

## Common Myths About Sexual Trauma and the Truth We Believe

There are a MULTITUDE of myths surrounding sexual trauma\*.

- Because we don't want to believe that this kind of evil exists in our world....
- Because our brains struggle to understand how something so horrific could happen...
- Because we want to make sense of things, even when it's not possible,...

...we find ourselves believing myths. Please know we believe the following statements are **NOT true** and our hope in sharing them (along with what we believe to be true) is to stop the continual spread of such lies and the negative ways people are treated because of them. We desire to come alongside and support those who have experienced sexual trauma as they journey toward healing.

### **MYTH 1: Someone who is drinking or using drugs is at least partly to blame for a sexual assault.**

- The victim of sexual violence is NEVER to blame, no matter what their behavior.
- When someone chooses to drink or use drugs, they choose to use substances; they do not choose to have sex.

### **MYTH 2: Someone who is dressing, or acting in a sexual manner, is "asking for it" and deserves some of the blame.**

- This is another example of victim blaming.
- Anyone should be able to choose what he or she wears without the fear of being sexually assaulted.
- This attitude assumes that sexual violence is about sexual pleasure (it's not) and it assumes that perpetrators simply are not in control of their behavior when they are aroused (which is false).

### **MYTH 3: It's not rape if a couple is dating or married.**

- Rape can and does happen within a relationship.
- Consent must be given for EACH sexual encounter.

### **MYTH 4: Victims who do not fight back have not been sexually assaulted.**

- Anytime someone is forced to have sex against their will, they have been sexually assaulted, regardless of whether or not they fought back.
- When we experience the threat of danger, our brains are wired to default to a fight, flight or freeze response. Freeze is a VERY common response.

### **MYTH 5: Women falsely accuse men of sexual assault or "cry rape."**

- Reported sexual assaults are true, with very few exceptions.
- FBI crime statistics indicate that only 2% of reported rapes are false.
- This is the same rate of false reporting as other major crime reports.

**MYTH 6: All sex offenders are male.**

- Males commit the majority of sex offenses but females do commit some, particularly against children.

**MYTH 7: The majority of child sexual abuse victims tell someone about the abuse.**

- It is estimated that 73% of child victims do not tell anyone about the abuse for at least a year and 45% of victims do not tell anyone for at least 5 years. Some never disclose.
- Child sexual abuse has been reported up to 80,000 times a year, but the number of unreported instances is far greater because children are afraid to tell anyone what has happened.

**MYTH 8: If children stay away from strangers, they will not be sexually abused.**

- Statistics show 93% of juvenile sexual assault victims know their attacker.
  - Family members account for 34.2% of all perpetrators,
  - Acquaintances account for 58.7%.
  - Only 7% of perpetrators are strangers to their victim

**MYTH 9: After time passes, people who experience sexual trauma should be able to get over what happened to them.**

- This idea shows the lack of understanding people have on the pervasive impact of sexual trauma.
- Despite the saying “time heals all wounds”, time itself does NOT heal a person’s trauma.
- It is vitally important that people who have experienced sexual trauma are able to have a safe space to process the way their trauma has impacted them. Support, counseling, community, education and faith are helpful ways to help with that process.

Finally, a personal myth that those who have experienced sexual trauma might believe...

**MYTH 10: What happened to me defines me.**

- Your sexual trauma is part of your story...it is not your whole story.
- It is something that has impacted you and influenced you, but it doesn’t get the final say on who you are. Your story isn’t done yet and there’s hope for the future. You are of great worth and very loved.

*\*Sexual trauma: any type of sexual behavior, visual exposure, verbal harassment or physical contact where consent is not freely given or obtained and is accomplished through force, intimidation, violence, coercion, manipulation, threat, deception, or abuse of authority.*