

Contact and Support Information

Avalon Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner

24 hr Response line

902-425-0122

avaloncentre.ca

Avalon Sexual Assault Centre

902-422-4240

South House Sexual and Gender

Resource Centre

902-494-2432

Mental Health Mobile Crisis Unit

902-429-8167

Victim's Services Emotional Support

HRPD

902-490-5300

Halifax Sexual Health Centre

902-455-9656

Immigrant Services Association of Nova

Scotia (ISANS)

902-423-3607

Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre

902-420-1576



AVALON
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Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner:

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Supportive Conversations

A guide for anyone responding to
disclosures of sexualized violence



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How to Help

You do not have to be a counsellor or a therapist to support someone who has experienced sexualized violence. If you are hearing a disclosure, it means that you have already gained some trust with the person who is telling you their story. This guide is designed to help you through the process of supporting the person who is disclosing to you.

One of the most devastating aspects of sexualized violence is the loss of power and control that victims experience. For this reason, it is extremely important to let them know that they are in control of what happens to them following the assault. You can help by empowering the survivor to make decisions about their own healing process. Provide options, such as:

- Do you want to report to police, or not?
- Do you want medical care, or not?
- Do you want to access counselling, or not?

Establishing Comfort and Maintaining Trust

There are many things that you can do to help a person feel more comfortable after they have been sexually assaulted. The best way to find out what would be most helpful, is to ask that person what they need right now. Check in around their physical needs- are they hungry or thirsty? Do they need a blanket to stay warm, or a pillow to hug? Be sure to give them options at every opportunity, such as where they would like to sit while you talk. You can also ask if there is anyone else that they would like to notify about what has happened, and whether you can be of any assistance contacting that person.

Let them know that they don't have to talk about any of the details of what happened unless it's important to them. They can take their time to make sense of what happened. Respect the person's choices, even if the decisions do not feel right for you, or are different than the ones you would make. Remember, the most important thing that you can do right now is to show them that they are in control.

"I believe you"

This is a very powerful message for people who have experienced sexualized abuse. The myth that people often lie about sexual abuse is extremely harmful and prevents many survivors from disclosing and accessing support. It is very rare for a person to lie about sexual abuse. It is actually more common for a person to minimize their experience and say that they were not abused when they were. This may be because they feel embarrassed, ashamed, afraid of retaliation by the offender, afraid that they will be disbelieved, or to protect the perpetrator, who is usually someone that they know. If someone tells you they have experienced sexualized violence, start by believing.

"It's not your fault"

No one deserves to be sexually assaulted, no matter what - ever. It doesn't matter where you were, who you were with or what you were wearing. There is no such thing as "asking to be sexually assaulted." Even if you were drunk or high, or if you had been sexually active with this person before, it is not your fault if someone else makes the choice to sexually assault you.