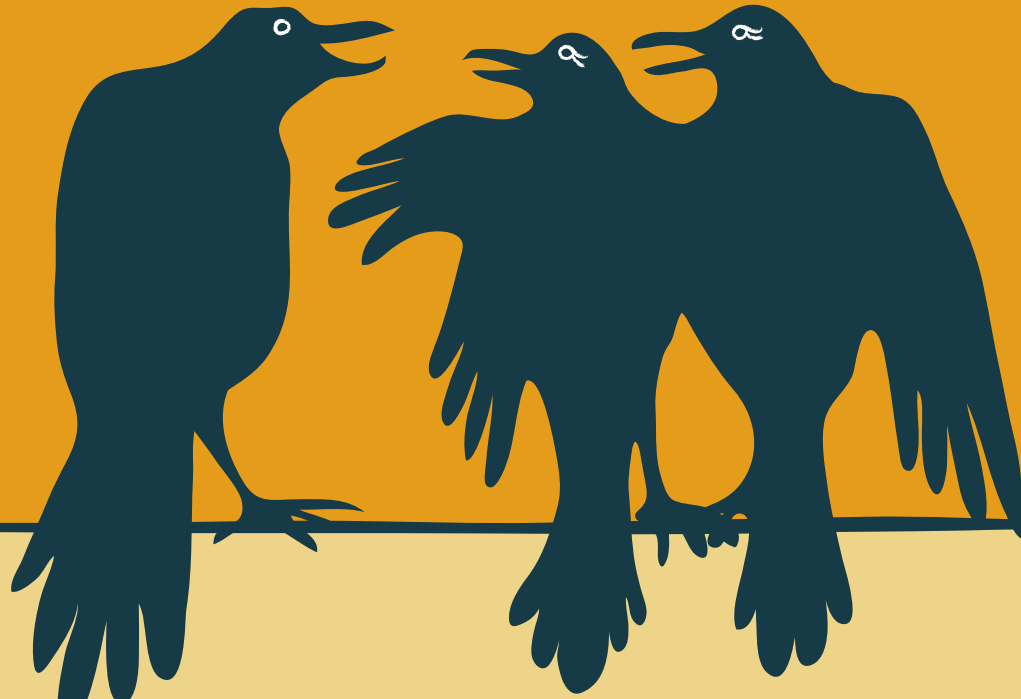


How to Support

a woman who has been sexually assaulted



HOW TO SUPPORT A WOMAN WHO HAS BEEN SEXUALLY ASSAULTED

Many women who have been sexually assaulted said it was important to have a supportive, nonjudgmental person to talk to. If you are a support person, it is important to:

- listen to her.
- tell her you believe her.
- reassure her it is not her fault.
- empathize with her.
- validate her feelings.
- respect her decisions.
- remind her of her strengths.
- be careful not to pressure her.

Myth: Sexual assault is very rare and doesn't happen in my community.

Reality: The Canadian Panel on Violence against Women estimated that two out of three Canadian women have experienced sexual assault. In the Yukon, rates of reported sexual assault are about three times higher than the national average.

HOW SHE MAY BE FEELING

She may be afraid people won't believe her. She may be afraid people will blame her for the assault:

Tell her you believe her. Tell her she is not to blame. She may want to discuss her fear that important people in her life (family, partner, friend) may not believe her, and how to prepare for this. It is important that she has people who support and believe her. If you are supporting her you may want to offer information on local support services. [\(see Yukon resource section p. 10\)](#)

She may be afraid the offender will:

- find out she talked and then come back to assault her again.
- hurt her children or family.
- kill her.

She may be unsure whether to seek medical attention:

The final decision about whether to seek medical attention belongs to the woman. She can seek medical support whether she decides to report to the RCMP or not.

The decision to speak with a health care worker about sexual assault can be hard, but a nurse or doctor can provide important health support and referrals. Health care workers can treat her physical injuries, screen for sexually transmitted infections and provide medications to help with healing. [\(see medical information section p. 5\)](#)

She may be unsure whether to report to the RCMP:

The final decision about whether to report the sexual assault to the RCMP belongs to the woman. She may not want to go through RCMP questioning and a trial. She needs to know that she has the right to decide. She needs the information to make the decision in an informed way. [\(see information about RCMP and Court process p. 8 & 9\)](#)

The sexual assault robbed her of her right to choose. An important part of her healing is taking back that power. She must be the one to decide what steps to take and when. You can support her by listening to her, believing her and providing information to her. [\(see information about trauma and emotional impacts p. 4\)](#)



SEXUAL ASSAULT TRAUMA AND EMOTIONAL IMPACTS

A woman who has been sexually assaulted may have physical effects and is likely to experience strong emotional reactions. Sexual assault is an act of violence and control. If a woman is supported after the assault, it may help her to cope with the effects. You can support a woman by listening to her, believing her, and reminding her of her strength.

