

Sexual Assault – FAQs

Sexual Assault on college campuses is unfortunately more common than you may think. It is most prevalent in the traditional college-aged population than in any other age group, making college years higher risk periods, especially for female students. Many victims do not report the assault for various reasons including lack of education about the topic or the available options; however, if you or someone you know was assaulted, know that you are not alone and that there are resources available for you.

What is sexual assault?

Sexual assault is any sexual activity that is perpetrated against someone's will or without explicit consent of the individual. All parties involved in a sexual relationship must give consent. Consent can be withheld at any point and must be given for each act along the way. Individuals who are intoxicated cannot give consent. Sexual assaults are crimes under Virginia law and can be prosecuted regardless of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator.

What constitutes sexual assault and who can become an offender?

Anyone can choose to engage in nonconsensual sexual conduct. Respecting each other's boundaries, especially in intimate relationships, and asking and giving consent at every step will reduce the risk of sexual assault. Perpetrators often know their victims and befriend them on college campuses. In fact, anywhere from 85 to 90 percent of sexual assaults reported by college women are perpetrated by someone they know.¹

Sexual assault is an umbrella term used to describe many nonconsensual sexual behaviors. Falling under the definition of sexual assault are sexual activities such as forced sexual intercourse, forced sodomy, child molestation, incest, fondling, and attempted rape.² These acts are considered sexual assault because they lack the explicit consent of the recipient. If permission to have sexual activity is gained through force, an imbalance of power, use of coercion, the threat of violence, or is perpetrated against someone who is not able to give consent because that individual is sleep, incapacitated, unconscious, legally intoxicated or a minor, consent is not actually given.³ Consent is a voluntary and sober agreement to engage in every step of a sexual activity. The absence of a verbal "no" does not indicate consent. If consent is not present then a sexual assault has been committed.

Some of the behaviors that are considered sexual assault include:

- Non-contact sexual offenses includes unwanted or non-consensual sexual behaviors that do not involve touch, such as threats of sexual assault, exposing someone to or creating pornography, taking nonconsensual sexual photography or exposing someone to nudity.
- Sexual harassment encompasses any unwanted or unwelcome sexual advances or obscene remarks in the workplace or other professional or social situations, such as the school setting.
- Sexual battery is non-consensual touching, without penetration, of the intimate parts of another individual.
- Rape includes any sexual intercourse or completed penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth through psychological coercion, intimidation, force, or the victim's inability to consent. Any attempts to commit these acts are considered attempted rape.

¹ United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice. (2008). *Most victims know their attacker*. Retrieved from <http://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/rape-sexual-violence/campus/Pages/know-attacker.aspx>

² United States Department of Justice, Office of Violence Against Women. (2014). *Sexual assault: What is sexual assault?* Retrieved from <http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/sexassault.htm>

³ United States Office on Personnel Management. (2013). Guidance for agency-specific domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking policies, p. 5. Retrieved from <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/worklife/reference-materials/guidance-for-agency-specific-dvsas-policies.pdf>

- Childhood sexual abuse is any of the acts described above perpetrated by an adult against a child or someone younger than 18 years of age. Childhood sexual abuse is sometimes referred to as child molestation.

Who can be a victim of sexual assault?

Anyone can be a victim of sexual assault. 1 in 4 adult women and 1 in 9 adult men have experienced sexual assault in their lifetime.⁴ Most female victims of completed rape experienced their first rape before the age of 25, while over 40% have experienced their first completed rape before the age of 18 years.⁵ Due to this, many college-aged individuals may have already been victimized before beginning higher education years. On college campuses the rates of sexual assault may be shocking to some. 1 in 5 women will be sexually assaulted in her college career.⁶

What can you do to if you or someone you know is a victim of sexual assault?

If you would like confidential support and guidance, including information on what options are available to you and accompaniment through the process, contact **NOVA's Sexual Assault Services (SAS) at 703-338-0834** (24-hour cellphone) or at nova.sas@nvcc.edu. Being violated sexually is a crime and against NOVA Student Conduct Policy. For more information on NOVA's obligation under Title IX to address instances of sexual misconduct, see the Title IX Policy on Sexual Violence, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking: <https://www.nvcc.edu/policies/student/docs/Title-IX-Policy-2015.pdf>. (The Title IX Policy has replaced NOVA's Sexual Misconduct Policy.)

- NOVA SAS can help you think about your options and talk about how the incident(s) has (have) impacted you.
- You have the right to file a police report, file a complaint with your Dean of Student's office or the Title IX Coordinator. For more information visit **(ADD NEW LINK)**
- In case of an emergency, call 911 or notify campus police at 703-764-5000.
- If you are a victim of sexual assault, know that such abuse is never your fault and there are resources available for you.

For more information, contact NOVA Sexual Assault Services (SAS) at 703-338-0834 (24 hours) or nova.sas@nvcc.edu.

⁴ Black, M.C., Basile, K.C., Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Walters, M.L., Merrick, M.T., Chen, J., & Stevens, M.R. (2011). *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Preventions, 19. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/NISVS_Report2010-a.pdf.

⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶ The White House. (2014). Not alone: The first report of the White House Task Force to Protect Students From Sexual Assault. P. 2. Retrieved from http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/report_0.pdf