

# A SPECIAL WORD TO FATHERS

- Rape may have been your daughter's first sexual experience, causing her to have exaggerated fears about adult intimacy. She needs to know that she is not tarnished, that her capacity for adult intimacy is not diminished, and that her rape is not how loving couples express themselves sexually. She also needs to understand that rape is a crime of violence, not an act of "uncontrolled passion," and that she bears no responsibility for the violence inflicted upon her.
- Because many fathers find it difficult to discuss sexuality with their daughters, a sympathetic and knowledgeable person (nurse or counselor) should be available to answer her questions. A refusal to divulge information about human sexuality when that information is sought by the victim will only heighten her fears. Honest responses to her questions help her to gain control and to reduce her confusion.
- If the victim is an adolescent, the rape may compound communication problems which already exist. Do not force her to self-disclose, but if she expresses a desire to talk about the assault, be prepared to do so. She can benefit from talking about the experience, if it is her decision to talk. Attempts to help your child "forget" about the rape by refusing to discuss it may give her the impression that you're ashamed or hold her responsible.
- If she was raped by a date, she is likely to fear that you will hold her responsible for using poor judgment. She may fear that she will be punished, that she will not be believed, or that you will take matters into your own hands and cause her to be ostracized by her peers. In anticipation of your responses, she may conceal information from you, or otherwise act out in a way, which further undermines her credibility. Again, it is important for you not to judge or punish her for what happened. Equally important, do not display more concern for what others might think (family reputation) than for your daughter's recovery needs. Knowing that she does not have to fear your reactions will be a positive step in her recovery.
- Encourage your daughter to resume her normal lifestyle. Limiting your daughter's emerging independence by making decisions for her or "grounding" her for not being sufficiently careful may seem like punishment and should be avoided. It is also important that her rights concerning dating, seeing friends, involvement in extracurricular events at school, as well as her responsibilities for household chores, remain the same. If she is overprotected or allowed to avoid routine activities, she will have a more lengthy and difficult period of readjustment.
- If the victim is a young child, she may express herself behaviorally, rather than verbally. Be alert for changes such as loss of appetite, withdrawal, altered sleeping patterns, nightmares, or fear of being alone. These reactions are quite common, but should be monitored closely for frequency and severity.
- If the victim is reported to the authorities and the victim is a child, parental permission may be required for medical treatment and police questioning. Be available to provide such authorizations and any additional information needed by medical and police personnel.
- The gynecological exam may also be a first-time experience and can be extremely upsetting unless parents and medical staff are sensitive. Gently convince her that the procedure is necessary, but insist that the medical staff carry out the exam with patience and sensitivity.