

## THE STUDENT WHO HAS SURVIVED SEXUAL ASSAULT

Sexual assault occurs far more frequently than was believed in the past. Recent studies have found that many college students have experienced some form of sexual assault in dating situations. Sexual assault may be defined as any sexual activity that is not agreed upon by adults who are capable of consent. Sexual assault is often experienced as a wrenching loss of control over one's life. For a survivor of sexual assault, restoring that loss requires the ongoing support of others to let survivors make their own decisions. Who to tell about the sexual assault must be their decision, including whether or not to report it to the police. It is especially important to respect the privacy and the rights of the survivor.

The first reaction to an assault may be shock. The survivor may appear to be functioning fairly normally, but is in fact in need of extra support and recovery time. Survivors often react to an assault by feeling guilt or shame (e.g., "It wouldn't have happened if only I wasn't walking there," or "What did I do to provoke him?"). It is very important that faculty and staff do their best to reassure a survivor that the responsibility for the assault rests only with the perpetrator.

It can happen that people forget an experience of being sexually assaulted or abused, only to have it re-surface in their awareness many months or years later. When such a memory surfaces, the survivor may need as much support as someone who has survived a recent trauma.

### DO:

- Listen to the student and help the student find a time/place/person with whom to talk comfortably.
- Allow the student to make her/his own choices about what to do next (even if you disagree). Give the student credit for having lived through a terrible situation.
- Assess the student's need for immediate safety. Police assistance is available by calling **9-911** from an on campus phone or by calling 972-2093
- If the assault has occurred recently, encourage the student to go to the nearest hospital emergency room as soon as possible. They should be examined, treated for any injuries, and screened for possible sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or pregnancy. The physician or nurse will also collect any evidence that may have been left behind.
- Believe the student's experiences without question. Listen without making judgments or giving advice.
- Let the student know that there are supportive services available. These include: the Counseling Center 972-2318; and the Wilson Student Health Center 972-2054.

### DON'T:

- Assume that the incident is not traumatic, even if the student does not seem too distressed.
- Make comments or questions that imply the student could have been responsible, could have done something different, etc.

\* Adapted from: Helping the Emotionally Distressed Student. Organization of Counseling Center Directors in Higher Education; 1999