



---

## Who responds to your case?

Depending on when you choose to report, you may engage with different types of law enforcement officers. You have the right to ask for a specialized law enforcement officer who is assigned to and trained to work on sexual assault cases. You also have the right to know the name and rank of any officer or detective with whom you are interacting.

- ◆ **If you have called 911**, the responding officers who arrive on the scene first may not be trained in sexual assault investigation or victim interviewing. They may not be the ones who continue to investigate the crime after their initial response. These officers will record their initial observations about the scene and their interactions with you, and you may see them again later if your case proceeds to trial.
- ◆ **If you file a complaint**, either at the time of assault or later, you will likely meet other law enforcement officers called detectives or investigators who will further interview you after the initial investigation of the crime. These detectives may also contact you before you file a complaint to see if you want to proceed.

---

## Author:

**RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network)** is a dynamic organization comprising experts to provide the best-in-class services for survivors. The victim services experts at RAINN take a victim-centered, trauma-informed approach to developing programs and services that support survivors of sexual violence and their loved ones.

---

## More Information:

**Sexual Assault Kit Initiative**  
[www.sakitta.org/survivors/](http://www.sakitta.org/survivors/)

---

## National Resources:

**RAINN National Sexual Assault Telephone Hotline:**  
1.800.656.HOPE (4673)

**RAINN National Sexual Assault Online Hotline:**  
[www.online.rainn.org](http://www.online.rainn.org)

**Domestic Violence Hotline:**  
1.800.799.SAFE (7233)

**Suicide Hotline:**  
1.800.273.8255

**Joyful Heart Foundation:**  
1.212.475.2026 or [www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/](http://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/)

**VictimConnect Resource Center:**  
1.855.4.VICTIM (842846)

This project was supported by Grant No. 2015-AK-BX-K021 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

---

# Encouraging Positive Communication: A Sexual Assault Victim's Guide to Working with Law Enforcement



What you can expect and what you may request during your communications with law enforcement.



“It’s OK to wait to have a difficult conversation until you feel safe and comfortable.”

## Request support:

It can be helpful and comforting to have support when communicating with law enforcement officers. That may mean...



- ◆ **Someone you already know and trust.** You may want a family member or friend to be with you. Be aware that family members or friends who are present when speaking with responding officers or detectives may be called as witnesses if your case proceeds to trial. If the law enforcement officer asks to speak with you privately, you may have the right to refuse this or you may have to comply, depending on your jurisdiction. Informal advocates, like family members and friends, do not have the same privileges and confidentiality obligations as a victim advocate.
- ◆ **A victim advocate.** The sexual assault service provider in your area may be able to connect you with a victim advocate who is trained to support you while you talk to law enforcement officers. Some law enforcement agencies also have advocates available. These professionals are trained to assist victims in navigating the legal system and to advocate on your behalf for your needs and concerns during the criminal investigation and legal process. They can accompany you when you report to law enforcement, meet with prosecutors, or attend court hearings. A trained advocate can also support you in safety planning and finding other supportive services (such as counseling, safe housing, applying for victim’s restitution, etc.).

## Privacy:

Privacy is important, and you do have a right to request it. When you discuss with law enforcement officers what happened to you, it should happen in a quiet area away from other people. If you believe that the conversation is too public, you may ask to be moved to a more private space, such as a quiet office or conference room where interruptions are minimized. Although immediately identifying an available private space may be challenging, it’s OK to ask for one. It’s OK to wait to have a difficult conversation until you feel safe and comfortable proceeding.



## Time:

When you first report the assault, the process may take a few hours. This is normal. Additional interviews with law enforcement officers or detectives may also take place over an extended period of time. If you need a break, water, a snack, or just a minute to breathe, you or your advocate may and should ask for them. Interviewers will accommodate these requests.



## Respect:

Because of the nature of sexual assault, some questions may feel uncomfortable or intrusive. Use whatever terms or phrases you feel most comfortable using. It may help to remember that law enforcement officers are professionals, just like doctors and teachers, and are prepared to listen to what happened.

## Repeat questions:

Law enforcement officers may ask the same questions several times or in several different ways. It may be difficult to describe or remember the details of your sexual assault. Offer information only as you remember it. It’s OK if you don’t recall everything immediately. Additionally, you have the right to ask the interviewers to rephrase or clarify questions if you do not understand what is being asked.



## Ask for a supervisor:

If you believe that your complaint isn’t being taken seriously, or if you feel uncomfortable, you may ask to speak to a supervisor or the next-highest-ranking officer. You have a right to know the names and ranks of the responding officers or detectives asking questions and to be given a business card in case you have any follow-up questions or comments.

## Safety matters:

Your physical and emotional safety is always a top priority for the law enforcement officers and victim advocates with whom you are interacting. If at any point, you feel unsafe or fear that you will be threatened when you are not with law enforcement, express this to the officer and advocate you are working with so that they can help you.



“Your physical and emotional safety is always a top priority.”