

YOUTH UPDATE

Mike Duke (16), Matt Grier (Theresa Hathaway (17), Meg Loar (17), Laura Norell (16) and Ryan Penrod (17) met at St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Kettering, Ohio, to discuss and critique this edition. Martha Saurine, parish youth minister, invited them to participate.

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sexual assault

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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Rape only happens in dark alleys in dangerous areas of town to people who have asked for it. Wrong! Rape's main victims are adult

form such violence can take. Rape is not about love gone awry, but about power gone

Who Is a Victim?

Some crimes seem easy to define: murder, bank robbery, kidnapping. But victims of sexual assault are often unsure

if what they've experienced should be characterized as assault. One reason for this is that 84 percent of the time the perpetrator or attacker is an acquaintance if not a relative or friend.

Prevention, Survival and Recovery

women. Wrong again! Estimates—based on current statistics on sexual violence—are that one in three girls as well as one in seven boys will be assaulted before they reach their 18th birthday. Sexual assault includes, but is not limited to, rape.

astray. We need skills to be powerful in a positive way, so that we can prevent violence of every kind.

If, sadly, violence enters our lives or the lives of our friends, we need skills to survive and recover. We also need the strength of our faith to remind us of our priceless value as human persons, individuals held dear by God.

by Lynn Klammer

Janet was 12 when a 16-year-old friend of the family began assaulting her. "I didn't know what was happening was abusive," remembers Janet. "Oh sure, I knew

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Mom and Dad wouldn't like it. I knew it had to be kept secret, but it's not like I was tied up or held down when it happened."

Janet was repeatedly fondled by this family friend from age 12 to 14. She says, "It felt wrong, but I wasn't sure why. He was always so nice to me. I hated it, but I was scared." Janet kept quiet about her assault because she was confused. You don't have to share in her confusion.

Sexual assault does not mean only rape. It also includes any unwanted sexual act that is attempted or completed against you. Janet worried that she had

to understand these feelings. He says, "Our bodies are sacred. Our souls are sacred. When we are violated in any way, that sacred feeling [feels as though it] is destroyed. We feel dirty and unclean. What was done was more than a physical violation. It was a violation of our very selves. That is why the pain is so deep and the shame is so great."

Feelings of shame are often accompanied by feelings of responsibility for the assault, as well as guilt, fear and anger. Colleen Sproul, M.S.W., is the sexual assault program supervisor for Child and Family

maybe something could have been done....By the time I went to my parents it was too late and they told me to just keep quiet about the whole thing. I think their response made me feel the most ashamed."

Just as people have different personalities, likes and dislikes, each person deals with trauma in a different manner. Sproul says, "Following a sexual assault, you may find your lifestyle disrupted....You may have difficulty concentrating. You may not want to return to school or be with old friends. You may experience a change in your appetite, become

to be poked and prodded after what happened to me," says Linda. "I just wanted to take a long, hot shower and hide in bed all day." It can be difficult to seek the necessary medical attention. It is, nonetheless, extremely important.

Judy Huett-Harris, a registered nurse, cautions, "There are actually four health risks that should be addressed following a sexual assault: sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV), possible pregnancy, physical trauma and psychological trauma. The emergency room (ER) or clinic may make arrangements for a counselor to speak with the victim."

Three of these issues require a medical exam. If you've been assaulted or are helping a friend who has been, you should not shower or even change clothes. After an assault, Huett-Harris says, "You should immediately go to an ER. After you have been examined, the ER will likely call the police for you."

If you are assaulted in any way, don't let fear stop you from seeking help. Huett-Harris adds, "I would encourage a young girl to go to a female professional who would be a good listener and still be able to meet the person's medical needs."

Linda remembers, "I was afraid the doctors would be too cold and treat me like a thing, you know." Huett-Harris responds, "Even though the ER seems like a harsh place, there are people there who care about you and what has happened to you. It is important to make sure you are all right first and then, secondarily, document what has happened." Only by gathering physical evidence against the assailant can he or she be stopped from hurting someone else. That evidence is affected, sometimes lost, by your delay, by your taking time

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Q. In your examples, parents weren't helpful. If parents don't want you to get help, what could you possibly do? **A.** *In the front of your telephone directory, you will find numbers to call in times of crisis. Calling such a number can help you identify what other steps you should take. You could also ask another adult to help you, perhaps a teacher, pastor or older relative. Such a person can also assist parents who may be misinformed or simply too emotional to think the situation through. Most parents, though, will want their children to receive every attention that will help them.*

not resisted enough. The power used against her was the power of age, of strength, of secrecy. It was wrong.

