



# CATS TO CATS NEWSLETTER



Vol. 3: Sexual Assault and Mental Health

24 October 2020

In collaboration with [From Survivors. For Survivors](#)



## What is **sexual assault**?

Sexual assault is not a term that comes easy to many. According to the United States Department of Justice, sexual assault is “any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient.” Sexual assault is a term that includes sexual activities such as rape, fondling, and attempted rape. Sexual assault is **never** okay and if it’s happened to you, know it’s not your fault. It is **never** your fault. A person can be a victim of sexual assault if they’ve been involved in any type of sexual activity without giving permission.

*Cats to Cats is not qualified to give advice. Cited information does not necessarily reflect the views of Cats to Cats or LGHS. Students can seek professional help from CASSY, view our Therapy Information page, and crisis hotlines page for outside institutions. We are legally mandated to report any information involving potential or real harm to self or others.*

**Please see the last page of the newsletter for the full disclaimer.**

# FACTS & MISCONCEPTIONS

MYTH	FACT
→ It's okay to force someone to have sex if they are drunk, wear revealing/provocative clothing, or agree to go out on a date in person.	→ It's <b>never</b> okay to force someone to have sex. No reason justifies sexual assault; consent must be given everytime.
→ Males always commit sexual assaults.	→ People of any gender can commit sexual assault or be sexually assaulted. It is common to think this, however no one is "immune" to committing these actions.
→ Sexual assaults are usually committed by a stranger.	→ Individuals are more likely to be assaulted by someone famailiar than a stranger — This is called acquaintance sexual assault.

## A few statistics about **sexual assault**:

- 8 in 10 survivors know the perpetrator (acquaintance rape)
- Consent given in the past does not carry over
- In a study of 4008 survivors, it was found that 30.8% experience lifetime PTSD prevalence vs 9.4% of non-crime-related trauma survivors
- Many survivors are under 18 years of age and have been sexually assaulted more than once. Childhood trauma caused by rape is very common and has detrimental long-term effects.
- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men report experiencing an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime.

## WEBINAR SUMMARY:

Cats to Cats vice president, Mabel Heenan, discusses experiences with sexual assault along with some of the For Survivors From Survivors team members in the Sexual Assault webinar. Survivors Maddie and Abbi spoke about their experience, struggles, coping advice, and what they were able to learn from their experiences. Ally, Sasha, spoke on what it means to be an ally, and how to help survivors in the best ways possible. It is important for society to break the stigmatism around sexual assault, and start believing the survivor. Creating an open and safe space is the first step in being a supportive ally. Maddie, Abbi, and Sasha each were able to share their stories, and what it means to be a survivor, or an ally. They each were able to not only give wildcat wisdom, but also share what they learned in their stories and processes.

# Why is it so difficult to go from a 'Victim' to a 'Survivor'?

There are 2 major types of rape:

- **Forcible rape** involves unwanted sexual penetration obtained by the use of force or threat of force.
- **Drug- or alcohol-facilitated rape** occurs when the victim is passed out or highly intoxicated because of voluntary or involuntary consumption of alcohol or drugs. Rape can happen to boys and men as well as to girls and women but this article will focus primarily on women.

No matter the type of rape or sexual violence an individual may face, it is important to realize that it can still be difficult to become a survivor. The terms 'victim' and 'survivor' are defined in the Medium post **Survivor (vs. Victim): What People Mean**: *"A victim has been destroyed and mistreated; a survivor has continued to live and prosper despite having been victimized. A victim is powerless, at the mercy of others; a survivor has reclaimed their power"*. As stated by the **Florida Council Against Sexual Violence**, it can be difficult to go from a victim to survivor because "Some of the impact of the trauma depends upon things such as age, how the person was before the traumatic event, the victim's coping abilities and who the offender was. What happened during the crime can affect the survivor's experience, too, including the severity, frequency and duration of the violence and the degree of personal violation". As mentioned throughout the webinar, it is both hard and takes time to fully understand and comprehend what just happened to a victim of sexual violence. Unfortunately, people often tend to question the truth of the victim's story and society can be shameful and blaming to survivors, which makes it ever more difficult to go through the process of acknowledging that you are a survivor and a thriver, not just a victim. All survivors had "to go through the treacherous valley, all the hard stuff, to be strong enough to climb the mountains". It is important to realize that becoming a survivor can be difficult, but it is not impossible! Just know that there are people who are in full support for any victim that needs a helping hand.

