

# Reporting to Law Enforcement

The decision to report to law enforcement is entirely yours. Some survivors say that reporting and seeking justice helped them recover and regain a sense of control over their lives. Understanding how to report and learning more about the experience can take away some of the unknowns and help you feel more prepared.

## How do I report sexual assault?

You have several options for reporting sexual assault:

- **Call 911.** If you are in immediate danger, dial 911. Help will come to you, wherever you are.
- **Contact the local police department.** Call the direct line of your local police station or visit the station in person. If you are on a college campus you may also be able to contact campus-based law enforcement.
- **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).

To learn more about the options in your area, call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.HOPE (4673). You'll be connected to a staff member from a [local sexual assault service provider](#) who will walk you through the process of getting help and reporting to law enforcement at your own pace. In most areas, there are specific law enforcement officers who are trained to interact with sexual assault survivors. Service providers can connect you to these officers, and might also send a trained advocate to accompany you through the reporting process.

## Who will I be talking to?

In most areas, there are specific law enforcement officers who are trained to interact with survivors of sexual assault. In addition, many law enforcement agencies participate in Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs), which provide a survivor-centered, coordinated response to sexual assault. SARTs incorporate medical personnel, law enforcement, and sexual assault service

providers in your area. They work together to organize the investigation, reduce repetition of questions and interviews, and facilitate communication among all agencies involved.

Learn more about [communicating with law enforcement](#).

## Is there a time limit on reporting to the police?

There is no limitation on when a victim can report a crime to police. However, in many states, there is a limitation on when charges can be filed and a case can be prosecuted. This is called the statute of limitations. Statutes of limitation vary by state, type of crime, age of the victim, and various other factors. Visit RAINN's [State Law Database](#) to learn more about the criminal statutes of limitation where you are.

## What are some common concerns about reporting?

If you have questions or concerns about reporting, you're not alone. The list below may have answers to some common questions that are on your mind.

- **The perpetrator got scared away or stopped before finishing the assault.** Attempted rape is a serious crime and can be reported. Reports of attempted rape and other assault are taken seriously.
- **I know the person who hurt me.** About 2/3 of victims know the perpetrator. It can be unnerving to be violated by someone you know. Regardless of who the perpetrator is, sexual assault is against the law.
- **I've been intimate with the perpetrator in the past, or am currently in a relationship with the perpetrator.** [Sexual assault can occur within a relationship](#). Giving someone consent in the past does not give them consent for any act in the future. If you did not consent, they acted against the law—and you can report it.
- **I have no physical injuries, and I'm worried there's not enough proof.** Most sexual assaults do not result in external physical injuries. It's important to receive medical attention to check for internal injuries. You can also choose to have a [sexual assault forensic exam](#) to check for [DNA evidence](#) that may not be visible on the surface.
- **I'm worried law enforcement won't believe me.** There has been great investment in police training on this topic. While there are occasional exceptions, most law enforcement officers are understanding and on your side. If you do encounter someone who isn't taking your case seriously, ask for their supervisor and let your [local sexual assault service provider](#) know.

- **I don't want to get in trouble.** Sometimes minors are afraid of being disciplined, either by the law or by their parents, because they were doing something they shouldn't have when the abuse occurred. For example, a teen might have been consuming alcohol, or a child might have been breaking a house rule. It's important to remember that sexual assault is a crime—no matter the circumstances. Nothing you did caused this to happen.

## **Do I have to report to get rape kit?**

By law, you are not required to report to law enforcement in order to receive a [sexual assault forensic exam](#), commonly referred to as a "rape kit." The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 has made it easier for someone to have a "Jane Doe rape kit," where they are given a code to identify themselves if they choose to report later.

## **Does it matter whether or not I know the perpetrator? Can I still have an exam?**

There is value in having a sexual assault forensic exam performed, regardless of whether or not you know the identity of the perpetrator or perpetrators. DNA evidence collected during the exam can [play an important role](#) in the case against the perpetrator.

## **Will I have to pay for the exam?**

By law, you should not be billed for the direct costs of a sexual assault forensic exam. The way states handle this law can vary. Since 2009, states have been required to provide sexual assault forensic exams for free or via reimbursement, regardless of cooperation with law enforcement. Starting in 2015, health facilities will no longer be able to charge for exams up front and ask for victims to file reimbursement through their insurance later. If you have questions about a bill you received related to your exam or about any other aspects of the process, you can contact your [local sexual assault service provider](#) or state coalition.

### Legal Disclaimer

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