

Resources

Someplace Safe: _____

www.someplacesafe.info

Law Enforcement: _____

County Attorney: _____

City Attorney: _____

Food Shelf: _____

Mental Health Services: _____

Medical: _____

Human Services: _____

Community Action: _____

Salvation Army: _____

Father's Resource: _____

HRA: _____

ECFE: _____

Suicide Hotline: _____

Work Force Center: _____

Legal Services: _____

Court Administration: _____

Court forms: www.mncourts.gov

Court Dates

Reparations

Restitution

Victim Impact Statement

All Advocacy services provided by Someplace Safe are completely free and confidential.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

If a client has concerns about a staff person, or a decision made by staff concerning you, you may file a grievance. If you need help with this, a volunteer can be called to assist you.

The steps that are involved in filing grievance are:

1. Put your grievance in writing.
2. Write what you think the solution to the problem should be.
3. Give it to the Supervisor.

As soon as possible, usually in a day or two, the Supervisor will meet with you directly. If you feel that there has been no resolution to your complaint, you can request in writing that the grievance go to the Director. The Director will respond in writing within 3 working days. If no satisfactory agreement can be reached, you can request that the grievance be submitted to the Personnel Committee of the Board of Directors. The grievance must be in writing and include pertinent information to the remedy being sought. The Personnel Committee shall review the grievance at the Board's next scheduled meeting.

We hope that the clients will request that the committee handle the grievance only after the client has tried to deal directly with the staff person involved or by working through options with the Director or Supervisor.

Financial Assistance for Crime Victims

As a victim of a crime, you have a right to request reimbursement for losses sustained as a result of the crime.

1. Restitution
2. Reparations
3. Civil Court

1. Restitution

Restitution is money that the judge orders the offender to pay to reimburse the victim of the crime. Restitution may be ordered in both juvenile and adult cases after the offender has been convicted or found delinquent. Restitution must be based on the amount of losses sustained by the victim as a result of the crime and the offender's income, resources, and obligation.

Requesting Restitution

The request for restitution should be made in writing prior to sentencing. The County Attorney provides an opportunity for the victim to submit an Affidavit of Loss to be reviewed by the Court.

If the full extent of the victims' loss is not known at the time of sentencing, and the offender is on probation or supervised release, the amount of restitution may be determined at a later date. The Judge does not have to order restitution and if the Judge does not order it, the Judge must explain the reasons. The offender will not be ordered to pay restitution for offenses of which he/she was not found guilty.

Amount of Restitution

Victims of crime have the right to request Restitution for all expenses which resulted from the crime. This may include, but is not limited to:

- * Medical bills
- * Counseling expenses
- * Transportation
- * Lost wages due to injury
- * Stolen or damaged property

The losses must be directly related to the crime.

In some cases, requests can be made for anticipated expenses. For example, an offender can be ordered to pay for counseling that the victim may need in the future. Some Judges will order restitution only for expenses not covered by insurance. The restitution order must include a payment schedule or structure.

2. Reparations

Reparations are financial compensation from the State of Minnesota Crime Victims Reparations Board for violent crimes. This program was enacted because of increased public safety concern for victims of violent crimes, and the recognition that the state bears some responsibility for the cost of crime. The purpose of the program is to restore victims economically to the fullest extent possible.

Reparations are different from restitution in that the state may pay the claim even if the offender is found not guilty or the offender is never identified.

Eligibility

To be eligible for compensation, a victim must meet certain requirements. The five primary requirements are:

- Claims must be for an injury or death as a result of a crime
- Claims must be submitted within three years of the crime
- Victims must have reported the crime to law enforcement within thirty days
- Victims must cooperate fully with law enforcement
- Victims must not have contributed to the crime through their own misconduct or criminal activity

There are exceptions to these rules, particularly for domestic abuse and sexual assault cases. Claim forms and assistance are available at Someplace Safe, the prosecuting attorney, or the Minnesota Crime Victims Reparations Board (1-888-622-8799).

Types of Coverage

The Reparations Board covers the following types of expenses related to the crime (if they have not been paid by other sources):

- Medical or dental care
- Prescription drugs
- Ambulance services
- Psychological counseling
- Loss of income
- Substitute child care
- Reasonable household services
- Funeral expenses
- Return of an abducted child
- Loss of support for dependents

Personal property losses and moving expenses are NOT eligible for reparations compensation.

