

FAQ on Sexual Violence

What is sexual violence?

Sexual violence violates a person's trust and feeling of safety. It occurs any time a person is forced, coerced, and/or manipulated into any unwanted sexual activity. The continuum of sexual violence includes rape, incest, child sexual assault, ritual abuse, date and acquaintance rape, statutory rape, marital or partner rape, sexual exploitations, sexual contact, sexual harassment, exposure, and voyeurism.

- Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (www.pcar.org)

The continuum of sexual violence includes suggestive looks, sexist comments/jokes, verbal, obscene phone calls, peeping, exposure, frottage, sexual assault, aggravated sexual assault, and sexual assault/murder. The common denominator for this continuum is lack of respect.

- Office of the Texas Attorney General, Sexual Assault Prevention and Crisis Services

Sexual assault includes a wide range of victimizations, distinct from rape or attempted rape. These crimes include completed or attempted attacks generally involving unwanted sexual contact between the victim and offender. Sexual assaults may or may not involve force and include such things as grabbing or fondling. Sexual assault also includes verbal threats.

- *Violent Victimization and Race, 1993-98*, (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/vvr98.pdf>), Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice

Sexual violence is a sex act completed or attempted against a victim's will or when a victim is unable to consent due to age, illness, disability, or the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

It may involve actual or threatened physical force, use of guns or other weapons, coercion, intimidation, or pressure. Sexual violence also includes intentional touching of the genitals, anus, groin, or breast against a victim's will or when a victim is unable to consent, as well as voyeurism, exposure to exhibitionism, or undesired exposure to pornography.

The perpetrator of sexual violence may be a stranger, friend, family member, or intimate partner.

- U.S. Centers for Disease Control (<http://www.cdc.gov/>)

Remember, submission is not consent.

What are the types of sexual assault?

- Stranger
- Non-stranger

- Drug-facilitated sexual assault

Who are the victims?

One out of every six 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.

- *Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences of Violence Against Women Survey, 1998*,
(<http://www.rainn.org/fullnvawsurvey.pdf>),
National Institute of Justice and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

About three percent of American men – a total of 2.78 million men – have experienced an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime.

- *Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences of Violence Against Women Survey, 1998*,
(<http://www.rainn.org/fullnvawsurvey.pdf>),
National Institute of Justice and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

About 44% of rape victims are under age 18. Three out of every twenty victims (15%) are under age 12.

- *Sex Offenses and Offenders, 1997*, (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/soo.pdf>),
Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice

Most victims are female.

- Female victims accounted for 94% of all completed rapes, 91% of all attempted rapes, and 89% of all completed and attempted sexual assaults.

- *Rape and Sexual Assault: Reporting to Police and Medical Attention, 1992-2000*,
(<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/rsarp00.pdf>),
Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice

Who are the offenders?

The average age of rapists at arrest is 31. 52% are white; 22% of imprisoned rapists report that they are married.

- *Sex Offenses and Offenders, 1997*, (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/soo.pdf>),
Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice

In about one out of three sexual assaults, the perpetrator was intoxicated—30% with alcohol, 4% with drugs.

- *Alcohol and Crime, 1998*, (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/ac.pdf>),
Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice

Most victims are sexually assaulted by someone they know or can identify. Approximately 66% of rape victims know their assailant.

- *Criminal Victimization 2000* (<http://www.rainn.org/Linked%20files/NCVS%202000.pdf>), 2000 National Crime Victimization Survey, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice

Approximately 48% of victims are raped by a friend or acquaintance; 30% by a stranger; 16% by an intimate; 2% by another relative; and in 4% of cases the relationship is unknown.

- *Criminal Victimization 2000* (<http://www.rainn.org/Linked%20files/NCVS%202000.pdf>), 2000 National Crime Victimization Survey, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice

What are some of the common reactions to sexual assault?

