
MAKING THE DECISION TO

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or call toll free 1-800-561-5643

© Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1995
Cat. H72-21/87-1995
ISBN 0-662-61980-3

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This booklet would not have been possible without the vision, support, and assistance of:

Barbara Merriam, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Health Canada, and

Femmy Mes, Child Care Programs Division, Health Canada.

Special thanks to the following persons for reviewing the English and French manuscripts and for providing helpful comments and advice on earlier drafts:

Terri Basi, Phoenix Program, Calgary, Alberta.

Dr. Robert Dubé, Clinique de protection de l'enfance, Hôpital Ste-Justine, Montréal, Québec.

Ross Dawson, Institute For The Prevention of Child Abuse, Toronto, Ontario.

Dr. Jean-Yves Frappier, professeur agrégé de pédiatrie Université de Montréal, Montréal, Québec.

Roger Godin, Breakthrough, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Ron Kane, MacDonald Youth Services, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Len Kushnier, London Children's Aid Society, London, Ontario.

Denis Lafortune, psychologue, centre des adolescents, Pavillon Albert Prévost, Hôpital Sacré-Coeur, Montréal, Québec.

Jane Matheson, Wood's Homes, Calgary, Alberta.

INTRODUCTION

This booklet is for teen males who have committed a sexual offense or who are thinking about doing it. It contains information to help you understand what a sexual offense is, why you did it or why you may be thinking about it, and how you can stop yourself from doing it again.

Most of the information in this booklet is easy to understand. Some of it you may want to talk about with someone else. You will probably get more out of it if you read one section at a time and discuss the contents with a parent, guardian, counsellor or anyone else you know and trust.

Reading this booklet may also help you understand what happens to the person or 'victim' you hurt. A 'victim' is someone who has been forced or tricked into doing something they did not want to do or may not have wanted to do if they knew they had a choice.

People often use different words or phrases to talk about sexual offending. You may be more familiar with terms such as rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, incest, or exhibitionism to name a few.

Sexual offending is not easy to talk about. It takes a lot of courage to admit that you have hurt someone this way. But talking about it is the first and most important step you need to take to sort out your thoughts, feelings, and knowledge about sex and sexuality, or anything else that may have contributed to your decision to offend.

If you're reading this booklet you are likely close to making one of the most important decisions of life - the decision to care - about yourself and others. It will provide you, with information that you can use to help make your decision. Though the booklet was written for teen males, we know that young women sometimes sexually offend too.

You are not the first guy who has either thought about or committed a sexual offense. Other young men have been in your situation before and with help and support put their lives back together. The important thing for you to do now is to stop and think about where your life is going and decide what your next step will be.

WHAT IS A SEXUAL OFFENSE?

In Canada a law book called the **Criminal Code** lists activities that are illegal for adults and teens. Young people between the ages of 12 and 17 also answer to the **Young Offenders Act** which sets the rules for how teens are to be treated in the courts. Included in the illegal activities listed in the **Criminal Code** are some sexual activities. This doesn't mean that all sexual activity is illegal, only that some actions harmful to others are against the law.

One of the keys to understanding what the law says about sexual activity is the word 'consent' which basically means to give permission. However, just saying "yes" doesn't make any sexual activity legal or mean that the other person cannot be harmed by what happens. To give real consent or permission a person must be 14 years of age or older and know about, or feel safe to make other choices. People will sometimes say "yes" to having sex or just not stop you from 'coming on to them'

if they think that by saying "no" they might lose their relationship or friendship with you. Victims will also not stop you if they be hurt physically by you. A person who says "yes" under these circumstances is not truly giving you their permission.

When deciding if a sexual act is illegal, the law will look at things such as your age, age of your victim, your relationship to the victim, and what you actually did to the other person. When looking at your relationship with the person the court will need to consider if you are physically bigger or stronger, if the victim was drunk or taking the offense, if you are older than the victim, or if the victim was under 14 years of age or was someone who lacked the mental capacity to give informed consent. The judge will also want to know if you were in a 'position of power, trust, or authority' over the other person. Being in a position of power, trust or authority means that you are responsible for the care, protection, and safety of the other person such as when you are babysitting, or if you are an older brother, or if you are a sports coach.

