



In the Aftermath: A guide for survivors of sexual assault and Intimate Partner Violence

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Purpose of this Publication

To educate anyone in the alt sex communities on:

- what they might expect to experience after an assault,
- what the options are,
- things to consider when weighing options and making a decision,
- what they might expect if they decide to report their experience and
- resources available to assist in coping with and healing from abuse

Statistically, we know that the majority of survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual assault are women and the majority of perpetrators, regardless of the gender of the survivor, are male. This publication is intended for all survivors, regardless of gender.

Clarifying Terminology

There are many definitions used for both sexual assault and domestic violence as well as misinformation about what constitutes abuse or assault in the context of a BDSM relationship. In the interest of assuring a common understanding of these terms as they are used in this publication, they are defined and outlined here.

Sexual Assault: Sexual assault is defined by the Department of Justice Office of Violence Against Women as any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient. Falling under the definition of sexual assault are sexual activities such as forced sexual intercourse, forcible sodomy, child molestation, incest, fondling, and attempted rape.

Rape: Rape definitions vary by state and in response to legislative advocacy. Most statutes currently define rape as nonconsensual oral, anal, or vaginal penetration by body parts or objects using force, threats of bodily harm, or by taking advantage of someone who is incapacitated or otherwise incapable of giving consent. Incapacitation may include mental or cognitive disability, self-induced or forced intoxication, status as minor, or any other condition defined by law that voids an individual's ability to give consent.

Intimate Partner Violence: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention define intimate partner violence as follows: Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) occurs between two people in a close relationship. The term “intimate partner” includes current and former spouses and dating partners. IPV exists along a continuum from a single episode of violence to ongoing battering and includes four types of behavior:

- Physical violence is when a person hurts or tries to hurt a partner by hitting, kicking, or other type of physical force.
- Sexual violence is forcing a partner to take part in a sex act when the partner does not consent. Threats of physical or sexual violence include the use of words, gestures, weapons, or other means to communicate the intent to cause harm.
- Emotional abuse is threatening a partner or their possessions or loved ones, or harming a partner’s sense of self-worth. Examples are stalking, name-calling, intimidation, or not letting a partner see friends and family.

BDSM/Kink:

BDSM includes a broad and complex group of behaviors between consenting adults involving the consensual exchange of power, and the giving and receiving of intense erotic sensation and/or mental discipline.

In a healthy BDSM relationship all parties involved are actively invested in the well-being of each other and themselves.

According to the National Leather Association, BDSM is not abuse or domestic violence because:

- BDSM is voluntary. The partners agree to erotic power exchange of their own free will and choice. Either partner is free to leave at any time. The fact that BDSM relationships do split (amiably or not) without retaliation or violence supports the importance of this distinction.
- BDSM is consensual. All partners involved agree to what is going to happen. Discussion of limits is usual and customary. Violation of those limits is a serious offense within the SM community.
- BDSM partners are informed. Participants involved in erotic power exchange have an understanding of the possible consequences.
- BDSM partners ask for and enjoy the behavior; they are often disappointed if the behavior does not happen. There is no apology for the behavior after it is over, rather both partners are happy and satisfied that it occurred.
- BDSM partners take great care to make sure that their activities are as safe as possible. To truly damage their partner would deny themselves of being able to participate in the behavior. Individuals that violate their partners' limits soon find that they are lacking partners in which to engage in the behavior. To emphasize the point, BDSM groups frequent hold educational meetings on how to safely engage in the behavior.

Intimate Partner Violence

BDSM versus Abuse

Because the BDSM lifestyle involves activities that may be considered abusive in the mainstream, it may be hard for some individuals to distinguish between what is abuse in a relationship and what is healthy, consensual BDSM.

Intimate partner violence occurs when one person demonstrates a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors intended to control their partner in nonconsensual ways.

Intimate partner abuse can occur between any two or more intimates. Intimate partner abuse is not isolated to any particular group. Submissives and those new to the lifestyle are not the only survivors of intimate partner abuse within the BDSM lifestyle. Dominants may be survivors as well.

Non-consensual dominance and control, also known as “intimate partner violence” or “Domestic violence,” may include:

- physical abuse
- threats of physical abuse
- emotional abuse
- threats against yourself or your property
- stalking

If you feel like something is not right in your relationship or you are uncomfortable with your partner’s behavior you should pay attention to that feeling and explore with someone you trust those things that cause you concern.

Warning Signs of Intimate Partner Abuse

While most abusers purposely try to hide their intentions and/ or have many rationalizations about their behavior, there are some things to look for that can be red flags:

- **Isolation:** In most abusive relationships, the abuser attempts to cut off someone’s family, friends, and independent financial resources. This can be very subtle. Beware of anyone who criticizes your friends and family or tries to monopolize all of your time.