The psychological trauma caused by a sexual assault can be severe and long-lasting. Because people react in very different ways to stress, it is not possible to predict exactly how you will feel. It may be helpful, however, for you to know some of the most common responses of sexual assault victims.

SHOCK AND DISBELIEF

- *"I feel numb."*
- *"I can't believe this happened to me."*
- *"I feel disconnected from other people and from my life."*

Initially, most sexual assault victims react with shock and disbelief. You may feel numb and dazed, withdrawn and distant from other people. You may want to forget about what happened and avoid people or situations that remind you of the assault.

REMEMBERING WHAT HAPPENED AND WHAT IT FELT LIKE

- *"Sometimes, I can't stop thinking about it."*
- *"For weeks, I couldn't wash away his smell."*
- *"It comes back out of nowhere. I feel like it's happening all over again."*

There may also be periods when you are preoccupied with thoughts and feelings about the assault. You may have unwanted memories or flashbacks and nightmares. When you think about what happened, you may re-experience some of the sensations and feelings you had during the assault, such as fear and powerlessness.

INTENSE EMOTIONS

- *"I feel very sad, like I lost a part of me."*

- *"I have this intense anger that I never felt before."*

Many survivors experience intense emotions in the aftermath of a sexual assault. At times, you may feel angry. You may also feel anxious or depressed.

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

- *"I couldn't sleep through the night. I had trouble falling asleep and then I would wake up every night at the same time that the rape happened."*

Some victims have physical symptoms, such as sleep disturbances, headaches, and stomachaches. You may find that it is very difficult to concentrate on routine activities. You may also experience changes in your sexuality, such as a loss of interest in sex or avoidance of sexual situations.

FEELING FEARFUL

- *"Every night when I come home, I search my apartment. I look in the closets and under the bed to be sure no one is there."*
- *"I can't go out alone at night because I am too scared."*

Fears about personal safety are an almost universal response to a sexual assault. Survivors often become fearful in situations and places where they were never frightened before. In many sexual assault situations, the victim feels powerless and/or terrified of being killed or seriously harmed. Afterwards, you may continue to feel frightened and vulnerable for a while.

SELF-BLAME AND SHAME

- *"I felt like it was my fault, I trusted him...."*
- *"I wondered if guys would think I was damaged goods."*

Feelings of guilt and shame are also frequent reactions. Because of misconceptions about rape, victims may blame themselves, doubt their own judgment, or wonder if they were in some way responsible for the assault. Feelings of guilt and self-blame may be reinforced by the reactions of others, who, because of prevalent myths about rape, may blame the victim or criticize his or her behavior. You may also feel ashamed. Some victims describe feeling dirty, devalued, and humiliated as a result of a sexual assault. Feelings of shame are sometimes a reaction to being forced by the assailant to participate in the crime.

EACH PERSON IS DIFFERENT...IT TAKES TIME TO FEEL BETTER

- *"One minute I feel okay and I think I can deal with what happened, and then the next minute I feel overwhelmed and weak. Sometimes it seems like it will never go away."*
- *"It's been 8 months since my rape. It's still always there, but I don't think about it every day anymore."*

Each person is unique. Although many victims experience similar reactions, there are still individual differences in how they respond to the trauma of rape. You may experience some or all of these symptoms. They may occur immediately, or you may have a delayed reaction weeks or months later. Certain situations, such as seeing the assailant or testifying in court, may intensify the symptoms or cause them to reoccur after a period during which you have been feeling better.