There are three stages a woman may go through after a sexual assault. How long they last depends on the woman's personal history and coping strategies as well as the resources and supports available to her.

1. First stage – Disorganization and crisis (may happen minutes or days after the assault)

Physical reactions may include:

- soreness
- bruising
- headaches
- tiredness
- trouble sleeping, nightmares
- feeling on edge
- stomach problems
- nausea
- infections
- tenseness
- eating disorders
- lack of concentration

Emotional reactions may include:

- fear of physical violence or death
- embarrassment
- anger
- feelings of revenge
- avoidance and withdrawl
- self-blame
- feeling dirty
- anxiety, panic
- feeling thankful for being alive
- feeling in limbo while waiting for medical test results

2. Second stage – Reorganization

(may happen weeks or months after the assault) She will reach a point where she is interested and is able to make decisions about her life. She may want to get her old life back or make changes for a new life. This may include:

- wanting to carry on as if nothing happened;
- moving to a new home, hoping that she will feel safer; or
- changing her home phone number to an unlisted number.

3. Reintegration stage (may happen months or years after the assault) She may feel able to deal with fears and other emotions. She may feel in charge of her life and in control of her future.

A woman needs support and encouragement at all stages. If a woman trusts you by sharing her story, listen to her, believe her and remind her of her strengths.

MEDICAL AND RCMP REPORTING INFORMATION AND OPTIONS

The final decision about whether to seek medical attention or report the sexual assault belongs to the woman.

Talking to anybody about sexual assault can be hard. But, a nurse or doctor can give important health information. She can ask for a female doctor or nurse. Her preference will be given when possible.

Health care workers can treat physical injuries, test for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and provide antibiotics.

A woman has the right to ask a doctor or nurse to test her for:

- ✓ HIV
- ✓ Hepatitis B, C and possibly A
- ✓ Syphilis
- ✓ Gonorrhea
- ✓ Chlamydia
- ✓ Pregnancy

A doctor or nurse will provide most results in 7-10 days. A pregnancy test is immediate but won't show a result from a recent assault. It takes 9-14 days for a positive pregnancy test to show after intercourse. Unless the woman consents, or if she tests positive for Hepatitis B, C or HIV, the results will not be sent to her family doctor. A doctor or nurse will contact her if the tests need to be repeated in 3 and 6 months.

The woman has the right to ask a doctor or a nurse to:

- ✓ provide antibiotics to treat sexually transmitted infections
- ✓ provide immunizations against Hepatitis
- ✓ provide emergency birth control pills
- ✓ complete the *sexual assault evidence kit*. If she would like to press charges, this is a kit to collect evidence. This kit is only available at hospitals and community health centres. The kit may involve taking hair and blood samples as well as an internal examination. Ask the doctor or nurse for more information.

There is no cost for testing or treatment (i.e. antibiotics for sexually transmitted infections or emergency birth control pills).

The woman may want to press charges by reporting the assault to the RCMP. However, she can seek medical support whether she decides to report to the RCMP or not.

Myth: Sexual assault can't happen to a man.

Reality: Anyone can be sexually assaulted, but most sexual assaults are committed by men, against women.

OPTIONS FOR MEDICAL SUPPORT AND RCMP REPORTING PROCEDURES

Option 1

- Don't report the assault AND
- Don't get medical support.

The woman does not have to have a medical exam or report the assault. It is her choice to make. However, she needs to be aware of the risks of internal injuries, unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, HIV, and possible emotional impacts.

Option 2

- Report the sexual assault to the RCMP AND
- Receive medical support AND
- Have the sexual assault evidence kit completed.

It is important to get the kit done immediately, as much of the physical evidence is lost after 72 hours. Hospitals and community health centres complete the sexual assault evidence kits. Getting samples for the kit can take up to 3 hours to complete. Often during that period she may feel exhausted, confused and vulnerable. The nurse or doctor will stop if she would like them to. If she prefers, only part of the kit will be taken.

Option 3

- Receive medical support AND
- Don't report to the RCMP.

She can choose where to go for medical support. Receiving medical support will help to reduce disease and injuries. It is within her rights NOT to report to the RCMP. It is important to help the woman understand that she is not at fault and that her well-being is the most important issue.