Here is a brief introduction to some of the types of charges that get laid against guys who commit sexual offenses. For a more detailed description of the laws governing illegal sexual behaviours you should consult a lawyer.

Sexual Assault. *Sexual Assault* involves a wide range of harmful sexual activity that included unwanted physical touching such as forced kissing, holding, grabbing, or other kinds of physical force, threats with a weapon, or physical violence.

Sexual Interference. *Sexual Interference* involves touching 'for a sexual purpose' any part of the body of a child who is under the age of 14. The touch can involve any part of the offender's body. Let's take the example of a 15 year old teen male who is babysitting an 8 year old boy. If the teen, for the purpose of 'getting turned on' sexually, rubs his crotch against the child's body while wrestling, he could be found guilty of *Sexual Interference*.

Sexual Exploitation. If an offender is less than 2 years older than the other person the activity, is not considered illegal under the **Criminal Code** unless the offender was in a position of trust or authority, if coercion, force, or violence was used, or if the victim was under the age of 14 years. If the child in the above example was 13 years old, the 15 year old could still be found guilty of committing the offence of *Sexual Exploitation* because, as a babysitter, he was in a position of trust and authority.

Invitation to Sexual Touching. It is illegal to ask a child under 14 to touch 'for a sexual purpose' you (if you are more than 2 years older than the victim), himself/herself, or another child. For example, if a 14 year old boy asks his 8 year old brother to masturbate him or touch his 6 year old sister's genitals or 'private parts' he could be found guilty of *Invitation to Sexual Touching*. If the offender is less than 2 years older than the victim the activity is not considered illegal according to the **Criminal Code** unless the offender was in a position of trust or authority, if coercion, force, or violence was used or if the child is under 14 years old. The child doesn't actually have to touch you for you to be guilty of *Invitation to Sexual Touching*. Just asking the child to do it is enough.

Indecent Exposure to a Child. You do not always have to actually touch someone to commit a sexual offense. For example, the **Criminal Code** says it is illegal for anyone to expose 'for sexual

purposes' his/her genitals or 'private parts' to a child under the age of 14 or anyone else. For example, if a 15 year old boy exposes his penis to his 5 year old sister for sexual purposes he could be found guilty of committing *Indecent Exposure to a Child*. However, it would not be illegal if your 9 year old sister walked into your bedroom by accident while you were undressing for bed.

Anal Intercourse. While the constitutionality of the criminal law prohibition against anal intercourse is being tested in the courts, generally speaking it is illegal for persons under 18 years to engage in anal intercourse unless they are married. Even if both persons give their consent it is still against the law if you are under 18 years old.

Other Sexual Behaviours. Not all sexual activity that might be considered inappropriate, illegal, or harmful involves touching another person. Some behaviours, suggestions, facial expressions, graffiti, or gestures of a sexual nature can upset, humiliate, or offend others or be as harmful as an attack on their body. Though not necessarily illegal, many persons find cruel sexual jokes or sexist humour offensive and degrading. Of course, *Incest* is always illegal.

WHY DID I COMMIT A SEXUAL OFFENSE?

Guys commit sexual offenses for a variety of reasons. Some do it out of anger, frustration, or a need for power and control. Some offend because they feel peer pressure to be sexually experienced or to prove they are 'macho' to their friends.

Guy who have difficulty making friends or who have been rejected by others their own age often get lonely or depressed and sometimes turn to younger children for friendship or sex. Some guys who were abused themselves hurt others to get revenge.

Some guys choose small children of the same or opposite sex, some choose victims their own age, and others choose adults or even seniors. Some teens abuse their brothers, sisters, or cousins and others choose the neighbour's children, kids they are babysitting, or strangers.

Some guys who get involved in sexual activity with others don't realize what they are doing is illegal or harmful. Not all victims say they are scared or tell you they don't like what you are doing to them. Young children often get confused or frightened if someone they know and trust hurts them in a sexual way. They may also be too young to understand what is even happening to them.

