

Self-Defense FAQ

How prevalent is rape in America?

One out of every 6 American women have been the victims of an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime (14.8% completed rape; 2.8% attempted rape). A total of 17.7 million women have been victims of these crimes.

What is the average age of a victim of sexual assault?

Eighty percent of victims of sexual assault are under 30 years of age:

- ⌘ 15% are under 12 years of age
- ⌘ 29% are between 12 and 17 years of age
- ⌘ 36% are between 18 and 30 years of age

What is the most important step to protect myself?

The first and most important step in protecting yourself against rape is mental awareness and readiness to perceive a threat when it is present. The first thing to avoid is denial – **you** could be targeted by a rapist.

How common is rape?

It is a lot more common than most people realize – you probably know several women who have been raped, though they may not have told you. **One in three women** will be attacked with the intent of sexual assault in her lifetime.

Is there a “typical” rapist?

NO. Street and abduction rapes and rapes by strangers forcing themselves into the victim’s home are not uncommon, but **rapists more often target someone with whom they are slightly acquainted**. A neighbor, a student at your school, a guy you saw at a party or a bar, someone you regard as a good friend, even your boyfriend or ex-boyfriend could decide he wants to have sex with you whether you want to or not, and depend on the “it’s my word against hers” plan of getting away with it. (Unfortunately, this plan works too often, partly because too many people believe rape myths.). None of these guys are going to wear a sign saying, “I am a rapist, and I want to rape you,” but they may give off signals that you can sense if you learn to **listen to and obey your instincts**.

Isn't it true that most rapists are strangers to victims?

NO!

In fact, **70% of victims of rape know their assailant.**

Is there a common place where most rapes occur?

YES.

- ⌘ More than 50% of rapes occur within one mile of victims' homes or at their homes.
- ⌘ Approximately 25% of rapes occur in someone else's home.
- ⌘ Approximately 20% of rapes occur outside or away from the home.

When do most rapes occur?

- ⌘ Approximately 42% of rapes occur between 6:00 pm and midnight.
- ⌘ Approximately 32% of rapes occur between 6:00 am and 6:00 pm.
- ⌘ Approximately 24% of rapes occur between midnight and 6:00 pm.

What sort of behavior may precede an attack?

Street rapists are looking for an "easy" victim – someone they can sneak up on who is not paying attention or who doesn't look like they would put up much of a fight. Try not to look like an "easy" victim – **be aware of your surroundings and look like you know what you are doing and where you are going.** Don't walk around with headphones on or when you are under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

A rapist may "interview" you to see what your boundaries are and whether or not you will defend them – he may ask personal questions or try to do you a favor. A street rapist may follow you or say something to you or about you. **Defend your boundaries and don't act like a pushover.**

What should I do when someone makes me feel uneasy?

Be prepared to **notice your feelings** and not repress or feel guilty about them. You may tell yourself that you don't have any good reason to be suspicious, but think instead: **I am afraid for some reason – what has triggered my fear response?** If someone is following you, don't be afraid to turn around and look at him – this may deter a rapist who is afraid of being recognized.

What should I do when I sense a threat?

Before you have “evidence” that you are being threatened, you can do several things:

- ⌘ Try to stay with people or go to people to avoid being in an isolating situation.
- ⌘ Attract attention – yell loudly: **“BACK OFF!” “STOP FOLLOWING ME!” “I DON’T KNOW YOU!” “LEAVE ME ALONE!”**
- ⌘ Scream – an ear-piercing, extended scream is audible from a distance.
- ⌘ Use noise-makers, such as a loud whistle or your car alarm.

Being mentally prepared to make a scene, to yell, to scream or make a lot of noise if you feel threatened is very important. Yelling attracts attention, and also helps to prepare you physically and mentally to protect yourself. Women are conditioned to be polite and overly compliant toward men – **counter this conditioning!**

If someone is scaring you, and you create a scene and turn out to be mistaken, what difference does it make? On the other hand, if you wait until the guy has grabbed you or maneuvered you into a more dangerous situation, you have lost an important opportunity to protect yourself!

To prepare yourself to yell or scream if attacked, practice screaming loudly and yelling loudly from your diaphragm. If you think you would rather blow a whistle than yell or scream, buy one.

According to research studies, “forceful verbal resistance” – yelling and/or screaming – is positively associated with rape avoidance, as is physical resistance. “Nonforceful verbal resistance” – pleading, reasoning with an assailant – is associated with rape completion. Before you are attacked, prepare yourself mentally to yell and scream if you are attacked or feel threatened, and don’t count on ordinary boundary setting or verbal resistance with an attacker.

Resist being relocated by an attacker on the street. Experts believe you have a better chance of surviving, even if your attacker is armed with a gun, if you resist being taken to another location rather than allowing yourself to be relocated.

