

**S**exual assault is a violent crime meant to degrade, humiliate and control. The attacker can be a stranger or someone known and trusted. It can happen to anyone, any place and anytime. It can be a very traumatic experience. Putting one's life together afterwards may seem like an impossible task. This brochure will give suggestions to help you cope.

## dealing with your feelings

Fear and embarrassment may make it difficult to report the crime and tell those closest to you. After an emotional trauma, one needs the understanding and support of family and friends to help get through this difficult time. It is important to realize, however, that loved ones do not always know what to say or do to help. Well-meaning advice or criticism about what happened can be painful for you. Keep in mind that their reactions may be the result of their own reluctance to accept the reality of everyone's vulnerability to crime. It sometimes helps if you can let them know what you need.

You may experience a variety of feelings during this time. You may have dramatic mood swings for awhile. You may feel raw and vulnerable, cry easily, be irritable or become upset over small things. You may have a startled response if you see someone who looks similar to the assailant or when you see something that reminds you of the crime. These are normal responses to sexual assault. Please remember that if you do not feel all these feelings that is okay. Everybody handles traumatic events in their own way.

Victims tend to go through several stages when coping with a sexual assault. Generally denial comes first, then realization, anger, and eventually resolution of the event.

### ■ the denial stage

Initially, there may be denial and you may shut out others and avoid the subject. It is an attempt to believe the assault did not happen. Disbelief can be a protection from the overwhelming feelings associated with the trauma.

### ■ the realization stage

Denial is often followed by a realization stage where feelings begin to emerge. You may begin to lack trust in others and fear of future assaults may cause you to isolate yourself. There is also a tendency to blame

yourself for the assault. It is important to remember you did the best you could in the situation. You are the victim; the blame rests on your attacker. Do not blame yourself in your attempt to make some sense out of what happened.

### ■ the anger stage

Victims usually move into a stage of anger. This is healthy when your feelings are directed toward your assailant. Sometimes your anger may be misdirected towards those around you. Let them know that you are not angry with them, but rather with what happened to you. The anger indicates you are beginning to integrate the event into your life and move on.

### ■ resolution

Finally, you can begin to look ahead. You accept that it happened and that it was terrible, but you realize it is over.

## suggestions

— Report the crime and cooperate with the police. Taking positive action against the assailant will help resolve your trauma. You will also be helping your community.

— It is your personal decision who else to tell. You have a right to privacy and only those you wish to tell need know about the incident.

— Express your feelings and needs to those who care. Be clear about what you want them to do or not do. If you feel it is necessary, seek outside help to discuss your feelings and reactions.

— It is very normal for the feeling of fear to linger and it is often difficult to overcome. Do whatever you need to do to be safe. Each person must decide for themselves what it takes for them to feel safe.

— Return to your normal routine as soon as possible. Everyday routine will help you regain a feeling of control in your life.

## reaction of others

Your family and friends may also have mixed feelings and confusion over the crime. They may be uncomfortable around you because they may be afraid of making things worse. Common feelings are anger at the assailant and frustration at not being able to direct that anger at the assailant. Marital relationships can become

strained. The victim often feels uncomfortable resuming sexual relations following an assault. Most spouses or partners of the victim can accept these feelings intellectually, but still feel rejected or blamed in some way. Encourage your spouse or partner and other family to seek help if they are having a hard time adjusting.

## police investigation

If an arrest was not made immediately, a detective will be assigned to investigate the case. You will probably be questioned in detail in an effort to get as much information as possible about your assailant and the crime. Report any new information on the case to the assigned detective. You may be asked to help with an artist's drawing, take a polygraph or view a lineup. These are investigative tools. Without positive identification of the suspect, prosecution is not possible.


## going to court

If the suspect is arrested, he may be held without bond or he may be released from jail on bond or on his own promise to return for court. The judge tells him not to see you or talk to you. You should report any contact by him or by anyone claiming to be his attorney to the police and county attorney immediately. Your interests will be represented by the County Attorney's office shortly after an arrest is made and charges are filed.

Crime victims have specific rights under Arizona laws and the Rules of Criminal Procedure which insure that the victim will be treated fairly. Some of these rights must be requested. You will receive more information on these rights prior to any court action.

You may be subpoenaed to testify at a preliminary hearing about what happened. During this hearing, the judge listens to the facts to decide if there is "probable cause" for the case to go forward to Superior Court. This hearing is not to determine guilt or innocence and there is no jury. The court process can take many months. This is normal so try not to be frustrated by the delays. Your Victim Assistance caseworker is available to give you the information and emotional support necessary to achieve successful prosecution. Your input and participation will be important at various times to insure a just outcome.

**remember - we're here for you.  
we want to help!**



## victim assistance and counseling

The West Valley Advocacy Center provides case-workers to help you through the maze of events and feelings connected with your sexual assault. A caseworker can be with you when the police question you to help answer your questions, to give you information about what to expect, and to refer you to needed services. You can come into the office for free counseling related to the crime. When you need or want to talk, the caseworker will listen to you, offer alternatives and help you sort out your feelings. The telephone number is 623-930-3030.

## other community resources

You can also contact the agencies below for counseling and other helpful information.

West Valley Advocacy Center..... 623-930-3720  
A New Leaf..... 480-733-3016  
EMPACT Hotline..... 480-784-1500  
Jewish Family & Children's Service. 623-486-8202

The Maricopa County Attorney's Victim Compensation Bureau, 602-506-4955, may be able to help with medical, counseling, or other expenses incurred as a result of being a crime victim. You may contact them directly.



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# surviving sexual assault



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