SEXUAL ASSAULT
North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault:
Working to end sexual violence through education, advocacy and legislation

Sexual assault is a violent crime, not a sexual one. The assailant uses sex to inflict violence and humiliation on the victim, or to exert power and control over the victim. (Minnesota Department of Corrections, Preventing Sexual Abuse of Persons With Disabilities.)

Statistics:
- Every two minutes, somewhere in America, someone is sexually assaulted. Men, women, young, old can all be victims of sexual abuse or rape. (http://www.safeofhc.org/)
- NC Statistics: According to the NC Dept. of Health and Human Services, 1 in 5 N.C. women have been sexually assaulted at some point in their lives. Over 10,000 North Carolinians were affected by sexual violence last year. (http://www.safeofhc.org/)

Sexual Assault Information
More than 10% of American women will experience rape, a violent crime that leaves physical, emotional and psychological scars. After such a personally devastating assault, you can take measures that may help you move through the healing process in each of these areas.

If you have been raped, it may be overwhelming to think about seeking help, but it's extremely important to get immediate medical attention you need.

First Actions are Critical
After a rape or other sexual assault, a woman may understandably be afraid that undergoing a physical exam will seem like yet another violation. Other normal feelings vary from person to person, but these may include:

- Fear of being judged by doctors or nurses
- Fear of others finding out about the rape
- Shame or guilt
- Numbness
- Degradation

A woman who's been raped may feel like she is to blame, even though rape is never the victim's fault. She may be in shock and feel like going home, crying, shutting down, sleeping or showering. But despite the urge to wash off the remains of the attack, it is essential that you:

- Do not bathe or shower.
- Do not comb or brush your hair.
- Do not change your clothes or shoes.
- Do not douche.

Getting a medical exam, which includes a vaginal inspection and blood tests, at a hospital emergency room or other medical facility after you've been raped is important for several reasons:

- **Evidence can be collected.** Physical evidence that may identify and convict your rapist can be captured and stored in what's called a rape kit.
- **Internal injuries can be assessed.** Some injuries that you can't see or feel can only be detected by examination.
- **Pregnancy can be prevented.** If you are not using contraception, morning-after emergency contraceptives that contain progesterin-only can be prescribed to greatly decrease the chance of pregnancy. It is highly effective and has fewer side effects than morning-after pills containing both estrogen and progesterin.
- **Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) can be treated.** Your chances of getting an STD from a rape is 5-10%. Doctors can prescribe medicines for chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis right away, as well as give you a Hepatitis B vaccine, if you aren’t already vaccinated.
• **HIV can be addressed.** Your chances of having contracting HIV from a rape are less than 1%, and likely the virus will not be apparent immediately. But if you do test positive for HIV, the treatment can be started right away.

• **Counseling can begin.** Rape crisis therapists are often available for confidential counseling.

All information known to medical personnel about you and the rape is protected by the United States federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

**The Rape Kit**
Your chances of successful prosecution depend heavily on the evidence in your rape kit, and you only have one chance to get that evidence -- immediately after the rape.

You do not have to decide immediately whether to report the rape to the police. You can collect the evidence and decide later on whether or not to report it to the authorities.

When obtaining a rape kit, a medical professional will:
- Collects any semen left in the victim's vagina, other body fluids and hair
- Look for clothing fibers and scene evidence, such as grass or soil
- Take clippings of your fingernails to examine any residue from your attacker or the scene

This evidence is then marked and stored. **If you want to refuse any particular test during the exam, you have the right to do so.** If you are under 18 and want to keep the information about the rape from your parents, ask whether the laws in your state will allow it.

Many women report that prosecuting their rapist helps re-establish a sense of control in their lives, aiding in their recovery, according to the Abuse & Incest National Network. Still, deciding whether or when to file a police report is a personal decision.

You can ask a doctor, nurse or friend to help you report the rape while you are receiving medical care or wait until after the examination. Many local laws have a cutoff date by which the crime has to be reported if it is to be prosecuted.

**Follow-Up Care**
It's important to see a doctor again within a week or two after the attack to receive your blood test results and to treat any resulting injuries.

Emotional care also is critical. Many rape survivors will experience Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS), a collection of emotional responses to the extreme stress of the sexual assault.

Some survivors openly display their emotions; others may appear calm and detached. Sleeping and eating patterns may change and nightmares commonly occur afterward.

It's critical that you seek and continue counseling or support groups for as long as you need them.

The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) provides a online hotline and can be reached by phone at 800-656-HOPE. RAINN offers counseling, as well as other types of help to rape and sexual assault victims.

Additional Information on how to respond if you have been sexually violated:

If you have been sexually assaulted recently or some time ago, you may be experiencing a wide range of feelings, from shock, fear, and disbelief, recurring memories, outrage, confusion, sadness, despair, and anger. Please do not lose hope. All of your feelings are valid. You did not deserve this and the offender is the only person who should be blamed. There are many who can be of help to you now. Below are some of the options that you have. Please read them all so that you keep open as many options as possible, especially if the assault has just happened.

**Emergencies:**
If you have recently been assaulted, your safety must come first. Please call 911 if you are in immediate danger. Also, do not hesitate to seek medical care if you are injured. Rape crisis center staff can also help you with a safety plan if the offender is someone you live with or work with.

