

Clergy and Layperson Response:

A survivor of sexual assault needs compassionate, non-judgmental understanding and assistance. Since rape involves a sexual act, and sexual conduct is a moral issue for the church, there can be a tendency on the part of clergy and congregations to see rape only in sexual terms. Nothing can be more damaging to the victim of sexual assault. Historically, the religious community has dealt with sexual morality around such issues as seductiveness, provocativeness, promiscuity, and even proper dress to avoid such conduct. Consequently, if sexual assault is seen to be primarily sexual, there is a strong temptation to put some blame on the victim for inciting the perpetrator. The business of a faith community is to deal with right and wrong, with a strong temptation to judge being present. But the business of the people of God is also to love, care for, support, and comfort those who have been hurt.

The Iowa Code Defines Sexual Assault and Sexual Abuse As:

- any sex act between persons done by force or against the will of the other; or
- if the other person consented, it was due to threats of violence against any person; or
- if the other person is under the influence of a drug inducing sleep or is otherwise in a state of unconsciousness.

If Someone Has Been Recently Assaulted:

It is important for the survivor to receive law enforcement, medical and legal assistance.

- Make sure the survivor is in a safe place.
- Suggest immediate medical attention if she/he chooses.
-there may be serious injuries that aren't visible, and any sexual contact can expose a survivor to sexually transmitted diseases-
- Instruct the survivor NOT to shower, brush their teeth, use the restroom, or change their clothes.
-important evidence may get destroyed-
- Suggest reporting to law enforcement if she/he chooses.

Exhibit non-judgmental compassion and understanding.

Clergy and congregations can stand by the survivor at every step from the medical examination through prosecution. The violation of the person who has been assaulted results in some of the most acute trauma experienced from any violent crime. Offering understanding, being quietly present, and giving reassurance that the crime was not their fault is very helpful.

The survivor's family will also need a great deal of emotional support during the aftermath of the crime.

Feelings a survivor has may vary from day-to-day, even minute-to-minute. They may shy away from their significant others and loved ones. It is important to allow, and not dismiss, any feelings the survivor is experiencing.

Professional services may be necessary for survivors.

Be aware that there are therapists who specialize in rape issues, especially for sexually abused children and adults sexually abused as children. There are also rape crisis centers located throughout the state who provide support, support groups, and other assistance.

**Iowa Sexual Abuse
Hotline
1.800.284.7821**

What to Say and What Not to Say to a Survivor:

Do Communicate:

"It's not your fault"
"I'm sorry this happened"

Do:

- Express support
- Help the survivor with learning that this experience will cause a disruption in their life, but they will recover
- Be a good listener
- Assist the survivor in getting the help they need/want

Do Not:

- Blame the survivor
- Give advice or make decisions for the survivor—it is important for the survivor to make their own decisions as a step toward regaining control and overcoming feelings of helplessness
- Prod for details about the sexual assault
- Prevent the survivor from talking about the sexual assault if they want to

Important to Know:

- ▶ For each year since 1997, the largest number of sexual assault victims in Iowa were females age 13-17.¹
- ▶ Among women who experienced sexual violence before the age of 18, the perpetrator was most commonly a family member or friend, acquaintance, or a date.²
- ▶ In a national survey it was reported that 29.4% of female victims and 16.6% of male victims were 18-24 years old when they were first raped, and 16.6% of female victims and 12.3% of male victims were age 25 or older.³
- ▶ More than half (54%) of female victims and nearly 3/4 (71%) of male victims were first raped before their 18th birthdays.⁴
- ▶ Strangers were the offenders in just 3% of sexual assaults against victims under age 6 and 5% of the victimizations of youth ages 6 through 11.⁵
- ▶ Overall, the prevalence of having been forced to have sexual intercourse was higher among black (12.3%) and Hispanic (10.4%) than white (7.3%) students; higher among Hispanic female (13%) than black female (12.9%) and white female (11.2%) students; and higher among black male (11.7%) and Hispanic male (7.6%) than white male (3.7%) students.⁶
- ▶ In a study of African American women, a large percentage (43%) of respondents reported being verbally or emotionally abused as a child. Approximately 20% indicated being physically abused as a child, and 22% reported being sexually abused as a child. Of the women who had experienced abuse, approximately 60% indicated they discussed abuse with someone.⁷

¹ 2003 Crime Report, Iowa Department of Public Safety.

² Iowa Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey, calendar year 2001, Iowa Department of Public Health.

³ National Institute of Justice, 2006. *Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Rape Victimization: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey.*

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Bureau of Justice Statistics. U.S. Department of Justice. 2000. *Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident, and Offender Characteristics.*

⁶ Kaba, Mariame. 2004. *Dating Violence and Forced Sex Among Teenagers.* 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System.

Responses to Trauma:

A survivor may experience some or all of the following psychological and physical symptoms:

- rage/anger
- confusion
- self-doubt
- nightmares
- vulnerability
- powerlessness
- frequent crying
- eating disorders
- substance abuse
- sexual dysfunction
- loss of masculinity
- lifestyle disorganization
- lack of concentration
- phobias
- blame
- fear
- sadness
- shame
- anxiety
- insomnia



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Resource to Assist
 African American
 Clergy and Lay Persons

BREAK THE
 SILENCE
 ABOUT
 SEXUAL
 VIOLENCE

