



What is sexual assault?

Gippsland CASA defines sexual assault any sexual behaviour which is **unwanted**, happens **without a person's consent**, or makes a person feel **upset or afraid**. This can include a range of harmful and criminal behaviours, such as:

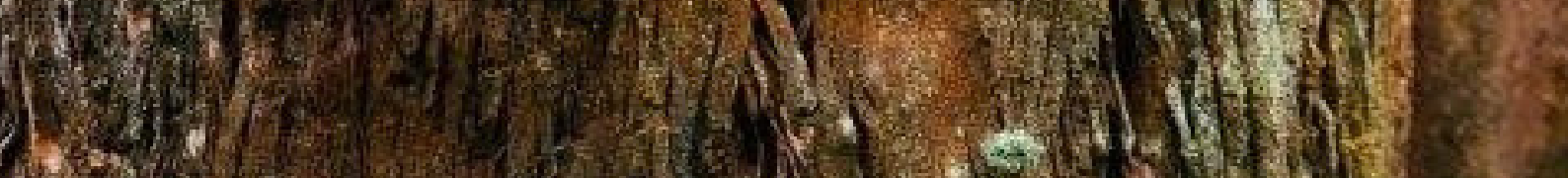
- Rape- forced or unwanted sex (oral, anal, vaginal)
- Touching or kissing of your body, including your genitals, or being made to touch or kiss someone else's body/genitals
- Someone showing you their genitals, or making you show yours
- Being made to look at, or pose for, sexual photos or videos
- Someone sharing sexual photos of you without your consent
- Sexual talking or harassment
- These behaviours can also be forms of child sexual abuse, depending on the age of the person harmed

Legally, a person **cannot** consent to any sexual activity if they:

- Are involved in the activity because they have been forced or threatened; this includes threats made against someone else who the person harmed cares about (for example, parent, child, pet)
- Are sleeping, unconscious, or drunk/under the influence of drugs
- Do not understand what sexual activity they are agreeing to
- Are tricked into participating into a sexual activity (for example, if someone lies and says it's part of a medical procedure)

No child can consent to a sexual act. These are the current laws relating to the age of consent in Victoria:

- Under 12 years: Legally, you cannot consent to sexual activity with anyone.
- 12-16 years: You can consent to sexual contact (if you want to, and no-one is pressuring you), with someone within 24 months of your age
- 16 years and over: You can consent to wanted sexual contact with someone, so long as they are not responsible for caring for you in some way (such as a guardian/carers, doctor, teacher, coach, etc.)



Most adults and children who are harmed sexually know at once that it does not feel "okay", even if the person who harmed them says it's fine. Sexual assault happens because people who hurt others abuse their power over someone.

Feeling like you don't have free choice in what someone does to your body is often very traumatic. Adults are often unsure about what sexual assault is, and worry about "making a fuss" if they tell someone about what happened. They may also blame themselves for what happened. **It is never their fault.**

Children can never consent to sexual activity, whether it is with someone the same age, someone much older, bigger, stronger, or because they are physically small. They are also unable fully understand the impacts of sexual activity, either with someone their age, or with someone older, or who may be responsible for caring for them.

Sexual assault isn't about sex, it is **all about power**. A person's ability to say "no" often depends on whether they are physically or emotionally able to say "no".

During a sexual assault, it is also very common for people to "freeze". This is a normal, automatic response from your body, when your brain determines that it's not safe to fight back. Freezing, or not fighting back/saying "no" **does not mean that you consent to sexual contact.**

For more information about sexual assault, or for further support, you can call Gippsland CASA on (03) 5134 3922.



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