What should I do about social situations when I feel uncomfortable?

Setting boundaries and defending them is a part of safety, because you will be aware of violations and be more prepared to act when your wishes are not respected. **“I feel uncomfortable when you press up against me. Please allow me some space.”** When you are defending your boundaries, your body language and tone of voice should communicate the same message as your words. “Please stop kissing me” should be spoken in a serious tone of voice, not while giggling.

A potential rapist wants you to keep your friendly and open attitude while he maneuvers you into a situation in which you would be vulnerable to rape. Be on the lookout for drinks or food laced with drugs such as GHB or someone trying to get you drunk. Resist manipulation and, once again, **counter your conditioning**. Just because you have been in a group situation with someone at a party or have talked with him in a bar does not mean that you have to accept a ride from him or go into another room with him. What if he doesn't like it or you seem rude or too suspicious when you refuse? SO WHAT!!! **You can also lie to someone in this situation**, rather than argue with him, if it will help you get to safety – pretend you are willing to go with him, but you need to go get something first. If someone is clearly violating your boundaries or is scaring you, forget the rules that usually apply in social situations, and treat them just like you would an attacker on the street – get ready to make a scene and attract others to your aid.

If you are attacked, don't waste energy pleading with your attacker – research has shown that pleading or reasoning with your attacker is useless.

Should I resist physically and fight back?

YES. Physical resistance and fighting back is often your best choice in defending yourself against an attack. If yelling doesn't induce your attacker to back off, and you don't see a way to escape, you may choose to defend yourself physically. Research has shown that women who physically resisted and defended themselves did **not** increase their danger, but reduced the odds of completed rape and physical injury. The subjects of this research included many who fought back without any specialized training.

Are there any self-defense tactics I can use without receiving specialized training?

YES.

- ⌘ Move fast, hard and without telegraphing what you are going to do – **the element of surprise will work to your advantage.**
- ⌘ If an assailant **has a grip on you**, use the strongest parts of your body that remain free to try to break his hold. For instance:
 - ▶ If you are grabbed from behind, try to stomp hard on his foot, kick him in the shins, or use your elbow to hit him in the ribs.
 - ▶ If he has grabbed your arm with his hand, use all the strength of your arm (or both arms, if one is free) to break the hold, moving in the direction of the thumb of his hand.
 - ▶ If he is on top of you, try to use your hips to create enough space to bring up your feet so that you can kick him off, or hit him hard in the head or neck with one or both hands.

- ⌘ If the assailant **does not have a grip on you**, try to avoid moves that will enable him to grab you or knock you down. For instance:
 - ▶ Kick him in the shin or the knee rather than the groin, unless you think he would not be able to grab your leg or get you off balance if you aimed for the groin.
 - ▶ If you have an object such as a cane or an umbrella, try to hit him with it hard and decisively in a way that does not allow him to grab it.

What should I consider before enrolling in self-defense training?

Different methods of self-defense require different types and degrees of mental preparation and/or training. If you want to improve your knowledge of self-defense and your preparedness to defend yourself, you may want to enroll in a self-defense training program. [Visit http://www.ncdsv.org/ncd_linkselfdefense.html for a variety of self-defense training programs. Check the local yellow pages for a complete listing in your community.]

Here are some questions to ask when considering a self-defense training program:

- ⌘ Have the techniques used in the class been adapted for women and well tested with women? Techniques for women need to consider the strongest parts of women's bodies and to be appropriate for the weight distribution of their bodies.
- ⌘ Has the program been developed with attention to the training safety needs of the students?
- ⌘ If the program involves simulated attacks, have instructors been trained to respond appropriately if these exercises trigger issues for sexual assault survivors in the class?
- ⌘ Are the physical demands of the class within your capabilities?
- ⌘ Is the training likely to advance your self-defense abilities in the time that you can devote to it? Do you have the time to practice what you learn in the class?
- ⌘ When you learn the techniques, would you be willing to use some or all of them in a real-life attack situation? (Consider that when you know and have practiced the techniques, you will be more confident in using them.)

Are there non-lethal weapons I can use for self-defense?

YES. There are lots of non-lethal weapons and other ordinary objects that increase effectiveness of hand-blows, such as kubatons, ballpoint pens, pencils, keys, nail files and flashlights.

What about tasers?

Tasers are legal in most states and could provide a self-defense alternative for those who are trained in their use.

What about pepper spray?

The effects of pepper spray have been studied and tested – pepper spray does not have long-term impact, so there is no risk of maiming or killing an attacker. Pepper spray, used according to the manufacturers' instructions, will disable an attacker for 30-45 minutes.

Pepper spray has overtaken all other sprays that have been used in self-defense because of its effectiveness and the predictability of its effects.