- **“Jekyll and Hyde” behavior:** Most abusers are not obvious but will go back and forth between being loving, caring and attentive and then angry and abusive. The abuser may then apologize and make excuses for their behavior.
- **Unrealistic expectations of the relationship:** Many abusers will push for intimacy very quickly and expect you to make decisions about the future of the relationship after a very short period of time. Consider carefully requests to move in, be collared, or any other relationship milestone that seems to come too quickly. They may also become very dependent very quickly and expect you to meet all of their needs.
- **Blaming:** A person who never seems to take responsibility for their problems in their day-to-day life, is unlikely to take responsibility for problems in a relationship.
- **Intense Jealousy:** Abusers will accuse you of having affairs or seeing other people. Or say things like “If I can’t have you no one will.”
- **Fostering financial or emotional dependence:** Abusers will often manipulate their partner to become fully dependent on them. They can then use this dependence to coerce their partners into doing activities they don’t want to do.
- **Minimizing and Denial:** Abusers frequently deny or minimize their abusive behavior.

Safety Planning

Many survivors of intimate partner violence are controlled by the tactics of their abusive partner. By thinking ahead and planning for your safety, you can take away surprises and feel more empowered in your life.

A safety plan is a strategy that helps you to identify ways to keep you and your family safe. Your plan will be unique to your situation and may include a plan to leave the abuser or it may be a plan to protect yourself while remaining with the abuser. The plan will adapt and change over time as your situation changes.

Having a safety plan is important regardless of what decisions you make about your relationship.

Safety plans should address the following areas:

- How to escape if there is an emergency
- How to get help if leaving is not an option (neighbors, family)

- Where to go once you get away (if leaving)
- How to be secure at a new location
- How to keep a link to helpers/support network
- How to stay safe at work, leisure and while commuting.
- How to keep kids and pets safe
- Protecting your “Stuff” (bank accounts, email accounts, personal property)
- Anticipating/Responding to abuser’s actions: who to call, maintaining a journal or log, how to communicate if necessary
- How to use computers and other technology safely

In an Emergency:

- Remember that your safety and well-being are your primary concern. If your partner becomes violent, do not hesitate to call the police.
- In the midst of a violent incident stay away from the kitchen and garage or any other room that contains visible weapons. Avoid small spaces where you might become trapped like bathrooms or closets.
- If you call police, explain what has occurred and write down the officer's badge number and name. You might also want to take pictures of all injuries and damages even if the police have already done it.

Protect Yourself at Home:

- Always carry a charged cell phone; know your phone's blackout areas. Most domestic violence centers offer recycled cell phones that you can use in an emergency to summon 911.
- Plan an escape route from your home and teach it to your children; know where you will go to escape. Know the domestic violence shelter in your area.
- Develop a signal with a trusted neighbor to alert them to when you are in danger (flipping on a porch light, etc.).
- Take a self-defense course and carry a noisemaker or personal alarm.
- If you are no longer living with the abuser, change all of your locks.

Protect Yourself Outside Your Home:

- Change routes to work, school, stores and ride with others; shop and bank in new places.
- Cancel joint bank accounts and credit cards; open new accounts in your name only at a different bank.
- Keep any court orders and emergency numbers with you at all times!
- Carry noisemakers or pepper spray/mace.
- Park in a well-lit space close to the door; ask security or a coworker to walk you to your car, bus, and lunch.

Actions to Consider:

- Call the police and report the violence.
- Seek a court order prohibiting the abuser from coming near you (injunction for protection, restraining order). Assistance with this process is available from most domestic violence centers.
- Have medical staff document your injuries and their cause.
- Call a confidential 24-hour crisis line. Resources are available in the back of this publication.
- Keep a journal and photos of the abuse (keep this in a spot where the abuser will not find it).
- Prepare an Escape Bag:

An escape bag can give you access to the things you need if you have to get away in a hurry. Keep a bag/box/suitcase in a safe place away from home (at work or a friend's). Place "originals" in the bag except for items you must carry with you

or things you can't take without the abuser knowing. Do not use your car or purse as these are places that an abusive partner might look.

Your emergency bag might contain:

- Identification for you and your children: driver's license, birth certificates, Social Security or immigration cards
- Cash
- Extra keys: car, house, storage, business, etc.
- Checkbook, ATM Card, credit cards, bank books, etc.
- Address book and phone numbers
- Food stamps, Medicaid cards, insurance cards, etc.
- Car registration; car, health and life insurance papers
- School and medical records
- Divorce, custody or injunction papers
- Proof of your partner's income (copy of a check stub)
- Home calling card (calls can be traced and cell phones have GPS in them)
- Copies of bills you owe with partner
- Change of clothes
- Medications and prescriptions for you, your children and pets (bring extra)
- Personal hygiene products (toothbrushes, tampons, deodorant, etc.); diapers, formula, toys, blankets
- Abuser's personal information (picture, date of birth, Social Security number, work permit information, place of employment, vehicle description and license plate)

Getting Help

Advocacy

If you are being abused you may feel very alone. You may feel like you are trapped in the relationship and that you cannot get away. There are many resources available that can help you to plan for your safety. **YOU ARE NOT ALONE!**

Domestic violence advocates are specially trained in the dynamics of abuse and can work with you on a personal safety plan and help you access resources that can make leaving easier for you.

Many survivors of abuse are hesitant to reach out for help for a variety of reasons. They may be afraid of judgment, afraid that they won't be believed, or afraid that the abuser will find out that they told and retaliate. For those in the BDSM lifestyle, these fears may be compounded by the inclusion of BDSM activities and the unique dynamics of power exchange relationships.