As a victim of a violent crime, you should file a claim with the Reparations Board even though you are requesting restitution. You may have trouble collecting restitution from the offender, or you may be eligible for reparations, so it is a good idea to pursue both at the same time. If the Board pays your expenses and the offender also pays you restitution for the same expenses, you must reimburse the Board for the amount it paid.

3. Civil Court

Another option for obtaining compensation for your losses is by suing the offender in Civil Court. If the total amount of your claim is under \$7500, you may file a case in conciliation court. You do not need an attorney for Conciliation court, but a judge can grant permission if you want to hire an attorney to represent you. Conciliation court forms are available at the court administrator's office. If your total losses are greater than \$7500 you must file your case in district court.

The Criminal Justice System

All legal matters filed in the criminal justice system are broadly classified as civil or criminal.

Civil

Civil cases are usually disputes between private citizens, corporations, governmental bodies or other organizations. They may involve property or personal rights - for example, actions arising from landlord and tenant disputes, auto or personal injury accidents, breach of warranty on consumer goods, contract disputes, adoptions, marriage dissolutions (divorce), wills and guardianship.

Criminal

Criminal cases are brought by the government against individuals or corporations accused of committing a crime. The government makes the charge because a crime is considered an act against all of society.

The prosecuting attorney prosecutes the charge against the accused person (defendant) on behalf of the government (plaintiff). In criminal cases, the prosecution must prove that the defendant is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

There are two major classifications of crimes: felonies and misdemeanors. Serious crimes are called felonies and possible punishment is confinement in a state prison. Examples of such crimes are arson, assault, larceny, burglary, murder, rape, robbery, kidnapping, and sale of controlled substances (such as illegal drugs).

Lesser offenses are called misdemeanors. There are three types of misdemeanors, depending on the seriousness of the crime. Possible punishment is confinement in a local jail and/or payment of a fine.

Examples of the most serious misdemeanors, called gross misdemeanors, include second or subsequent DWI (driving while intoxicated) violations and sale of tobacco or alcohol to children. Other misdemeanor offenses include disorderly conduct, prostitution, tampering with a motor vehicle, trespass, littering, writing bad checks and making harassing phone calls. Petty misdemeanors are not punishable by imprisonment but only by a fine. Examples include possession of a small amount of marijuana and most traffic and parking violations.

It is very important to remember that the government has the burden of proving the defendant guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. The defendant does not have to prove his or her innocence.

PROGRESSION THROUGH THE MINNESOTA COURT PROCESS

Gross misdemeanor or Felony

Misdemeanor

1st appearance

Rule 5

Sometimes called a bail hearing, given his rights, charges explained, may enter a plea, request for an attorney

Pre- Trial Hearing

Rulings by the court on probable cause and pre-trial issues

2nd appearance

Rule 8

He will enter a plea or request Omnibus hearing have attorney present or waive right.

Omnibus Hearing

Court rules on probable cause and pre-trial issues.

Sometimes plea agreements are done at this time.

Plea Hearing

Held only if defendant pleads guilty

Trial

If no plea was made, there is a trial to determine guilt or innocence. Sometimes a plea agreement is reached before this happens.

Pre-Sentence Investigation

Pre-sentence investigator will interview the assailant, the victim, prior incidents, and witnesses and make a recommendation to the judge at the sentence hearing.

Sentence

The judge will give a sentence after reading and hearing the recommendation of the prosecuting attorney, the defense attorney, and the pre-sentence investigator.

Protective Orders

WHAT IS A HARASSMENT RESTRAINING ORDER?

A harassment restraining order (HRO) is a court order that can prohibit contact. It provides protection from harassment and assault. It may prevent an abuser from entering your home, your place of employment, or educational institution.

An HRO is not a criminal court proceeding but takes place in a civil court proceeding.

You may qualify for a Harassment Restraining Order if the other party has engaged in “repeated unwanted acts, words, or gestures that are intended to have an adverse effect on the safety, security or privacy of another, regardless of the relationship between the actor and he intended target.”

HOW DO I APPLY FOR A HARASSMENT RESTRAINING ORDER?

You can apply for an HRO yourself in the County you live. You do NOT need an attorney. The application does not cost anything.

Many victims of harassment find it helpful to have an advocate support them through the HRO process. An advocate is a person who helps you get what you decide is best for you. You can, however, apply for an HRO without the assistance of an advocate or attorney.