Option 4

- Receive medical support without the sexual assault evidence kit AND
- Report the assault later.

The woman can receive medical support when and where she chooses. The sexual assault evidence kit does not have to be done. If she decides to report later and has not had the kit done, physical evidence will be lost. A successful criminal conviction may then be less likely.

Option 5

- Have a third party report submitted to the RCMP AND
- Receive medical support.

A Victim Services Worker, or someone else the woman chooses can do this. The RCMP documents the name of the offender. The RCMP may use the information for other investigations.

Option 6

- Receive medical support AND
- Have an "Information Only File" created by the RCMP.

The woman can receive medical support when and where she chooses. The woman alone or with a Victim Services Worker, or someone else she trusts can contact the RCMP to open an information only file. The RCMP record this information. The woman does not have to give a taped or written statement for an "Information Only File". The RCMP are aware of the offender's actions and the information will be available should the same offender's name surface later in a similar investigation. If that should happen, the woman can decide whether she would like to offer a statement so a formal investigation can go ahead in her case. RCMP may contact her to see if she would like to provide evidence in another case.

Myth: If the woman didn't say no, there was no sexual assault.

Reality: It is still sexual assault if things like intimidation or threats were used. It is sexual assault if the woman was not free emotionally, physically and/or mentally to say no or if she was passed out.

Myth: Only strangers commit sexual assault.

Reality: Over 80% of sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim.



INVOLVING THE RCMP

RCMP are investigators who respond to complaints of sexual assault by interviewing the woman who has been sexually assaulted and collecting other information. They must follow legal procedures to ensure they get relevant and admissible evidence.

It is the woman's choice to involve the RCMP. If she decides to contact them, she can have a friend or other support person (who is not a direct witness to the sexual assault) go with her and stay for the interview. If a court case goes ahead, the friend or other support person may be called to speak as a witness.

The RCMP will ask the woman if she would like to:

- give a video/audio-taped or a written statement which says what happened in her own words; (let her know not to worry if she can't remember what she said in the statement; should the case go ahead to court, she will be allowed to review the statement).
- explain what happened and in what order it took place (i.e. who was the abuser, where did they meet, what was said, where did they go, at what time, who may be a witness).
- consent to provide other evidence such as clothing, photographs, and medical reports or a sexual assault evidence kit.

The RCMP:

- know you will be nervous, so they will be understanding and helpful;
- may ask some questions that sound formal and the woman can ask for clarification or choose not to answer them;
- can, with the woman's consent, refer her to community supports;
- are concerned for her physical and emotional safety; and
- can release the offender on conditions that include "no contact" with the woman and her children and a requirement not to go to the woman's house or workplace. If the RCMP choose not to immediately release the offender, they can also provide the Crown Attorney with recommendations for conditions. These conditions can then be added during a bail hearing, if the Judge decides to allow the offender to be released from custody.

Myth: It's not sexual assault if the woman says ok at the start, then changes her mind and tells him to stop.

THE LAW AND SEXUAL ASSAULT WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

It is against the law for one person to force unwanted sexual acts on another.

There are many sexual offenses outlined in the Criminal Code of Canada. Sexual Assault is what lawyers, the RCMP, and judges call any unwanted sexual contact. This definition is much broader in scope than the term "rape" which is no longer used in law.

If the woman reports the sexual assault to the RCMP, they may lay charges if they think the case is strong enough. The RCMP will then give the file to the Crown Attorney's office. The woman will not need a lawyer of her own. The Crown Attorney is a lawyer who represents the interests of all of society. The Crown Attorney will examine the evidence the RCMP provides to see if there is enough evidence to prosecute the case and, if so, will try to prove before a Judge at a trial that the accused committed the sexual assault. The Crown Attorney will also meet with the woman and her support person before the trial to help her be prepared to testify in court.

Reality: Legally a woman can change her mind and if the person does not stop, it is a crime.

If the case goes to trial, the woman's role is to be a witness and explain what happened.

- As a witness at the trial, the woman will have to tell her story in the courtroom and she will be asked about the statement she made to the RCMP.
- The lawyer for the accused (Defense Attorney) will test the strength of her story (testimony) by asking her questions (cross-examination). The Crown Attorney's job is to make sure that only relevant questions are asked.
- The accused will be present in the courtroom which can be difficult for the woman. She can have support people present, including a Victim Services Worker who will help her prepare for court.
- Both the Defense and Crown Attorneys may call other witnesses to testify. The accused is not required to take the stand.
- The Crown will have to prove "beyond a reasonable doubt" that the sexual assault occurred.
- The Defense Attorney does have limits on what questions he or she can ask about the woman's sexual, medical and/or psychological history or her reputation.
- When there is a guilty verdict, sexual offenders may go to jail, but more likely will be released into the community under supervision.

