
Respect:

Because of the nature of sexual assault, some questions may feel uncomfortable or intrusive. Use whatever terms or phrases make you feel most comfortable. It may help to remember that law enforcement officers receive extensive trauma-informed training and are prepared to listen to you without judgment.

Repeat questions:



Law enforcement officers may ask the same question several times or in several different ways. Remembering or describing the details of the crime may be difficult, especially if years have passed since the assault. Offer information as you remember it. It is okay 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. Take your time and know that there is no wrong way to tell your story.

Ask for a supervisor:

If you believe that your requests for accommodations aren't being taken seriously, or if you feel uncomfortable, you may ask to speak to a supervisor or the next highest-ranking officer. Remember, you have the right to know the name, rank, and title of any law enforcement officer or any other individuals who work on your case. You can ask for business cards in case you have any follow-up questions or comments about the process.

Safety matters:

Your physical and emotional safety is always a top priority for law enforcement officers and victim advocates. If you feel unsafe or fear that you will be threatened when you are not with one of these individuals, share this information with the officer and/or advocate so that they can help you.



Author:

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) is a dynamic organization comprising experts to provide the best-in-class services for survivors, inform and educate the nation about sexual violence, and improve the public policy and criminal justice response to sexual violence. 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

National Resources:

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

National Domestic Violence Hotline:
1.800.799.SAFE (7233)

Suicide Hotline:
1.800.273.8255

Joyful Heart Foundation:
1.212.475.2026

VictimConnect Resource Center:
1.855.4VICTIM (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. For more information, visit www.sakitta.org.

Engaging with Law Enforcement: Guidance for Cold Case Sexual Assault Survivors



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



“ A trauma-informed approach ensures you are treated with respect and have access to supportive services. ”

If your sexual assault case has been reviewed as part of your jurisdiction's efforts to test all previously unsubmitted sexual assault kits (SAKs), you may be contacted by someone from your local law enforcement agency who specializes in the area of cold case sexual assault investigation. This individual belongs to the victim notification team; this team typically also includes a victim advocate. Members of this team have been trained to use a trauma-informed, victim-centered approach to ensure that victims are treated with respect and that they feel valued. Someone from the victim notification team will work with you during the notification and investigation processes if you choose to reengage with the criminal justice system.¹

Reengagement:

You will likely meet other law enforcement officers (called detectives or investigators) when you reengage with the criminal justice system. They may need additional information from you during the reinvestigation of your case. Law enforcement officers or victim advocates may provide you with resources for support; you have the right to ask for this information if it is not provided to you.



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

¹For more information on the cold case sexual assault investigation and prosecution stages, please see the Sexual Assault Kit Initiative Training and Technical Assistance (SAKI TTA) brief “What Happens Next? Victim Resources for Support, Questions, and Information in Cold Case Sexual Assaults” by visiting www.bit.ly/saki_ccsa.

Support:

Having support when interacting with law enforcement officers can be helpful and comforting. This support may come in the form of a trusted individual or a victim advocate.



- ◆ **An individual you already know and trust.** You may want a family member or friend to be with you when meeting with the victim notification team or when you are having meetings with law enforcement about your case. The law enforcement officer may ask to speak with you privately; depending on your jurisdiction, you may have the right to decline this request. Remember that this officer has specialized training to help you and wants to create a trauma-informed supportive environment for you throughout this process.

“ Advocates can provide a variety of supportive services after the interview, even if you choose not to reengage in the criminal justice process for this case. ”

- ◆ **A victim advocate.** This person may be a systems-based advocate who works in the police department or prosecutor's office, or a community-based advocate who works for a local service provider, such as a rape crisis center. These trained professionals assist victims in navigating the legal system and provide support to address your needs and concerns throughout the criminal justice process. They should share information about their respective roles and the specific support they can provide. For example, advocates can accompany you when you meet with law enforcement or prosecutors, or when you attend court hearings. Both systems- and community-based advocates can also support you in safety planning and finding other supportive services (e.g., counseling, safe housing, applying for victim's restitution).

Follow-up meeting:

After first contact from the victim notification team, you can choose not to engage further with law enforcement.



If you choose to arrange a follow-up meeting to learn about the SAK results, you may be asked about pursuing criminal charges or an investigation. You are not obligated to pursue these actions. If you feel pressured to pursue charges or engage further with the victim notification team, you can ask to take a break or end the meeting and decide about possibly following up with them at a later date.

Privacy:

Your follow-up meeting should be held at a mutually convenient location determined by you and the victim notification team. This meeting should be in a private setting so you can discuss the SAK results with law enforcement officers and what options you have, should you decide to pursue a criminal case. If you move forward with the case, you will have further interviews and meetings with law enforcement. All meetings should be held in a quiet, confidential space where interruptions will be minimal. You can request to move to an office or a conference room to have these talks. Additionally, it is okay to postpone a difficult conversation until you feel safe and comfortable proceeding with the discussion.



Additional interviews:

Additional interviews with law enforcement officers, detectives, or members of the prosecution team will likely be necessary. During any interview, you should feel free to request a break, water, or snack—or to request that the pace of the interview be slowed down. Interviewers should accommodate such requests; your advocate, if present, can offer support when you make these requests.