Some guys will commit a sexual offense against a young woman they are dating or are in a relationship with. They mistakenly believe that if a girl consents to going out with them she is also consenting to sex. If a woman lets you kiss or hug her, or initially consents to going further but changes her mind, you must stop immediately if she says "no"! Even if you have had sex with her before, ***no means no!***

Some guys think that if their date says "no" she really means "maybe" or "yes" and only needs a little encouragement, verbal persuasion, or mild force. The truth is anything you do after you hear the word "no" is illegal and a sexual offense. ***Period!***

You also need to know that your date doesn't have to verbally say "no" either. If she is pushing you away and struggling to stop you, then she is saying "no" too! Guys who grew up in families with a lot of problems or who were hurt or abused as children over a long period of time think that abusing others is just a normal part of life. If you grew up in a family where there was a lot of violence or alcoholism you may relate to others the same way your family members related to each other. Abusive families teach members to solve their problems and deal with their anger and frustration by using violence. Of course violence never really solves anything. Though it is not always easy to do, talking honestly and openly to others about your feelings, thoughts, or concerns is the best way to start really dealing with them.

Living in our society it is easy for a guy to get the message that women are little more than sexual objects. Women are often shown as sexual objects in many forms of advertising and in videos, films and television programs. Check out the discussions your male friends have at school about their girlfriends or dates or sexual jokes. Chances are you will find many of the discussions with remarks about women that are degrading or offensive. Hearing these discussions and jokes all the time it can become tough for a guy to resist thinking about women in this manner. But, it is just this kind of thinking that makes a lot of sexual offenses against women possible!

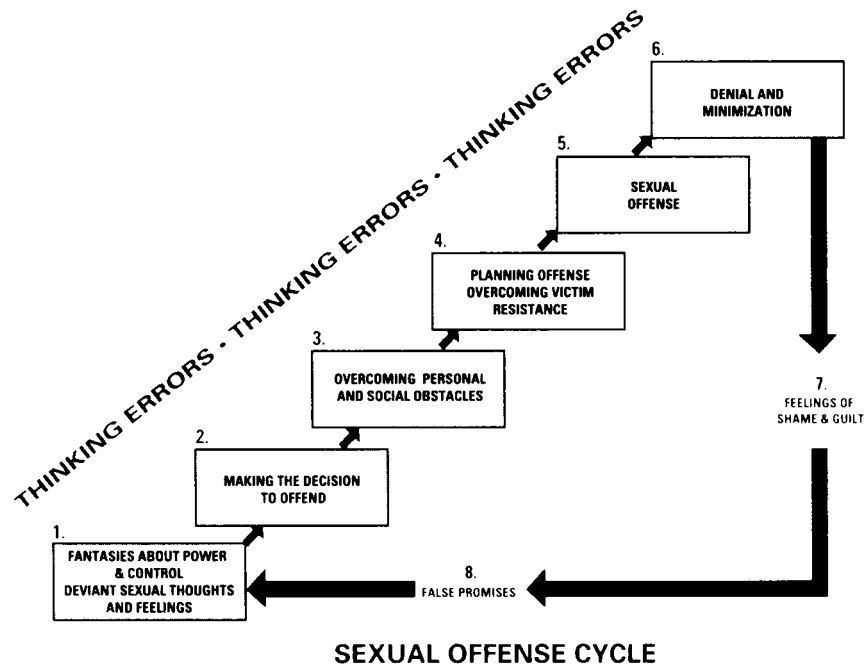
Some guys sexually offend to act out or imitate scenes they saw in pornography or "dirty books" and magazines or X-rated films and videos. In fact, many guys learn about sex from these kinds of materials. The problem is that pornography or X-rated films and videos often show, and appear to support, violence and abusive sexual behaviour towards women. These materials can give a guy a very limited and harmful view of sex. Violent and abusive forms of pornography can give guys the negative and misleading impression that violence and forced sex is acceptable and enjoyed by women. Nothing could be further from the truth!

THE SEXUAL OFFENSE CYCLE

Regardless of the reason why you offended or the victim you chose, it is very important to understand that your illegal sexual behaviour was not just an "accident", it did not "just happen". It may not seem like it at the time but there are a number of steps you have to take before you can commit a sexual offense.