Because there is frequent confusion among service providers about the difference between BDSM and abuse, it might be helpful to bring information like this manual along with you to help facilitate any discussion around your involvement in BDSM, power exchange and/or other activities.

Medical Treatment

Your health and safety are of primary importance. If you have been injured by abuse, please seek medical attention.

As important as it is for you to seek treatment for any injuries, it is also important for you to know how your medical information might be shared.

Some medical personnel may be mandated to report certain injuries or crimes. Laws about this vary from state to state. Some states require medical personnel to report intimate partner violence or injuries made with weapons or that are the result of violence. More information about this can be found at: [Futures Without Violence](#).

When seeking medical treatment, you will be asked to sign a statement of understand regarding privacy laws under the [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act \(HIPAA\)](#). It is important for you to understand that privacy laws do allow for medical personnel to release your information in making reports to law enforcement about certain crimes. More information about HIPAA for survivors of domestic violence, including circumstances under which intimate partner violence can be reported can be found [here](#).

If you find that you have to explain BDSM or consensual non-monogamy to medical personnel during the course of treatment, you might want to use resources available from the National Coalition Sexual Freedom including this manual and/or:

- [Kink Clinical Guidelines](#)
- [Consensual Non-monogamy for Mental Health Professionals brochure](#)
- [What Psychology Professionals Need to Know about Polyamory](#)
- [BDSM Glossary](#)
- [Education Outreach Resources for Professionals](#)

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Frequently Asked Questions About Sexual Assault and BDSM

- **Was I sexually assaulted?**

There are lots of misperceptions about what does and does not constitute a rape or a sexual assault. The main consideration is whether the act was consensual or not.

There are three main considerations in judging whether or not a sexual act is a crime or if it is consensual (which means that both people are old enough to consent, have the capacity to consent, and agreed to the sexual contact).

1. Are the participants old enough to consent? Each state sets an “age of consent,” which is the minimum age someone must be to have sex. People below this age are considered children and cannot legally agree to have sex. In other words, even if the child or teenager says yes, the law says no.

In most states, the age of consent is 16 or 18. In some states, the age of consent varies according to the age difference between the participants. Generally, “I thought she was 18” is not considered a legal excuse — it’s up to you to make sure your partner is old enough to legally take part.

Because laws are different in every state, it is important to find out the law in your state. You can call your local crisis center or the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1.800.656.HOPE to find out more about the laws in your state.

2. Do both people have the capacity to consent? States also define who has the mental and legal capacity to consent. Those with diminished capacity — for example, some people with disabilities, some elderly people and people who have been drugged or are unconscious — may not have the legal ability to agree to have sex.

These categories and definitions vary widely by state, so it is important to check the law in your state. You can call your local crisis center or the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1.800.656.HOPE to find out more about the laws in your state. Or you can consult with NCSF’s [State by State Assault laws](#).

3. Did both participants agree to take part? Did someone use non-consensual physical force to make you have sexual contact with them? Has someone threatened you to make you have intercourse with them? If so, it is rape.

It doesn't matter if you've already started having sex or what you have previously negotiated—you have the right to change your mind. If you use a predetermined "safe word" or express to your partner that you want to end an encounter or a scene and your partner does not stop or if your partner forces sex when it was not previously discussed, that is assault.

- **I didn't resist physically – does that mean it isn't rape?**

Physical resistance is not always possible or safe but many people believe that only a violent incident is truly considered rape. This is not true. If you are coerced, threatened or forced into sexual activity when you did not want to, you have been sexually assaulted.

- **I used to date the person who assaulted me – does that mean it isn't rape?**

Even if you are involved in a long term relationship with someone, married to them, have played with them in the past, or have had sex with them in the past, does not mean that you consented to an assault. You have the right to change your mind about your relationships and to withdraw consent at any time.

- **I was drunk or my partner was drunk – does that mean it isn't rape?**

You have the right to drink if you are of legal age to do so. This does not give anyone the right to have sexual contact with you without your consent. If you are intoxicated, you are not able to consent.

Your attacker's state of intoxication is not an excuse for assault.

- **I have a Master/slave contract...doesn't that mean I have to tolerate whatever my Master does?**

It is important to understand that contracts regarding relationship dynamics do not override the law. A Master/slave contract is not a defense against the crime of sexual assault, nor is it an excuse to be abusive.

You should always feel that you have the right to leave a relationship or to withdraw consent.

Safety and Prevention

While this publication is aimed at assisting survivors of assault, many who read it may not have been assaulted and may be looking for ways to keep themselves safer and be prepared in the event that something happens. While it is never the fault of the survivor when someone chooses to assault them, there are some things that people can do to reduce the likelihood of an attack. Please keep in mind, however, that not remembering or implementing these safety strategies does not mean that the survivor is responsible for the assault. Perpetrators are the only ones responsible for their behavior.

There is no absolute way for a survivor to prevent rape or sexual assault, but there are precautions and strategies that one can use to decrease both the motivation and opportunity of a perpetrator. While most sexual assaults are perpetrated by someone the survivor knows, rape by a stranger also happens frequently. These precautions are suggestions for minimizing your chances of sexual assault in various scenarios of both stranger rape and acquaintance rape.

