



# SEPS

the situation determines the solution

## MODULE 6 - SEPS WOMEN'S PERSONAL SAFETY PROGRAM

*Some people, especially if you have been the victim of violence, may find some of the subject matter contained in this article disturbing or traumatizing. If you are still in the process of recovering from violence and abuse, you may want to consult with a mental health professional before reading this content. The subject matter is also intended for an adult audience, and so if you are under 18, you should have an adult read the material first (parental guidance is advised for people under 18). This article addresses the subject matter head-on, so reader discretion is advised.*

### SYNOPSIS

This module looks at date and acquaintance rape. These forms of sexual assault on women, are far more common than "stranger" rape, where the victim does not know, and has no prior relationship with their assailant/attacker. This module looks at the motivation(s) behind date/acquaintance rape, preventative measures that can be employed, and how to identify and predict those individuals who have and possess harmful intent towards you.

### DATE/ACQUAINTANCE RAPE & PERSONAL SAFETY IN SOCIAL SETTINGS

Date/Acquaintance Rape can take several forms. It can be committed by an existing partner who you refuse sex to, a stranger you have just met at a party or bar, or a person you know that you have agreed to meet socially, etc. The assault itself can be initiated against you when you refuse this individual sex (whether vaginal, oral, anal etc.) or after agreeing to sex but changing your mind, wanting to stop but being forced to continue. Simple things, such as insisting that the other person wears a condom, and them refusing to do so but insisting, or pressurizing/forcing you to still have sex with them against your will still constitutes rape - if you are made to comply with a sexual demand that you don't want to participate in, it is rape. The Rapist may use drugs, physical force, or emotional blackmail to force you to acquiesce to their demands.

Many times, victims of such assaults don't want to define what has happened to them as rape - sometimes they only do this many years later. This is because they may feel guilty that they lead their attacker on, or did

something or behaved in a way that caused the person to assault them. Many victims of date and acquaintance rape don't want to blame the rapist because they know and may still "like" them and/or don't see them as responsible for their actions, blaming the situation and circumstances rather than the person who committed the assault. This can often be a "natural" response to being sexually assaulted by someone you know, or someone you may have felt you lead on. It may be that you feel you at least partially created the situation.

When people suffer from trauma, it is because they have been exposed to a highly stressful/emotional experience, which they had little or no ability to control. If a victim of an assault felt that there was nothing they could do to stop a sexual assault e.g. they were unable to get their assailant to stop, either verbally or physically, they will experience some degree of trauma. As social individuals, we will naturally feel shame at our inability to control a situation, and will find it difficult to admit to ourselves and others that we were unable to influence or deal with a situation we were in. To deal with this shame, we often look to see and understand the things we perhaps could have controlled or done to prevent being assaulted, and this causes us to experience feelings of guilt. This is the way that human beings cope emotionally when having to come to terms with being sexually assaulted; feelings of guilt and self-blame are natural. However this doesn't mean that you are to blame or should feel guilty for being assaulted. If somebody forced you to have sex and/or engage in sexual acts that you didn't want to, they are the ones that are guilty and to blame - not you, or the situation. The term rape and rapist may seem extreme and ugly terms to use, especially if they involve somebody that you know, liked and may even still like, however there is no other way to describe being made to have sex against your will.

Many times, individuals will try to explain that the person only acted this way because they were drunk, or that they weren't able to "refuse" their assailant's advances and actions because they were drunk, etc. If you didn't consent to sex with another person then it is rape - you don't have to say "No", you just don't have to say "yes". It is as simple as that.