Though this might be the first time you were caught committing a sexual offense, it is probably not the first time you have either done or thought about it. It is normal for a guy to have sexual thoughts and urges or to fantasize about sex. Sex is a normal and healthy part of life. The problem is that you have crossed a line between healthy and harmful sex and consequently hurt someone.

The following diagram shows the steps guys usually take when they commit a sexual offense. The 'sexual assault cycle' will help you understand some of the thoughts or feelings that might have made it possible for you to sexually abuse someone.



THE SEXUAL OFFENSE CYCLE

1. *Fantasies about power and control.* If you are having thoughts or fantasies about sex that involve violence, force, trickery, or other kinds of deception, or that involve persons who are younger or weaker than you, you are already starting your 'sexual offense cycle'. Masturbating while having these thoughts and fantasies may encourage you to actually do what you have previously only been thinking about.

2. *Making the decision to offend.* No matter what you may believe about why you offended, no sexual offense can take place unless you decide to do it. After being caught some guys say that they did not mean to harm their victim in any way and simply got carried away. But even if that were true ***you still made a decision not to stop!***

Think about it! If you say you did not make a decision to commit a sexual offense and that it "just happened" you are really admitting that you are "out of control". That should make you even more concerned about your behaviour! The same is true for guys who say they did it because they were drunk or taking drugs at the time.

As hard as it is to admit, you ***did*** make a decision to harm someone else. What most guys aren't aware of is that their decision usually involves some other choices as well.

3. *Overcoming personal and social obstacles.* In order for you to commit a sexual offense you have to get past some obstacles that would prevent most people from doing what you did. These things include ignoring your conscience and the feelings or pain of your victim, having no fear of the law and getting caught, or not caring about your responsibility towards those younger, smaller, or weaker than yourself.

4. **Planning the offense.** Next you had to find a way to actually commit the offense. This means you had to find someone to abuse and get him or her alone. Next you had to get this person to go along with you and you needed enough time to commit the act. All this takes some thought and planning.

5. and 6. **Committing the offense, denial and minimization.** After committing a sexual offense most guys eventually start to feel guilty and can become depressed or feel ashamed. These feelings are unpleasant and can cause you to feel bad about yourself. To avoid these bad feelings many guys escape into daydreams about being powerful or into sexual thoughts and fantasies about abusing someone again. Sexual thoughts and fantasies about abusing someone are called 'deviant'. The problem with escaping into deviant thoughts and fantasies is that they keep you from working on your real problems.

7. **Feelings of shame and guilt.** Some guys have difficulty handling the feelings of shame, guilt, and anger they experience after committing a sexual offense and actually turn around and blame the victim for making them feel bad. This confusion can lead them to hurt their victim or someone else again.

8. **False promises.** When you are feeling guilt or shame about having committed a sexual assault you are likely to make false promises to yourself or others that you will never do it again. However, the problem is that just saying you won't do it again is no guarantee. Unless you understand the reason why you offended, your sexual offense cycle, and the thinking errors you used to 'deny' or 'minimize' your actions you are still at risk to harm someone else again. That is why it is important for you to make the decision to care and get some help from a trained counsellor.

DENIAL AND MINIMIZATION

Because the response of others to your offense can be swift and strong once it is found out, there is a great temptation to 'deny' or 'minimize' that it happened. It is important to talk a little about these two words because understanding them better will help you make your decision to care.

When you 'deny' you are saying that the offense did not happen or that the victim is lying about the circumstances. You should be careful when denying that the offense took place, especially when there is strong evidence to indicate that it did. Children typically do not lie about being sexually abused or assaulted.

If you committed the offense but were not found guilty because the crown attorney was unable to prove the case 'beyond a reasonable doubt' the harm done to the victim does not go away. ***In fact, your continued denial actually means that you have harmed the victim twice!***

If the court finds you guilty and you still continue to deny your responsibility it will be difficult for you to benefit from counselling. Without counselling you are at risk of offending again.

When you 'minimize' you are not completely denying the offense took place but you are trying to reduce your responsibility. When you minimize you are also trying to ignore the harm done to the

other person.

