

RESPONDING TO SEXUAL ASSAULT DISCLOSURES --  
HOW TO HAVE A HARD CONVERSATION

# ABOUT US

**Pathways - Victim Services** is one of 13 designated Rape Crisis Centers in the state of Kentucky. All 13 form a coalition monitored and guided by KASAP - The Kentucky Association of Sexual Assault Programs.

KASAP provides training for advocates, SANEs, and law enforcement throughout the state of Kentucky, while also coordinating prevention programs like Green Dot, and lobbying with state lawmakers regarding legislation that will affect survivors of sexual assault.

THE PROBLEM.



39% of women in  
Kentucky.

18% of men in Kentucky.

Yes, it happens here





SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS TYPICALLY RECEIVE MORE **NEGATIVE REACTIONS FROM LOVED ONES** THAN THEY DO FROM LAW ENFORCEMENT OR COMMUNITY SERVICES.

#Startbybelieving



SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS TYPICALLY REACH OUT TO **2-3** PEOPLE FOR SUPPORT, BEFORE REPORTING TO LAW ENFORCEMENT.

Friends and family play a critical role in determining whether victims will report or access services. #StartbyBelieving



**63%** OF SURVIVORS DIDN'T REPORT THEIR SEXUAL ASSAULT BECAUSE THEY WERE AFRAID THEY WOULD BE BLAMED FOR IT.

#StartbyBelieving



IN ONE STUDY, "EMOTIONAL SUPPORT FROM A FRIEND WAS RELATED TO SIGNIFICANTLY BETTER RECOVERY" AMONG SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS.

(Ullman, 1996)

#STARTBYBELIEVING



“I WAS SEXUALLY ASSAULTED.”



Breathe.

# START BY BELIEVING.



RESEARCH STUDIES ESTIMATE THAT JUST **2-8%**  
OF SEXUAL ASSAULT REPORTS ARE FALSE.

Kelly, Lovett & Regan, 2005; Lisak, Gardinier, Nicksa & Cote, 2010; Lonsway & Archambault, 2008; Spohn, White & Tellis, 2014



# STOP WITH VICTIM BLAMING.

- >Nothing and no one can cause a sexual assault except the perpetrator.
- >Assigning blame to the survivor, especially in the immediate moment of a disclosure, will not be constructive.



>There's no perfect thing to say or do.

>There is no instant fix--and that's okay.

> Most importantly: proceed w/ empathy, authenticity, and intention.

# You should try to:

- >Take it slow.
- >Silence is okay.
- >Monitor your reactions.
- >Ask permission.
- >Reflect the survivor, both physically and verbally.
- >Avoid “I know” statements.
- >Validate feelings.
- >Avoid disclosing personal experiences that may further burden the survivor.

# You should try to avoid:

>Asking any questions that aren't absolutely necessary.

"Do I need to know this information in order to be helpful?"

>Judging, criticizing, blaming--whatever actions the survivor took, the fact that they are alive means they made the right choice.

>Guilting the survivor--"Think of what might happen to someone else if you don't report."

>Probing--we aren't entitled to more details than the survivor wishes to disclose.

>Minimizing – don't try to diminish the strength of the survivor's feelings: "You'll feel better tomorrow," or "Things will work out."





## AVOID WHY QUESTIONS

Even with the best of intentions, “why” questions can sound accusatory and make survivors blame themselves.



## BE SUPPORTIVE

"You can tell me as much, or as little as you want."

"It's not your fault."

"I'm glad you told me. I'm so proud of you."



## ASK HOW YOU CAN HELP

"What can I do to support you?"

"I can stay with you tonight.  
Would that help?"

"Do you want me to go with you to the hospital or police station?"

# OTHER THINGS YOU CAN DO

Determine the survivor's support network.

- “Have you talked to anyone else about what has happened?”
- “Do you need time off work or school? How can we make that happen?”
- Always check with the survivor before speaking with any family or friends about the details of the assault or what the survivor has shared with you. Do not assume the survivor would want you to inform others.

Create a course of action.

- Powerlessness vs. empowerment
- Encourage the survivor to make decisions, even small ones. “What do we want to do tonight?”
- Avoid giving advice; assume the survivor has the strength/skills to progress.
- Help the survivor make small, attainable goals--even if it's as small as doing a load of laundry or fixing a meal.
- Give information--local resources, hotlines, websites, phone numbers.

Check on the survivor's basic needs.

- Have you eaten?
- Have you slept?
- How are you taking care of yourself right now?

# Three primary concerns:

- Are you hurt?
- Are you safe?
- What do you want to do next?

# What are the survivor's options?

- File a report with the police .
- Go to the nearest hospital for a medical and/or forensic exam .
- Do nothing and/or take more time to decide .
- Contact their local Rape Crisis Center to speak w/ an advocate .



# 1. File a report with the police.

>Survivors can contact their local law enforcement agency to file a report, as well as any Kentucky State Police post.

>The survivor is allowed to have a friend, family member, or advocate present when they file a police report, and/or during any statements given.

>Filing a police report can limit some of the choices a survivor can make going forward--the process can take on a life of its own, and can often cause retraumatization.

>Catharsis and healing is different for everyone--be mindful that the judicial system may not be the correct path for every survivor.

## 2. Go to the nearest hospital for a medical and/or forensic exam.

>Survivors do NOT have to file a police report in order to receive a medical and/or forensic exam.

