

Sex Talk

Promoting Sexual Health for Youth

Editor's note

In recent years, we have all become much more aware of sexual assault and sexual violence in our society. Sometimes the numbers seem hard to believe: one of every four Canadian women and one of every seven Canadian men will be sexually assaulted sometime in their lifetime. The fallout from this abuse lasts for years, affecting the individual as well as his or her family.

What exactly is sexual assault? Sexual assault refers to any form of sexual activity with another person without that person's consent. It is a crime of violence and can happen to anyone: adults, children, the disabled, and the elderly. It can happen just about anywhere: at school, in workplaces, at recreation centres, and in the back seat of cars. However, it most commonly occurs in private homes.

Contrary to popular belief, the offender is usually not a stranger. It is someone known to the victim, often someone the victim has come to trust. Recently, the news has been filled with stories of childhood abuse by people considered above suspicion: coaches, teachers, group leaders, and priests.

This issue of Sex Talk is intended to provide you with information regarding sexual assault and what you can do to protect yourself and those you love.

Alice's Story: The Impact of Sexual Assault

"He was one of my best friends. You know the way you tell everything to your girlfriends? That's how close we were. He knew everything about me."

Alice was sexually assaulted when she was 15. The "friend" who assaulted her was 18. They went to the same school. She had known him for a year.

Like many people who experience date or acquaintance rape, Alice couldn't believe it was happening to her. "We were in a neighbourhood park. I knew he was raping me, but it didn't click," she says. "I kept thinking it was a dream or something. After he raped me, he offered to walk me home to 'make sure I got home safely'."

Three years later, Alice is still trying to get over the attack.

Mary Webb of the Sexual Assault Care Centre in Owen Sound says adults should never underestimate the ongoing impact an assault can have on a youth. "Once a youth has been assaulted, their sense of security is very unbalanced," says Webb, who also coordinates support groups for youth who have been assaulted. "They don't feel secure anywhere because the assault was so unexpected.

"Sometimes there is nothing you can do (to avoid the assault) without denying yourself a life," adds Webb. "How can you constantly stay on guard with a friend you've had for years?" While many youth don't seek help until years after an attack, Alice did. She went to

a friend's house. "I can't remember everything about what happened after my friend opened her door. I was still in shock. Her mum called my mum, who called the police." The police investigation and a court process that lasted two and a half years and involved 30 different court dates added to Alice's pain. "He wouldn't show up in court, or his lawyer wouldn't, or something else would delay it."

Eventually, the man who attacked her was sentenced to 15 months in prison.

impact

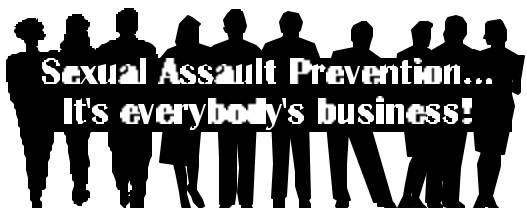
The assault has had a lasting impact on Alice's life. Her friendships at school, her sense of safety, and her ability to respond to the pressures of school work were disrupted by the emotional impact and the court case.

"It was a very small school," she says. "I thought everyone would know what had happened. One of his friends threatened to 'come and get me' because of what I'd done to him." Eventually, the pressure became too much and Alice dropped out.

Webb says youth who have been assaulted need their pain acknowledged and supported from other youth. "Peers are a strong influence for youth, so being with others in their situation is very comforting. By talking about sexual assault with other youth, they can put it in perspective." They can talk about how it affected them, she says.

"The emotional work of

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acknowledging their pain and sitting with them as they work through it is the foundation of healing," says Webb. "Sometimes our training is so strong to try and 'make it better' or just do something. But sometimes there's nothing we can do. If we keep on making suggestions, they (youth) know that we're just missing the point."

services

While Webb says support services are essential for youth who have been assaulted, those services are not always available. Alice says a lack of services contributed to her decision to drop out of school. When she turned 16, she says she got cut from a support group she had been attending because she was too old. "I didn't qualify for Children's Aid anymore, which had paid for me to take taxis to the support groups (and) I couldn't go out anymore because I was afraid to travel alone," she says.

Alice is now trying to fit back into the school system, hoping to take equivalency exams for the credits she has missed. She also works as a volunteer helping other 16 to 21-year-olds who have been sexually assaulted.

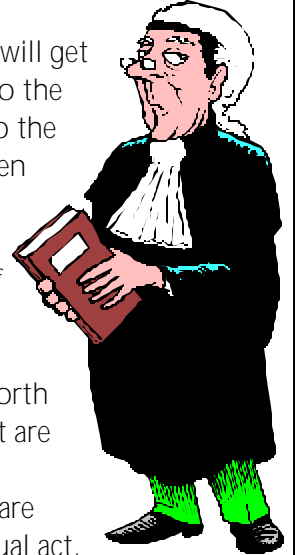
"There's a need for more services for youth," she says. "It's important that youth who've experienced assault don't fall through the gaps."