It is not easy to admit you sexually assaulted someone or tell others everything that happened. Lots of things keep guys from telling the whole story-pride, fear of getting into trouble, wanting to avoid angry reactions from parents or friends, concerns about involvement with the police, or embarrassment caused by other kids at school finding out about what you did.

However, the longer you continue to deny or minimize your behaviour the harder it is to make the decision to care and get counselling. Though it may not seem like it now, it really is in your best interest to tell the whole truth. You don't have to admit everything or completely stop minimizing to begin counselling, but in the long run the more honest you are the better your counsellor can help you.

THINKING ERRORS

In addition to denial and minimization you need to be aware of your 'thinking errors'. Thinking errors are excuses or 'rationalizations' that help you deny and minimize your responsibility by placing the blame on your victim. For example some guys will say that they were "just teaching their little sister about sex" or that their child victim "asked for it by jumping up in their lap and wriggling around".

Other examples of thinking errors are: believing that you offended because you "loved the other person and meant it as affection"; claiming that the other person "deserved it because she made you mad"; believing that he "was too young to understand what was happening to him"; or claiming that she said "yes" so she "must have wanted it."

Thinking errors make it possible for you to commit a sexual offense because they help you ignore the other person's feelings, get past his/her resistance, and help you live with your feelings of shame or guilt. However, the truth of the matter is that people never "deserve it", "want it", or "ask for it". Nothing in the dress, manner, appearance, or clothing worn by anyone ever invites a sexual offense!

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME IN COUNSELLING?

Some young people who commit a sexual offense think they are "crazy" or a "bad person" and that counselling is punishment for what they did. The truth is counselling will give you an opportunity to learn about yourself in many different ways and can make you a more caring and happier person.

Specially trained counsellors can help you sort out your problems or any confusing thoughts or feelings you may have about sex or your sexuality. A caring and supportive counsellor can work with you and help keep you from harming yourself or others again. Counsellors typically have worked with many other young people in your position. They have "heard it all" before and will not be shocked or surprised by anything you might say to them. You can and should tell them everything that happened so that together you can make plans to keep you and others from harm.

But remember nothing will really happen in counselling until you admit you have a problem and that you have harmed someone else. The decision to obtain counselling can only be made by you. No one

can force you against your will.

Counselling can take place in a small group of 6 or 8 other young people or individually. Sometimes your family will be asked to be involved, especially if you abused your brother or sister.

Why groups? Groups can be far more effective than one-to-one counselling. Groups give you the opportunity to talk with other guys in the same situation. You can learn a lot about why you offended by listening to the stories of other group members. Groups are usually lead by two counsellors.

In counselling you will have the opportunity to learn more about sex and sexuality. It will be important for you to understand how and what you learned about sex or showing affection. A trained counsellor can answer your questions about sex in a straightforward way and give you information about the joys and responsibilities of sex. This information can help you make more positive choices about sex. A person who makes 'positive' choices about sex chooses only partners who are age-appropriate and consenting and sexual activity that does not involve force, threats, the abuse of power, trickery, or deception.

You may also learn how to make friends, ask someone special for a date, or better ways of understanding and managing your anger. Your counsellor can also help you plan a strategy to keep you away from situations that will put you at risk for re-offending. Once you understand your reasons for offending, your sexual offense cycle and the thinking errors you use, you can recognize a risky situation *before* you get started and just walk away.

One thing to keep in mind is that your counsellor is bound *by law* to report to police or other authorities anything you tell them about other sexual offenses not previously reported. This doesn't mean they don't care about you. They must obey the law too! Also, your counsellor may want to talk to somebody else about your problems to better help you. It would be a good idea for you to talk openly to your counsellor about who else he/she might need to speak with.

BUT IT HAPPENED TO ME TOO!

Many young people who sexually offend against others were abused themselves either sexually, physically, or emotionally. However, being abused *does not cause* anyone to do it to others. Most offenders were never abused themselves. Your own past abuse, tragic and unfortunate as it is, does not give you any right or permission to hurt someone else.

