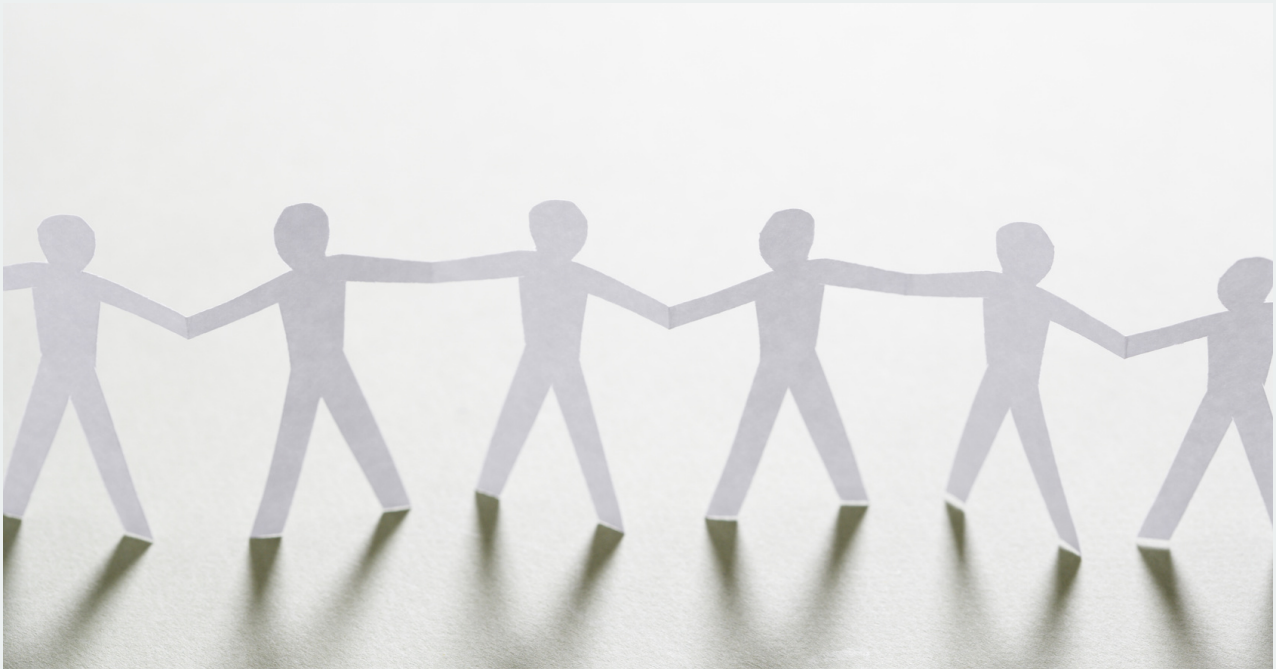




SUPPORTING A **SURVIVOR**

SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTRE KINGSTON

Statistics



1 / 3

Women

Will experience sexual assault during their lifetime

1 / 4

Men

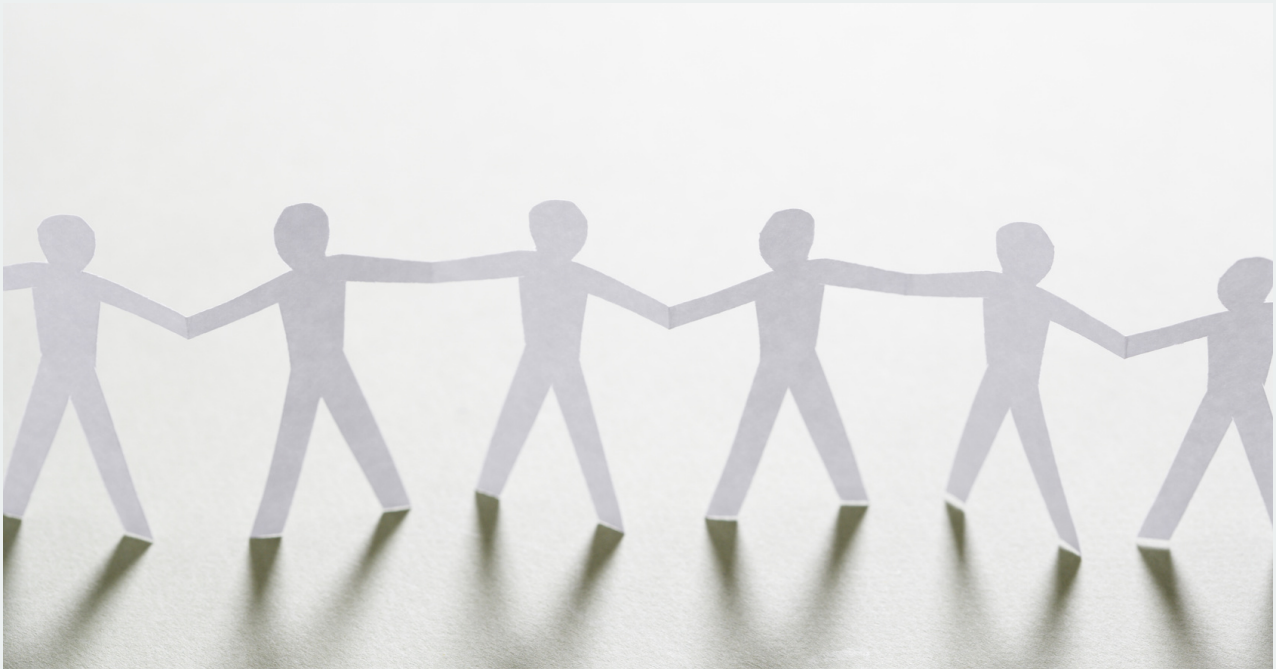
Will experience sexual assault during their lifetime

3x
more

2SLGBTQAI+ Folks

Will experience sexual assault during their lifetime

Statistics



60%

of Youth

under the age of 17 will experience sexual assault

56%

of Indigenous Women

have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime

70%

of Regular Force Members

witnessed or experienced sexual or discriminatory behaviour in the workplace

Our Services



The Sexual Assault Centre Kingston provides free, confidential, non-judgemental support to all survivors of sexual violence, aged 12 and up, in Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox, and Addington. We provide education and advocacy through public workshops and outreach in the community.

Rapid Access Program

We are able to provide rapid access to our Skills and Support program for some groups who often face additional barriers. This includes the **Defence community**; active Defence members, reservists, and Royal Military College (RMC) students; civilians employed by CAF or DND; survivors who have a current or past CAF/DND partner, an immediate CAF/DND family member in a shared home, retired members, and veterans. **Indigenous Survivors**; all those who self-identify as Indigenous. **Youth**; ages 12-19

Supporting A Survivor



Some feelings a survivor might experience include:

- Violation
- Guilt
- Shame
- Confusion
- Helplessness
- Shock
- Suspicion

Remember to:

- Listen
- Remind them it's not their fault
- Ask questions in a sensitive way
- Honour the survivor's autonomy
- Understand that how a survivor responds is complex and can vary
- Help establish safety
- Offer resources
- Take care of yourself
- Validate their feelings

Survivors may feel alone and/or at fault.

What to say and what to avoid:

DON'T Say!

"It was your fault"

DO Say!

"It was NOT your fault"

DON'T Say!

"You could have avoided it if you...."

DO Say!

"I'm sorry this happened to you"

DON'T Say!

"Why didn't you fight back?"

DO Say!

"You survived, you did the right thing"

DON'T Say!

"It's been so long. Get over it"

DO Say!

"Thank you for telling me. I'm here for you"

How to Help

Try to understand

Sexual assault is an act that can strip an individual of their dignity, autonomy, and control. This violation by another human can disrupt the sense of self and the understanding of the world around them. It is violence against a person's most inner and personal self.



Ask the Survivor

- "Is this a good place for us to talk?"
- "Is there anything you need to make you more comfortable?"
- "What can I do to make this space safer for you?"

