

## Guidelines for Change

Acquaintance rape - indeed, all forms of rape - has to be understood by men as their problem too. "It is men who rape and men who collectively have the power to end rape," writes Timothy Beneke in *Men on Rape*. To harness that power, many men will have to rethink their beliefs about women and sex and change their behaviors. The following 11 points are guidelines suggested by rape-awareness advocates to help men achieve that goal:

1. *Never force a woman to have sex* – even if she has “led” you on, even if she has slept with your friends, even if she at first said “yes” and then changed her mind before having sex, even if she had sex with you before. This includes *all* unwanted sexual contact – from kissing to “copping a feel” to forcing intercourse on her against her will.

Women have the right to set limits on sexual behavior – just as you do. As a sexual *partner*, you must understand and respect those limits. When partners’ desires conflict, the one who wants more activity has to yield to the one who wants less (either male or female).

2. *Don’t pressure a woman to have sex*. Men often see their verbal pressuring as being less forceful than women do. Even when the words you use are not threatening, the woman may feel that she is in danger. Just the fact that you are a man can be intimidating. Your size, strength, social role, and age are all factors that can contribute to her feeling powerless against your pressure for sex. Don’t lie to a woman in order to con her into agreeing to have sex either.

3. *Stay sober*. Right. This is exactly the same advice given women earlier. In many individual acquaintance rapes and nearly all gang acquaintance rapes, the men involved had been drinking, taking drugs, or both, and were often intoxicated. Social groups that emphasize heavy drinking and drug taking are often those whose members condone acquaintance rape.

When you’re drunk or high on drugs, your decision-making abilities are crippled, your aggression level may rise, and your ability to control your impulses may disappear. Adopt this rule: *If you get drunk or stoned, don’t have sex*. Your intoxicated perception may be that you are seducing a willing woman when in fact you are forcing her to have sex against her will.

Being drunk is no legal defense against committing rape or any other sexual assault. You will still be charged with rape, regardless of your blood-alcohol content. And that’s a sobering thought.

4. *Don’t buy the myth that a drunk woman “deserves”*

*to be raped*. Of course no woman does. But men often think it’s not rape if the woman was too drunk or stoned to know what was going on, or if she had passed out from using drugs and alcohol. In fact, an intoxicated woman cannot give intelligent consent about sexual activity; therefore the likelihood is even greater that what went on was rape.

5. *Do not “join in” if a friend invites you to participate in sexual behavior*. Do not have intercourse or other sexual contact with a woman who is having sex with a group of men, particularly if she is drunk or stoned. This is gang rape. Any other possibility exists almost exclusively in the fantasy world of X-rated movies and magazines. A drunken or intimidated woman being assaulted by a group of men is not enjoying a fantasy come true. Instead of contributing to her attack, you should try to stop the assault or call police.

6. *Do not confuse “scoring” with having a successful sexual encounter*. Sex is not a payback for a pleasant evening. You can have intercourse with 100 women and still not know anything about good sex or love or what it means to be a “real” man. Ejaculating is no big deal; having a mutually agreed-upon and sustained relationship is.

If your friends think keeping count of the number of times you’ve had intercourse is important, tell them that you don’t agree. If they continue to demand “body counts” from you and to brag about their own sexual “victories,” find new friends.

7. *Don’t assume that you know what a woman wants and vice versa*. Ask her. Give her an unpressured atmosphere in which to answer. If she doesn’t know how involved she wants to be with you sexually, then back off.

Just because a woman wants affection (hugging, kissing, sitting close) or sex play (sexual fondling) doesn’t mean that she wants sexual intercourse. Again, ask her. You deserve a clear, definitive response. If you don’t get one, do not assume that intercourse is okay.

8. *“No” means “no.”* Forget all the times your friends told you that all women say “no” when they mean “yes.” It’s not true.

When a woman says “no” that means “no.” Stop. She does not want to go further. Do not try to cajole her or argue with her. And do not ignore her. If you think she’s saying “no” to protect her “reputation” (even though you know she *really* wants to have sex with you), so what? When (and if) she’s ready to have sex with you let it be her choice to make.

If a woman says “no” and really means “yes, but you have to convince me,” then you don’t want to be with her anyway. She’s playing a game and it’s a game that nobody wins. Forget about “losing an opportunity.” Just walk

away.

**9.** *Speak up if you feel you're getting a double message from a woman.* Ask her directly what she wants. Again, if she can't tell you don't have sex with her.

**10.** *Communicate with women.* Try talking to women, lots of different women, not just the ones you date or want to date. By talking with women about their lives and feelings, you can develop an understanding that will benefit you in all of your relationships.

**11.** *Communicate with other men.* Talk about sex, dating, and acquaintance rape with your male friends. Let them know you dislike behavior and talk that are hostile, abusive, and even rape threatening toward women. Step in if you think a friend is about to cross the line between sexual interest and sexual assault.

If you live in a dorm, belong to a fraternity, or play on an athletic team, find out what acquaintance-rape awareness programs are available for your group. Support and participate in such programs.

From Robin Warshan:

I Never Called It Rape: The MS. Report on Recognizing, Fighting, & Surviving Date & Acquaintance Rape. 1988