Safety in Relationships

It is an unfortunate fact that most sexual assaults (between 73% and 85%) are perpetrated by someone known to the survivor. Because of this, it is important to understand safety in relationships. It cannot be stressed enough that a survivor is never to blame for having been assaulted; but there are some precautions and tips that may help to decrease the likelihood of assault:

- Be aware that the survivor's home is the most common location (other than the offender's home) for sexual assault to occur. Homes, yours or theirs, should NOT be the first place where you meet someone alone early in the relationship, and especially for a first in-person meeting. Most accountings of sexual assault in the BDSM community are in the context of play with a relative stranger in a private setting where there is little to no accountability.

If you are new to the BDSM lifestyle, make connections in the community through munches and other public events. These are great, safer places to meet someone that you may be interested in dating or playing with.

Even if you have been around for a long time, this is a safe thing to do when meeting new potential partners. Whether you choose to meet at a lifestyle event or a “vanilla”

venue, you should meet publicly. Anyone who hesitates to meet publicly should be considered with caution.

- When you are out at clubs, bars, munches or any other social gathering, always keep your drink in your hand. If you must leave your drink, order a fresh one when you get back. Leaving a drink unattended gives opportunity for someone to put date-rape drugs in it.
- Be mindful of your alcohol and/or drug consumption when you are with someone that you do not know well. Being under the influence can impair your ability to respond to a situation. If you know you are going to use any mind-altering substance, it is best to have someone you know well and trust with you.
- Get comfortable with being honest about your desires and intentions in a relationship. When negotiating a scene or a BDSM relationship, it is important for you to know what you are willing and not willing to experience and to communicate these things clearly.
- Honor your RIGHT to control your own life and your experiences, including the right to decline any level of sexual activity, at any time, with anyone. Even if you have previously consented to something, you have the right to change your mind. Don't allow yourself to be pressured into any sexual or play activity that you don't want or don't feel good about.
- **Trust your instincts. This is the most important thing.** If a person seems to have nothing wrong with them that you can put your finger on, but they just give you the willies, the skeevies, and/or the heebie-jeebies—DO NOT PLAY WITH THEM. If a particular activity, invitation, or group of people makes you more nervous than it really ought to--stay away. That crawly feeling on your spine and that sinking feeling in your stomach are the best safety aides you have. They are not wrong. They are not silly. You should not "give that person/activity a chance." Do not doubt your gut.

Don't be afraid to be a picky. "No" requires no explanation and no debate. Play with someone because you want to, not because you can't come up with a good reason not to. If someone asks you "Why Not?" after you have said "No" that is a warning sign in itself.

- Remember that you don't "have to" do anything. Beware of anyone who tells you that to be a "real" Dominant or submissive you must act a certain way or engage in a specific

activity in a specific way. Consent to things because you want to do those things specifically, not because anyone or anything challenged your authenticity or competence, or in any other way made you feel obligated.

- Whether you are a top or a bottom you should be knowledgeable about the specific play you engage in. Take a class, go to a party and watch an experienced person at work, and or ask an experienced person to teach you. The more that you know about the play you are engaging in the easier it will be to keep yourself safe and to know when things are not as they should be.
- Use a safeword. Although safewords are no substitute for trust and knowledge, and a person who is unsafe may disregard the word, it can clearly communicate your desire to stop a scene and demonstrate that you are no longer consenting

Online Safety

It is important to use discretion when engaging in online correspondence. Never give out personal information to anyone online unless you are absolutely sure of who is receiving that information. Especially do not give information to anyone you do not know well.

Remember that it is very easy for a person to hide their true motives when they are corresponding online. A few things to consider:

- Does this person seem too good to be true?
- Are they consistent in what they write and say? Do they contradict themselves?
- Does this person express a level of intimacy in the relationship right away? Do they expect complete submission from a stranger? Or do they immediately call you “Master” before you have established a relationship?
- Does this person push you for “cybersex” when you don’t want it?
- Do they respect your concern about safety? Do they belittle your precautions and try to coerce you?
- Do they have nothing nice to say about past partners?

Safety in Your Home

According to the US Department of Justice, Bureau of Statistics, 4 out of 10 rapes occur in the survivor’s home. Although the majority of perpetrators are known to the survivor and do not force entry into the home, it is still important to take precautions to keep out unwanted intruders or those who are no longer welcome:

- Use good quality deadbolt locks on all exterior doors, including the door from the garage to the house, and from a basement to the house if the basement has a window, coal chute, or other outside access.
- Have the locks on all exterior doors re-keyed when you move into a new house or apartment or when roommates or other persons with access to your home are no longer welcome.
- Keep your garage door shut when not in use. Remember that your garage remote is also a key of sorts. Remember to re-code your remote and opener to prevent unauthorized access. Do this NOW - if you keep your remote on the default setting, anyone can open your garage door by simply buying a replacement opener! Change the code again if you have persons who are no longer welcome in your home. Your local police department, sheriff's office, crime prevention organization, or hardware store can help with this. Perpetrators looking for easy targets have been known to buy a bunch of remotes set on the default setting and just drive around pushing the buttons until they find doors that open for them - don't let yours be one!
- Install a peephole viewer with a minimum 180 degree viewing angle to the front door and get in the habit of checking it BEFORE you open the door...EVERY TIME - get in the habit.
- Install key locks to secure sliding glass doors. Since these doors can be shaken off their tracks if there is enough "play" in them, it's also a good idea to put a dowel in the door so that it can't be rocked. Dowels can be obtained from your local hardware store and cut to your measurements for less than \$5.
- Good lighting is a deterrent to crime. Install adequate exterior lighting at all entrances. Lights that come on with motion sensors are even better.
- Don't open your door to strangers. Never let anyone into your house to use the phone, even for an emergency. Offer to make the call for them, but don't let them inside. You are always better safe than sorry here so don't hesitate to call the police for assistance.
- Request identification from all repairmen and maintenance persons. You can even request identification from people claiming to be police officers. The police will NOT think you are crazy if you dial 911 to find out if the cop at your door is really a cop (this author used to be the one ANSWERING those 911 calls!) Impersonating an officer is a

