

What To Do To Reduce The Risk Of A Sexual Assault

While you can never completely protect yourself from sexual assault there are some things you can do to help reduce your risk of being assaulted.

- **Be aware** of your surroundings. Knowing where you are and who is around you may help you to find a way to get out of a bad situation.
- Try to **avoid isolated areas**. It is more difficult to get help if no one is around.
- **Walk with purpose**. Even if you don't know where you are going, act like you do.
- **Trust your instincts**. If a situation or location feels unsafe or uncomfortable, it probably isn't the best place to be.
- **Try not to load yourself down** with packages or bags as this can make you appear more vulnerable.
- **Make sure your cell phone is with you** and charged and that you have money for a cab.
- **Don't allow yourself to be isolated** with someone you don't trust or someone you don't know.
- **Avoid putting earbuds in both ears** so that you can be more aware of your surroundings, especially if you are walking alone.
- **When you go to a social gathering or party**, go with a group of friends. Arrive together, check in with each other and leave together.
- **Practice safe drinking**. Know your limit. Do not leave any beverages unattended or accept drinks from someone you don't know or trust (this includes non-alcoholic drinks).
- **Have a buddy system**. Don't be afraid to let a friend know if something is making you uncomfortable or if you are worried about you or your friend's safety.
- If someone you don't know or trust asks you to go somewhere alone, let him or her know that you would rather **stay with the group**.

Walking/Running

- Make sure your cell phone (if you have one) is easily accessible.
- Have enough money for cab fare should you need it.
- Take major, public streets and paths rather than less populated shortcuts.
- Avoid dimly lit places and talk to authorities if lights need to be installed in an area.
- Avoid walking/running alone whenever possible.
- Carry a small noisemaker (like a whistle) and/or flashlight on your person.
- Remain mentally alert and aware of your surroundings.
- Plan your route and know what "safe" places are on it (police stations, hospitals, etc.).

Driving

- Keep your doors locked.
- Have extra car necessities (oil, jumper cables, etc.).
- Try not to wait until the last minute to fill your gas tank; always keep it at least half full.
- Have your keys ready when you go to unlock your car.
- Plan your route and know what "safe" places are on it (police stations, hospitals, etc.).

Taking the bus

- Be alert at bus stops when waiting for them to arrive.
- Use the bus schedule to avoid waiting for a long time at a stop.
- Plan your route to use the busiest, best-lighted stop possible.
- If someone is bothering you on the bus, tell the driver or use the emergency signal.
- If you feel uneasy about getting off at your usual stop, stay on until the next stop or wait until the safest stop.

Home Safety:

- Keep house doors locked, even when you are at home.
- Install a security system (if possible) and use it.
- Install outside lighting system (with motion detectors).
- Do not prop open doors or windows.
- Close blinds/curtains at night.
- Keep car doors locked, even in your own driveway or garage.

At parties

- Be aware of rape drugs.
- Try not to leave your drink unattended.
- Only drink from un-opened containers or from drinks you have watched being made and poured.
- Avoid group drinks like punch bowls.
- Cover your drink. It is easy to slip in a small pill even while you are holding your drink. Hold a cup with your hand over the top, or choose drinks that are contained in a bottle and keep your thumb over the nozzle.
- If you feel extremely tired or drunk for no apparent reason, you may have been drugged. Find your friends and ask them to leave with you as soon as possible.
- If you suspect you have been drugged, go to a hospital and ask to be tested.
- Keep track of how many drinks you have had.
- Try to come and leave with a group of people you trust.
- Avoid giving out your personal information (phone number, where you live, etc.). If someone asks for your number, take his/her number instead of giving out yours.

If Someone is Pressuring You

If someone is pressuring you to engage in sexual activity, it is important to remember that being in this situation is not your fault. You didn't do anything wrong, it is the person who is making you uncomfortable who is to blame. But if you need to get out of an uncomfortable or scary situation here are some things that you can try:

- **Trust your instincts.** Don't feel obligated to do anything you don't want to. "I don't want to" is always a good enough reason.

- **Be true to yourself.** Do what feels right to you and what you are comfortable with.
- **Have a code word with your friends** or family so that if you don't feel comfortable you can call them and communicate your discomfort without the person you are with knowing. Your friends or family can then come to get you or make up an excuse for you to leave.
- **Lie.** If you don't want to hurt the person's feelings it is better to lie and make up a reason to leave than to stay and be uncomfortable, scared, or worse. Some excuses you could use are: needing to take care of a friend or family member, not feeling well, having somewhere else that you need to be, etc.
- Try to **think of an escape route.** How would you try to get out of the room? Where are the doors? Windows? Are there people around who might be able to help you? Is there an emergency phone nearby?
- If you and/or the other person have been drinking, you can say that you would rather wait until you both have your full judgment.

REMEMBER: Even if you are cautious you may still become the victim of rape. Whatever you do to survive the assault is the right thing.

*Information gathered from The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) website at www.rainn.org