

Do I tell, or don't I?

Whether it happened a few hours or several years ago, and no matter what your age is, telling someone you've been sexually abused or sexually assaulted is a very difficult thing to do. It takes courage and strength to talk about such an intimate, painful experience with another person. Sometimes it's even harder if they are someone who is close to you and really cares about you.

Telling someone can be a very important part of your recovery. It's a huge step that can move you forward in your healing.

Some reasons why you may choose to tell

- You don't want this to happen again.
- You're tired of feeling scared, sad, mad or alone (or all of these feelings).
- You're acting differently at home, and your family keeps asking what's wrong.
- You're acting differently at school or work, and your friends keep asking what's wrong.
- You keep thinking about what happened and can't concentrate on other things.
- You're crying all the time.
- You're having trouble eating.
- You're having trouble sleeping.
- You want some help in deciding what to do.
- You hope that by telling someone you'll feel better.
- You want to take action against the person who assaulted and hurt you.

Some reasons why you may choose not to tell

- You may think the sexual assault was your fault.
- You may feel too embarrassed or ashamed.
- You worry that people would talk about you if they knew.
- You're afraid; he said he'd come back and hurt you if you told anyone.
- You think nobody will believe you.
- You just want to forget about it.
- You're afraid of the police.
- You think your parents or family have enough problems to deal with.
- You think your parents and/or family will be mad at you.
- You're afraid of what your parents might do.
- You don't want your boyfriend/girlfriend to find out.
- You're afraid you may have to report it to the police, and you don't want to.

In addition to the reasons above, here are some common reasons why guys who are sexually abused or assaulted often don't want to tell anyone:

- People might think you're gay.
- People might think you are a "wuss."
- You're embarrassed that another guy touched you in a sexual way.
- You thought that person was your friend.
- You worry that you could lose your place on the team if you told anyone.
- You worry that girls won't like you anymore.

Who can you tell?

Choosing the right person to talk to about what happened to you can really make it easier and help you to feel a lot better. It's very important that you pick someone that you can trust, and that you believe will be able to help you. This needs to be someone you believe will listen to you and try to understand what you are experiencing, someone who may be able to help you tell others you need to, or help you get help for yourself.

You may consider talking to:

- A good friend
- Your mom or dad or other family member
- A teacher or school counsellor
- A doctor or nurse
- A faith leader
- A police officer
- A sexual assault crisis line or counselling service

Where should you tell?

Choosing the right place to talk to someone about your experience is very important. If this is what you decide to do, you may want to:

- Find a place where there are no distractions.
- Find a place where you will not be interrupted.
- Find a place where you will feel safe, before and after you tell someone.
- Find a place where you can express your emotions if you want to and not feel embarrassed.

When should you tell?

The decision to talk to someone becomes a lot easier for you...

...when you really feel you're ready to share your experience.

...when you believe you've found the right person to tell.

...when you feel safe and supported.

What should you tell?

When you tell the person you trust about what happened, you only need to share the information you feel safe and comfortable talking about. If you're getting ready to talk to someone, try to consider these things:

- It's a lot more important to talk about how you're feeling than the details of the assault or abuse, except if you're talking to the police. That's different: you need to tell them everything you can remember, even if some stuff may be embarrassing (like drinking, taking drugs or breaking family rules).
- You don't have to talk about everything all at once or in a single conversation; it's OK to tell your story bit by bit.
- If talking becomes difficult, you can stop at any time.

How might your family and friends react if you tell?

Just as you are struggling with feelings and reactions after the assault, the people who care about you will also have emotions and reactions to cope with. Your experience may have happened a few hours or a long time ago, but either way you may be very sensitive about how family members and friends respond to it:

- Just when you need to talk, other people may have trouble listening to you.
- Others may want to make decisions that affect you instead of letting you make them.
- Even though you did nothing wrong, your parents may give you a curfew or try to protect you in other ways you don't like.
- You may only want to be comforted, but other people may keep pushing you for more information about your experience.
- You may be ready to talk, but other people may avoid you because they don't know what to say or do around you.

After a sexual assault happens, parents often think they should have done something that would have prevented it. Family members and friends may become overprotective as they try to deal with their own feelings of helplessness or anger about what happened. A boyfriend or girlfriend might avoid closeness with you, or even push for it because they believe it can somehow erase the trauma of your assault.

On the other hand, your family can surround you with love. They can provide comfort and a feeling of safety and security that will help you to recover from your assault. It's very important for you to have a support system during your healing journey, and your family and friends can give you that.

Sometimes family or friends may blame you for what happened. In our society there are lots of victim-blaming myths about sexual assault. People who blame victims of assault or abuse often don't understand how the offenders think and act, and that sexual assault and abuse is usually perpetrated by people we think are trustworthy.

If your family or friends do not understand that this was not your fault, do not take responsibility for that. Talk to someone else about how you are feeling and get support.

It's up to you to decide how much you want to tell, and who you'll share your experience with. Understanding the reactions of other people doesn't mean you need to take responsibility for their feelings -- you need to focus on your own.

If I tell, does it have to be reported to the police?

This is a bit complicated.

- If you're under age 12, the adult you tell **MUST** advise the police or Children's Services that this has happened to you.
- If you're over age 12 but under age 16, the adult you tell **MAY** need to report this to the police.
- If you're over age 16, it will depend on the perpetrator's relationship to you. If he/she was in a position of trust or authority over you (parent, caregiver, coach, teacher, youth worker, etc.) then this must be reported to the police.

AASAS member agencies are located all over Alberta. We're able to talk with you about your experience, tell you if it has to be reported, and support you through your healing. If you're ready, you can [click here](#) to connect with someone you can trust and who really wants to help you.

What happened to you is NOT your fault

People of every age, race and cultural background experience sexual assault. You did not choose to have this happen to you. Sexual abuse and sexual assault is never the fault of the person it happens to.

It doesn't matter where you were or how you were behaving. It doesn't matter what you were wearing or saying. It doesn't even matter whether you were drinking or using drugs. You did not deserve to be assaulted or abused. Nobody does.

It's **NOT** your fault. The person who did this to you is entirely responsible for what has happened. That person has committed a crime.