



CARING FOR YOURSELF

A Guide to Recovery
Following Sexual Assault

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DEFINITION



Sexual Assault

The term sexual assault is used to describe any form of sexual touching that happens without your consent. You have been sexually assaulted if someone forces you to participate in any other type of sexual activity without your consent.

Sexual assault happens to people of all genders and in all walks of life. You can be sexually assaulted in your home, at your workplace, or on the street. You can be assaulted by a trusted friend, a close relative, or a complete stranger. There's no such thing as a "typical" sexual assault.



HOW YOU MAY BE FEELING ■

If you have been sexually assaulted, you may be surprised by your emotional reactions. You may be alarmed by the intensity of your feelings or shocked by how calm you feel.

There's no right or wrong way to feel after you've been sexually assaulted. The emotions you are experiencing are the right ones for you.

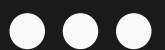
"I spent the first few days crying, and then I got really angry.
I was enraged that he would do this to me. I trusted him!"
"I feel like this is all my fault. "

Some people who have been sexually assaulted have nightmares or feel like they are reliving the assault. This is a common experience as your brain tries to process what happened to you. Some strategies that might help include:

- Sleep with a nightlight
- If you wake up from a nightmare remind yourself that you are safe now
- If you feel like you're reliving the assault, bring yourself back to the present by telling yourself today's date, reminding yourself that you are safe now, and using the grounding techniques on the back of this booklet.

You may feel that what has happened to you is your fault – that you did something to cause the assault.

You didn't. You did not make this happen.





WHAT DO I DO NOW?

"I can't even think straight. I don't know who to call or what to do."

It's hard to think clearly when you've just been sexually assaulted. You may find yourself doing things that you would not usually expect yourself to do. This can be a very confusing and overwhelming time.

*What kind of medical care do I need?
Should I report the assault to the police?
How do I get the support I need?*

If you don't know who to call or where to turn for help, call the Navigation Line at **1-855-NAV-SADV (1-855-628-7238)** and someone will be able to assist you with navigating to the closest 24/7 hospital based Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Care and Treatment Centre. These services will provide you with emotional support, as well as information about medical care and what's involved in reporting an assault to the police.



WHAT MEDICAL CARE DO I NEED?



After a sexual assault, you may be wondering about what type of medical care is available and recommended such as testing for STIs, pregnancy prevention and assessment of any injuries. These are good questions to ask and it is always your decision whether to accept recommended treatment if needed.

Some hospitals and communities have Sexual Assault Care Treatment Centres with staff who have been specially trained to care for people who have been sexually assaulted. It's a good idea to call your local sexual assault crisis line or hospital emergency department before you leave home so that they can give you information about where you can get the care you need.

Some people decide not to get medical care because they think the hospital staff will report the assault to the police.

You need to know that it is your decision to report to police and the hospital staff cannot report the assault without your permission.



SHOULD I REPORT TO POLICE? ■

Some people know right away that they want to report the assault to the police. Others know right away that they don't want to report the assault. Still others aren't sure what they want to do. You may need additional information before you make this important decision. You may want to know what is involved in making a statement, how decisions are made about whether the case goes to court, what's involved in testifying in court, and so on. A sexual assault nurse/counsellor can help you explore your options.

At OSMH if you decide to complete a sexual assault evidence kit, it will be stored for up to one year. This can give you the time you need to make a careful decision about whether you'd like to share the information with police.

There are contact numbers for Victim Services and supports at the back of this booklet if you need to speak to someone about the legal process.

Web resources:

www.journeyproject.ca/reportingtopolice

www.schliferclinic.com/independent-legal-advice-for-survivors-of-sexual-assault-in-ontario/





What does the law say?

Under Canadian law, there are three types of sexual assault charges:

Sexual assault occurs when "any form of sexual activity is forced upon another person without that person's consent" (with no physical injury).

Sexual assault with a weapon occurs when a person is sexually assaulted by someone who "(a) has a weapon or threatens to use a weapon, imitation or real; (b) threatens to cause bodily harm to a third person (e.g., a child or friend); (c) causes bodily harm to that person; and (d) is party to the offense with any other person:'

Aggravated sexual assault occurs when "a person wounds, maims, disfigures, brutally beats or endangers the life of a person during a sexual assault.

Depending on the circumstances of your assault, the person who assaulted you could be charged with more than one crime. If, for example, you were forced into a car and then taken to another location and sexually assaulted, the person who assaulted you could be charged with both kidnapping and sexual assault.

Don't allow anyone to pressure you to make a decision about legal matters before you're ready. You need to be given enough time to make the decision that's right for you.



HOW TO GET THE SUPPORT I NEED



As much as you may want to avoid thinking about what has happened to you, it's important to seek out the help and support you need. This is a way of taking care of yourself. It can also help to determine how well you are able to recover from the assault. Talking about the assault can take you past the self-blame that some people feel and help you to start the healing process.

Some people who have been assaulted choose to seek out the services of a professional counsellor or therapist to help them work through their feelings about the assault. You can find such help by contacting your local sexual assault centre, community mental health agency, Victim Services or counsellors and therapists in your community.

Other people prefer to talk to friends and family members about the assault. If you think you would like to discuss the sexual assault with a friend or family member, it's important to think about the best person to tell. You might want to ask yourself the following questions when you're making this decision:

- Would this person respect my privacy?
- Would this person listen without blaming me for what happened?
- Would this person feel like she should tell me what to do?
- Would this person be prepared to support me during this difficult time in my life?