common ruse used by perpetrators to gain entry into a survivor's home. If you don't see a marked police vehicle through the peep-hole, or if the visitor says they are a private investigator or plain clothes detective, call to find out.

- Don't advertise that you are home alone or that your home might be unoccupied. Keep a light on in more than one room to make it appear that you may not be alone. Lamp timers are great for creating the impression of multiple people being home, as well as for use when you're away from home. Remember, most rapists and burglars are opportunists and if you can increase their belief that confrontation is possible, easier targets may be sought.
- Keeping extra keys hidden outside your home can be dangerous. Perpetrators know all the best spots like "hide-a-rock", under the doormat, under a potted plant, etc. If you're got to keep one out (for example, as a backup for your kids who get home before you), then don't put the extra key anywhere near the door. Put it somewhere that is NOT convenient and thus not likely to be found (for example, in a ziplock bag, buried at the edge of a flower garden, or stuck behind the air conditioning unit with a magnetic key holder). Give extra keys to a trusted neighbor and always notify them if you have someone that will need the key in advance.
- Pay attention to your landscaping! Other than lighting, this is one of the best elements that you can alter to deter crimes at home. Is your home easily visible from the street? Is your address/house number easy to see if police or EMS are trying to find you? Do plants or shrubs obscure your windows and provide places to hide or cover for someone wanting to pry open a window?
- Contact your local police department or sheriff's office. Most departments will happily give you a free home security survey.

Safety While Driving and in Your Car

- Park in well-lit areas
- Always lock your car, whether you are inside or the car is parked.
- Have your keys in your hand when heading to your car and stay alert of your surroundings while approaching your car.

- If working late, try to go to your car in the company of a friend or security guard. If this is not possible, try to move your vehicle close to the office before sunset.
- Get in the habit of looking inside your car and the back seat before you get into the vehicle.
- If you have car trouble, raise your hood and put on your emergency flashers. Wait for help inside the car with the doors locked. If possible, try to pull into a well-lit area or under a street light.
- If you're thinking about stopping to help someone else on the side of the road, remember that you should go to the nearest phone and call the police to assist them. They get faster service from the towing companies than you ever will.
- Don't pull over for flashing headlights. If it is an emergency vehicle there will be red and/or blue flashing lights, usually on top of the car. If the lights are at the front of the car, it may be a "low profile" law enforcement vehicle. Even during a legitimate traffic stop, always pull into a well-lit area that is visible from the road.

Safety on the Street & Out in Public

- Always be alert and aware.
- If you are being harassed by someone, always head towards lights or people.
- If you think you are being followed, DO NOT GO HOME. Head for a well lit area, a crowded area, or an open business with people around, like a convenience store.
- Don't hitchhike.
- If something doesn't feel right, TRUST YOUR FEELINGS. Don't feel pressured to "go along." It's ok to wait for the next elevator, or take another cab, or whatever if someone's presence makes you uneasy.
- If you use Laundromats, try to go with a partner, neighbor or friend.
- Take SPECIAL precautions when traveling. Remember, rapists are opportunists, and tourists generally have a more relaxed posture concerning their safety.

If You Are Attacked

During the course of an attack, it may be hard to think. You may be paralyzed with fear or you may fight back physically. Trust your instincts during the course of an attack. Fighting back may deter the perpetrator or it might put you at risk of significant injury or death. Only you can decide the right course of action. Try to stay as calm as possible in the moment and pay attention to specific details. This can increase the likelihood of accountability for the attacker.

If the attacker is a stranger, pay attention to as many specific details as possible:

- Clothing: What are they wearing? Is their face covered? If so, with what? What kind of shoes are they wearing? Do they have jewelry on?
- Features: What is their eye color? Hair color? Do they have facial hair? Body hair?
- Odors: Do you notice an odor of alcohol? Body odor?
- Voice: What do they sound like? High voice or low voice? What did they say?
- Weapons: Do they have a weapon? What kind? What does it look like?

As soon as possible, once you are safe, write down as many details as you can remember. It is important to capture details on paper as soon as possible as you may forget them easily once you are safe.

If the attacker is known to you, once you are safe you may want to write down as much as you can remember of your encounter. Include as many details as you can of the events leading up to the attack including:

- Details of your conversations: Be as specific as possible and try to remember and write down exactly what was said.
- Details of past encounters and any differences between these.
- Details of the relationship: Is it a neighbor, coworker? Play partner? Is this an intimate partner?