## RAPIST'S MOTIVES & BELIEF SYSTEMS

A criminal's motives for committing a crime are rarely singular. It may seem that a mugging or street robbery is simply a case of somebody wanting money/possessions, however wrapped up in this crime, are other motives e.g. anger, power, and control. Muggers don't just engage in robbery to get money (though this maybe their primary motive), they do so to dispense anger at the seemingly unjust world around them<sup>2</sup> - those who have not, equaling the score with those who have,<sup>3</sup> as well as enjoying some power and control, for a few moments in their life. A rape or sexual assault may be primarily motivated by the desire for sexual gratification (though not always), however the assault is also largely motivated by a mix of anger, power and control. Rape is primarily an act/display of dominance that allows an assailant to demonstrate power and control over a victim, whilst releasing anger, through a sexual act. Rapes and sexual assaults are committed by predatory individuals,<sup>4</sup> who can appear at first glance to be the nicest and most charming people on the planet.

All Sexual predators believe they are entitled to act the way they do (and will often justify their actions to their victims after the assault e.g. "I knew you wanted it all along, I'll drive you home now...") they also have little or

no conscience about their assaults (whilst a victim's life is torn apart, they go on with their lives regardless), and they understand that it is difficult for them to be prosecuted legally/criminally, and/or that institutions such as universities and colleges are often reluctant or don't know how - to act against them. Many sexual predators are serial rapists, who have experience in keeping their victims quiet, and have honed their process over time to be ever more effective.

Date and Acquaintance Rape, are two slightly different things. Date rapes occur within a dating scenario, though it doesn't have to happen on the first date; an assailant could use the first few dates to test out their intended victim's likelihood of resistance, etc., and plan the best way to set up the assault. Acquaintance Rape, is committed by a predatory individual that the victim knows, such as a partner or husband's best friend, a work colleague, etc.

## KEEPING QUIET

It is always an individual's decision whether to tell somebody - either the police, friends or family - that they've been raped/sexually assaulted, however talking through what has happened to you, even if it's on the phone to a stranger at a rape crisis center, can help you understand what has happened and confirm to you that you are not responsible for being assaulted in this way. You can always inform the police and decide later not to press charges - informing the police straight away gives you this option, whereas not reporting the crime doesn't. If you have a good friend you can call and help support you after being assaulted, do not hesitate to contact them.

Rapists and sexual predators are extremely skilled at getting their victims to stay quiet - you may believe that you are the sole victim of a friend or acquaintance who has raped you, but the chances of this are slim. If you believe that the "nice" guy, you know from school, college or work, just got carried away in the situation, and that the assault was a "misunderstanding" or "miscommunication" on both of your parts, you should understand that you were probably not the first victim of this rapist, nor will you be the last.

Date/Acquaintance Rapists use a variety of emotional tools to keep their victims quiet. They know that the longer they can delay one of their victims from telling someone about being assaulted, the more likely it is that nothing will ever be said. They know that most victims of sexual assaults fear they won't be believed, or that they will be judged as being at least partly to blame for the assault e.g. they were drunk, willingly went home with their attacker, were seen kissing them in public, etc. Many rapists will tell their victim that they won't be believed if they tell anyone. It could be that they use lines such as, "Nobody will believe that a person like me would want to have sex with someone like you", or "Everybody knows you wanted to sleep with me" etc. Others will use some form of emotional blackmail such as, "What will your boyfriend or partner think of you now if you tell them?" or simply say, "If you tell anyone, I'll just tell them that you lead me on, and it was you who initiated the sex. I'll tell them that you're now feeling guilty and that's why you're telling everyone I raped you." They know that they only have to put enough doubts in your head so you don't immediately report what's happened; they know the longer you delay, the less forensic evidence will be available to the police, and the

more likely it is that people will question why you didn't immediately report what happened. The longer you delay telling someone, the more likely you are to never say anything about what happened to you.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing. We can always look back at things we could have done and "mistakes" that with better knowledge and understanding we wouldn't have made e.g. we can spend a lifetime regretting drinking too much, letting someone into our home, etc. The truth is there are people in this world who wait to take advantage of us, who create and orchestrate situations that allow them to commit their crimes and assaults. These people are the only ones to blame for any assault they commit against us; we may inadvertently behave and act in ways that help them and facilitate their crimes, but we are certainly not to blame for them. Because someone took advantage of you when you had too much to drink, or did like the person enough to go back to their house - even with the intention of having sex, but then changed your mind, etc. doesn't make you to blame for the assault.