MAKING A NEW BEGINNING



It may take time and energy to heal after you have been sexually assaulted. Don't expect yourself to feel better right away. Be patient with yourself and give yourself the time you need to figure out how this experience has affected you.

In the days following the assault, you may find yourself experiencing a range of physical and emotional reactions, including:

- A feeling of being lost and alone and/or disconnected with people and the world around you
- A belief that no one understands what you are experiencing
- Confusion or an inability to think clearly; difficulty concentrating
- Not feeling like eating or feeling nausea
- Feeling tired or fatigue a lot
- Changes in your sleeping patterns
- Headaches and tension
- A sense of grief and loss
- Not being able to stop thinking about the assault
- A change in the way you feel about sex
- Not wanting to be touched by anyone
- Having a hard time trusting others
- Feelings of fear, such as a fear of being alone or going out at night
- Nervousness and anxiety
- A change in your sense of self-confidence.





It's important to recognize that the emotions that you are feeling are part of the healing process. These reactions can help you to understand how the sexual assault has affected you. Taking the time to understand these reactions is an important part of the recovery process.

When you've been sexually assaulted, it's important to take care of yourself, to seek out support, and to obtain answers to any questions you may still have after reading this booklet. While the journey to recovery isn't made in a day, a week, or a month, with support and caring from friends, family, and your community, you will begin to feel better again



TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF



There are lots of ways to take care of yourself, what works for one person might not work for another. The following list gives some examples, try to find something that works for you.

Grounding & Self-Soothing Strategies — Grounding strategies help to bring you back to the present moment. Self-Soothing strategies help you manage overwhelming emotions.

- Remind yourself of the date and time; remind yourself that you are safe now
- Put your feet firmly on the ground, feel your feet in your shoes, socks, or ground
- Rub your palms, clap your hands, and focus on sounds to bring you to the present.
- Look at art or photos you find visually appealing.
- Listen to music; make a playlist of songs that you find soothing or empowering.
- Put essential oils in a diffuser, focus on the smell.
- Have some tea, coffee or cold water; focus on the taste and temperature.
- Hold a fuzzy blanket, cuddle a pet, or hold a stone or ice.

Self-Care

- Try to get enough sleep and to rest when you need it
- Remember to eat regular meals
- Let the people in your life know what you need (space, someone to listen, practical supports)



CARING FOR A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER FOLLOWING ASSAULT



You may experience some powerful emotions when you learn that your friend or family member has been sexually assaulted. You may feel anger and sadness that this has happened to someone that you care about, guilt that you weren't able to do something to prevent the assault, and confusion about what you can do to help.

It's important for you to understand that a person who has been sexually assaulted may experience some or all of the following interactions:

- A feeling of being lost and alone and out of touch with the rest of the world
- A belief that no one understands what they are experiencing
- Confusion or an inability to think clearly
- A change in eating habits to think clearly
- Fatigue
- Changes in sleeping patterns
- Headaches and tension
- A sense of grief and loss
- Not being able to stop thinking about the assault
- A change in the way they feel about sex
- Difficulty with affection and being touched by anyone
- An inability to trust others
- Feelings of fear, such as fear of being alone or going out at night
- Nervousness and anxiety
- A change in self-confidence



CARING FOR A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER FOLLOWING ASSAULT



Your friend or family member may need help and support to redeveloping their trust in the world. Building a new sense of trust and safety is one of the most difficult steps in recovering from sexual assault.

Their reaction to the sexual assault may be strong enough to lead to difficulties in your relationship. You may feel hurt and upset by their new-found distrust or detachment from you and angry that this situation has occurred at all. Try to be patient and gentle with your loved one as they struggles to come to terms with the assault. Support their efforts to make changes and help them to find the resources they need.

Its important to take care of yourself, too, during this difficult time. You may find it helpful to talk to a counsellor about your feelings as you support to your friend or family member.

For additional emotional support and information, contact your local 24 hour sexual assault crisis line, or the nearest Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Care and Treatment Centre.

1-855-NAV-SADV (1-855-628-7238)



HELPFUL NUMBERS ■

- **Athena's Sexual Assault Counselling & Advocacy Centre**
1-800-987-0799 (Simcoe County)
- **Mamaway** Barrie Clinic (705) 721-9554
Orillia Clinic (705) 259-9520
- **Beendigen's Talk4Healing Helpline** offers help, support, and resources 24/7 through talk, text, and chat.
1-855-554-HEAL
- **Colibri** – Centre des femmes francophones du comté de Simcoe 1-877-797-2060
- **Simcoe County Crisis Line** 1-888-893-8333
- **Muskoka/Parry Sound Crisis Line** 1-800-461-5424
- **Muskoka/Parry Sound Sexual Assault Services** 1-800-461-2929 (Muskoka)
- **Victim Services** 705-325-5578 (Orillia) 1-844-762-9945
(Muskoka) 705-725-7025 ext. 2120 (Simcoe County)
705 938 1476 (Parry Sound)
- **Victim Witness Assistance Program**
705-739-6560 (Simcoe)
705-645-3516 (Muskoka)
- **Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit** 1-877-721-7520
- **Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline:** 1-833-900-1010
- **La Maison Rosewood Shelter** – Human Trafficking support
- **Safehome.com** – survivor-led HT outreach and support
- **Schlifer Clinic** – independent legal advice for survivors of sexual assault in Ontario 1-855-226-3904
- **Sheltersafe.ca** – find the closest shelter to you ● ● ●



CONNECT WITH US

For medical care, counselling/therapy,
or general questions contact us at:



705 327 9155
1 877 377 7438



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