For information about a support group or counselling, or for referrals to other resources, contact Mary Webb at 519-376-2121.



The Law and Sexual Abuse

- ❧ There are a number of legal complications in sorting out disclosures of sexual abuse from kids of high school age.
- ❧ Much depends on the age of the child disclosing the abuse, and sometimes the age of the abuser.
- ❧ If a child is 16 or under, a child welfare agency will get involved. "If this is someone over 16, it is up to the young person to decide whether to report it to the police," says Sue Askin of the Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound Health Unit.
- ❧ Teachers need to know the law and know the policies of the board they work for in terms of their legal responsibilities, says Askin.
- ❧ "Mandatory reporting of child abuse by professionals is pretty much a given now in North America," says Askin. "Fines or imprisonment are the penalty for failing to report."
- ❧ The law says that children under the age of 14 are considered not capable of consenting to a sexual act, and up to the age of 18, it is illegal for a youth to be used sexually by an adult in a position of authority or trust.



Definitions Related to Sexual Improprieties and Offences

Sexual abuse often used in relation to the sexual assault or exploitation of children

Sexual assault any sexual activity (e.g., kissing, fondling, and intercourse) that takes place without that person's consent

Sexual exploitation a legal term for when a person in a position of trust or authority engages in sexual activity (including invitations to sexual touching) with someone in their care, especially with youth under the age of 18

Sexual favours requesting sexual acts in return for a reward such as a higher grade

Sexual harassment sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other inappropriate verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature

Sexual interference a legal term for touching a young person under the age of 14 for a sexual purpose, including invitations to sexual touching or encouraging a child under 14 to touch his/her own body or someone else's body for a sexual purpose

Help Is Available

If you or someone you know has been assaulted, there are many resources in our community that may assist you.

Grey-Bruce Regional Health Centre -
Sexual Assault Care Centre
SACC 519-376-2121, ext. 2458
Crisis Team 519-376-2121

1-800-265-3133 or 519-371-5487
Sexual Assault Centre of Grey-Bruce
24-hour hotline 1-800-720-7411
Durham 519-369-6633

“Choices” Drug & Alcohol Counselling for Youth



Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound Health Unit

Sexual Health Clinic

The Sexual Health Clinic provides confidential services for adolescents and young adult females and males.

We provide counselling and service on a variety of issues including abstinence, birth control options, emergency contraception, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and AIDS. Both STD and HIV testing are available through the clinic, as well as hepatitis immunization.

We also provide information on healthy relationships including such topics as:

- ◆ What is a healthy relationship? (What are red flags in a relationship?)
- ◆ What can teens do to protect themselves from dating violence?
- ◆ What can parents do to help protect children from sexual assault?

The staff are relaxed and approachable and, of course, confidential. Our clinics are located in Owen Sound, Walkerton, Port Elgin, Hanover, and Wiarton. Please call the following numbers for further information about our clinic hours.

Owen Sound 376-9420 or 1-800-263-3456
Walkerton 881-1920 or 1-800-821-7714
Port Elgin 797-2010 or 1-800-230-7719

Hanover 881-1920 or 1-800-821-7714
Warton 376-9420 or 1-800-263-3456

The public health nurses in our program also act as consultants and provide resources for individuals, community agencies, and groups. We also respond to requests for educational workshops and group sessions.

Please remember that if you know of or suspect a case of sexual assault involving a child, you are required by law to notify the Children’s Aid Society and/or the police.



RESOURCES

USEFUL PHONE NUMBERS FOR YOUTH

Sexual Health Clinics

Owen Sound376-9420
 (toll free).....1-800-263-3456
 Walkerton881-1920
 (toll free).....1-800-821-7714
 Port Elgin.....797-2010
 (toll free).....1-800-230-7719
 There is also a school clinic at JDSS.

Crisis Intervention

Ask for Crisis Team.....519-376-2121

Sexual Assault Centre

24-Hour Hotline1-800-720-7411

"Choices" Drug & Alcohol Counselling for Youth

1-800-265-3133 or 519-371-5487

Kids Help Phone

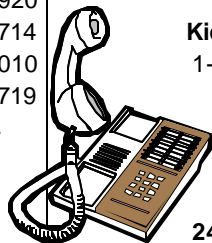
1-800-668-6868

AIDS Hotline

1-800-668-2437

24-Hour Recorded Information on Sexuality

1-800-Info Sex
1-800-463-6739



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To contribute ideas, comments or materials, please call Sue Askin, Sexual Health Program Manager, at 519-376-9420 (1-800-263-3456) or fax 519-376-7782.

Our website is www.srhip.on.ca/bgoshu



Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound Health Unit

Prevention is the Intention

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