Getting Safe After an Attack

The first and most important thing for you to do is to get away from the perpetrator and to a safe place. This might mean getting to your home, a friend's home, a police station or a hospital. It is important make sure you are not in any danger anymore.

This can be particularly difficult if you are living with your perpetrator, such as a spouse or a relative. If this is the case, you might need to develop a safety plan with someone you trust before leaving.

Getting Help

Your health and physical safety should always be the first priority. If you are injured, call an ambulance or get to the nearest hospital immediately.

There are many services available to assist in the immediate aftermath of an assault. Because this is such a difficult time and because there are so many decisions that you will have to make, it is important to have help and support. Some people or places that you might want to reach out to include:

- Rape Crisis Line
- Domestic Violence Hot Line
- Law Enforcement
- Family
- Friends

Some things that you should know when seeking assistance after an attack:

- Do not shower, wash your hands, change your clothes, brush your teeth, drink anything, douche, urinate, etc. All of these things will destroy evidence such as fibers, hairs, saliva or semen which may help law enforcement to identify your attacker. This can be very difficult as the feeling of being “unclean” and wanting to shower is very strong for many survivors.
- Most states have victim assistance programs that will pay for evidence collection, medical treatment and other financial losses that are incurred as a result of a crime; however, some of these programs require that the survivor cooperate with law enforcement and prosecution. An advocate can help you to access these resources and can explain to you the requirements for each state.

BDSM and Medical Treatment

Some medical personnel may be mandated to report certain injuries or crimes. Laws about this vary from state to state. Some states require medical personnel to report intimate partner violence or injuries made with weapons or that are the result of violence. More information about this can be found at: [Futures Without Violence](#).

If you do not have injuries that resulted from BDSM activities or the attack was not in the context of a BDSM event or relationship, it may not be necessary to discuss your BDSM activities or lifestyle with medical personnel. If however, your attacker is your intimate partner in a BDSM relationship, the incident occurred during the course of BDSM activities or if you have

marks, cuts or bruising that resulted from consensual BDSM activities prior to the attack, you may have to discuss this with medical personnel or with others involved in reporting a crime.

This can be a difficult decision as many people engaged in consensual BDSM activities report that they have been discriminated against by medical personnel when disclosing their involvement. While it is very understandable in the face of trauma to want to avoid this discussion, it is important to be honest. Resist the urge to cover up or misrepresent anything that might be related to the attack or to the collection of any evidence.

If you find that you have to explain BDSM to medical personnel during the course of treatment, you might want to use resources available from the National Coalition Sexual Freedom including this manual and/or:

- [Kink Clinical Guidelines](#)
- [Consensual Non-monogamy for Mental Health Professionals brochure](#)
- [What Psychology Professionals Need to Know about Polyamory](#)
- [BDSM Glossary](#)
- [Education Outreach Resources for Professionals](#)

Possible Reactions to Sexual Assault

After going through a trauma like sexual assault or domestic violence, survivors often say that their first feeling is relief to be alive. This may be followed by stress, fear, and anger. Survivors may also find they are unable to stop thinking about what happened. Many survivors will show a high level of arousal, which causes them to react strongly to sounds and sights around them.

Most people have some kind of stress reaction after trauma. Having such a reaction has nothing to do with personal weakness. Stress reactions may last for several days or even a few weeks. For most people, if symptoms occur, they will slowly decrease over time.

If you understand what is happening when you or someone you know reacts to a traumatic event, you may be less fearful and better able to handle things.

Self Blame: Because a survivor's behavior and actions are often questioned after an attack, it is easy for a survivor to believe that they have some responsibility for rape. One study showed that 25% of rape survivors believed that the attack was 100% their fault. Another 50% believed that the attack was partially their fault. THIS IS NOT TRUE! Only the attacker is responsible for rape.

Regardless of your actions, behaviors, style of dress or any other factors, you are not to blame. The only possible way for rape to occur is that a rapist makes the decision to rape.

Reactions to a sexual assault may include:

- Feeling hopeless about the future
- Feeling detached or unconcerned about others
- Having trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Feeling jumpy and getting startled easily at sudden noises
- Feeling on guard and constantly alert
- Having disturbing dreams and memories or flashbacks
- Having work or school problems

Common physical reactions include:

- Stomach upset and trouble eating
- Pounding heart, rapid breathing, feeling edgy
- Sweating
- Severe headache if thinking of the event
- Failure to engage in exercise, diet, safe sex, regular health care

- Excess smoking, alcohol, drugs, food
- Having your ongoing medical problems get worse
- Trouble sleeping and feeling very tired

Common emotional reactions include:

- Feeling nervous, helpless, fearful, sad
- Feeling shocked, numb, and not able to feel love or joy
- Avoiding people, places, and things related to the event
- Being irritable or having outbursts of anger
- Becoming easily upset or agitated
- Blaming yourself or having negative views of yourself or the world
- Distrust of others, getting into conflicts, being over controlling
- Being withdrawn, feeling rejected or abandoned
- Loss of intimacy or feeling detached

Do not hesitate to seek assistance for yourself during this time. A list of resources is available at the end of this publication. Find someone in your area to reach out to. **YOU ARE NOT ALONE!**

Many survivors in the alt sex communities hesitate to seek assistance because they are afraid to talk about their involvement in BDSM, kink, polyamory, swinging, cross-dressing or fetishes. Please do not let this deter you from seeking assistance. The National Coalition for Sexual Freedom has a directory of professionals, including therapists, who are familiar with and nonjudgmental of BDSM, swing and polyamory activities. Please search the [Kink and Polyamory Professionals](#) page to find someone in your area.

