

Navigating the Legal Process of Reporting Sexual Violence



The decision to report a sexual assault can be extremely intimidating, but it is also a critically important step to ensuring justice is served and preventing the incident from reoccurring. However, the decision to report is a personal choice. You should not feel pressured or coerced into filing a claim. If you decide to report a sexual assault some steps can be taken to maximize your privacy and to ensure that your claim is given the seriousness and professionalism it deserves. Here is what you need to know:

What is Sexual Assault?

Sexual assault means more than forcible penetration under the threat of violence. Any sexual or sexualized behavior that makes a person feel uncomfortable, intimidated, threatened or frightened is a form of sexual assault. Sexual assault can be, and often is, committed by people you know and trust. This includes family members and significant others. You have the right to refuse sexual contact at any time no matter your relationship to the perpetrator. If you have given a person consent for previous sexual encounters that consent does not cover all future contact. If you decide to have consensual sex with someone after they have previously sexually assaulted you, the latter sexual encounters do not absolve the previous assaults.

Criminal Sexual assault includes:

- Rape or Attempted Rape - penetration of a victim's body with any portion of the perpetrator's body or an object/ forcing a victim to perform sexual acts on the perpetrator.
- Fondling or unwanted sexual touching - touching, pinching, rubbing, groping, kissing,
- Having sex with someone too intoxicated to give consent/spiking drinks with alcohol or drugs to engage in sexual acts.
- Stalking/voyeurism – following or watching someone doing intimate things w/o permission
- Indecent exposure – exposing or flashing genitals
- Forcing someone to watch or participate in pornography/ filming a victim without permission
- Engaging in sex with someone who has not reached the age of consent

How Do I Report a Sexual Assault?

- Ground yourself. Take ten slow deep breaths. Splash water on your face. Practice conscious counting between breaths - One, (breathe), two, (breathe), three, (breathe). Roll shoulders up and down. Recite something out loud. If possible, take a brief walk.
- Call 911. Call for emergency services as soon as it can be done safely.
- Write your story down. Though it may be painful, it's important to write your story down. While dealing with trauma, details can often be forgotten. It's important and less stressful to have it in writing.
- Contact the local police department. Call the direct line of your local police station or visit in person. If you are on a college campus contact campus-based law enforcement.
- Rally your support system. Tell a friend and take someone with you when talking to authorities. You will need the support.
- Visit a medical center. If you are being treated for injuries resulting from sexual assault, tell a medical professional that you wish to report the crime. You can also choose to have a sexual assault forensic exam. To find an appropriate local health facility that is prepared to care for survivors, call the National Sexual Assault Hotline 800.656.HOPE (4673).

Additional Resources

[The Royal Women's Hospital \(Australia\) Sexual Assault Resource Guide](#)

[RAINN Sexual Assault Information Guide](#)