There is a filing fee of \$250 for all Harassment Restraining Orders. Advocates can speak with you about other options if you can not afford the fee. Certain individuals may qualify for a waiver called an In Forma Pauperis; this fee waiver is based on your ability to pay the fee. The court may also grant a Harassment Restraining Order fee waiver; this is granted by the Judge if your HRO meets certain criteria.

What Happens At the Hearing?

Not every HRO petition (application for HRO) has a hearing. The Petitioner (person who filed the HRO) or Respondent (Person who the HRO is against) can request a hearing, or the Judge may set a hearing if they would like additional information. The Respondent(s) have the right to request a hearing if they disagree with any portion of the HRO, object to the HRO being issued, or wish to be heard. Either party may also request the HRO be dismissed or modified at any time throughout the period that the order is valid.

The Petitioner (Person who filed the HRO) must attend any court ordered hearings or the Order will be dismissed.

At the hearing, the court will ask to hear both sides talk about the abuse described in the Petition (all allegations listed on the HRO application), and will also hear any other relevant testimony. You have the right to have an attorney present if you wish.

You do not need an attorney for this type of a hearing, but if the other side does have an attorney, you can ask the judge for more time (called a continuance) so you can seek legal council.

It would be to your benefit to bring evidence such as police reports, medical records, photocopies, witnesses, etc., to support your claim.

You should also prepare a list of specific restrictions or limitations you want placed on the respondent, as part of the HRO. For example: Please restrict the Respondent from having

contact with myself or my minor children, please restrict Respondent from coming to my place of employment or school. The Judge cannot order someone be barred from a house of worship or public place.

You should keep a copy of your protection order with you at all times. If you need assistance from law enforcement, show the officer your copy of the order.

What Happens If the Harassment Restraining Order is violated?

If the abuser harms you, threatens you, or comes to your home, they have violated the HRO. Call law enforcement right away.

This is the criteria needed to qualify for a Harassment Restraining Order:

To file an HRO a Petitioner must have the NAME & LOCATION of Respondent. Without this information the Order will not be valid.

Unless the incident was a physical or sexual assault it needs to be repeated. It also helps if the Petitioner asks that the Respondent not contact them again.

- Respondent physically or sexually assaulted the Petitioner as follows
- Respondent has followed, pursued or stalked the Petitioner as follows:
- Respondent(s) made uninvited visits to the Petitioner(s) as follows
- Respondent(s) made harassing phone calls to the Petitioner(s) as follows
- Respondent(s) made threats to the Petitioner(s) as follows:
- Respondent(s) frightened Petitioner(s) with threatening behavior as follows:
- Respondent(s) called the Petitioner(s) abusive names as follows:
- Respondent(s) damaged the Petitioner’s property as follows:
- Respondent(s) broke into and entered the Petitioner’s residence as follows:
- Respondent(s) stole property from the Petitioner(s) as follows:
- Respondent(s) took pictures of the Petitioner(s) without permission of the Petitioner(s) as follows:
- Other:

WHAT IS AN ORDER FOR PROTECTION?

An Order for Protection (OFP) is a court order. It provides protection from abuse. It orders that the abuser not commit domestic abuse. It can also remove the abuser from the home you share. It can order the abuser to not contact you. It can also provide temporary custody, visitation, child support, spousal maintenance, and use of property.

An OFP is not a criminal proceeding; it takes place in the family court division of civil court.

WHO CAN GET AN OFP?

Family members or household members may request an OFP. This includes:

- People who are married
- People who used to be married
- People who are related by blood
- People who live in the same home together
- People who have a child together or a pregnancy together
- Dating partners – you do not need to have lived together or have a child

You can get an OFP before, during, or after a divorce case involving the abuser. The OFP court case is separate from the divorce case.

TO PROTECT A MINOR: If a child under age 18 has been abused, the parent or guardian or another family or household member may apply for an OFP on behalf of the child. Also, a reputable adult age 25 or older may apply for an OFP on behalf of a minor, if the court finds that it is in the best interest of the minor, even if that adult is not a family or household member. If you apply for an OFP based on physical or sexual abuse of a young child, get an attorney to help you right away.

DATING PARTNERS: The court looks at the length of the relationship, the type of the relationship, and – if the relationship has ended – how long ago it ended, to decide if you are "involved in a significant romantic or sexual relationship," and are able to request an OFP.

