult with school personnel, however, tell your son and explain the reason why.
- ★ Do not isolate yourself or your son from friends who are aware of the rape. Doing so will underscore his belief that he has been diminished in worth or dishonored as a result of the attack. Neither of you is to blame and neither of you should feel shame.
- ★ A significant concern of young males who are sexually assaulted is that they will become the object of gossip and ridi-

cule by peers. Male peers especially are inclined to make hurtful remarks about the victim's sexual orientation or "manhood." Although it may be impossible to control all such insensitive remarks by peers, you can teach your son to cope with them. Discuss words or actions that will help him to respond appropriately to gossip or ridicule. If appropriate, it may help to discuss the assault with his teachers so that they too can be alert to the behavior of his peers. Educators may take the opportunity to educate all students about sexual violence and its consequences, and about the importance of supporting those who are victims.

- ★ If your son is young, he may show signs of distress through a change in behavior, rather than by articulating what is bothering him. Be alert for signs, such as loss of appetite, withdrawal, altered sleeping patterns or nightmares, fear of other people, fear of touch, or fear of being alone. These reactions are common but should be monitored closely for frequency and severity.
- ★ If the crime is reported and the victim is a minor, parental permission may be required for medical treatment and for police questioning. Be available to provide such authorizations and to ensure that official procedures are conducted with sensitivity.
- ★ The medical exam may be physically invasive and extremely upsetting, even if parents and medical staff are sensitive. Gently persuade your son that the procedure is necessary and insist that the medical staff conduct the exam compassionately. Be sure that every step in the process is explained to your son. If appropriate and desired by your son, you or a trusted person may be present for support during the exam.
- ★ Monitor older children and adolescents for the consumption of drugs and alcohol. Among those who are already prone to experiment with drugs or alcohol, there may be a sharp increase in substance abuse following the assault. If you are aware that your son is using drugs or alcohol, it is important that you consult with professionals who know how to deal with both the substance abuse and the rape victimization.
- ★ Do not let your son use his victimization to manipulate you inappropriately. Although your son's routine activities will be

disrupted for a time, his responsibilities for school, household tasks, or extracurricular activities should not become points of negotiation. He needs to know that, even as you love and support him as he struggles to recover, you are consistent in your role as parent.

There are no magic ways for you to make everything right for your son. The most important message to communicate is simple: *you love him no matter what*. That message is the basis for keeping open the line of communication, an essential element in his recovery. As a parent, you can hasten your son's recovery by believing his explanation of what happened, by communicating openly and honestly, by being non-judgmental, by not trying to overprotect him, and by demonstrating your unconditional love.

9

Finding Help

In most communities, there are several possible sources of help for rape survivors and their support persons, including community mental health centers, pastoral counseling services, and private practitioners. There are also a number of national organizations dedicated to helping victims and their families.

In addition, hundreds of rape-crisis centers have been established in communities throughout the United States and Canada. These centers specialize in addressing the needs of victims; usually they provide assistance free of charge. Many also provide services to family members of victims. While some rape-crisis centers only provide services to women, many are willing to help males who are raped. Virtually all rape-crisis centers will make referrals to help males locate additional services.

As we have mentioned, many males are reluctant to seek help because they believe it is a sign of weakness or because they do not want their sexuality questioned. Many will resist discussing their victimization because of their discomfort with the emotional vulnerability associated with receiving help. Even when male rape victims do seek help,

they may do so in ways which hide their true purpose for making contact with helpers. For example, some will say that they are doing a term paper on rape, or that they want information to help a "friend." Those who provide help should be alert to males who mask their victimization when they initiate contact.

In our culture, males generally are taught to be aggressive, emotionally tough, self-reliant, and independent. These are values that discourage victims from asking for help or accepting it when it is offered. Because it is difficult for some males to acknowledge their vulnerability, you need to reinforce the message that accepting help in the aftermath of a rape is not a symptom of weakness or an admission that he "can't take it." Rather, it is a realization that there are those whose professional training places them in a position to offer guidance at a time of great need. Seeking help is *not* a sign of weakness; it is a sign of intelligence and strength.

The earlier the victim seeks assistance, the better the chance for his speedy recovery. But even if the rape took place years before and is just now coming to light, he can still benefit from professional guidance.

As he progresses through his recovery, he may even decide to help other rape victims or work to raise public awareness about rape. As many rape survivors have learned, healing is often possible by extending one's self to help others. Because you care about him, and because you are standing by him throughout the ordeal, you can help bring him to a place the victimization does not control his life, or yours.

Resources

American Correctional Association
(handles correctional facility grievances)
4380 Forbes Blvd.
Lanham, MD 20706
Phone: 800-ACA-JOIN
www.corrections.org.aca

Centers for Disease Control:
National AIDS Hotline
P.O. Box 13827
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709
800-342-AIDS •
800-344-SIDA (Spanish)
www.ashstd.org

Childhelp USA
15757 N. 78 St.
Scottsdale, AZ 85260
1-800-4-A-CHILD

Gays and Lesbians Opposing Violence (GLOV)
(reports taken for hate crimes and harassment)
Washington, DC
202-737-4568

Men's Resource Center
(offender treatment)
12 SE 14th
Portland, OR 97214
503-215-7082 Hotline •
503-235-3433 Telephone

National Clearinghouse on Child Sexual Abuse and Neglect
P.O. Box 1182
Washington, DC 20013
800-394-3366
www.calib.com/nccanch

National Coalition Against Sexual Assault
125 Enola Drive
Enola, PA 17025
717-728-9764

National Crime Victims Center
Medical University of South Carolina
171 Ashley Avenue
Charleston, SC 29425
803-792-2945
www.mvsc.edu/cvc

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
2320 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20009-2702
202-332-6483
www.nglftf.org

National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA)
1757 Park Rd NW
Washington, DC 20010
800-TRY-NOVA
www.access.digex.net/nova

National Victims Resource Center
2111 Wilson Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201
800-FYI-CALL
www.nvc.org

Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN)
635-B Pennsylvania Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20003
202-544-1034 • 800-656-HOPE Hotline
www.rainn.org

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