

Understanding sexual assault

What is sexual assault?

Sexual assault is any behaviour of a sexual nature that makes someone feel uncomfortable, frightened, intimidated or threatened.

It is sexual behaviour that someone has not agreed to, where another person uses physical or emotional force against them. It occurs within families and in other settings and types of relationships.

Sexual assault can include:

- **Stalking:** repeatedly being followed or watched by someone
- **Rape:** being forced to have vaginal, anal or oral sex
- **Unwanted touching:** pinching, patting, embracing, rubbing, groping, flicking, kissing, fondling, being touched on the breasts, bottom, legs etc
- **Sexual harassment:** dirty jokes or rude comments about a person's sex life
- **Obscene gestures:** simulating masturbation in front of a person
- **Voyeurism:** being watched doing intimate things without permission
- **Unwanted sexual comments or jokes:** comments about a person's body or relationships;
- **Sex-related insults:** calling someone a slut, dyke, homo, slag etc
- **Pressuring for dates or demand for sex:** invitations that threaten, refusal to take 'no' for an answer
- **Indecent exposure:** someone showing private parts of their body or 'flashing' their genitals
- **Being forced to watch or participate in pornography:** taking a photo without permission, forcing someone to be on video, making someone watch a pornographic movie
- **Offensive written material:** dirty notes, letters, phone messages, emails, SMS, pictures
- **Incest/intrafamilial child sexual assault:** a family member engaging in sexual activity with a child or young person
- **Unwanted, offensive and invasive interpersonal communication:** through technologies such as mobile phones, internet social networking sites and email.

The terms sexual assault and sexual abuse are often used interchangeably. Generally, the term sexual abuse refers to abuse that has happened in childhood and has occurred more than once. Sexual assault is often used to describe one-off incidents of sexual assault in adolescence and adulthood.

Sexual assault is an abuse of power.

It is never your fault or responsibility if you have been sexually assaulted.

How common is sexual assault?

If you have experienced sexual assault you are not alone. Almost 2 million Australian adults have experienced at least one sexual assault since the age of 15.

What feelings and reactions might I have after sexual assault?

After sexual assault, you may experience anxiety and low mood; be on the lookout for danger; have flashbacks, intrusive thoughts and nightmares; and have difficulties maintaining relationships, employment or leisure activities.

You may have experienced some of these things or you may have different impacts of the trauma.

All responses to a traumatic event such as a sexual assault are considered 'normal'.

Counsellors at sexual assault services can help you to understand your experience and your responses to the sexual assault.

Where can I get support?

- Sexual Assault Crisis Line (Victoria): 1800 806 292
- 1800 RESPECT (Australia-wide): 1800 737 732
- Find your local specialist sexual assault service in Victoria: sasvic.org.au/our-members