- Rape Treatment Center (<http://www.911rape.org/impact/index.html>),
UCLA Medical Center, Santa Monica, CA

EFFECTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- In a study surveying more than 3,000 women at 32 colleges and universities in the U.S., 30% of the women who identified in the study as rape victims contemplated suicide after the incident; 31% sought psychotherapy; 22% took self-defense courses; 82% said the experience had permanently changed them.*
- Compared to non-victims of crime, rape victims were:#
 - 5.3 times more likely to have used prescription drugs non-medically (14.7% vs. 2.8%)
 - 3.4 times more likely to have used marijuana (52.2% vs. 15.5%)
 - Six times more likely to have used cocaine (15.5% vs. 2.6%)
 - 10.1 times more likely to have used hard drugs other than cocaine (12.1% vs. 1.2%)
 - 6.4 times more likely to have used hard drugs or cocaine (19.2% vs. 3.0%)

- * Warshaw, Robin. 1994. "I Never Called it Rape:" *The Ms. Report on Recognizing, Fighting and Surviving Date & Acquaintance Rape*. New York: Harper Perennial: 63

- # Kilpatrick DJ, Edmunds CN, Seymour A, 1992. *Rape in America: A Report to the Nation*, Arlington VA: National Victim Center

Can I reduce the risk of sexual violence?

Yes. Here are a few tips for reducing the risk:

- Don't leave your beverage unattended or accept a drink from an open container.
- When you go to a party, go with a group of friends. Arrive together, watch out for each other, and leave together.
- Be aware of your surroundings at all times.

- Don't allow yourself to be isolated with someone you don't know or trust.
- Think about the level of intimacy you want in a relationship, and clearly state your limits.

- Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (www.rainn.org)

Is sexual assault ever the victim's fault?

No. Sexual violence is never the victim's fault no matter what the circumstances. No one asks to be raped; therefore, the perpetrator is the one to blame, not the victim.

- Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (www.pcar.org)

How many people are affected by sexual violence?

“Persons age 12 or older experienced annually, an average of 140,990 completed rapes, 109,230 attempted rapes, and 152,690 completed and attempted sexual assaults between 1992 and 2000, according to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). Most rapes and sexual assaults were committed against females: Female victims accounted for 94% of all completed rapes, 91% of all attempted rapes, and 89% of all completed and attempted sexual assaults, 1992-2002.”

- *Rape and Sexual Assault: Reporting to Police and Medical Attention, 1992-2000*,
(<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/rsarp00.pdf>),
Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice

Is it a crime?

Rape is a crime. It's motivated by the need to control, humiliate, and harm. It is *not* motivated by sexual desire. Rapists use sex as a weapon to dominate others.

- Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (www.pcar.org)

Laws vary from state to state. To find out more about rape statutes of limitation in your state, visit the Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network website (<http://www.rainn.org/statutesoflimitationcrim.html>).

Are all rapes reported to the police?

No. Most rapes and sexual assaults [are] not reported to the police. [Between 1992 and 2000], 63% of completed rapes, 65% of attempted rapes, and 74% of completed and attempted sexual assaults against females were not reported to the police.

- *Rape and Sexual Assault: Reporting to Police and Medical Attention, 1992-2000*,
(<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/rsarp00.pdf>),
Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice

Why don't victims report rape?

When victims of rape, attempted rape, and sexual assault did not report the crime to the police, the most often cited reason was that the victimization was a personal matter:

- Rape: personal matter, 23.3%; fear of reprisal, 16.3%; police biased, 5.8%.
- Attempted rape: personal matter, 16.8%; fear of reprisal, 11.3%; protect offender, 9.9%.
- Completed and attempted sexual assault: personal matter, 25.3%; reported to different official, 12.4%; fear of reprisal, 11.3%.

THE VICTIM-OFFENDER RELATIONSHIP AND INFORMING THE POLICE

- The closer the relationship between the female victim and the offender, the greater the likelihood that the police would not be told about the rape or sexual assault.
- When the offender was a current or former, husband or boyfriend, about three-fourths of all victimizations were not reported to police (77% of completed rapes, 77% of attempted rapes, and 75% of sexual assaults not reported).
- When the offender was a friend or acquaintance, 61% of completed rapes, 71% of attempted rapes, and 82% of sexual assaults were not reported.
- When the offender was a stranger, 54% of completed rapes, 44% of attempted rapes, and 34% of sexual assaults were not reported to the police.

