

Tips for responding to sexual violence

Sexual violence is any unwanted sexual behaviour that can make a person feel uncomfortable, scared, or unsafe. It can happen to anyone and most often the perpetrator is someone known to the victim such as a partner, friend, or recent acquaintance.

Sexual violence occurs on a continuum of consent violations including street harassment and sexual comments, touching or filming a person's body, showing someone pornography, and rape.

Did you know that a person who is drunk or on drugs cannot legally consent to any sexual behaviour? This is also true if the person is asleep or unconscious.

Sexual violence may be witnessed, suspected, or disclosed. You may witness acts such as people photographing a person's body without their consent or young people having sex on the beach. Don't be afraid to interrupt. You might temporarily interrupt something consensual and fun, however you could also stop a serious offence from occurring. People who are consenting to sexual activity (even pictures or comments) will be having a mutually good time and will both be coherent and clear about what is going on.

Often you will hear about suspected sexual violence from friends of the victim/survivor who are worried about their friend and think something might have happened. The least likely way you will be notified of sexual violence is a direct disclosure from the victim. Regardless of how it comes to your attention you should always start by believing.

Start by Believing



Most victim/survivors do not immediately tell someone what has happened, and there is a tendency for young people to want to try and ignore it and 'deal with it later'. Sadly, when it does get to later it can have a big impact on their future.

You do not need to be a professional counsellor to provide an appropriate crisis response. If you do respond to sexual violence, trust your skills in managing a crisis; remain calm, use common sense, and keep your focus on the immediate safety of the victim/survivor.

Victim/survivors of sexual violence need to feel safe, believed, and they need practical information on support and referral.

The principles for practice are Safety, Trust, Support, Empowerment, Referral.

SAFETY:

- Start by believing, do not convey judgment through your tone or body language. Some useful phrases are; "Thank you for telling me", "I'm sorry that happened to you", "It's not your fault"
- Ask their name and use it throughout your interaction
- Allow them the option of having their own support person (at the victims request only)
- Reframe WHY questions as these can sound like blame, use WHAT instead. Do not interrogate the victim
- Do not initiate touching of any kind, victim/survivors need their boundaries to be respected
- Ensure current safety before departure eg "What are you going to do now?", "Who with?"



REFERRAL:

- You will need to know what referral options exist for the young person in the coming weeks and months
- Not all victim/survivors will require medical treatment or police referral. They may just need some time-out and someone to believe them
- Most sexual violence centres across Australia operate on self-referral
- Victim/survivors often don't remember things when in crisis. If it is safe, give them printed information to take away such as the Youth Info Card. Whilst this has Gold Coast agencies listed, it can give the young person an idea of the range of services available in a community

**A change in the law means we now must tell the police if we have information that a sexual offence involving a person under 16 years may have been committed by an adult 18 years or over.
All volunteers should closely follow the Safer Schoolies referral pathways.**

In Surfers Paradise:

Safer Schoolies Wellbeing Space, The Esplanade (Gold Coast only)
Safer Schoolies Emergency Treatment Centre, The Esplanade (Gold Coast only)
Recharge Zones located around the Schoolies precinct
Radio to Control and request assistance
Call 000 and ask for the Ambulance service

Gold Coast Centre Against Sexual Violence (GCCASV). (07) 5591 1164 (9am - 5pm weekdays)

Each region across Australia has its own centres against sexual violence. They offer free and confidential support and do not require a referral. GCCASV is able to assist non-Gold Coast residents with referral to other services.

Queensland Sexual Assault Hotline. 1800 010 120 (7.30am - 11.30pm daily)

TRUST:

- Listen without interruption or judgment
- Don't make assumptions
- Validate their feelings and reactions

SUPPORT:

- Support is not counselling or rescuing, all you need to do is say "I am here to support you"
- Ask what kind of support the victim/survivor would like
- Don't promise anything you can't deliver

EMPOWERMENT:

- Give the victim/survivor information and options so they can decide. You must not decide for them
- Give them as much control as possible, including control over who to tell. They DO NOT have to tell their parents or the police if they don't want to
- Respect their choices even if you disagree with it. Intoxicated people can be easily lead so be aware of the impact of your words