

Afraid to see rapist ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I was date raped by a man who I was seeing. I had broken it off with him a month before, but got into a situation where he attacked me. The problem now is he is friends with many of my friends, and he works at a place I must go to frequently. I haven't told my friends because I don't want them to confront him. I haven't seen the man since he raped me and I am afraid to. I know my friends will want to see him, and I know I will eventually run into him. I guess my question is what do I do when I see him? I don't want to talk to him, but I am afraid he will try and talk to me. I am scared of my reaction and don't want to have a freak out in front of my friends (although I know that they would understand). How can I leave this situation behind and resume normal life, not being afraid of seeing him in my everyday life?

Answer

Dear Reader,

It is extremely brave of you to reach out for help. Unfortunately, your experience is all too common. About 90% of sexual violence survivors report knowing the person who assaulted them and many people are faced with your same painful dilemma: What do I do if I see this person again? Your desire not to see or interact with him is, of course, perfectly understandable. And yet you are faced with what seems like a very likely possibility that you will indeed see him. This is incredibly unfair ? you should have the option of no contact with him whatsoever. But since it sounds like it may happen, let's explore some options.

You mentioned that you did not want to tell your friends because you are afraid they will confront him. Are there any friends you can tell who would respect your wishes not to confront him? Friends often are unsure how to best support a survivor of sexual violence. Sometimes they think that confronting or threatening the offender, even against the wishes of the survivor, is the best way to show support. Plus, they may feel angry, protective, and really unsure about what to do. Their hearts are in the right place, but what they don't realize is that acting in ways that are contrary to the wishes of the survivor can be re-victimizing. Taking control away from you in this way can be triggering because that is what the offender did. Do you have friends who might be able to understand this and act according to your wishes? If so, telling even one person can make all the difference, especially if s/he can be with you if or when you may have to see him. Just their silent witnessing of the encounter, and being there for you after, can be hugely supportive. Some campuses offer [How to support a survivor?](#) workshops for friends, as do some local rape crisis centers. You may also consider having your friends read this webpage on [how to help a friend](#) [2] before you tell them.

Another option to consider is how you can minimize the interaction you have with him if you see him. Even if you cannot avoid the place where he works entirely, there might be ways to decrease the contact. When you go to this place, are there many other people there? Can you go only when there are many other people present? Is there a way to minimize the likelihood that he would see you? Another option may be to let him know ahead of time that you want no contact. Of course, he may not respect your wishes. However, making this known (especially over email or text message) may be effective because it is documented evidence. So if you send him an email saying [Do not talk to me or interact with me at all?](#) and then he does, there is now evidence of him violating your request and this can later be even more grounds for you taking additional action, if you feel inclined to do so. Such actions may include obtaining a restraining order or notifying police or security. And there is a possibility that he would respect your request and stay away from you, but trust your gut with this one and do what feels most likely to work for you.

One thing to consider is whether or not you wish to prosecute the rapist. Deciding whether or not to take legal action can be very challenging. Should you ultimately decide to proceed in this direction, many communities have rape crisis centers that provide advocates for survivors along the journey to legal justice. In New York City you can speak with advocates at one of the many [rape crisis centers](#) [3] around the city for emotional support and legal guidance. In case you ultimately decide to take legal action, it is important that you write down everything that you can remember, and speak with an advocate to obtain further information on how to proceed.

Finally, know that your reactions are perfectly normal. It is important to always remember that you are not at fault for what he did. You are not to blame for this situation, as the person who violated you chose to behave in this way. If you are faced with seeing this person, trust your gut to know what to do. It may also be useful to talk to someone. If you are a Columbia student, you can make an appointment to speak with a professional counselor at [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CPS\)](#) [4]. Also, check out [Columbia's Rape Crisis/Anti-Violence Support Center \(RC/AVSC\)](#) [5]. The RC/AVSC provides peer counseling, advocacy, and education to the entire University community.

Healing from this trauma will take time and support, but it will come. Reaching out to ask your question took strength and courage, so thank you for writing.

Alice!

Category:

[Emotional Health](#) [6]

[Relationships](#) [7]

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[Nonconsensual Relationships](#) [9]

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Footer menu

- ▼ [Contact Alice!](#)
 - [Content Use](#)
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 - [Comments & Corrections](#)
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Links

[1] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/afraid-see-rapist>

[2] <http://health.columbia.edu/topics/violence/help/help-friend>

[3] http://www.svfreenyc.org/resource_list_Hospital.html

[4] <http://health.columbia.edu/services/cps>

[5] <http://health.columbia.edu/services/svprp/rcavsc>

[6] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/emotional-health>

[7] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/relationships>

[8] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/stress-anxiety>

[9] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/nonconsensual-relationships>

[10] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/older-guy-went-too-far>

[11] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/forgiving-myself-after-being-sexually-abused-0>

[12] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/sexual-assault-survivor-needs-help-intimate-relationships>

[13] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/male-rape-possible-0>

[14] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/was-i-raped>