- *Rape and Sexual Assault: Reporting to Police and Medical Attention, 1992-2000*,
(<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/rsarp00.pdf>),
Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice

A study of 278 acquaintance rape survivors indicated that 97% informed at least one close confidant, 28% informed the police.

- Wiehe & Richards, 1995. *Intimate Betrayal: Understanding and Responding to the Trauma of Acquaintance Rape*, Sage Publications, New York

What is the difference between sex and rape/sexual assault?

Sex is consensual when both persons mutually agree to sexual intercourse.

Rape is forced sexual intercourse, including both psychological coercion and physical force. Forced sexual intercourse means vaginal, anal or oral penetration by the offender(s). This category includes incidents where the penetration is from a foreign object such as a bottle. This definition includes attempted rapes, male and female victims, and heterosexual and homosexual rape.”

- *Violent Victimization and Race 1993-98*, (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/vvr98.pdf>), Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice

Sexual Assault: Any touch or act that is sexual in content and is used for the gratification of the perpetrator by force, trickery, coercion, bribery, or between 2 people where an imbalance exists in age, size, power, development or knowledge. Sexual assault includes child sexual abuse, rape, incest and ritual abuse.

- Office of Texas Attorney General's,
"Sexual Assault Prevention & Crisis Services: Advocate Training Manual"

What is drug-facilitated sexual violence?

Perpetrators use substances to increase the vulnerability of potential victims and decrease their ability to protect themselves. In the criminal justice community, assaults committed using these drugs are known as "drug-facilitated rapes." Many kinds of substances have been used – everything from prescription drugs, illegal street drugs (including so-called "club drugs"), veterinary drugs, and alcoholic beverages. These substances can act in various ways, making victims confused, disoriented, helpless, unconscious, or even comatose. In a number of documented cases, the use of these substances has ultimately resulted in death.

Two of the most commonly used substances are Rohypnol (flunitrazepam) and GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate). Rohypnol, nicknamed roofies, roaches, or "the forget pill", is a powerful benzodiazepine drug 10 to 20 times stronger than Valium. Manufactured by Hoffman-LaRoche Company, a Swiss-based pharmaceutical producer and distributor, Rohypnol is widely used in Europe and Central and South America as a treatment for severe sleep disorders. Rohypnol cannot be legally distributed or possessed in the United States; however, illegal trafficking in Rohypnol tablets occurs nationwide. GHB (also known by street names such as Liquid E, Liquid X, and Grievous Bodily Harm) can be produced in the form of a white powder, but it is more commonly encountered as an odorless, clear liquid. It is particularly dangerous because it is often given to victims in random, unmeasured doses (quickly squeezed into an unattended drink, for example).

Across America, alcohol is by far the most commonly used substance in drug-facilitated rape. Although most of us are aware of dramatic media reports concerning GHB, Rohypnol, and other drugs, many people fail to realize that they are perhaps hundreds of times more likely to be victimized when under the influence of alcohol. Why? Because alcohol is readily available, and because it decreases a potential victim's ability to think clearly, make good judgments, and protect herself.

- Butler County Rape Crisis Program (www.helpandhealing.org), Oxford, OH

What are some common myths/misconceptions regarding sexual violence/sexual assault?

- It can't happen to me.

- Sexual violence can sometimes be the victim's fault.
- If a child I know was being sexually abused, he/she would tell me right away.
- Males should be able to prevent their rape.
- If the people are dating, it's not rape.
- Most rapes are committed by strangers.
- Women often 'cry rape.'
- When an individual commits rape it's because he/she is 'turned on' and has uncontrollable sexual urges.
- Talking about it only makes it worse.

- Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (www.pcar.org)

What can you do if you've been a victim of sexual violence?