## THE TOOLS & METHODS OF THE DATE RAPIST

Many date rapists gain access to you because you also want access to them. It might not be that you're intending to sleep with them, but you're happy enough to enjoy their company in a social setting e.g. talk to them at a party, go out for a meal with them, spend time with them as a work or study partner, etc. They are often people we like, and may even want to know better. Sometimes we know them quite well and for a significant period of time, others we might only have met a few minutes beforehand.

For a predator, it is always better to get somebody to "willingly" comply with their demands, rather than to have to physically enforce them. If somebody can "groom" you and gain your trust, then they are more likely to be able to put you in a position where it will be harder for you to resist and refuse their other demands. Alcohol can seriously impair judgment - we interpret other people's emotional state based on our own - if we are happy and looking to enjoy ourselves we tend to interpret other people's behaviors and actions to be the same. This can cause us to miss and fail to pick up on the cues that might alert us to danger. Your first question to ask whenever somebody suggests or asks you to do something is, "does this person have my personal safety and best interests in mind?" If you have any doubt as to this, you make your excuses and don't do what that person is asking you e.g. if they are asking you to leave the group you are with and come to another bar (isolate you), or come back to their house, or go to yours, etc., and you don't feel they have your best interest at heart, you should not comply. Also question the reasons as to why this person wants you to go along with their plan - what are their eventual goals? Do they want you to come to another bar with them, so that they can isolate you and make it difficult for you to refuse a ride home with them, or as a precursor to going home with you, etc? What do they eventually want? What may seem like an easy request to go along with at the time, and seems to present little danger, could simply be a way to get you to acquiesce to one demand, so it's difficult to refuse another. However drunk you get, always question whether those offering help or suggesting ideas to you have your best interest at heart.

Never underestimate the speed at which an assault can occur. An assailant may only need to get you alone and

out of sight for a few minutes in order to sexually assault you - in the module/section on rape and sexual assaults, we mention that women have been raped in less than 10 seconds - the time between two subway stops. We can often confuse rape with involving the same process around consensual sex, where there is foreplay and a build-up to intercourse. In a sexual assault a rapist can be moments away from ejaculation when they begin the assault.

Have a plan for yourself and stick to it - and then have a backup plan. When you go out, either on a date, to a party, or simply socializing with friends, have a plan about how you are going to get to the place you are going to, how long you are intending to stay, and how you are going to get back home. Stick to the plan. If you are relying on friends for a ride, have a plan for if that falls through - your friend(s) might change their plans in a way that you are not comfortable with e.g. decide to go on to a party at a person's house you don't know, in a part of town you're not familiar with. You can always have a face-saving way/excuse to get out of going with them e.g. a boy/man you are interested in has asked you out for a drink (this of course doesn't have to be true), there's a problem with your babysitter, etc.

If an offer is good today, it should also be good tomorrow. If a man says that he really likes you, wants to get to know you better, spend time with you, etc., and then asks you to leave your friends, ditch your plan and go to another bar, etc., understand that if he truly is interested in you, he will be tomorrow. If someone is genuinely interested in you, and has your best interests at heart, all of this can wait until tomorrow, when you will be able to control and set the time and place where you meet. If the person isn't happy with you refusing their offer and/or you controlling the details of your "future" date, then you should heed those warning signs as signals of this individual's personality.

## DATES, DATING & THE INTERNET

Many people arrange and make dates using the Internet and the numerous dating websites that are available. Do your research on the dating site that you intend to use, as different sites have different audiences e.g. some are designed at matching up singles who want to get married, whilst others are more general in their approach.