Remember

Sexual assault is traumatic. It is often difficult for someone who has been sexually assaulted to be alone, especially immediately after the assault.

Believe what has happened, do not judge

Believe

Often it is quite difficult for a survivor to label what has occurred as a sexual assault, especially if the perpetrator was not a stranger. Questioning or disbelieving the person will only increase the pain. Accept what they have told you about what happened and be supportive.

Don't ask about details of the assault. Even if you are curious about what happened and feel that you want to fully understand it, avoid asking for details of how the assault occurred. However, if a survivor chooses to share those details with you, try your best to listen in a supportive and non-judgemental way.

Use inclusive language that affirms the survivor's gender identity and sexual orientation. Use neutral language like "partner" or "date" instead of "boyfriend/girlfriend." Try not to assume what someone's gender identity or pronouns are; let them tell you, ask them, or you can use "they" instead of "he/she" if you are unsure.



Offer Information and Choices

Suggest resources, such as legal, medical, and counselling options. However, remember that it is only your job to present these options. Support these choices even if you disagree with them. It is more important for the survivor to be able to make decisions and have them respected than it is for you to impose what you think is the "right" decision.

Let the Survivor know they are not to blame

Many survivors blame themselves and need to be reassured that the perpetrator is fully responsible for the assault. **The survivor is NEVER to blame, even if the attacker was an acquaintance, date, friend, or spouse, AND/OR the survivor...**

- has been sexually intimate with that person or others before.
- was drinking or using drugs
- froze and did not or could not say "no," or was unable to fight back physically.
- was wearing clothes that others may see as 'seductive.'

Recognize Possible Barriers

Be understanding and supportive of the fact that, for some survivors, resources may not be accessible to them or may not feel safe for them to access.

These could include barriers related to:



Shame

Some survivors may feel guilt or shame that the assault/ abuse was their fault. They may fear that they will not be believed or taken seriously.



Discrimination

Some survivors may fear experiencing discrimination based on their race, financial status, sexual orientation, disability, etc.



Reporting Obligations

Some survivors may avoid reaching out for support for fear that they will be forced to report their assault or abuse.



Gender/ Sexual Identity

Some survivors who have not come out in the community about their sexual orientation or gender identity may struggle to seek support.



Be available, patient, and understanding

The survivor may need to talk at odd hours, or for a great deal of time at first. Be there as much as you can and encourage the use of other resources, such as a hotline or counseling. Do not impose any timelines on the survivor. It can take a very long time to take steps that may seem small to you.

Offer shelter and support, but don't be overly protective

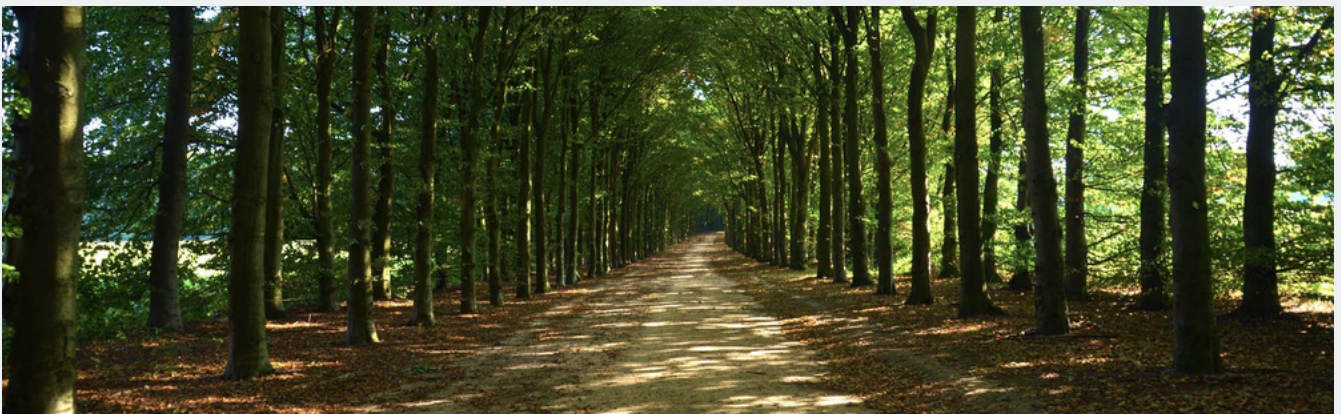
Offer shelter if needed, and if you are not in a position to offer shelter, assist in identifying supportive people the survivor may be able to stay with. Let them make decisions about what they will do, where they will go, how much of daily life they will resume as normal, etc.