MINORS: Minors, age 16 or older, may get an OFP on their own, without a family or household member bringing the case in court, against the spouse, former spouse, or person with whom the minor has a child in common, IF the court finds the minor is mature, has good judgment, and it is in the minor's best interest.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR AN OFP?

You can apply for an OFP yourself. You do NOT need an attorney. The application does not cost anything. There is no filing fee.

Many victims of domestic violence find it helpful to have an advocate support them through the OFP process. An advocate is a person who helps you get what you decide is best for you. You can, however, apply for an OFP without the assistance of an advocate or attorney.

You may apply for an OFP:

- In the county where you live
- The county where the abuser lives
- In the county where other family court proceedings have occurred
- In the county where the abuse occurred

What Happens At the Hearing?

At the hearing, the court will ask to hear both sides talk about the abuse described in the Petition, and will also hear any other relevant testimony. You have the right to have an attorney present if you wish.

You do not need an attorney for this type of a hearing, but if the other side does have an attorney, you can ask the judge for more time (called a continuance) so you can seek legal council, as well.

It would be to your benefit to bring evidence such as police reports, medical records, photocopies, witnesses, etc., to support your claim.

You should also prepare a list of specific restrictions or limitations you want placed on the respondent as part of the OFP.

You should keep a copy of your protection order with you at all times. If you need assistance from law enforcement, show the officer your copy of the order.

What Happens If the Order for Protection is violated?

If the abuser harms you, threatens you, or comes to your home, they have violated the OFP. Call law enforcement right away.

The police are mandated to arrest the abuser if they violate the OFP. Violation of the OFP is a misdemeanor – the Respondent could be jailed for up to 90 days, fined \$700, or both.

Federal law makes your OFP enforceable in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, tribal lands, and U.S. territories, as well as throughout the State of Minnesota.

What Happens If You Invite the Abuser Back Into Your Home?

If you get an Order for Protection, it is not made invalid because you let the abuser into your home. The purpose of the OFP is to keep the abuser away from you because you fear you may be harmed.

However, you should know that the abuser may still be held in violation of the court order and still may be fined, jailed, or both. Also, you should know you put yourself in an extremely vulnerable position since law enforcement may not take you seriously later on when you really need their help.

Sexual Assault Program

The sexual assault program of Someplace Safe is operated by staff or volunteers who have been trained to help victims/survivors cope with a wide range of needs and responses to domestic violence.

24 Hour Crisis Line

There is a crisis line available to anyone at any time, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The line is staffed by individuals trained to listen, offer information, and make referrals to cooperating emergency agencies if necessary.

Advocacy Services

Advocates are trained staff and volunteers who offer help for victims, survivors, family and friends who have been affected by family violence. Advocates are available 24 hours a day and will assist survivors of abuse or assault at the hospital or law enforcement center. Advocates will also be available to accompany the survivor and/or family through the criminal or civil court systems.

Parenting Time Centers

Someplace Safe Parenting Time Center provides a safe neutral environment to visit or exchange children. Intakes are required. PTC office locations Fergus Falls, Perham, Ortonville, Morris, and Glenwood. Sliding fee scale used for services.

Community Education

The goals of community education are prevention and awareness. Presentations are designed to increase awareness about domestic violence and sexual assault. Our speakers include trained staff and volunteers who will speak to clubs, schools, or organizations. Informative programs are available on domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and child abuse; these focus on raising awareness and prevention of future violence. Presenters also discuss all services available through Someplace Safe.

Volunteers

Trained volunteers are directly involved in providing the services that Someplace Safe offers. All volunteers complete an initial 40 hour training program and receive on-going training. If you are interested in volunteer opportunities, call Someplace Safe for more information.

All Advocacy services provided by Someplace Safe are completely free and confidential.

Crime Victims Rights

As a victim of a crime, you have the right to be informed and participate in prosecution. You also have the right to:

