

Pandora's Project

Support and resources for survivors of rape and sexual abuse.

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What to Do if You Have Been Raped

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Get to a safe place.

The first and most important thing for you to do is to get away from the perpetrator and to a safe place. Whether this is to your home, a friend's home, a police station or a hospital, make sure you are not in any danger anymore. This can be very difficult if you are living with your perpetrator, such as a spouse or a relative (in which case, you might want to tell someone you trust and develop a [safety plan](#) before you leave the situation).

Get Help

Call 911, your local rape crisis center or [RAINN](#) (1-800-656-HOPE). It is also a good idea to call a friend, relative, significant other, or resident advisor and ask them to accompany you to the hospital or police station, or to call the police, hospital or crisis center for you. Some communities have victim advocates who will accompany you to the hospital and assist you with the process. Calling 1-800-656-HOPE or your local crisis line may help you find one of these advocates. You may also want to bring a second set of clothes for you at the hospital, as the police may want to keep yours. If you have clothing evidence at home, such as clothing left by the perpetrator, you, or a friend, should place each item in a separate paper bag and have the police collect it later.

Take the Necessary Steps

Do not shower, wash your hands, change your clothes, brush your teeth, drink anything, douche, urinate, etc. All of these things will destroy evidence (things that your attacker may have left behind, such as fibers, hairs, saliva or semen). I know that it is hard... the first thing many survivors want to do is take a shower and be "clean" again, but it is necessary.

Go to the hospital to have injuries treated, and have a rape kit done (minors in the US do not need parental permission to obtain a rape exam, in case you are worried about telling your parents right away). If you make a report to the police of the incident, most states will pay for the evidence collection (The Attorney General's Rape Victims Assistance Program will pay for evidence gathering at the hospital, including Emergency Room registration fee, doctor's fee, and two lab tests). This involves, in most cases, photographs, mouth, anal and vaginal swabs, hair combing and/or pulling (the nurse will let you pull hairs out yourself if you ask), collection of clothes and underwear, fingernail scrapings and/or clippings, drawing blood and a pelvic exam (if female). They will also check and treat you for injuries, STDs and pregnancy (if female). They will, with your permission, administer the morning after pill to prevent pregnancy. Make sure to tell the doctor if you believe you have been drugged.

At hospitals, rape victims have priority after life-threatening cases. If you have been waiting for a long time, ask, or have your friend ask, to be seen more quickly. You may also ask, or have a friend ask, for a private area to wait, instead of the waiting room. You may request a doctor of the same sex as yourself if it will make you feel more comfortable (depending on the hour, this may make your wait time longer). You can have your friend stay with you during the exam. You should expect to be at the hospital between 2 and 5 hours. The exam usually takes about an hour and 1/2.

If you can, make notes, mental or written, about your perpetrator's appearance, the location and events of the assault, etc. This will help you if you decide to talk to the police.

If you can, talk to the police

Getting treatment at the hospital does not mean that you are required to talk to the police. However, if you can talk to the police, and if you do decide to press charges, it is a good idea to talk to them right away when events are fresh in your mind.

In most states, but depending on where you live it could be different, a sexual assault survivor has three options when filing a

police report: a report can be filed with the intent of prosecuting the offender, a report can be filed but without the intent of prosecuting, or a third party report can be filed where the survivor remains anonymous (the survivor's name is withheld from the report) and no prosecution takes place. It is the survivor's right to change their mind at any time during the judicial process. This means: just because you file a report, does not mean you are required to prosecute. Before relying on advice found online or from friends, you should consider contacting an attorney.

Look into the Victims Compensation Fund

This is something to do once you are safe, have been treated at the hospital and have decided the legal route you are going to take. This fund assists victims with things like lost wages, medical bills and counseling. Generally, the crime must have been reported to the police and the claim must be filed within 5 years. You can get more information about this by visiting this website: <http://www.nacvcb.org/index.html>.

Counseling is Vital

It is important to have a support network to help you get through this difficult time. **RAINN** (1-800-656-HOPE) will connect you to a crisis center that will probably be able to recommend a good therapist. You can also look up therapists in your local yellow pages and call around, asking for recommendations for someone who specializes in rape survivors.

Important Things to Remember

It was not your fault

Many survivors feel guilty because they made the choice to "not die" or to not be injured. For example, the rapist may have said "Scream and I'll kill you," so the survivor didn't scream and were therefore, in their mind, an accomplice in their own rape. The fewer physical injuries a survivor suffers during the rape, the more likely it is that this "consent to live" problem will plague her after the rape. This is also true of survivors who are forced to actively "participate" in the commission of the rape. A rapist will often force his victim to act like she is enjoying the rape, to moan or move to help stimulate him. A rapist who cannot complete the act is more likely to seriously injure or kill his victim. If the survivor is forced to "help," her "choice" to do so will haunt her. Nancy Venable Raine was forced by her rapist to pretend to enjoy what he was doing to her. Her "choice" to comply, and avoid death, tormented her.

"although I had no desire and experienced no pleasure, I did have what appears to be 'consent.' I instinctively 'decided' to live... I did make 'a deal with the devil.'... I did, after all, 'consent' in some way, didn't I? This fact, as evidenced by my survival, cast a long and terrible shadow over me for many years, and even now it is not entirely lifted... The shadow cast by my 'compliance' could only be completely lifted if I had 'resisted' to my death. The fact is, I did not."

(After Silence: Rape and My Journey Back)

It was not your fault. You are not responsible for the actions of others and it is not your fault that someone decided to hurt you. Whatever choices you made were the right ones, because you are alive.

You can get through this

Healing is extremely difficult, but you can do it. Things will get better. It may take a long time, and sometimes it may feel like you're getting nowhere, or you're getting worse, but if you keep trying, you can get through it.

Help is Available

There are people who will help you. Call **RAINN** (1-800-656-HOPE) or your local crisis center. Tell a friend, a relative or a significant other. It is important to take an active role in your healing. Talking about your assault to supportive people will make you feel better and less alone. Consider joining the [Pandora's Aquarium message board](#) for support as you heal.

Links

[Suggestions from RAINN](#)

[US and International Hotlines](#)

[Pandora's Aquarium](#) - a message board and chat room for rape and sexual abuse survivors

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Contact Us
Email: admin@pandys.org
3109 W. 50th Street, Suite #320
Minneapolis, MN 55410



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Pandora's Project provides resources and operates an online support group, message board, and chat room for survivors of rape and sexual abuse. No services are intended to be a substitute for professional assistance. Crisis support can be found [here](#).

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