Shame, Guilt, Fear

Linda, only 13 when she was assaulted, was also confused about what had happened to her. "I didn't know what people would think of me," says Linda. "I felt dirty, sinful and like I was changed....Like I could keep it a secret, but I would never be whole again. Anyway, I was too ashamed to do anything but just try to forget the whole thing."

Linda's experience of shame is not uncommon. Rev. Bill Nicholson (a neuropsychologist in Bay City, Michigan) helps us

Services in Saginaw, Michigan. She believes, "Sexual assault is the only crime where the victim may be treated as the guilty party. These feelings may be very strong, especially if you know who your assailant is. You may feel guilt because you were not able to stop or predict the assault."

Janet remembers, "I felt like I was really as much to blame for the whole thing as he was. I mean, I didn't do anything to stop it. I told him I thought it was wrong, that he shouldn't be touching me in those places, but I didn't stop him. I didn't like it. It was horrible, but I still didn't stop him."

Linda says, "It took me a long time to tell my parents what happened to me....If I had gone to the police right away

depressed or have nightmares."

Nicholson says, "None of us can say that we know just how you feel, because none of us are you. Only you can know what this event has done to you. But those of us who care about you care a great deal, and want you to know that our caring for you hasn't changed. Even though this terrible thing has happened...you haven't changed in our eyes."

What Are the Health Risks?

Survivors of assault don't want further invasion, and suspect that medical care will be just that. "I couldn't imagine going to a cold, sterile hospital

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to clean yourself up and calm down.

Can a Guy Be Sexually Assaulted?

When most people think of sexual assault, they think of a female victim

and a male assailant. The belief that sexual assault happens only to females, however, is a misconception.

When he was walking home, Jon, 14, was attacked by three other students from his school. He was ambushed behind an abandoned building, repeatedly raped and also violated with the wooden handle of a snow scraper. Jon's physical injuries were extensive, but his emotional injuries were even more profound.

When a young man is assaulted, there are some special issues to consider. A male victim may be afraid to tell others out of fear that he will be ridiculed for being unable to defend himself. Some may fear that their sexual orientation will be questioned. Sproul says, "Many people wrongly believe that assaults against men are committed only by, or primarily by, homosexual men and that



only homosexual men are raped. Both of these are myths, not facts, but they may affect the way others treat you and they may affect the way you feel about the assault and about yourself."

If you have been assaulted, you may wish to request a male counselor at a crisis center as well as a male nurse at the hospital or clinic. There are also support groups available especially for male survivors.

Sproul urges male victims to remember that "...strong or

weak, outgoing or withdrawn, homosexual or heterosexual, young or old, you have done nothing that justifies this violent attack. No matter what you said or did, no matter what you wore, you did not ask for or deserve to be sexually assaulted. This assault has nothing to do with your present or future sexual orientation. Sexual assault is a crime of violence and power, not lust or passion."

Dating Violence

In the last few years, date rape has become more publicized and recognized as a potential high-risk situation for teens. Rachel was 18 when she went on a date with Peter, whom she'd known for several years. "We knew each other from the time we were kids," Rachel remembers. "Although we went to different schools during our elementary years, I had classes with him in high school. Anyway, I'd known him a long time. I felt safe going out with him. But I guess

I was wrong about him."

Rachel's first date with Peter was also her last. The date went well until Peter returned to her house with her. "I never suspected that I was in danger," says Rachel, "and I wasn't especially worried once we pulled into my parents' driveway—but that's when he changed.

"He slid over on the car seat next to me and kissed me. I had decided that he was a nice guy, but I wasn't attracted to him, so when I didn't respond to his kiss he started to place my hands on his shoulders and kissed me again. I said I thought it was time to say good-night, and that's when he reached over and locked my door. I started to get nervous, but I was afraid to say anything—I didn't want him to think I was a nut. Besides, I just couldn't believe that I could be in danger from someone I'd known so long.