When you create an online profile, try to do it in such a way as it is difficult for a person to link you to your pages on social media sites such as Facebook - you may want to consider using an alias rather than your real name and maintain this until you have met and are sure of any individuals you want to interact with. You will want to control the information that other people have about you. If someone is able to take a few pieces of pertinent information that can collectively identify you, or reduce a search down to 5 or 6 people on another site, they may be able to start building up a picture of your life; who your friends are, and the places that you frequent. It may be that through this information, a person you didn't want to have contact with, can make contact with you.

It is also a sensible idea to create another email account for the purposes of dating, rather than use your personal

one. Creating a "second" Google or Yahoo account is quick and easy, and will mean that if somebody starts to pester or stalk you, you don't have to worry about them sending emails to your primary account. You can also replicate this by buying a cheap, pay as you go phone, or getting an online 2nd number such as that provided by Google Voice and giving that number rather than your regular cell, to anyone you meet online and want to meet. This will mean that should things not go well, you can avoid answering calls, and just check your voice messages at the end of the day, etc.

Sexual Predators are extremely skilled at getting their victims to see them as something different to what they are. In a dating scenario, a predator will make every effort to get their intended victim to see them as a date, rather than as a stranger. A friend of friend/family, will use that relationship, in order to give the impression that they're not actually a stranger, but someone that their victim knows, and can therefore trust. By firming up our definition of what a stranger is, we can dramatically increase our level(s) of personal safety: A stranger is anyone that you don't know, or don't have experience of, how they will act and behave in a particular situation, context, or scenario. If you go out on a date with a work colleague who you have shared an office with for the last 2 years, you may not see them as a stranger; however, if you have never experienced them in a date setting/context then they are, and should be treated, as a stranger. If at the end of the night they offer you a ride home, even if you've been in the car with them before, you haven't in a date setting - and from a personal safety perspective, it would be unwise to do so. Planning your evening from start to finish, including how you get home, and sticking to that plan, is the best way to ensure your safety.

When you plan to meet someone on a first date, it would be beneficial to consider two things: the type of setting you meet in, and the particular day on which you meet. If you arrange to meet your date for a meal, be prepared to be with that person for at least an hour, possibly more. The same goes for seeing a film, where you will probably be expected to meet for a drink beforehand, and one after (just to be sociable). Meeting at a bar or coffee shop for a drink, with no expectations beyond that is a sensible and good first start. It is better to also set a first date for a Sunday night or a weeknight rather, than on a Friday or Saturday night. Everybody knows that people free up Friday and Saturday nights, have nothing planned for the rest of the night, as well as generally have few actual commitments on Saturdays and Sundays, and therefore have little or no reason not to stay out late. Having a prebuilt/planned exit strategy is always a good way to improve personal safety, in dating scenarios.

Try to choose the location and setting yourself - don't choose somewhere you frequent a lot, where the person might be able to find you when you don't want them to. Make sure that the place is busy and open. Try not to take a booth, but chose a table where it will be difficult for somebody to spike your drink without being seen. Park in a well-lit and well-travelled location that enjoys "natural surveillance" i.e. a lot of people either drive or walk by it - see the section/module on car security. When you arrive, apologize that you will only be able to stay until a particular time as a relative's child is sick and you're need to babysit, etc. or have a similar excuse, that you can use to make sure you have a reason to leave at a particular time. If things go well you can always "receive a TXT" that you are no longer needed/required. Regulate your drinking, and don't leave your drink

unattended (this should be a given in all social settings); if you finish a drink and your date orders you another whilst you are away from the table e.g. in the bathroom, make an excuse not to drink it - you no longer want it, you'd rather have a soft drink, etc.

If you want to leave, because things aren't going well or because you don't get a good feeling about the person, you can always receive a TXT from the relative with the sick child, saying that you're needed sooner. Don't let the person walk you to your car, where they can see the make, model and get the license plate. You should set the time when you have to leave when it will still be light and/or there will be people around. Tell the person that you will email/message them in the morning.