Sources: <https://www.rainn.org/articles/sexual-assault>  
<https://centerforfamilyjustice.org/community-education/statistics/>

## How sexual assault affects individuals

Sexual assault can create certain mental health issues for individuals. These examples do not mean all will experience it, but here are a few that many may experience. Many survivors may develop PTSD after they experience sexual assault. PTSD, or post traumatic stress disorder is a mental illness that is often developed after a very traumatic event. PTSD Symptoms include recurring haunting memories/nightmares, withdrawal from society, jumpy anxiety, and trouble sleeping. Four commonly used psychosocial therapy treatments for PTSD include: exposure therapy, cognitive therapy, anxiety management training, and psychoeducation. Another mental illness survivors may experience is depression. Major depressive disorder, persistently feeling depressed causing a significant interference with your life, is very common in survivors. Prescriptions for this include antianxiety and antidepressants. Survivors may also turn to substance use, such as alcohol and drug use disorders. Effects include changes in mood, serious organ damage, memory and sleep problems, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Survivors also are more likely to develop anxiety and eating disorders from their traumatic experience.

Sources: <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/rape-related-ptsd-issues-and-interventions>  
<https://www.mhanational.org/sexual-assault-and-mental-health>

# WILDCAT WISDOM: WAYS TO COPE

## AFTER SEXUAL ASSAULT/ABUSE

### What should I do if I've just experienced this?

- Turning to someone trustworthy is essential as victims will learn that they are never coping alone.
- <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/recovering-from-rape-and-sexual-trauma.htm> says:
  - ◆ Open up about it, if you feel safe doing so.
  - ◆ Realize that what happened is *never the victim's fault!*
  - ◆ Understand that feelings of guilt and shame are normal, not because there is something to be guilty of, but because sexual assault is traumatic and difficult to cope with.
  - ◆ Take small steps. It's ok to not be ok right away.
  - ◆ Avoid drugs and alcohol, and be careful about social media usage
- <https://www.kch.nhs.uk/Doc/pl%20-%20819.2%20-%20a%20self-help%20guide%20for%20survivors%20of%20rape%20and%20sexual%20assault.pdf> says:
  - ◆ Try not to completely avoid thinking about the assault. Avoidance can lead to harder times down the road.
  - ◆ Keep up physical health: exercise, eating habits, hygiene, sleep. All in moderation.
  - ◆ During flashbacks or nightmares, ground the body using sensory techniques to minimize the nightmares.
  - ◆ Intimacy can be hard after sexual assault: taking small steps and giving time to the body is incredibly beneficial for individual's well being.
  - ◆ It sounds cliché, but take time to rest
- The importance of seeking help from trusted adults cannot be stressed enough.

### Ways to help make a change!

- Speak on experiences! (Of course it is okay not to be comfortable with it at first)
- Foundations like RAINN and NSVRC are nationwide and help survivors all around the country
- Get educated
- Correct behavior in others that encourages rape culture
- <https://www.bustle.com/p/13-sexual-assault-support-organizations-you-can-donate-to-on-giving-tuesday-6334608> lists organizations and what they do

### Sources that are here to support survivors and allies:

View the From Survivors, For Survivors Instagram [here](#).

View the Audrie Pott foundation Instagram [here](#).

View the Los Gatos High School #metoo Instagram [here](#).



## Disclaimer for Cats-to-Cats Peer Education Program

Cats to Cats is a peer-to-peer organization. The students on staff are not qualified to give advice or assist directly with any of the mental health issues presented. All informational and educational content is from widely-accepted sources and the testimonies of individuals featured and interviewed. More information on any of the sources or individuals can be found on this page or on our website. The information cited does not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of the Cats to Cats Team or Los Gatos High School.

Students can seek on-campus professional help from our contracted mental health provider [CASSY](#), or view our [Cats to Cats Therapy Information page](#) for information on outside organizations. In addition, [crisis hotlines](#) are listed on our website.

In addition, if we receive any information involving potential or real harm to self or others, we are legally required to report the incident, which can lead to potential intervention by school or other authorities. The person who contacted us and/or the person's parents will be contacted to verify that the student's parents are aware of the situation and/or that the student is under the care of a professional.

In case of a criminal report, or when in doubt, please contact WeTip at 1-800-78-crime. WeTip receives anonymous and confidential reports and follows up with potential crimes. We encourage all students to be upstanders instead of bystanders when they witness or are the victims of wrongdoing.

# COMING SOON ON NOVEMBER 14



# CATS TO CATS



# WEBINAR

## Coping with College Apps