>Survivors can receive a medical exam without the collection of forensic evidence, just to ensure they are not injured or ill.

>After 96 hours, the potential for collecting viable evidentiary material begins to diminish rapidly. Drinking, eating, urinating, and bathing can also also cause diminished potential.

## 2. Go to the nearest hospital for a medical and/or forensic exam.

>These exams are free and do not require the billing of insurance.

>The survivor will not be charged for the exam or any STI/prophylactic medication administered--

>--however, survivors may be charged for the treatment of other injuries or illnesses.

>If this happens, survivors may apply to the Crime Victims' Compensation Fund, which can provide retroactive financial compensation. An advocate can help with this process.

## 2. Go to the nearest hospital for a medical and/or forensic exam.

>The forensic exam, known as a SAFE (Sexual Assault Forensic Exam), is typically performed by a SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner), who is an RN with special training in administering these exams. The exam can also be performed by any RN or licensed physician.

>The SAFE has five primary components, and may take up to a few hours to complete.

Those components are:

1. Clothing Collection
2. Cotton Swab Collection
3. Hair Collection
4. Blood Sample Collection
5. Genital/Pelvic Exam



## 2. Go to the nearest hospital for a medical and/or forensic exam.

>The survivor can complete as many or as few of those components as they want, and they have the right to stop the exam at any point.

>The survivor may choose to allow a friend, family member, or advocate remain present while the exam is administered.

>A completed kit will be held by the hospital for up to 365 days, giving the survivor time to decide whether or not they wish to file a report with law enforcement.

### 3. Do nothing and/or take more time to decide.

>Although we may feel like we know what the survivor should do, we must always respect the survivor's right to make their own choices.

>Only the survivor knows what's right for them in that moment.

>Never use guilt tactics to influence a survivor's decision.

“What if this happens to someone else?”

>The survivor's only obligation is to their own safety, well-being, and healing.

## 4. Contact your local Rape Crisis Center to speak with an advocate.

>This is a lot to remember. An advocate can meet or speak with a survivor to help walk them through all of these options.

>A survivor's communication with an advocate is privileged and confidential.

>Advocates can help a survivor facilitate hard conversations with friends and/or family.

>Advocates can connect survivors with valuable community resources.

# WHAT DOES A PROFESSIONAL ADVOCATE DO TO HELP SURVIVORS?

01 On call, 24/7 response to local hospitals to support survivors following the disclosure of an assault.

02 Provide information and help identify the survivor's options.

03 Accompany survivors to any court proceedings and/or law enforcement interviews.

04 Accompany survivors when giving statements to police.

05 Assist in navigating the legal process, including providing resources for legal aid.

06 Provide safety planning and assistance in seeking Emergency Protective Orders.

07 Provide referral to necessary community resources, such as housing, job assistance, counseling services, etc.

08 Facilitate communication between other service providers and the survivor, such as law enforcement, medical professionals, and legal personnel.



# OPTIONS FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights enforces Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX protects people from discrimination based on sex in education programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance. Title IX states that:

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

All public universities use Title IX guidelines to structure systems for internally investigating & addressing student sexual misconduct.

# OPTIONS FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

MSU Title IX Coordinators:

Andrea Stone, Coordinator

Rice Bldg

606-783-5272

[titleix@moreheadstate.edu](mailto:titleix@moreheadstate.edu)

To file a Title IX grievance at MSU, you can contact a Title IX Coordinator or visit the following website:

<https://www.moreheadstate.edu/about-msu/leadership/administration/titleix/>

Lora Pace, Deputy Coordinator

217 Adron Doran University Center

606-783-2517

[titleix@moreheadstate.edu](mailto:titleix@moreheadstate.edu)

# DON'T FORGET-- TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF & PRACTICE BOUNDARY-SETTING.

>We can't pour from an empty cup.

>Even if the cup is full--we can only afford to pour so much.

>If the problem feels overwhelming or outside of your skillset--  
maybe it's time to delegate (w/o disclosing more than necessary).

>While we all want to be helpful, no one is required to sacrifice  
their mental health or wellbeing for anyone else.

>If a request directly conflicts with your own needs--  
it may not be reasonable. Boundary-setting is key.

# Other ways to support survivors

- Become familiar w/ local resources & keep contact info nearby
  - phone numbers, text lines, websites
- Make your support visible/vocal
  - share supportive stories on social media
  - put up positive posters/stickers/art in your physical spaces
- Participate in Sexual Assault Awareness & Prevention Month
  - Check w/ your local RCC for events
- Check out Green Dot on campus here at MSU!

# Other ways to support survivors

- Seek out further education
  - Podcasts
    - Something Was Wrong
    - This is Really Happening
    - Do You Know Mordecai
  - Books
    - The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel van der Kolk, M.D.
    - Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson
    - After Campus Sexual Assault: A Guide for Parents by Susan B. Sorenson
  - Websites
    - Rape, Assault, Incest National Network--RAINN.org
    - Kentucky Association of Sexual Assault Programs--KASAP.org



# Thank

For further questions, please feel free to reach out to me at any time.

Megan Rookard

Coordinator/Advocate -

Pathways Porchlight Sexual Assault Resource Center

606-326-2875 ext. 4643

[mrookard@pathways-ky.org](mailto:mrookard@pathways-ky.org)