- Request a speedy trial
- Receive notice of changes in the schedule of court proceedings if you are required to testify.
- Have a safe waiting area separate from the defendant during court.
- Not give out your home or work address in open court unless the judge finds that this is necessary.
- Take time off work to testify without your employer disciplining you.
- Be notified of any plea agreement or deposition before it is finalized.
- Express to the judge orally or in writing any objection you may have to the proposed plea agreement or disposition, or have the prosecuting attorney do so on your behalf.
- Be present at the offender's sentencing hearing. You, or the prosecutor on your behalf, can submit a victim impact statement, orally or in writing, at the sentencing hearing.
- Be notified of the final disposition of the case.
- Receive restitution. You must submit requests for restitution in writing.
- Request a probation review hearing if the offender fails to pay restitution as ordered.
- Know when an offender is released or escapes from jail, prison, or any other facility, or is transferred to a minimum-security setting. You must request this in writing from the Commissioner of Corrections or the head of the facility where the offender is confined. Or if VINE service is available in your area, you may call to see if the offender remains in custody.
- Victims of Criminal Sexual Conduct may ask the prosecutor to request the court to order a convicted sex offender to submit to testing for the HIV or AIDS if certain conditions occurred in the crime.
- Victims of domestic assault or harassment have the right to input in a pre-trial diversion decision.
- Injured victims may receive financial compensation from the Crime Victim Reparations Board for certain costs incurred as a result of crime such as medical care, counseling costs, lost wages, childcare, or funeral expenses – NOT property damage or loss. Claims must be filed within two years of injury except cases involving domestic child abuse. For application information, call 1-800-247-0390, TTY (612) 282-6555.

REMEMBER: Tampering with a witness is against the law. If you are threatened, call your local law enforcement agency and/or your prosecuting attorney.

Child Sexual Abuse

You should know about these signs...

When you have concerns for a child's well-being, the indicators listed below may help guide you in your thought process. Many of these "symptoms" or "signs" could be caused by things other than abuse or neglect. Generally, these indicators do indicate that a child's safety may be at risk and, at the very least, the situation should be assessed by a professional who is able to determine the causes of these symptoms and offer the help and assistance necessary to reduce the risk to a child.

Signs of Sexual Abuse

Physical Indicators:

- Torn, stained or bloody underclothes.
- Frequent, unexplained sore throats, yeast or urinary infections.
- Somatic complaints, including pain and irritation of the genitals.
- Sexually transmitted diseases.
- Bruises or bleeding from external genitalia, vagina or anal region.
- Pregnancy.

Behavioral Indicators:

- The victim's disclosure of sexual abuse.
- Regressive behaviors (thumb-sucking, bedwetting, fear of the dark).
- Promiscuity or seductive behaviors.
- Disturbed sleep patterns (recurrent nightmares).
- Unusual and age-inappropriate interest in sexual matters.
- Avoidance of undressing or wearing extra layers of clothes.
- Sudden decline in school performance, truancy.
- Difficulty in walking or sitting.

Signs of Emotional Abuse

Physical Indicators:

- Eating disorders, including obesity or anorexia.
- Speech disorders (stuttering, stammering).
- Developmental delays in the acquisition of speech or motor skills.
- Weight or height level substantially below norm.
- Flat or bald spots on head (infants).
- Nervous disorders (rashes, hives, facial tics, stomach aches).

Behavioral Indicators:

- Habit disorders (biting, rocking, head-banging).
- Cruel behavior, seeming to get pleasure from hurting children, adults or animals; seeming to get pleasure from being mistreated.
- Age-inappropriate behaviors (bedwetting, wetting, soiling).
- Behavioral extremes, such as overly compliant-demanding; withdrawn-aggressive; listless-excitabile.

Background/General Information Regarding Sexual Assault

Sexual assault does not discriminate. Females and males of all ages, all walks of life, and all races can be victims. Sexual assault is defined as any sexual contact to which one party does not consent. Sexual assault includes:

- Rape or forced vaginal, anal or oral penetration,
- Forced touch of the intimate/private parts.

Force can be accomplished by physical assault, threat, by manipulation, coercion, or trickery. The assailant's goal in using any kind of force, physical or emotional, is to make the intended victim vulnerable and less able to protect her or himself. Often, the kind of force the assailant uses may become the focus of a victim's self-blame. ("I shouldn't have been drinking." "I shouldn't have gone off alone with him." "I should have fought back harder or argued more.") It may help to remember that the assailant's intent was to make the victim vulnerable.

Assailants may be anyone. Assailants are family members, strangers, acquaintances, marriage or other intimate partners, someone of the opposite sex or someone of the same sex, professionals such as counselor, clergy or medical personnel. Sexual assault occurs within the sex industry or the use of women and children in prostitution and in the making and use of pornography.

Sexual assault is a humiliating, terrifying, often brutal crime that violates the individual in the most intimate way. Whether the victim knows or does not know the assailant, the fear and terror can feel the same. Most victims say their fear of being killed during the assault may have been stronger than their fear of being raped. The motive for sexual assault is not the need for sexual gratification but the desire to overpower, dominate, humiliate or hurt another person. Sex is not the motivator but the tool of that harm.