Allow the survivor to take control and steer conversation and actions

A significant step to survivors recovery is to regain a sense of control. Allow the survivor to direct conversations about the assault. Deal with any feelings of your own - such as anger, disbelief, or doubt - when you are away from the survivor as the survivor has enough emotions to sift through already.

Survivors may feel like...

- They can't trust people who are supposed to love and protect them
- Attention and affection are almost always followed by sexual demands, betrayal, and shame
- They don't have much control over their body
- Other people's needs come before their own
- They are in danger if not in complete control
- Survivors may question themselves, as during the assault, they may experience a normal physical response or arousal
- This may lead to embarrassment, guilt, shame, and confusion



Responses to trauma



Triggers:

Things that stimulate a reaction when something in their present life links to their history of trauma. These result in negative responses or experiences in the survivor's mind, body, emotions, behaviours. They can be linked to smells, colours, sounds, holidays, etc.

Trauma Responses:

- 01** Re-experiencing the abuse in recurrent, intrusive and distressing ways such as: disturbing thoughts or images of the abuse, repetitive dreams, flashbacks, racing thoughts, going blank, dissociating from reality, increase heart rate, etc.
- 02** Avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma or numbing responses such as efforts to avoid activities, people, or places that remind them of the trauma, inability to recall certain aspects, diminished interest in activities, altered ability to feel emotions, a sense of foreshortened future, etc.
- 03** Persistent symptoms of hypervigilance such as: irritability or anger outbursts, difficulty concentrating, feeling on guard, increase or decreased time spent with friends, lack of self-care practices, compulsive behaviours, eating disorders, suicidal ideation, addictions, sexual difficulties including increased promiscuity or reduced interest in sex.

A survivor might have trouble with...

Trust

Abuse/assault is a betrayal of trust especially if the abuser was a person they cared about. As a result, they might have difficulty in allowing themselves to trust or in knowing who to trust.

Power

Someone who is sexually abused/assaulted may feel powerless. They might feel powerless at times and unable to assert themselves. At other times, they might try to control even the smallest detail to feel safe and more powerful.

Intimacy

They may be afraid to let anyone know their secret and too ashamed to let anyone get close. They may learn how to behave as though everything is fine, while keeping their true thoughts and feelings hidden, even from themselves.

Sexuality

Sexual abuse interferes with sexual development, sex, and intimacy. Instead of learning to experience the body as a source of pleasure, they may have experienced it as a source of pain. They may think of sex as a form of control rather than an expression of love. As a result, they might withdraw from sex & intimacy or use sex as a way to get power or affection.

There is no set time limit or "right" way to recover

Crisis Stage

01

Survivors may struggle with memories, flashbacks, nightmares, confusion, and mixed emotional states. They may feel overwhelmed. You may see them withdraw from people, push people away and/or start to fear being alone.

Middle Stage

02

Survivors will start to deal with the abuse and this involves some hard-emotional work. They will struggle with details and how to express their feelings. They may tell you their story repeatedly. They will get mad, sad, and eventually, feel some kind of relief when things start to make sense

Resolution

03

With hard work and support, they can recover. This doesn't mean they will never think of the abuse again, just that they will have better ways of coping and that survivors will be more confident in handling problems when they arise.

Every person responds differently to abuse

Although there are certain feelings that are common, such as fear, distress, humiliation, anger, confusion, numbness, and guilt. The feelings a person has may vary from week to week, day-to-day even minute to minute. What is important is that someone who has experienced abuse is allowed to experience their feelings without fear of having them invalidated or dismissed. It is important that they feel they have people who will allow them to talk and will try to understand their needs rather than assuming that others know best and rushing them to "get over it". Support them through the wide variety of emotions that they will feel. Try to understand that sometimes they will not be able to explain how they feel because they do not understand it themselves.