(Please note: "Mace" is not a particular substance, it is a brand-name, and has referred to several different substances in the past.)

The Pepperface.com™ Edition Palm Defender® is an effective self-defense device. Precision machined, this aerospace aluminum body stylishly encases the world's smallest aerosol pepper spray insert. It has these specifications:



- ⌘ 10% Oleoresin Capsicum
- ⌘ 2 million Scoville Heat Units (SHU) of strength
- ⌘ Three 1/2-second bursts per dispenser
- ⌘ Effective range: 3 feet
- ⌘ Weighs 1.8 ounces
- ⌘ Measures 4 1/2 inches – small enough to hang on a key chain

The Pepperface.com™ Edition Palm Defender® is available exclusively at <http://www.pepperface.com/store/products.html>.

Use of pepper spray is restricted in a few localities – for instance, in New York it may be purchased only through licensed gun dealers. There are some restrictions on its use in Federal buildings. Before you travel, you should check on any regulations on it at your destination. Airlines require that pepper spray must be packed in checked luggage.

What else should I keep in mind to protect myself?

Keep the following safety precautions in mind:

At Home

- ⌘ Hang opaque curtains or shades in your windows.
- ⌘ Have a dog or give the impression that you have a dog.
- ⌘ Lock your doors and windows – certainly when you are gone and even when you are home.

While Traveling

- ⌘ Plan transportation to all locations in advance to avoid being stranded alone.
- ⌘ Order cabs in advance, rather than flagging them on the street; this way, the dispatcher knows the identity of the driver.
- ⌘ When driving, don't stop for a minor accident, law enforcement or anything where the road is isolated – drive to a populated area and then stop. Rapists sometimes create minor accidents or masquerade as law enforcement.
- ⌘ Use your cell phone to call law enforcement about any suspicious behavior from other motorists or to summon help in emergencies.

At Work

- ⌘ Recognize sexual harassment as part of the sexual violence continuum.
- ⌘ Make sure your employer does not give out information about you, such as your address, to customers or people who say they know you, etc. Have coworkers take a message so you can return the call if you wish.
- ⌘ Inform your employer if anyone has threatened you, followed you, etc., including being threatened from your present or past intimate partners. If you have a protective order against someone, be sure to notify your employer and carry a copy of the order with you at all times.
- ⌘ When working late, park near the exit in a well-lit area or ask someone to accompany you to your car, if possible.

More safety tips and suggestions are available at www.ncdsv.org.

What should I do in an emergency situation?

Call 911, immediately.

Where can I get more information?

- ✂ National Domestic Violence Hotline – 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE), 1-800-787-3224 (TTY) and <http://www.ndvh.org/>
- ✂ National Sexual Assault Hotline – 1-800-656-4673 (HOPE) and <http://million.rainn.org/>
- ✂ 911rape <http://www.911rape.com/>
- ✂ Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence <http://www.apiahf.org/apidvinstitute/default.htm>
- ✂ Family Violence Prevention Fund <http://endabuse.org/>
- ✂ Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community <http://www.dvinstitute.org/>
- ✂ It Happened to Alexa Foundation <http://www.ithappenedtoalexa.org/>
- ✂ National Alliance to End Sexual Violence <http://www.naesv.org/>
- ✂ National Center for Victims of Crime <http://www.ncvc.org/>
- ✂ National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence <http://www.ncdsv.org/index.html>
- ✂ National Coalition Against Domestic Violence <http://www.ncadv.org/>
- ✂ National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence <http://www.dvalianza.org/>
- ✂ National Resource Center on Domestic Violence <http://www.nrcdv.org/>
- ✂ National Sexual Violence Resource Center <http://www.nsvrc.org/>
- ✂ No! “The groundbreaking feature-length documentary that unveils the reality of rape, other forms of sexual violence and healing in African-American communities.” <http://www.notherapedocumentary.org/>
- ✂ Project GHB <http://www.projectghb.org/>
- ✂ Promotetruth.org <http://www.promotetruth.org/>
- ✂ Sacred Circle – National Resource Center to End Violence Against Native Women <http://www.sacred-circle.com/>
- ✂ Stalking <http://www.esia.net/>
- ✂ Stalking Resource Center at <http://www.ncvc.org/src/Main.aspx>.
- ✂ Stalking Victims Sanctuary <http://www.stalkingvictims.com/>
- ✂ State Domestic Violence Coalitions <http://www.nnedv.org/default.asp?Page=29>
- ✂ State Sexual Assault Coalitions <http://www.nsvrc.org/resources/orgs/coalitions/index.html>
- ✂ Take Back the News <http://www.takebackthenews.net/>
- ✂ Violence Prevention – National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/dvp.htm>

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