



SERVE & SAVE

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE INITIATIVE

What to know about
SEXUAL
ABUSE



FNB Eswatini
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WHAT IS IT?

Sexual abuse is any sexual activity that occurs without consent. Also referred to as sexual assault or sexual violence, it includes unwanted sexual touching, forced oral sex, and rape, among other sexual acts.

It is threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

FORMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

These may include, but are not limited to :

- **Rape** - When someone didn't want to have sex or didn't give their consent for sex to happen.
- **Sexual assault by a person's spouse or partner(intimate partner sexual violence)** - Sexual assault that takes place within an intimate relationship
- **Unwanted sexual contact/touching** - Any sexual touching that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient is sexual violence. No one has the right to touch you in any way without your consent.
- **Watching someone engage in private acts without their knowledge or permission**
- **Nonconsensual image sharing** - Sharing or distribution of sexual, intimate, nude, or semi-nude photographs or videos of someone without their permission.
- **Sexual exploitation** - Sexual exploitation involves a person profiting from the use of another person's body in a sexual manner in order to benefit (financially or otherwise). In general, the perpetrator of sexual exploitation takes advantage of their victim's vulnerable or dependent state, including addictions to drugs or alcohol.

- Exposing one's genitals or naked body to other(s) without consent

WHAT IS CONSENT?

Consent must be freely given and informed, and a person can change their mind at any time. Consent is more than a yes or no. It is a dialogue about desires, needs, and level of comfort with different sexual interactions.

It is **NOT** consent if you or someone else was:

- Asleep, unconscious, drunk, drugged or 'on' drugs.
- Pressured, manipulated, tricked or scared into saying yes.
- Too young or vulnerable to have the freedom and capacity to make that choice.

Consent can be withdrawn at any time, including during sex or a sexual act. Just because someone consented to something before doesn't mean they consented to it happening again.

If someone's unsure whether the other person is giving their consent for something sexual, they should always check with them.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

- Anxiety about specific situations that didn't previously prompt anxiety
- Explicit use of sexual language or changes in attitude and behaviour towards sexual activity.
- Concentration difficulties
- Deep feelings of guilt and shame
- Emotional outbursts
- Extreme dislike of certain places, smells, sounds, people, or situations
- Memory loss
- Restlessness
- Vigilance

Interpersonal relationships can be affected. Adults suffering from sexual abuse trauma may have:

- Anger issues and issues with holding onto resentment
- Difficulty establishing boundaries or saying “no”
- Easy stress within relationships
- Fear of attachment or intimacy
- Fear of being alone
- Secrecy, and the inability to open up or trust

Childhood sexual abuse almost always affects sexual behaviors, often leading to:

- Confusion about sexual identity
- Dislike or fear of sex
- Mental escapes in order to enjoy sex
- Going above and beyond to “please” others and gain acceptance
- Promiscuity
- Sexual fantasies of abuse, rape, or confinement

There are also some physical symptoms associated with childhood sexual abuse, such as:

- Anorexia
- Chronic pain
- Digestive issues
- Gynecological disorders, physical pain or itching in the genital area
- Headaches
- Immune system disorders
- Lethargy and listlessness
- Obesity and compulsive eating
- Sexual dysfunction
- Soiling or wetting clothes, or bedwetting (or an increase, if it happens already)

HOW TO ADDRESS IT?

- **If You've Just Been Sexually Assaulted** - Don't shower, drink, eat or change your clothes. These activities can destroy physical evidence that could be useful if you decide to prosecute.
- **Get medical attention** - Even if you feel embarrassed about your injuries, it is very important to receive medical assistance. Hospital staffs are accustomed to dealing with injuries to the penis or anus and they are trained to do so as professionally as they would treat a broken arm or a heart attack. Even if you don't seem to be seriously hurt, you may have hidden, internal injuries that can become infected or get worse with time. Furthermore, symptoms of sexually transmitted diseases can lie dormant for a long time, but early medical attention may prevent future outbreaks. If you are concerned about HIV infection, talk to a staff member at Student Health Services or an area hospital about the possibility of exposure and the need for testing.
- **Write down everything** that you remember happening, with as much detail as possible. This can help you to cope with the situation but may also be helpful in any legal action you might decide to take.
- **Get in contact with your local police**
- **Tell someone trustworthy about it** - Telling someone else about your experience is a way of getting help. If you have been keeping it hidden inside of you because of shame and fear, it's time to break this wall. Confide in someone you can trust. It could be a close family member or a good friend. Telling someone is a way for you to heal and a step towards doing something about the issue.
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- **Get counseling** - Don't try to heal alone. There are professionals trained to help those who have been abused and assaulted. A local crisis or women's shelter, sexual assault hotlines, and professionals like counselors are better able to help you work through your pain. You are not abnormal, you are simply getting proper assistance from someone who knows how to help you deal with this emotionally and psychologically.

FOR MORE INFORMATION



25052407 / 76317827 / 79627941



info@phumelela.org



www.phumelelaproject.org



Office No. 1, Manzini Heights,
145 Du Toit Street, Manzini

HOW TO ADDRESS IT/BREAK FREE

Tell someone - Whether it's a family member, friend, or counselor, let someone you can trust know what you're going through. You're going to need emotional support as you make the break.

Gather paperwork and important documents - Birth certificates, IDs, bank statements, ownership documents, and marriage certificates. Store them in a safe place or with a friend or family member. Abusers will often block access to these documents once they realize they are losing control. If it's unsafe to take the originals, make copies of your financial data like credit cards and financial statements. These copies will be useful later in proving who owns what. Keep this documentation in a safe place until you're able to safely leave

Cancel joint bank and credit card accounts - Though your credit score will take a hit when you close your credit card accounts, it will stop the financial bleed.

Change online passwords, if you have any, so your abuser no longer has access to your accounts.

Get professional help - Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline , chat with them . Even if your partner has never hit you, most domestic violence cases include economical abuse so the professional would assist on how to deal with your situation.

Because financial abuse is a crime, you should also report it to your local police department.

Commit to leaving and follow through with your plan

RECOVERING FROM ECONOMIC ABUSE

You can get financial education - It's important to speak up about your experience with supportive friends and family and consider getting education on your finances and how the system works.

1. Call your bank and ask to meet with someone to learn about your personal finances
2. Meet with a financial planner
3. Speak to an attorney
4. Check your credit score and learn about the impact of credit scores

Set up your accounts & get legal services if necessary -

After taking these steps, start setting up independent accounts, secure email, and phone. Close any joint credit cards with 0 balances and consider signing up for a credit monitoring service. Once your financial situation is secure, start looking into legal options for repairing credit, addressing the abuse, and filing for divorce if you were married. Approach legal aid organizations, if any available, that will provide free or discounted legal services for survivors of domestic abuse.

Get Emotional Support - As you do this, seek support. Any kind of abuse likely has emotional and psychological effects that should be addressed by a professional.

Take Recovery One Step at a Time - It can be a challenge to deal with recovery, but it's important to take it one step at a time. Recovery from this form of abuse, like any abuse, is going to take time as you need to heal and deal with the practical impacts from the abuse. Taking small steps consistently is a great way to build a foundation and gain your confidence back.

We may have a different experience of economic abuse, so each person's recovery will also vary. Some may experience other types of abuse along with economic abuse and some may not. It's important to create a plan to determine the impact of the economic abuse and to lay the foundation for recovery.

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katphumelela@hotmail.com



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