- Find a safe environment – anywhere away from the attacker. Ask a trusted friend to stay with you for moral support.
- Preserve evidence of the attack – don't bathe, urinate, or brush your teeth. Don't change your clothes (take clean clothes to change into after the exam) – you should preserve them for the SANE (examination by a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, see below for definition). Write down all the details you can recall about the attack and the attacker.
- Get medical attention. Even with no physical injuries, it is important to determine the risks of sexual transmitted diseases and pregnancy.
 - To preserve forensic evidence, ask the hospital to conduct a rape exam.
 - If you suspect you may have been drugged, ask that a urine sample be collected. The sample will need to be analyzed later on by a forensic lab.
- Report the rape to law enforcement authorities. A counselor can provide the information you'll need to understand the process.
- Remember it wasn't your fault.
- Recognize that healing from rape takes time. Give yourself the time you need.

- Call the National Sexual Assault Hotline, operated by RAINN, for free, confidential counseling, 24 hours a day: **1-800-656-HOPE**.
- *Know that it's never too late to call.* Even if the attack happened years ago, the National Sexual Assault Hotline can still help. Many victims do not realize they need help until months or years later.

- Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (www.rainn.org)

- Get to a safe place.
- Do not shower, bathe, wash your hands, brush your teeth, use the toilet or clean up in any way. You could destroy evidence.
- Do not change or destroy clothing. Your clothes are evidence.
- If it was in your home, do not rearrange and/or clean up anything. You could destroy evidence.
- Get medical attention as soon as possible. (Evidence should be collected when you get to the hospital.)
- Contact a friend or family member you trust or call the local rape crisis center hotline.
- *Most of all, know this is not your fault.*

- Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (www.tassa.org)

GET SUPPORT FROM OTHER PEOPLE

Some rape victims feel that if they avoid talking about the assault, they will be able to forget about what happened to them. Most survivors who try this approach eventually realize that they need to deal with the assault. Their unresolved feelings and fears hold them back from enjoying their lives and participating fully in relationships. Talking about the assault can help relieve some of the control it has over you and help you begin the process of recovery. We recommend that victims seek professional counseling as soon as possible to begin the healing process. Therapy provides a safe, private place to deal with your feelings and concerns. It also can be helpful to talk about your reactions with friends and family members who are supportive and understanding.

TALK WITH A COUNSELOR

- *"Therapy saved my life."*
- *"I'm stronger than he is."*
- *"It's always there, but now I can deal with it."*

- *"I had to grieve for the person I was and learn to love who I am now."*
- *"I wasn't going to be his victim forever."*

Many sexual assault victims find that therapy is a healing and empowering experience. A professional counselor can support you in your recovery from the trauma of a sexual assault.

A person trained to assist sexual assault victims will understand the unique concerns you have and know ways to help you cope with the physical and emotional effects of the assault. A counselor can also help you deal with the reactions of family members and friends.

You can find a therapist by contacting a rape crisis center, a hotline, or a counseling agency in your community. Look in the yellow pages under rape or women's services or call Directory Assistance. You can also call RAINN, a national victim assistance organization, at 1-800-656-HOPE. RAINN will connect you to a rape crisis center in your area. Most rape crisis centers offer free services to sexual assault victims.

- Rape Treatment Center (<http://www.911rape.org/impact/index.html>),
UCLA Medical Center, Santa Monica, CA

What is SANE?

A Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner is a Registered Nurse who has been specially trained to provide comprehensive care to sexual assault patients and demonstrates competency in conducting a forensic exam (and demonstrates the expertise for effective courtroom testimony).

- Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence (www.kcsdv.org/index.html)

What is SART?

The Sexual Assault Response Team is a community-based coordinated response to child and adult victims of sexual assault. The team is comprised of SANE's, hospital directors and administrators, sexual assault victim advocates, law enforcement, prosecutors, judicial members, and any other professionals with a vested interest in assisting victims of sexual assault.

- Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence (www.kcsdv.org/index.html)

Where can you go for help if you've been a victim of sexual violence?