Remember these things...

The following was written by someone who was assaulted, just as you were. Keep it with you, read it as many times as you want to, as often as you want to. It may seem too "logical" for you right now, but these are things you must remember and remind yourself of anytime you need to.

This assault was not your fault. No one can cause an assailant to attack, no matter where you were, what you happened to be doing or wearing or who you are.

Almost anything you are feeling is normal. Different people have different responses. Your feelings may stay the same, or change suddenly. If you are worried about your feelings, check them out with someone who knows about these things.

Talk to someone, or many people, when you want to, and talk to the person that you want to talk to.

If someone you talk to hassles you, don't listen to them. You deserve support and response from someone who doesn't want to make your feelings go away.

Don't be surprised if you begin to feel better and then difficult feelings come back -fear, anger, confusion, or whatever - because that's perfectly normal and probably how it will be for awhile.

Make sure you follow up with your medical care: the tests for pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease need 6-8 weeks to "check out."

Don't confuse rape with sex - they're two different things, and can cause a whole lot of pain if they're confused. Rape is violence, something you don't ask for or consent to...sex is what you can have when you want to.

This is a crisis - a serious one, the worst thing you could imagine happening - and you must take care of yourself. Do whatever makes you feel safe and feel better. Check it out with a professional if you are uncertain.

You are not dirty, you are not bad...try to get angry at the assailant for making you feel this way about yourself.

In spite of how you feel now, you are a good, courageous person who has survived a terrifying and violent experience. You will be stronger one day soon.

There is nothing to feel ashamed about. Ask for help if you want it. You deserve all the support that's available.

Something changed in how he acted that night. Am I just a bad judge of character?

Sometimes, the circumstances of an assault can make us question ourselves or the response we will get from others - whether professionals or friends. In the examples above, all of the victims deserve the right to make decisions about what they want to have happen. They all deserve the right to find personal and professional resources which will provide a helpful response. A call to the Sexual Assault Program can be a first step in getting support for concerns like those listed above. Remember, no one deserves to be assaulted.

Health care following a sexual assault involves three important parts:

Part One: The Initial Exam

An initial medical/evidentiary exam is done for the following three purposes:

- . to begin a determination of your physical injuries,
- . to provide you with physical and emotional care,
- . to collect evidence of the sexual assault should you choose to have the crime investigated.

For medical and legal reasons it is very beneficial to have this exam done as soon as possible following a sexual assault. If you have not yet received any medical attention, consider discussing this with a Sexual Assault Program advocate. She can assist you with information about who in our community does the exams, what happens during the exam and how payment is handled. An advocate will also accompany you to an exam if you would like them to.

Part Two: Follow-up Care

After an initial medical exam, it is important to remember that follow-up tests and visits to a physician are extremely important in determining any long term health concerns. If you were seen and treated at the Stevens Community Medical Center, you should have received information on whom to contact to schedule a follow-up appointment. If you received medical attention in another setting, you may be expected to pursue follow-up appointments on your own. In either situation, a Sexual Assault Program advocate is available to discuss any questions you have about follow-up medical care.

Part Three: Learning More About Health Concerns

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Depending how soon after the sexual assault you were able to seek medical attention, you may have received medication to help prevent you from becoming infected with a sexually transmitted disease or STD. While this early treatment can be beneficial, follow-up testing is necessary to accurately determine whether or not you were infected with an STD.

If you did not complete follow-up testing, or you have not yet sought STD testing since the sexual assault, you may want to consider doing so. Many sexually transmitted diseases do not exhibit symptoms or may have periods of time when symptoms disappear. Even though they may not cause noticeable discomfort, untreated STDs can create long term health problems. Early detection and treatment can help prevent these long term health complications. Sexual Assault Program advocates are available to talk with you about your concerns and provide referrals to confidential testing sites.

HIV/AIDS

Victims of sexual assault frequently express concerns about having been infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. You should know that experts believe that most victims of sexual assault face a low risk of contracting the virus. The best way for you to learn more about your potential risk is to be tested at a confidential or anonymous testing site. Trained health professionals offer the test along with pre and post test counseling. Although it may be necessary to wait between 6 to 12 weeks after the sexual assault before it is possible to detect the presence of the virus, earlier testing can document your status prior to the assault. Sexual Assault Program advocates can talk with you further about these considerations and your other concerns. We can also provide referrals to testing sites and other available services.