#### PREDICTIVE INDICATORS OF A DATE RAPIST

Many rapists will give indications that their perspectives and views on women aren't healthy - it is difficult for them to hide/disguise their underlying emotions completely, and their actual feelings come to the surface. This normally occurs in offhand comments and seemingly casual remarks, that many women treat as insignificant e.g. talking about how women lead men on, never know what they want, are always changing their minds, etc. Any comments, where women are talked about as a group, rather than as individuals, should be treated seriously. It may be that a rapist, will throw out such comments to test whether the victim will say something and call them on it, or whether they'll keep quiet and say nothing. Rapists feel entitled to treat their victims in a certain way, and this is because they have feelings and views on women as a group. In many stranger rape (where the victim doesn't know their attacker) cases that go to court, the rapist isn't able to identify his victim; to the rapist they are just another woman.

Many date rapists are unable to hold back their need for power and control, even before the assault. If they don't listen to your requests, or acknowledge that you have a right to make decisions, you are probably dealing with someone who has certain fixed views about the role of women, and their emotional/psychological make-up e.g. women aren't entitled to, or able to, make decisions due to being irrational, etc. If your date takes charge of the logistics of the date, and/or alters and changes plans without consulting you then you are dealing with someone who has power and control issues. If your feedback and issues with such changes aren't asked for or considered then you should take this as a warning. Controlling individuals will often keep changing the time of the date, or insist on a particular bar/restaurant regardless of your input. If during the date they take charge of the conversation, and you find that you are more listening to your date's opinions (many of which may be derogatory towards women), than being involved in a conversation, take note - at best you are dealing with a boorish, opinionated individual, at worst a sexual predator. This is the time to use your exit excuse, e.g. my sister just texted me I, need to go and help her with the kids, etc.

If you do leave, and they ask for your phone number e.g. you set the date up via email (using your second account), ask to take theirs instead - give the excuse that you are changing jobs at work, and they are giving you

a new cell number. It is often best to call them the next day, so that if you run into them in the future it isn't socially awkward, and/or aggressive. It also shows you are not scared or intimidated by them. When you do message/email them, be direct in what you say; don't try to be overly polite and nice in order to not hurt their feelings. Tell them they are not the person you are looking for, and wish them every success in finding someone else in the future. Keep it short and brief, and don't be pressured into expanding on what you have said. People who have been rejected will try to have their good points recognized and acknowledged - the problem with this is that it may also act to encourage them to pursue you further, in fact you may even be seen as a challenge to them. Cutting correspondence with them is the safest policy.

## CONCLUSION

We all have a life to live, and will always be subjected to certain dangers. Every time we cross a road, we have to accept a level of risk - of course we try to mitigate this by looking both ways, waiting for a break in the traffic, etc. If we want to go out, socialize, date, we have to accept that these ventures contain a level of risk and that we should do what we can to reduce this. We may feel that we shouldn't have to, and that because we are ultimately not to blame or at fault for being assaulted, that it's not our responsibility to think about the potential risks and dangers we may have to face in our lives. Dealing with the consequences of a sexual assault, or a violent attack, is not a small thing. It will change your life, it will traumatize you; taking some time to think about your personal safety, changing some habits and behaviors, that may have so far not resulted in trouble, but that you know are ill advised, will go a long way to reducing the risk of assault. You may not believe that you are able to physically defend yourself against a large, aggressive man, and whilst I would disagree, you should understand you have the ability to control how you act and behave, and that taking some preventative measures will mean you may never have to test your physical abilities.

**SEPS (Situation Effective Protection System) is a framework, for understanding how violent situations occur and evolve, along with the motivations behind them, so that it is possible to predict, identify and avoid them. The system was created and developed by Gershon Ben Keren and Andy Rallings. This handout is part of the SEPS free women's personal safety program developed by Gershon Ben Keren. For more information and other course modules, please go to [www.womensselfdefense-seps.com](http://www.womensselfdefense-seps.com).**

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