If you were assaulted **less than 72 hours ago**, call the police in the jurisdiction in which the assault occurred, and file a police report. The police will escort you to the nearest hospital with a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner program or other appropriate facility if major trauma is involved.

If the assault happened **more than 72 hours** ago, contact the police department in the jurisdiction in which the assault occurred. Explain what happened. The police will set up an appointment for you to come in and make an official statement.

- The Rape Crisis Center (www.rapecrisis.com), San Antonio, TX

What can you do to support a friend or family member who's been a victim of sexual violence? (Things to say/not to say)

- *Believe them.*
- Listen. Be there. Don't be judgmental.
- Encourage your friend/family member to seriously consider reporting the rape to law enforcement authorities. A counselor can provide the information your friend will need to make this decision.
- Be patient. Remember, it will take your friend/family member some time to deal with the crime.
- Let your friend/family member know that professional help is available through the National Sexual Assault Hotline. Encourage him or her to call the hotline, but realize that only your friend can make the decision to get help.

- Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (www.rainn.org)

What should I do when someone says, "I was raped?"

- Believe them
- Help them explore their options
- Listen to them
- Never blame them for being assaulted
- Ask before you touch
- Recognize that you've been assaulted too
- Get help for yourself

What can men do to end sexual violence?

- **Check the papers. Surf the Net.** Talk to women you know. Pay attention to the stories about rape, battering, and harassment that appear every day. If you do, you'll realize that men's violence against women isn't a myth. It's a serious local, national, and international problem.
- **Don't look the other way if your buddy or another guy is abusive to women.** It takes guts for guys to confront other guys about this stuff. But if somebody's hurting or harassing your mother/sister/daughter/niece/friend, wouldn't you want a man to have the courage to stand up for her?
- **Support organizations that help survivors of men's violence.** Make a donation to the local Rape Crisis or Battered Women's Shelter. Volunteer your time. Better yet, organize a fundraiser! And don't forget to give your personal support to survivors of violence.
- **Organize a group of guys willing to work to end men's violence against women.** Sure, it takes courage to go public. But keep your eyes on the prize: You and your buddies can make a big difference by getting other men to talk about this issue. Men have been silent for far too long.
- **Speak out against rape, battering, sexual abuse and sexual harassment.** Even if you're not the organizer type, you can make a difference by writing a letter to the editor, calling talk shows, etc. And challenge sexist language when you hear it. Racist language isn't cool. Neither are comments that demean women.
- **Think about how you think about women.** Do you believe women should have equal rights? OK. Now try this one: Do you believe women should get stuck with most of the child-and-house chores because of their gender? If so, maybe you still have some mind work to do.
- **Last but not least. Think about the impact of porn on your brain.** A lot of guys think porn is harmless entertainment. If you agree, take this challenge. Immerse yourself in your favorite porn rag or video. Then hit the streets. How do you view the women you see? Do you think of them as 3-D human beings? Or do you see them as 2-D sex objects? Quit porn for a week, and see if it changes your view.

- The White Ribbon Campaign (www.whiteribbon.ca/), Toronto, Ontario, Canada

How can I protect my child from sexual abuse?

- Communicate, communicate, communicate.
- Speak to your children using the proper names for their body parts. Armed with information, children are better able to report abuse to you.

- Teach your children about safe and unsafe touches, as well as what is appropriate physical affection.
- Let your children know that respect for elders doesn't extend to an adult that has made your child uncomfortable. It's OK to say no and it's OK to leave the situation.
- Trust your own instincts. If your instincts tell you something is wrong, follow-up.
- For information about Internet safety, download *A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety* (<http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguide.htm>) from the FBI. The materials are available in English & Spanish.

- Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (www.rainn.org)

For information about a local sexual assault program or to talk with someone who can help, call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE.

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4612 Shoal Creek Blvd. • Austin, Texas 78756
tel: 512.407.9020 • fax: 512.407.9020 • www.ncdsv.org