

Article: Responding as a Sexual Assault Victim

Learning how to act if you are sexually assaulted can prepare you to take action, protect yourself from further harm, and begin healing.

This article will outline reporting options available to sexual assault victims, as well as inform you about what to do immediately after a sexual assault and how to engage assistance to help begin the recovery process.

What do I do if I'm sexually assaulted?

If you are ever sexually assaulted, immediately after the attack, you need to:

- Get to a safe place
- Get medical care as needed
- Preserve the evidence of the assault if interested in potential prosecution of the offender
- Write down what you can remember of the offender and the attack
- Choose your reporting option (see below)

How do I preserve the evidence?

To preserve important evidence for possible prosecution of the offender, avoid certain actions until medical personnel (and investigators, if using unrestricted reporting) have had the opportunity to collect evidence. Specifically, do not:

- Bathe, shower, or douche
- Change clothing
- Wash your hands
- Brush your teeth or gargle
- Use the restroom, if possible
- Eat or drink
- Clean, rearrange, or remove items from the scene of the assault.

What are my reporting options?

Members of the Coast Guard have two options for reporting an assault: restricted reporting and unrestricted reporting.

Restricted reporting:

- is a confidential method of reporting an assault by contacting **ONLY** the Employee Assistance Program Coordinator (EAPC)/Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC), a Family Advocacy Specialist (FAS), a Health Care Provider (HCP), or a Victim Advocate (VA). If the assault is disclosed to anyone other than these individuals, the report must be unrestricted.
- gives victims access to medical and counseling services even if they are not willing to openly report the offense.
- may not be available in every circumstance

Unrestricted reporting:

- allows for a formal investigation to be initiated and the offender to be punished, which is usually done by calling the police or reporting the offense to military authorities.
- Victims can switch to this option after having chosen restricted reporting but evidence will not be available after a year.
- Victims are not required to cooperate with investigators.

For details on reporting options, see Commandant Instruction 1754.10 (series) or an EAPC/SARC.

Did You Know?

Preserving evidence is important. Even if a victim initially chooses restricted reporting, evidence will be kept for twelve months and an investigation can be initiated at any time at the victim's request.

Myth

"It's better if I pretend like nothing happened."
Fact: Victims may need assistance to fully recover and may likely need medical care.

Is there someone who will help me through this?

Yes, a Victim Advocate (VA) will be made available to sexual assault victims. The Victim Advocate is a trained volunteer who supports and informs victims; acts as a companion during recovery and through investigative and medical processes; and ensures the victim's safety.

Victims also have access to:

- Medical support
- Local rape crisis centers
- Employee Assistance Program Counseling Services
- USCG Legal services
- USCG Investigative services

To request services, contact your local EAPC/SARC or any military healthcare provider. Websites that can help you locate USCG resources are:

- <http://www.cgsuprt.com>
- http://www.uscg.mil/worklife/rape_sexual_assault.asp

Outside resources include the National Sexual Assault Hotline at (800) 656-4673, the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) (<http://www.rainn.org>), or Hope for Healing (<http://www.hopeforhealing.org/>).

Did You Know?

Services are available to Active Duty members, reservists on active duty, full time Civil Service, Exchange System, and MWR employees, as well as their dependents.