Considering Your Options

Who to Tell

You do have options about who to tell. You could reach out to a domestic violence or sexual assault center. You could call police and make a report for crimes against you. You can seek medical treatment if necessary. You could also reach out to friends or family. The decision about who and what to tell is up to you.

Sexual assault centers and domestic violence centers have advocates available to guide you through the process of a making a decision. They can also guide you through the process of a medical exam, evidence collection, reporting to law enforcement, and the other processes of recovering abuse or sexual assault and reclaiming your life. Many of these victim advocates have been trained by the NCSF in understanding the difference between BDSM vs. abuse, and you can request help from NCSF if your local agency needs training.

You have no obligation to report intimate partner violence or sexual assault against you. The decision is a very personal one and is entirely up to you. Do not let yourself be pressured into doing anything that you are not comfortable with.

Many survivors say that reporting is the last thing they want to do; especially right after being attacked. That's perfectly understandable — reporting can seem invasive, time consuming and difficult. Many others want their attacker brought to justice.

There are many good reasons to report, and some survivors say that reporting helped their recovery and helped them regain a feeling of control.

Medical Treatment: even if you don't think you want to report the crime or you are uncertain, please consider immediately getting to a medical facility that can do a "rape kit" to gather evidence and to protect and treat you for any health issues related to the attack. An advocate, friend or family member can accompany you for support and to help guide you through the process.

Remember that you may change your mind and want to pursue accountability for your attacker. The gathering of evidence is a necessary part of this and can only be done immediately after the attack to be most effective.

If You Decide to Report to Law Enforcement

You can report a crime whenever you make the decision to do so; even months afterwards, however, contacting the police and informing them as soon as possible following an incident will allow for the strongest evidence to be gathered. It is also important to remember the positive impact that can come from taking control of the situation and bringing your attacker to justice.

Knowing what to expect from the reporting process can help you to be more prepared. Remember that the only chance for an abuser or a rapist to be brought to justice is by working within the system. Also, because many rapists are repeat offenders, reporting the crime to the police can potentially help prevent future sexual violence from occurring.

Once you have reported, the criminal justice process begins. There may be many individuals with whom you will have to speak and tell your story. You may find that you have to tell your story many times to different people or sometimes to repeat it to the same person again. It is important to understand the roles of each person, your rights to refuse to talk to them, and things to consider when making disclosures.

It will be very helpful to keep a notebook or journal to keep track of the people that you are speaking to whether you speak to them on the phone or in person. Things that you should keep track of in your notebook include:

- Date and time of communication
- Name of person with whom you spoke
- Agency with whom that person is affiliated
- Content of the communication
- Anything of note about the communication (were they particularly helpful or not; were they rude or demeaning, were you comfortable talking to them)

The criminal justice process can be confusing for anyone. Being prepared and keeping track of information as you go may help you to be less overwhelmed.

Remember that you do not have to do this alone. You can ask a trusted friend or family member to be with you during this process. You can also have an advocate with you at any point of the process.

A Word on Confidentiality

Once you have made the decision to report, much of the information that you disclose to the individuals involved may become part of public record or may be shared with other people. It

is important for you to know how your information may be used and shared among all parties involved. Federal laws exist that provide for the privacy of rape survivors but other laws vary from state to state.

Know the limits of confidentiality for each person with whom you speak. Only a few people involved in the criminal justice process are able to keep your information confidential. Sexual assault and domestic violence advocates are usually able to keep your information private depending on the laws of the state you are in. If you want to tell someone information but are not sure that you want that information shared with others, please make sure that you ascertain their role and obligations.

For example, you will want to make sure that the person you are discussing the details with can and will keep that information confidential until you have made a decision about if and how you want to reveal it. If you reveal this information to a member of law enforcement or prosecution, that information will become part of the investigation and will be shared. If you discuss the information with a sexual assault advocate who has privileged communication, the information will be confidential and not be revealed.

[State Laws on Advocate/Victim Privilege](#)

You may want to ask the question “Is the information I give you going to be shared as part of the investigation or is this confidential between us?” Don’t hesitate to question further if you are not clear about the role and obligations of the person you are speaking with. Remember that once information is given, you cannot take it back.

Know Who Is Who

- **Advocates:** An advocate is someone whose job it is to support you through the aftermath of intimate partner violence and/or sexual assault. Their role is to explain your options, assist you in making decisions about what you want to do, and to support you emotionally through the trauma that you have suffered.

An advocate is not the same as a counselor or therapist although many counselors and therapists can fit into this role.

Many law enforcement agencies have victim advocates who respond to the needs of crime victims either at the scene of a crime or afterwards. There are also advocates available through crisis centers. While both have the primary function of supporting survivors of crimes, sexual assault and domestic violence advocates are specialized in this area and are often granted privileged communication with survivors through state

laws which helps protect your confidentiality while you are making a decision about what to do next.

