

Sexual intimacy can be a fulfilling and enjoyable part of a marriage or intimate relationship. Healthy sexual activity can benefit our body, mind and spirit. Healthy sexual intimacy involves the consent of both people in the relationship. When sexual activity occurs without consent freely given by both parties, it is against the law. This applies to all people in all circumstances including marriage. You have the right to be treated with respect if you do not wish to engage in an intimate sexual act. You have the right to initiate, consent or refuse to engage in a sexual act with your partner/husband.

**SEXUAL VIOLENCE** is any activity or behaviour of a sexual nature that is unwanted, and/or that is forced upon a person by another/others. Sexual violence is any activity or behaviour of a sexual nature that is undertaken without consent and/or where coercion has been used.

**CONSENT** is the process of agreement expressed freely and without pressure and based on all the available information.

**COERCION** is the means used to make someone do something that they do not want to do. It can include physical force and intimidation, verbal harassment, emotional manipulation or intimidation, manipulation of cultural or religious beliefs, restriction of basic human needs and/or the threat of any of these.

Sexual violence can include touching, rape, viewing of sexually degrading or explicit material, participation in the production of sexually degrading or explicit material or sexual harassment in the workplace or at home.

**You have the right to be safe and feel safe from physical and sexual violence.**

This means that:

- You do not have a duty to anyone to engage in sexual intimacy with them. You do not have to engage in a sexual act simply because you are in a relationship with a person, married or closely related to them.

- Your partner/husband has no right to hit you, force you or pressure you to engage in any sexual activity without your consent.
- You have the right to choose when, where and how you want to engage in sexual intimacy.
- You don't have to feel guilty about not wanting to have sex with your partner/husband.
- You don't have to agree to have sex because you think your partner/husband needs it and that it is your role to meet all his needs at all times.
- Your partner/husband can't force you to have sex by threatening you with deportation or losing residency in Australia.
- No matter what your cultural background or that of your partner/husband, there's never any excuse for being touched against your will, forcing or pressuring you to engage in a sexual act.



There are many reasons why a person from a non-English speaking background finds it hard to talk about what's happening in her relationship or marriage:

- You may feel that you are ruining your family honour, or jeopardising your family's reputation, by talking about how your partner/husband is treating you.
- You may feel that it is your fault that your partner/husband doesn't respect your rights to decide when and where you want to engage in sexual activity.
- Language and cultural barriers could make it hard for you to contact organisations for help.
- You may have experienced racist attitudes in Australia and think the best option is to keep to yourself.
- You might fear that friends in your community and place of worship would blame you for your partner/husband's abusive behaviour.
- You may think it is shameful to talk of sexual matters with other people.
- You may feel that you are being disloyal to your cultural and religious community by talking about what your partner/husband does to you.
- You may have been brought up to believe that you have to obey your partner/husband's demands, including sexual demands.
- As a migrant or refugee in Australia, you might be fearful of contact with authorities such as the police, particularly if you have had earlier adverse experiences with the Australian police or with authorities in your country of origin.

### What some of us have done ...

"I spoke with our priest who told me my husband's forcing me to have sex was a breach of our marriage vows and a violation of the sanctity of marriage. He told me not to feel guilty for speaking up and seeking help."

"I talked to a friend who put me in touch with a Sexual Assault Service. I went to counselling and came to realise that I was not to blame for my partner having forced me to have sex."

"Talking to someone I trusted helped me feel stronger and more able to decide what I wanted to do."

"I left him. I went into a Women's Refuge for a while, and with their support and assistance I was able to find my own place. I obtained a divorce from him and now I feel safe."

"I got a domestic violence order against my partner. Domestic violence services, police and legal aid helped me with this."

"I talked to a worker from the Immigrant Women's Support Service who provided information that assisted me in clarifying what was happening to me."

"I went to the police and gave a statement: he was arrested. We went to trial and he was sent to prison on three charges of rape for what he did to me during our marriage."

"Whenever I meet other women in the same situation, I provide them with the information I gained through my experience and encourage them to stand up for themselves and their rights."

"Our minister told me not to feel guilty about leaving. My husband's continual rape of me over the years had destroyed the trust and love in our marriage. My minister said the Bible should never be used to justify abuse."

"I rang the Immigrant Women's Support Service. They assisted me to find a safe place, and provided me with information on how to get my own income through Centrelink and how to go about reporting my case to the police."

### It's Against the Law

It's against the law in Australia for a husband, boyfriend or partner (whether male or female)

- to physically force, trick or coerce a woman to engage in a sexual activity
- to sexually harass a woman
- to force a woman to watch pornography
- to ignore a woman when she says she does not want to engage in a sexual activity
- to engage in any sexual activity with a child.

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