

Law Enforcement Response

If the sexual assault is reported to law enforcement, an officer will need to ask questions about the assault. Some questions may be very difficult to answer and may not make sense at the time they are asked, but there is a reason for them. It is not unusual for law enforcement to contact a victim or survivor numerous times during the course of an investigation. Once law enforcement completes the investigation, they will send the investigative report to the county or district attorney (prosecutor) for review.

Prosecutor Response

The county or district attorney (prosecutor) determines if there is enough evidence to move forward with prosecution. There can be a long period of time between when the sexual assault occurred and when the prosecutor makes a decision. It sometimes seems that just as a victim or survivor begins to heal, they are thrown back into the middle of the trauma because of a court hearing or trial. Victims and survivors have a legal right to certain information and may find it important to know about their court case and proceedings.

Most prosecutors have Victim Witness Coordinators who can help get this information.

Advocate Response

Kansas Sexual and Domestic Violence Advocacy Programs can provide the support and help victims and survivors often need in the healing process. These programs offer services 24 hours per day, seven days a week. Services include crisis hotlines, crisis intervention, personal advocacy, medical advocacy, court advocacy, law enforcement advocacy, emergency accommodations, safe shelter, supportive counseling, support groups, and child and youth advocacy.

All of these services are free and confidential. Any information shared with a Kansas Sexual and Domestic Violence Advocacy Program is kept private and cannot be shared with anyone outside the organization, unless:

- The program is required to disclose the information by law.
- The victim or survivor signs an informed, written, time-limited release allowing them to disclose the information.

**For 24/7 support, contact:
Kansas Crisis Hotline
1-888-END-ABUSE (1-888-363-2287)**

**To find the Kansas Sexual and Domestic Violence Advocacy Program nearest you visit:
www.kcsdv.org/find-help**

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HOW TO SUPPORT VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The logo for the Kansas Coalition against sexual & domestic violence. It features a stylized 'C' icon in green and blue, followed by the text 'Kansas Coalition' in a bold, sans-serif font. Below this, the text 'against sexual & domestic violence' is written in a smaller, lighter font.

**Kansas
Coalition**
against sexual &
domestic violence

Your Support Matters

If someone you know is a victim or survivor of sexual violence, your support can be a critical part of their healing. After the violence, some victims are very emotional and some are numb initially. The experience of sexual violence can have different meanings for each person. There is no “right” way to act after experiencing sexual violence.

The effects of sexual violence may be felt directly after, or for many months or years later. The trauma of sexual violence can cause feelings of helplessness and powerlessness, as well as physical symptoms such as breathing problems, vomiting, or nightmares. Research has also found that trauma can affect the way the brain recalls memories and events.

You may never know exactly how someone is effected by sexual violence, but you can listen, believe, validate, and be supportive.

Getting Started

Listen

Healing takes time. Talking about the violence can help in the healing process. They may need to tell you about the experience over and over

again. Respect their pace, be patient, and listen to their story in a safe and private place.

Believe

When someone shares their experience of sexual violence, being believed helps in the healing process. They need to know that you believe what happened to them. It is rare that people make up stories about sexual violence.

Validate

Acknowledge feelings of sadness, anger, fear, shame, guilt, confusion, or other feelings they may be having. These are all very normal feelings after experiencing sexual violence. Let them know that no one deserves to be sexually assaulted and it is not their fault.

Support

Ask how you can best support them. Let them decide what they feel they need from you for support. Do not tell them what to do, make decisions for them, or tell them what you would have done. Let them know you support them now and in the future.

Ways You Can Help:

- Do not blame or judge them for the sexual violence. Remember, it is not their fault under any circumstance.
- Keep their information private. Do not tell others about their experience without their permission.
- Respect their right to decide who to tell (or not tell) about the sexual violence.
- Accept and support their decision about reporting to law enforcement and whether or not to participate in a criminal investigation.
- Only give advice if and when they ask for it.
- Remind them that they are not alone and there is help available.
- Avoid treating them like a helpless victim.
- Help them identify support systems and provide information on community resources.
- Offer to go with them if they choose to go to the hospital for medical care or to the police department.

To Report or To Not Report

Reporting a sexual assault to law enforcement is a very personal decision that victims will need to make for themselves. If they decide not to report, they are still fully entitled to advocacy services and medical care.

Kansas Sexual and Domestic Violence Advocacy Programs can help victims and survivors of sexual violence consider all options available to them, provide information on what to expect from the criminal justice system, and provide ongoing support regardless of whether they report the crime or not.

Hospital Response

Whether or not a victim or survivor reports the sexual violence to law enforcement, they have the right to a sexual assault medical forensic exam. There are two primary purposes of the sexual assault medical forensic exam: 1) to provide medical care and treatment; and 2) to collect evidence related to the sexual assault. Although medical professionals who complete the exam are often well-trained, the process can be uncomfortable. Support is important and they may need you to be there.