- **Law Enforcement:** Police are the first responders in the criminal justice system. Their role is to respond to reports of crime from citizens and to identify and apprehend suspects. Sometimes a suspect can be identified and apprehended immediately and sometimes a thorough investigation is needed.

Law enforcement includes uniformed officers and detectives. If you call 911 or report the attack immediately, a uniformed officer will usually take the report. Detectives will follow up and continue investigations. Both are part of the initial investigation phase of a crime report. You may speak to several different law enforcement officers who are working together

During the investigation, law enforcement will gather any physical evidence available and will identify and question any witnesses. Questions from law enforcement may seem probing at times but remember that they must gather as much evidence as possible.

Once a perpetrator is identified, law enforcement will make efforts to apprehend that person. If the person is not arrested at the scene, police will present evidence to a judge and request a criminal arrest warrant. Once a warrant is issued, police will look for and apprehend the perpetrator. It can take some time between the incident and an arrest for many reasons, even if you knew the person that attacked you.

During the course of the investigation, law enforcement will work with the prosecutor.

Prosecutor: The prosecutor is the government's attorney in a criminal case such as a District Attorney, States Attorney, U.S. Attorney, Attorney General, Solicitor General, or special prosecutor. They represent the government and the people.

The prosecutor works with law enforcement officers during the investigation and makes the decision whether or not to bring charges for a crime and against whom the charges will be brought. Contrary to what most people believe, it is the State, as represented by the prosecutor that decides whether or not charges will be pursued in a criminal case; it is not the survivor's decision. Crimes of sexual violence are tried in criminal court, with the state acting as the prosecuting party and typically the survivor acting as a witness on behalf of the state.

Most prosecutors, however, do not pursue charges in cases where the survivor does not want to testify or prefers not to move forward with the case. If at any point you have a

preference about whether or not you want to continue cooperating in the criminal justice process, you should discuss this with an advocate and with the prosecutor.

The prosecutor must persuade the jury or judge "beyond a reasonable doubt" of every fact necessary to constitute the crime charged. It is important for survivors to be aware of the intricacies in moving a case forward to prosecution. There are many factors prosecutors take into consideration when deciding whether or not a case can be moved forward to trial:

- Is the offender known?
- Is there a way to prove non-consent?
- Is there forensic evidence (DNA) or other physical evidence to corroborate?
- Are there witnesses? Is the survivor willing and able to testify?

If a prosecution team feels that they are not able to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, they will not move forward with prosecuting the crime. If you are informed by the prosecutor that they are not going to prosecute your attacker, you may speak to the prosecutor about the reasons that they feel unable to move forward.

If the prosecutor feels there is sufficient evidence against your attacker, the case will go forward to trial. If this happens, you will generally be asked to testify.

Although there are no guarantees, prosecutors often have legal tools they can use to protect the survivor in court, such as a rape shield law, which limits what the defense can ask the survivor about prior sexual history. A chart of these laws by state can be found [here](#). The prosecutor can also file legal motions to try to protect the survivor from having to disclose other personal information. If you have any concerns about the disclosure of personal information during the course of trial, it is important to discuss these with a sexual assault advocate and with the prosecutor.

Criminal Defense Attorney: The role of the criminal defense attorney is to protect the rights of the accused and to defend the accused against the accusations against them. You may be contacted by your attacker's criminal defense attorney or investigator to independently investigate the crime and to prepare a defense for the accused.

When the prosecutor files charges with the court, the defendant may plead not guilty and retain a criminal defense attorney. The prosecutor will send a copy of the police report and any other evidence to the defense attorney.

The defense attorney may conduct further investigation into the crime. A defense investigator works for the person accused of the crime and will use information obtained to help the defendant have charges dismissed or reduced, or to receive a lighter sentence. The defense, like the police, may electronically record conversations without your knowledge or consent.

Some things to keep in mind if you are contacted by a defense attorney or investigator:

- You do not have to have contact with a defense investigator.
- You have the right to have a prosecutor or other person present for any contacts.
- If an interview is electronically recorded, you can request and must be provided with a copy of any electronic recordings and any transcripts prepared of the contacts.
- A defense investigator must tell you that he works for the criminal defendant, that the survivor may choose whether to have contact with the defense, and that the survivor may have a prosecutor or other person present during any interviews.

Resources

Hotlines

The hotlines listed below can provide access to domestic violence and sexual assault resources in your community:

The National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). Offers callers information about domestic violence services in their area, and is accessible 24/7.

National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) This line will connect callers to their nearest rape crisis center, and is accessible 24/7.

Websites

- **The National Coalition for Sexual Freedom:** <https://ncsfreedom.org>
- **Office of Victims of Crime: Directory of crime victim services:** <https://ovc.ncjrs.gov/findvictimservices>
- **The National Leather Association Domestic Violence Project:** <http://nlaidvproject.us/who-we-are>
- **Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN):** <http://www.rainn.org>
- **National Coalition Against Domestic Violence:** <http://www.ncadv.org>
- **National Sexual Violence Resource Center:** <http://www.nsvrc.org>