Don't criticize their actions or minimize the assault. Do not compare their experiences to others'.

What survivors need from loved ones



To be loved and accepted

Often survivors will distance themselves for fear of rejection. Patience, gentle reassurance, and confirmation from family, friends, or partners will help to increase their self confidence



To be believed

It is crucial that the person's story of their abuse is believed, particularly when they have tried to tell someone in the past and were not believed. Disclosing is a very courageous step and survivors need affirming and validating.



A support network

Many survivors feel lonely and isolated, even in the midst of a close family, so it's very important that they be encouraged to build and maintain a network of supportive, positive people who they can turn to, especially in times of crisis.

What survivors need from loved ones



Time to heal

It is also hard work facing the trauma, emotionally, mentally, and physically. There may be times the survivor feels like giving up. At these times, they need to be acknowledged for the progress they have made and reminded that healing is not linear.



Time to grieve

There are many losses associated with the effects of sexual abuse. These can include loss of trust, loss of privacy, personal space, boundaries, and much more. Each loss must be identified and grieved in the same way we would grieve the loss of a loved one.



Boundaries

Survivors may not have boundaries or may have very strict boundaries for their protection. As they heal, they will learn how to set and maintain healthy boundaries. Give them space if they need it, but make yourself available if they need you.

What survivors need from loved ones



Lots of positive messages

They say it takes 40 positives to counter one negative message. Survivors have internalized many negative messages and it will take a lot of positive messages from their loved ones to help them begin to change the way they think about themselves and others.



Additional support

There may be a need for the survivor to talk to someone who is experienced and qualified in dealing with survivors of abuse. This can be a counsellor, pastor, or psychologist who is able to help them move through the healing process. You can offer support by connecting with services on their behalf to inquire about the support they provide, or offering to accompany the survivor to an appointment or act as an advocate for them.



To be seen as strong

Continue to see them as a strong, courageous person who is reclaiming their own life.

Seeking Support

What can be immediately done after a sexual assault

If your loved one tells you within several days of the assault there are a few things to consider in regard to collecting evidence, in case they want to file a police report. Remember evidence can only be collected at that time, but the decision to press charges can come later. It may be a good idea to go to the local emergency room as it leaves the option to file charges immediately or at a later time.

Where can you go?

The Sexual Assault/ Domestic Violence (SA/DV) Treatment program offers comprehensive care, in a safe, and confidential space. They address emergency medical, forensic, emotional, and social needs, for survivors of recent sexual or domestic violence (occurring within 12 days if you are under 14 years of age or older, and no time frame if you are under 14 years of age). Access this support service through the Emergency Department at Kingston General Hospital, Urgent Care at Hotel Dieu, Lennox and Addington County General Hospital

Sexual Assault Evidence Kit



While receiving medical care from the SA/FV Treatment Program, you may choose to undergo a Sexual Assault Evidence Kit (This is completely the survivor's decision if over 14), a medical exam that collects evidence of the sexual assault, which may be used in a police investigation. The Kit can be stored in confidence at the hospital for up to six months (after which it will be destroyed), as the survivor decides whether or not to report the assault and release the kit.

Things to keep in mind

- In order to gather the most evidence, it is recommended that the survivor not shower, use the washroom, eat, brush teeth, or change clothes, if they are going to the SA/FV program soon after the assault.
- The survivor can provide other evidence such as sheets and blankets
- The hospital will keep the evidence so bring a change of clothes.
- The doctor may check for STIs and prescribe emergency contraception if there is a risk of pregnancy.

Dealing with your own emotions

Feeling **guilt** is a common reaction to the sexual assault of a loved one. However, remember that it is often impossible to protect someone from sexual assault because it happens at unpredictable times

You may feel **anger** towards the perpetrator, but violence will not help. Survivors need to decide what is best for their own recovery. While they were being abused/assaulted they were powerless, survivors need to be allowed to control their own situation and their own healing.