**Advice and Emotional Support:**
Contact friends and family you trust. Although they may not always understand how you feel, they know you the best and care about you. For free, confidential help and support with questions you can also contact your local rape crisis center (SAFE of Harnett County; PO Box 728, Lillington, NC 27546; Administrative Line: (910) 893-7233; Crisis Line(s): (910) 893-7233; Fax: (910) 893-3508; Website: www.safeofhc.org). Every question you have is valid and important. They can also provide assistance at the hospital, at the police station or court, and with counseling if you wish. Whether the assault occurred today or years ago, rape crisis center services are for anyone who has experienced a sexual assault.

**Police Investigations:**
You may choose to call the police to have the offender arrested and charged with a crime. If you do, a medical exam may be taken to preserve evidence of the assault (sometimes called a "rape kit"). Police investigators may be able to take evidence from your clothing and body to prove the offender committed the crime. A nurse examiner will look for injuries related to the assault, proof that sexual activity occurred, and DNA from the offender on the victim’s clothing and/or body. Therefore, please do not eat, urinate, shower, bathe, douche, brush your teeth, or brush your hair in order to preserve any evidence that can be used against the offender. Investigators will also need all of the clothing that you were wearing at the time of the assault, so please do not change clothes or wash any of the clothes that you were wearing (and bring a change of clothes with you). The cost of the exam is generally covered by state funds. Note that the offender may also be medically examined for evidence.

**Medical Exam:**
A medical exam can be a powerful tool to put the offender behind bars, but it can also be very difficult emotionally to be medically examined after an assault. Most rape crisis centers have trained advocates that can stay with you at the hospital to support you. If you would like, call for a rape crisis center advocate or ask law enforcement or hospital staff to call the rape crisis center for you, so that an advocate can be with you as support.

**Medical Care:**
Some medical concerns may not be immediately apparent, such as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), internal injuries and pregnancy. Even if you do not wish to have a doctor or nurse collect evidence for an investigation, please obtain a medical exam to protect yourself as soon as possible from further physical harm. Some medications, such as the "morning after pill" for pregnancy and antibiotics for STDs are most effective when administered as soon as possible. Medical care may also preserve evidence of the assault, should you wish to pursue criminal charges immediately or in the future. If you suspect you may have been drugged, ask that a urine sample be collected. The sample will need to be analyzed later on by a forensic lab. Remember that you are an important person, deserving of the best treatment possible. Let those you seek help from, whether they are rape crisis center advocates, medical staff, and/or law enforcement investigators work for you.

**NC Rape Crisis Centers**
North Carolina has a large number of rape crisis centers throughout the state that can be of help to you. These centers provide free, confidential referrals and services for sexual assault victims, survivors and their close family and friends. One of the most important services is a hotline that you can call to talk to a trained staff member or volunteer about your feelings and concerns related to the assault. Your conversations with rape crisis center staff are kept private and confidential by North Carolina law. If you are
concerned about mandatory reporting to the police or to DSS you can withhold your name and still have your questions answered in privacy (please see the website's confidentiality section for further information).

Please feel free to call your local rape crisis center and use their services, whether you are a teenager or an adult; whether you are heterosexual or of another gender; whether you are a person with or without a disability; and whether you are male or female. Rape crisis centers are private, non-profit organizations committed to helping all members of the public.

Most Crisis Lines are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Please, don't hesitate to call if you need help.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Resources and Crisis Lines</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>National Sexual Assault Hotline</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual Assault &amp; Family Emergency</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>[SAFE of Harnett County] (Local rape crisis &amp; domestic violence center)</td>
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<td><strong>Wake County: Interact of Wake</strong></td>
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**The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network**
(RAINN) is the nation's largest anti-sexual assault organization. RAINN operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1.800.656.HOPE and carries out programs to prevent sexual assault, help victims and ensure that rapists are brought to justice.

**Men can Stop Rape**
Men Can Stop Rape (formerly Men's Rape Prevention Project) empowers male youth and the institutions that serve them to work as allies with women in preventing rape and other forms of men's violence.

**Rape Trauma Syndrome:**

The cluster of symptoms experienced by victims are known as *Rape Trauma Syndrome* and may include *sleep disturbances; eating pattern disturbances; mood swings; feelings of humiliation, anger, and self-blame; nightmares; development of phobias specific to the attack; and fear of sex*. Ann Wolbert Burgess and Lynda Lytle Holmstrom, *Race: Crisis and Recovery*.

Rape impacts a victim's mental health. 31% of all rape victims develop Post Trauma Stress Disorder sometime during their lifetimes and they are 3 times more likely to have had a major depressive episode than non-victims of crime; 4.1 times more likely to have contemplated suicide and 13 times more likely to have actually made a suicide attempt. "Rape in America", *National Victim Center, Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center*, April 1992

No one asks to be sexually assaulted. Nor does anyone's behavior justify or excuse the crime. People have a right to be safe from a sexual violation at any time, any place and under any circumstance. The offender, not the victim, must be held responsible for this crime. *Myths and Facts About Sexual Assault, National Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Harrisburg, PA 1993*

http://www.nccasa.org/