YUKON RESOURCES

Communicable Disease Unit:

Infectious disease testing, education, treatment, and support.

Monday to Friday 8:30-12:00 and 12:30-4:00. #4 Hospital Road, beside the Thompson Centre in Whitehorse. (867) 667-8323 or 1-800-661-0408 ext 8323

Dawson City Women's Shelter:

Offers support and referrals for victims of sexual assault. Staff will act as advocates and support workers during statements and exams.

(867) 993-5086 or
(867) 993-5915

Health Centres:

Medical attention and support 24 hours a day.

In the communities use the prefix of your community, followed by 4444 (xxx-4444).

Help and Hope For Families: Watson Lake Transition Home / Women's Shelter:

A 24-hour shelter home for women and children fleeing an abusive situation, in transition or in crisis. It offers a 24-hour crisis line, safety, confidentiality, advocacy, information, referrals and nonjudgmental support.

(867) 536-7233 (24 hours)
or e-mail: hhfs@northwestel.net

VictimLINK 24 Hour:

Toll-free confidential support, information and referrals.

1-800-563-0808.

Kaushee's Place / Yukon Women's Transition Home:

A 24 hour shelter and crisis line to women and their dependent children who are seeking safety from abuse, including sexual assault.

Women and children may stay on transition level free for up to 30 days.

There is also a second stage housing program that has self-contained, secure apartments available for six-month rental periods based on Yukon Housing rates. Kaushee's offers outreach and advocacy services, as well as an on-site childcare worker and specialized services for women over 50. Kaushee's also offers a 24-hour crisis line and a drop-in service for women in need. There is a donation room open to women in the community 2 days per week.

Phone: (867) 633-7720

Fax: (867) 668-2374

Crisis Line: 668-5733

RCMP:

(867) 667-5555 or 911 (in Whitehorse) in the communities, use the prefix of your community, followed by 5555 (xxx-5555)

Victim Services:

Counseling, information and support available.

Monday to Friday 8:30-5:00
in Whitehorse (867) 667-8500 or
1-800-661-0408 ext 8500.

Part-time services available in
Dawson City, (867) 993-5831,
and Watson Lake, (867) 536-2541.

Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre:

Counseling, information, referrals and support.

Monday to Friday 8:30-5:00
in Whitehorse (867) 667-2693

Whitehorse General Hospital:

24 hour medical attention.

(867) 393-8700

Yukon Family Services Association:

Confidential counseling, information, support, referrals and youth outreach services.

Whitehorse Office:

(867) 667-2970

Dawson City Office:

(867) 993-6455

Haines Junction Office:

(867) 634-2111

Watson Lake Office:

(867) 536-2330

Counsellors make regular visits to Carcross, Carmacks, Teslin, Beaver Creek, Burwash Landing, Destruction Bay, Mayo and Pelly Crossing.

For information call:

(867) 667-2970

(collect calls accepted).

Yukon Human Rights Commission:

Promotes human rights and works to resolve harassment and sexual harassment in the workplace, by a landlord, or by someone providing services to the public.

Monday to Friday 8:30-4:30

(867) 667-6266 or 1-800-661-0535.

Reality: Many men who sexually assault women have a sexual partner. It is not due to a "lack of sex" that drives them to assault women. Men are responsible for their acts of violence! Women have sexual urges too. Men can control themselves just as women can. Sexual assault is not about sexual needs; it is about using sex to gain power and control.

Myth: A man who violates a woman can't control his sexual needs.

Special thanks to:

Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre
St. Stephen's Community House
Montreal Health Press

Women against violence against women

Myth: Women who are sexually assaulted “ask for it” by the way they dress or act.

Reality: A woman who has been sexually assaulted is never at fault. A woman’s dress, hair, and manner are not an invitation to violate her. Men can control themselves just as women can.

LOOK THROUGHOUT
THE BROCHURE FOR
MYTHS AND COMMON
QUESTIONS ABOUT
SEXUAL ASSAULT.

Reality: Sexual assault is an act of violence that some boyfriends or spouses will use to try to gain power and control over their partners.

Myth: A spouse or partner has a right to force a woman to have sex.

