

You, YOUR^{Best} Friend, or Me

***Sisters,** there's a secret that many of us live with. Never told a soul. The words are never spoken out loud. And when it's spoken, it's in hushed tones never to be repeated. Or we are told it's a cultural thing so we must not shame our culture or our family. But it's not a cultural thing. And it shouldn't be kept in silence because it's happening too often- and it affects us all- You, Your Best Friend, or Me.*

Has someone ever touched you sexually without your permission? In places that you didn't want them to? Have you ever had sex with someone when you didn't want to? Maybe because you felt you had no other choice or because they convinced you that is was the right thing to do. Or maybe you were told that no one would believe you. Or you were too young, too confused to understand what was happening.

It's called sexual assault.

Sexual assault is a word used to describe any unwanted activity or contact of a sexual nature. Sexual assault includes rape, attempted rape, fondling/touching, sexual harassment, child molestation, incest.

The perpetrator is the harm doer and the person responsible for the assault. The perpetrator can be a stranger, friend, pastor, acquaintance, someone you've known for years or someone you just met. Incest is when the perpetrator is a family member or someone who is considered like family.

Sexual assault can happen to anyone - regardless of age, how you look, what you're wearing or how much money you make. It's not a cultural issue. It's an individual behavior. The majority of sexual assaults are planned; the perpetrator intends to hurt you - regardless of what they say. You didn't cause the assault - the perpetrator did.

Some people question if what happened to them is sexual assault. Especially if they knew the perpetrator or if there was no weapon involved.

If it is a sexual activity that you didn't want to happen, then it is **sexual assault.**

In fact, it doesn't matter...

- If** it only happened one time.
- If** they said they're sorry
- If** you said "yes" then changed your mind
- If** it was your friend, spiritual leader, husband, lover, or john
- If** you didn't fight back
- If** it was someone you know and trust
- If** they said they couldn't stop
- If** they said they are just trying to show how much they love you
- If** it's a family member or someone who is considered a family
- If** your family wants you to pretend it never happened
- If** you never told the police
- If** you are the toughest girl on the block
- If** you've been keeping it a secret
- If** the person acts like they did nothing wrong
- If** you or they were under the influence of a substance
- If** you have had sex with the person before...

... it's not your fault, it is sexual assault.

You are not alone. This has happened to many of us -Our aunts, nieces, cousins, girlfriends, daughters, mothers, sisters and grandmothers. In fact studies suggest that 1 in 3 women will be sexually assaulted at some time in their life –

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If YOU have been sexually assaulted:

- Talk to a friend or someone you feel comfortable confiding in. Sometimes it helps just to break your silence and talk to someone.
- Consider calling a sexual assault program to get support through your healing process. You can find more information on our website.
- Be patient and take care of yourself. Allow yourself to cry. It doesn't make you less of a strong, fierce woman.
- Try not to blame yourself. No one can control another person's behavior no matter how hard we try.
- Know that you can heal and reclaim your life!

If YOUR BEST FRIEND or someone you know has been sexually assaulted:

- Believe her.
- Be patient and listen without judging or interrupting her. Don't pressure her to give details; allow her to talk at her own pace.
- Don't question her reaction, people deal with difficult situations differently.
- Tell her that she is not to blame and it is not her fault for the assault. Help her understand that she is not responsible for someone else's actions.
- You may get angry as you are listening to her story. You have to deal with your anger another time. Focus on what your friend needs now.
- Ask her how you can help. Let her decide what she wants to do. Just telling you may be enough for her. Keep the information she has shared confidential. Remember she is trusting you.

Visit our website at www.sisterslead.org/resources to find services in your state or territory that can help. If you can't find services on our website, email us at scsaprograms@sisterslead.org.