A common reaction is **disbelief**, especially if the abuser is someone you know and like. You may feel repelled that they were sexually abused and you may want to deny it. You believing them will support their first step towards healing. Your denial could increase the feelings of shame.

Feelings of **fear** may come forward. You may worry that you will say the wrong thing or have a new negative outlook on the world. Navigating a crisis together

Let's talk about the feeling of helplessness

A survivor may behave in ways that are very challenging for their support people. They may lash out, or push you away, and you may wonder if they even want you around. One reason for these behaviours is that the survivor's sense of self, understanding of the world, and feeling of safety have all been violated. They may be testing to see if they can really trust you to stick with them, by doing things and saying things that make you feel like they want you to leave.

Taking time to learn more about trauma responses and find community resources can be of great value for the time when the survivor does choose to reach out to you. Educating yourself about sexual assault and its consequences can help you to feel less anxious, and more prepared.



How to support yourself

Be patient

If the survivor is your partner, they may want to avoid sexual activity. Although this can be difficult for you, remember that it is not because of anything you did wrong. Try to take it as an opportunity to explore other ways to express love and affection.

Take care of yourself

In healthy relationships, both people should pay attention to their own needs as well as others'. Set limits if their behaviour becomes abusive. You can talk to a counsellor yourself, join a support group, or have a trusted friend to turn to.

Get therapy for yourself

Trauma affects more than just the victim. Supporters of survivors also need to take care of themselves and can benefit from talking to someone about the challenges of supporting a loved one through a trauma.

Myths and Realities

There are a number of myths surrounding sexual violence. Here are a few other commonly held-incorrect- ideas about sexual assault.

Myth- Women sometimes invite sexual assault

Reality: Statements exclaiming that the survivor is at fault because they were dressed a certain way or in a certain location are all untrue. Regardless of the circumstances it is the attacker who is at fault.

Myth- Sexual assault is a result of sexual frustration or unfulfilled romantic feelings

Reality: Sexual assault has nothing to do with romance and very little to do with sex; it is about violence and the decision to abuse, dominate, control, or humiliate someone.

Myths and Realities

There are a number of myths surrounding sexual violence. Here are a few other commonly held-incorrect- ideas about sexual assault.

Myth- If a survivor doesn't fight back they are consenting

Reality: It is very common for individuals to freeze during a sexual assault. Often, the assaulter knows and is close to the survivor. The survivor may become frozen in part because of their disbelief that a person they know is sexually assaulting them.

Myth- A person cannot be sexually assaulted by their partner

Reality: In January 1983, the Criminal Code of Canada acknowledged that sexual assault within a marriage/relationship can occur. Each individual in a relationship has the right to say 'no' and their partner has the responsibility to respect that decision.

Survivor testimonial

"I was blessed with pastors, friends, and family members who knew what I was going through, gave me space when needed, but simply let me know they were there. It was a relief to have people around me, that although may have had no prior dealings with survivors, allowed me to be who I was, set my own pace, encouraged me, and allowed me to grieve and heal." - Anonymous

"They were willing to learn from me and didn't push their own expectations or opinions on me. This also helped me begin to trust others."



Resources

Here are some helpful organizations in which you can access support

Description	Phone	Email
Sexual Assault Centre Kingston	613-545-0762	sack@sackington.com
Sexual Assault Centre Kingston <i>Crisis line</i>	613-544-6424	
Sexual Misconduct Response Centre <i>Crisis line</i>	1-844-750-1648	DND.SMRC-CIIS.MDN@forces.gc.ca.
Kids Help Phone <i>Support line</i>	1-800-668-6868	
Immigration Services for Kingston and Area	613-544-4661	info@kchc.ca
Kingston Youth Shelter	613-549-4236	kys@kingstonyouthshelter.com
Victim Services of Kingston and Frontenac	613-548-4834	info@victimserviceskingston.ca
Kingston General Hospital	613-548-2333	