Being abused can make you really angry and confused. Often, children are forced to keep their abuse a secret under threat of violence or by being offered bribes of money or gifts. If you enjoyed any physical sensation from the abuse or if you feel you consented to any part of it you might feel a lot of guilt or shame. It is important to acknowledge and work out these feelings with a trained counsellor. It is also important to understand that being a child you could not really give consent and were not responsible for the abuse. *Your abuser was responsible!*

It is not easy to tell anyone that someone has sexually abused you. When you're really small you likely did not even understand what was happening to you. If you were hurt physically at the same

time your pain, confusion, or anger could be even stronger. Some abused young people hurt others to get even or to feel strong or good about themselves again. Of course this never works. Hurting others only makes things worse.

Young boys who are sexually abused often don't tell an adult they were hurt, especially if the person who hurt them was an older boy or a man and someone they knew or trusted. If you were abused by an older girl or a woman, people you tell may find it hard to believe or wonder why you didn't enjoy it. In our society boys are expected to enjoy all sexual contact with females. When you are hurt by having sex with a female it can leave you very confused.

Some guys act tough or 'macho' to hide their feelings of fear or to show they are in control of them. Instead of dealing with their feelings of guilt, shame, anger, or pain they try to shut them off. However, keeping all your feelings inside and not being believed can make abused young people unhappy and even emotionally and physically ill.

If you were abused yourself, part of understanding your offense will involve working on your past. The more you understand about what happened to you, and the more you sort out your own feelings and past experiences, the better you will understand your behaviour and the feelings of the person you harmed.

WHO GETS HURT BY MY SEXUAL OFFENSE?

People respond to being sexually abused or assaulted in various ways. Some feel ashamed and bad about themselves and become withdrawn or try to commit suicide. Others may suffer from depression, nightmares, anxiety, stop eating, or start using drugs or alcohol. Some find it impossible to ever enjoy sex. Most find it difficult if not impossible to trust others, especially persons of the same sex as their offender. Many never feel safe again.

Regardless of their immediate response to being assaulted, all victims carry their experience with them for the rest of their lives. You may go to court and then to counselling for a few months or years, but your victim carries the emotional pain of being hurt with them all their lives.

When you sexually assault someone it is not just your victim who gets harmed. The family and friends of the victim are also affected. Adults, children, and other teens in your community often feel scared or unsafe when they learn there has been a sexual offense committed in the neighbourhood. Your family and friends can also be hurt by your actions.

You also get hurt by your offending behaviour. Feelings of shame, guilt, anger, and confusion can weigh heavily on you. A criminal record, missed days at school, low self-esteem, and a loss of self-respect are additional burdens an offender typically has to bear.

MAKING THE DECISION TO CARE

Reading this booklet will give you a lot of things to think about and perhaps some guidance to help you decide what your next step will be. Admitting you have a problem takes courage. Just remember, asking for help is a sign of strength!

Making the decision to care is a big responsibility and counselling takes hard work! But keep in mind that you are not alone. You do not have to deal with this all by yourself. Your counsellor is trained to help support your decision and to provide you with the things you will need to get your life back together. It's all up to you now!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Abused Boys: The Neglected Victims of Sexual Abuse.

M. Hunter (1990).

Fawcett Books, New York, New York.

Changing Bodies, Changing Lives: A Book For Teens on Sex and Relationships.

R. Bell (1988).

Random House, New York, New York.

How Can I Stop? Breaking My Deviant Cycle.

L. Bays, R. Freeman-Longo, & D. Hildebran (1989).

Safer Society Press, Orwell, Vermont.

I Never Called It Rape.

R. Warshaw (1988). Harper & Row, New York, New York.

Man to Man: When Your Partner Says No.

S.A. Johnson (1992). Safer Society Press, Orwell, Vermont.

Macho: Is That What I Really Want?

P. Bateman and B. Mahoney (1989). Youth Education Systems, Scarborough, New York.

So, There are Laws About Sex!

W. Harvey and T. McGuire (1989).

Butterworths, Toronto, Ontario and Vancouver, B.C.

Victims No Longer.

M. Lew (1990). Harper & Row, New York, New York.

Why Did I Do It Again? Understanding My Cycle of Problem Behaviours.

L. Bays and R. Freeman-Longo (1989). Safer Society Press, Orwell, Vermont.

