

Judicial System

For many, this may be the first involvement with law enforcement or the judicial system. It's very common for people to expect what they have seen on television or movies to apply to their current circumstances. Unfortunately, these expectations are often unrealistic or a distorted snapshot of how things truly operate.

Texas has laws and regulations in place aimed at protecting victims. For cases involving prosecution, court advocates can provide you with information, education, and support that will help reduce fears and uncertainties.

Criminal case resolution by plea agreement is a practice that is often utilized. Through both negotiation and agreement, this approach to resolution can prevent the need for testifying in court.

Education and information regarding how the judicial system operates can assist victims and their family in the reduction of trauma.

Benefits of Counseling

Some of the benefits of seeking counseling are:

- Reviewing the incident and processing the event can help you clarify what actually occurred.
- Legal and judicial decisions can be discussed and utilized as part of the promotion of healing and resolution.
- Counseling can help develop coping skills and strategies—allowing for the continuance of school, work or relationships.
- Establishment of a support network can help to decrease the negative physical, psychological and emotional effects that often result from traumatic experiences.

You can utilize the traumatic experiences as an opportunity to build and practice assertiveness, confidence, and even protective instinct skills.

Who can help?

The Travis County Sheriff's Office Victim Services Unit can assist you with information regarding your case status, Victims' Rights, Crime Victim Compensation, navigation of the criminal justice system and referrals to the appropriate community helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.



Resources

SAFE Alliance

512.267.SAFE
www.safeaustin.org

VINE

(Victim Information and Notification Everyday)
1-877-894-8463
www.vinelink.com

Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network

1-800-656-HOPE(4673)
www.rainn.org

Office for Victims of Crime

1-800-851-3420
www.ovc.gov

Sexual Assault

Victim Services Unit

5555 Airport Blvd
Austin, TX 78751
512-854-9709



Name/ID Number:

Direct Number:

Mailing Address:
PO Box 1748
Austin, TX 78767

Types of Sexual Assault

Crimes that involve forced or unwanted sexual conduct are considered to be sexual assaults and can include:

- Acquaintance Rape/Non-Stranger Rape
- Stranger Rape
- Drug/Alcohol Facilitated Sexual Assault
- Forced Sodomy (Oral or Anal)
- Gang Rape/Multiple Rape
- Marital Rape or Marital Sexual Assault
- Object Penetration
- Same Sex Sexual Assault

It is common for victims of sexual assaults to question whether they were victimized and/or whether they are responsible for the event or the opportunity for its occurrence.

Because you may not have resisted verbally or physically, does not mean that you were not assaulted. A choice not to physically resist is often made as a means to avoid escalating the attacker's violence. Surviving the event may require you to refrain from saying "No". Use of a weapon or a threat against your friends or family could also be reasons that make it unsafe to resist.

A question that often surfaces for victims who know or are familiar with the attacker is whether the event is still considered a sexual assault. Sexual assault occurs any time the sexual event is not consensual.

Inability to remember the assault does not mean it didn't occur. Although this may make prosecution difficult or not possible, reporting the incident to law enforcement is welcomed and encouraged.

Many times alcohol and/or drugs are used as an excuse or explanation for the assault. Being unconscious or asleep during the assault may cause doubt about the event. The key is to consider the fact that in these states of mind providing consent is not possible and if you did not give consent, it is sexual assault.

Time and Patience

Recognize that healing from sexual assault takes time. Give yourself the time you need. Many different reactions are understandable and do not mean that you are "going crazy." You may also find yourself reliving the incident, trying to find an alternative response or different outcome. You may see these possibilities in retrospect (now that the immediate danger has passed), but do not forget the reality of what happened. During the assault you were powerless and in a state of fear.

Always remember you are not to blame and that your actions were understandable given the potentially life-threatening circumstances of the assault.

Common Reactions

- Inability to concentrate/function at a usual level
- Changes in appetite
- Nightmares
- Loss of self-confidence
- Stress related illness
- Feelings of grief/despair/helplessness
- Sleeplessness
- Anxiety and mood swings
- Fear of being alone, with people, or in a specific setting—especially at night
- Feelings of guilt and shame
- Denial of the assault
- Flashbacks
- Embarrassment
- Distrust towards others

These reactions may occur immediately after the event or come to the surface at a later time—days, weeks, or months later. You may feel that you are overreacting to normal everyday circumstances and concerns. You may also feel that you are not reacting enough. You may experience one, a few, or several of these reactions.

It's important to remember that a variety of reactions after a traumatic experience can occur. Some of the normal reactions and thoughts you may experience can include:

- **Anger:** I want to kill him/her.
- **Anxiety:** I'm having panic attacks. I can't breathe. I can't stop shaking. I can't sit still. I feel edgy and overwhelmed.
- **Denial:** It wasn't really a "rape".
- **Depression:** How am I going to get through this? I'm so tired. I feel so helpless. I might be better off dead.
- **Disbelief:** Did it really happen? Why Me? Maybe I just made it up.
- **Disorientation:** I don't know what day it is, or where I'm supposed to be. I keep forgetting things.
- **Embarrassment:** What will people think? I can't tell my family or friends.
- **Emotional Shock:** I feel so numb. Why am I so calm? Why can't I cry?
- **Fear:** I'm scared of everything. What if I am pregnant? Could I get an STD or even AIDS? How can I ever feel safe again? Do people know there is anything wrong? I can't sleep because I know I'll have nightmares. I am afraid I am going crazy.
- **Guilt:** I feel as if it's my fault, or did something to make this happen. If only I had...
- **Powerlessness:** Will I ever feel in control again?
- **Sexual relationships suffer:** I can't stand to be touched. Having sex reminds me of the assault. I don't trust my partner not to hurt me. My partner will leave me if I don't have sex with them.
- **Shame:** I feel so dirty, like there is something wrong with me. I want to wash my hands or shower all the time.
- **Triggers:** I keep having flashbacks. I smelled or saw something that reminded me of the assault. I'm still reliving it. I see their face all the time.

These responses will likely subside with time. However, if reactions are especially troubling or long lasting, you may consider turning to a helping professional for assistance.