Pregnancy

If you received a medical exam soon after the sexual assault, you may have been offered medication to prevent an unwanted pregnancy. If you did not seek medical services or did

not take the medication, you may consider getting a pregnancy test. It may be necessary to wait 1-2 weeks after your expected next period to be tested. Since there are several variables involved in making an accurate determination, consult a health care professional about the best time to be tested. You may consider requesting that this be done in conjunction with other STD testing.

For many sexual assault victims, seeking medical attention may not be a priority, especially if they are experiencing little or no physical pain. Others may be very concerned about knowing whether they were infected or have become pregnant through the sexual assault. Both reactions are very understandable. As you consider your own health issues, keep in mind that early detection and treatment of any health problems can be an important step in regaining control in your life and reducing any long-term complications. Sexual Assault Program advocates can assist you with support, and referrals for any questions you may have.

A Guide For Friends and Family

Someone you know and care about has been sexually assaulted. They are suffering terror and feelings of helplessness which are perfectly rational responses to her experience. They need time and support to work through these feelings.

Your friend/relative's reaction to being sexually assaulted is individual, and thereby, the pain and needs are unique, as well. Let your friend/relative take the lead in their own recovery. Right now, they need to be in control of their actions. Don't force them in any way. Regardless of how sincere you are, if they feel that you are being pushy or coercive, you won't be helping.

Believe

Believe the experience without question. Do not blame. Whatever the circumstances, this person was not looking or asking to be assaulted. It is very common for the victim of a sexual assault to blame them self.

Reassure

- 1) the blame for rape rests squarely and only with the assailant, and
- 2) there is no way of knowing what would have happened if they had acted differently.

Respect.

Respect the fear. Assailants commonly threaten to kill or seriously harm the victim if they do not comply.

Most victims we have spoken to did not know whether they were going to live through the experience or not. This fear does not go away when the rapist does. This fear is real. Help them deal with it by finding ways to increase safety.

Accept

Accept the strong feelings. The victim has a right to any emotion. They have a right to be numb, sad, angry, in denial, terrified, depressed, agitated, withdrawn, etc. Being supportive is an attitude of acceptance of all their feelings, an atmosphere of warmth and safety that the victim can rest in. Tolerate the moods, be there.

Listen

Let the victim know you want to listen. It doesn't matter so much what you say, but more how you listen. Try to understand what they are going through. The victim did the very best she knew how in a dangerous situation.

The Victim Survived!

- Find a time to be alone with the victim (Ask what the victim needs from you. Offer to make time to be available to them).
- Let her talk, don't interrupt.
- Show interest in what is being said by sitting close, facing the victim and looking at them.
- Nod your head occasionally to let the victim know you are still with them and listening.
- You may feel nervous about stalls and silences. They're okay, just let them happen.
- If the victim needs help to continue talking, try repeating back the things they have said.

- Reassure the victim that they are not to blame. Blaming questions such as "Why didn't you scream?" or "Were you hitchhiking?" are not helpful. Instead you might say, "It's difficult to scream when you're frightened"

or "Hitchhiking is risky, but you were asking for a ride, not to be assaulted."

Take the victim seriously

Pay attention. This will help validate the seriousness of the feelings and the victims need to work them through. Sexual assault is a shattering experience which a victim does not get over in a hurry or alone. It may be months or years before the victim feels fully recovered. Recovery is a process of acceptance and healing which takes time.

Stay With the victim

Stay with her as long as she wants you to. One of the most upsetting losses experienced by rape victims is the loss of independence and solitude. For awhile, many women feel too frightened to endure being alone. This will pass with time. Meanwhile, be good company.

Let them make their own Decisions.

Do not pressure them into making decisions or doing things they are not ready to do. Help them explore all her options. It is essential to respect their confidentiality. Let them decide who knows about the sexual assault.

Care

Care about the victim's well-being and your well-being. In order to care about your friend, you may need to cope with some difficult emotions of your own. If you are experiencing rage, blame or changes in how you feel about your friend/relative - you can be most helpful to them by finding ways of coping with your own emotions. Sexual assault is not provoked nor desired by the victim. In fact, sexual assault is motivated by the assailant's need for power and control and his desire to humiliate and degrade the victim. The Sexual Assault Program has advocates that can help people sort through their feelings and emotions.