"Anyway, I tried to get him talking, but it didn't work. I started to panic when he held my wrists and started to force me down on the seat.... We were in my driveway and my parents were home, but it didn't matter.

q. If a friend of mine tells me that he or she has been assaulted, what's the best way for me to respond? a. If someone tells you he or she has been assaulted, let that person talk. Be a compassionate listener. Encourage your friend to get medical help. Don't let your friend take time or energy to clean up. As difficult as it may be to get through the initial crisis, it's equally as important to be there for your friend later on. During the days, months and years following an assault, your friend will still need your support. Let your friend know of your love and willingness to listen.

When it was over and he finally let me out, he acted like nothing happened and I never told anybody."

Moving On

Rachel turned to God following her experience with Peter. "I prayed so hard that God would take the pain away....I couldn't understand what I had ever done to deserve this." Like Rachel, Linda and Janet also struggled with questions of why this had happened to them. Jesus had a

Q. Why shouldn't you clean yourself up before you report sexual assault? It seems so natural to do that and it also seems like it would help you be calm. **A.** *If you clean yourself up, you may wash away evidence that could help to convict your assailant. For instance, the hair, blood and semen of your assailant will likely be on your clothes and body. A careful medical examination can prove that an assault took place, as well as point to the identity of the assailant.*

similar struggle with evil when he was on earth.

Nicholson responds, "What happened to you was terrible. It was not supposed to happen to you. It shouldn't happen to anyone. I'm sure you never dreamed it would happen to you, but it did. You cry out 'why' and I have no answer."

Linda says of her experience of assault, "No matter why it happened to me, I felt like an outcast—ruined, dirty and sinful. It was only after counseling that I found my way back to myself, and it took equally as long for me to accept

destroy our feelings for you."

In summary, if you experience sexual assault or physical violence of any kind, first seek medical attention immediately.

Don't allow anyone to talk you out of this! Second, those who help you



the fact that God still loved me and was there for me."

As Nicholson guides the victims of sexual assault through the healing process, he encourages them to remember that God still cares for them, no matter what has happened in their lives. If you have experienced sexual assault, Nicholson's words have special power: "This terrible thing has hurt you deeply, and you probably feel like something inside of you has died, that you are no longer the same person, that the ugly experience has made you ugly and no one will ever love and care for you again. But we care. We cared for you before, we care for you now in your pain, and we will care for you....You are too precious and...we will not allow what has happened to you to destroy you or

recover physically will probably be sensitive to your need for reassurance, counseling and support from your pastor, youth minister or school chaplain. If not, express your need.

Third, identify more ways to act out of love in your own life. Every positive action you take leaves that much less room for anger, violence and abuse. Pray for those who have been hurt through the violence of others and for those who have injured them.

We should not accept the continuation of violence—physical or emotional—in our world, but we need to believe in our power to recover and continue to contribute to a world that needs us very much. **YU**

Lynn Marie-Iltner Klammer is a licensed clinical psychologist, college educator and author. This is her fourth *Youth Update*. She wrote this article for Sexual Assault Awareness Month, sponsored by the National Coalition Against Sexual Assault, based in Washington, D.C.

Safe Date Every Date

EVERY DATE IS A SAFE DATE

1. FIRST TIME TOGETHER Don't go on a first date with another couple or go to a group date.

2. DON'T ISOLATE Stay in places where other people are. Get a friend to use your mail box or phone for you to make sure you're not isolated or private.

3. KNOW YOUR LIMITS Before a formal date, see what you can tolerate through your own limits. Don't let your date pressure you into anything you've determined when you're calm and alone.

4. EXPRESS YOUR WISHES If you're with your date and things aren't working with one person or both and the other is a believer, if one party is a dating virgin, it's better to believe that he or she can order the date around the same way that may play out as only.

5. DATES OVER If you're not enjoying the date, you can say no to the date, you can say no to further sexual activity, you can say no to the date over. If you're sure you have to leave your date.

6. LET YOURSELF BE LED BY GOD Remember to remember that the Lord is your friend and that God's help is available to you. When the date and you are not sure, you may have great times and you may have a great time.

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