

# You're Not Alone

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A Guide for Survivors of  
Sexualized Violence



ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITIES AGAINST ABUSE




# You're Not Alone

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A Guide for Survivors of  
Sexualized Violence



 1 (866) 807-3558

 [info@acaahelps.ca](mailto:info@acaahelps.ca)

[acaahelps.ca](http://acaahelps.ca)

For immediate assistance, please call, text or chat with trained and specialized sexual violence service providers on **Alberta's One Line: 1-866-403-8000**

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This service offers supportive listening and information about sexual violence, tools for coping with the impacts of trauma and provides resources and options. You will never have to talk about anything you don't want to.

*We always do our best to ensure that conversations on the support and information lines are confidential, but there are some circumstances in which we may have to break this confidentiality. If it is known or suspected that anyone under the age of 18 is being hurt, Albertans are legally obligated to make a report to Child and Family Services. Additionally, if we suspect someone might harm themselves or others we may be required to reach out to authorities. In both of these instances contacting authorities is our last resort; we value and work to preserve the confidentiality of our calls.*

If you are reading this, it might mean that you or someone you know has experienced sexual abuse or sexual assault.

The most important thing we want you to know, is that what happened is not your fault.

This package is to provide you with information about what you might be experiencing, your rights and your options.

You are not alone, and what happened to you is not your fault.





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# Telling Others

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Who, When & How

# part 1

You might have questions and be confused about which way to turn. Deciding to tell someone about what happened can be one of the hardest things to do. You get to decide who to talk to, how and when.

# Who can I tell?

No matter who you tell, you have the right to be listened to and believed. When making this decision, consider the following:

Is there someone in your life you feel comfortable talking to?

Can this person react calmly in stressful situations?

Have you shared with this person before and felt understood and supported?

Is this someone who will respect your desires for privacy and confidentiality?

If you cannot think of someone safe to talk to, or you don't think anyone will believe you, please know that you are not alone.

- You can call or text the **Alberta One Line (1-866-403-8000)**, a province-wide central platform for sexual assault support services.
- You can contact the **Association of Communities Against Abuse (1-866-807-3558)**, the regional sexual assault centre in East Central Alberta.
- You can contact your local medical clinic or family physician.
- You can go to your school counsellor or Family School Liaison Worker.

## *I'm ready, but what am I suppose to say?*

## *When is it time?*

You might be ready to talk about the hurt that someone caused immediately, or years after it ended. The right time to talk about it is when you are ready. If you aren't sure, some clues that talking about your story could help, might be:

- You notice sudden or gradual changes to your personality.
- You feel angry, anxious, agitated, or moody.
- You are pulling away from family and friends, and/or stop taking part in activities you enjoy.
- You may begin to neglect your self-care and engage in risky behavior.
- You may notice you are feeling overcome with hopelessness and feel overwhelmed.

It is so hard to decide how to share your story. There is no right or wrong way, and you get to decide how much or little you want to share. You do not need to share any of the details of the abuse or assault, and for many reasons you may not even remember them. Instead, it might mean sharing the ways it has changed your life, how you are feeling or what you need. The immediate priority is making sure you are safe. Some of the questions survivors are often asked include:

- Are you safe now?
- Is the person who hurt you in contact with you?
- What are your main worries or feelings right now?
- Would you like a medical exam or follow-up?
- Are you interested in reporting to the police?
- Who else might be able to support you?

# Your Rights

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Information,  
Choice & Control

# part 2

Sexual violence is an act that removes power and control from the person who is hurt. This is why it is so important that the healing process be based on restoring this power and control back in the survivors' hands.

# You Have the Right To...

- Be informed about your options, including support, counselling, medical assessment and reporting to the police.
- Ask questions about what you can expect, and who will have access to your information.
- Take your time making decisions or to change your mind at any time.
- Choose who you tell, how much you tell and when to share your story.
- Make choices based on your own experiences, comfort level and the information that has been offered to you.

If someone has sexually assaulted you in the last 96 hours, scan here:



## What Are Your Options?

- Crisis support and information is available through the **Alberta One Line (1-866-403-8000)**.
- Specialized sexual violence Support, Counselling and navigation through the Criminal Justice System through the **Association of Communities Against Abuse (1-866-807-3558)**.
- Medical assessment is provided through your local urgent care centre or hospital at any point.

# The Medical Process

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# part 3

# There are 3 options available to you:

You get to choose whether any of these options are right for you and have the right to change your mind at any time.

## 3 Medical Care + Sexual Assault Kit (evidence collection), Do Not Report to the Police

- Evidence collected through the Sexual Assault Kit can be stored for one year while you decide whether to report to the police (this is called the Third Option).
- You get to decide whether reporting to police is something you want to do, and there is no time limit. Some people choose to report immediately following the abuse or assault, some people wait months or years, and some people decide that the Criminal Justice System is not going to meet their needs.

## Medical Care

- You may contact your local physician, urgent care centre or hospital emergency department for medical care, STI testing/treatment, pregnancy testing at any point.
- Medical care is also an option provided by Sexual Assault Response Teams (SART) in Edmonton or Red Deer.

## Medical Care + Sexual Assault Kit (evidence collection), Report to the Police

- Sexual Assault Response Teams (SART) in Edmonton or Red Deer can offer specialized medical support, assessment and follow-up treatment. You can also access a Sexual Assault Kit within 96 hours of the sexual assault through SART. Simply go to Emergency Department, and ask for the Sexual Assault Response Team.
- The SART nurse can also arrange for you to talk to the police or RCMP (if you choose to report) and can help you find a safe place to stay (whether with friends, family, or in a shelter) if you do not feel safe going home.

## *What Happens in a Medical Exam?*

The SART nurse or Physician will offer a physical and genital exam to look for injuries that may have occurred from the sexual assault and can help to determine risk for pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections if relevant. The nurse will help with any necessary treatments and provide information about follow-up care. For confidentiality, this examination will happen in a private, walled room.

## *What's a Sexual Assault Kit?*

Specialized Nurses or Physicians will collect swabs from parts of your body that may have had contact with the person who assaulted you that can be used as evidence if you choose to report to police. These medical professionals are trained in identifying injuries associated with sexual violence. In many cases, sexual violence does not lead to physical injury, and lack of physical force does not mean that it was consensual.

# What's Next?

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How to Process &  
What to Expect

# part 4

A “trigger” is a trauma reminder. It can be a feeling, smell, place, topic, or anything that engages our nervous system and causes a survival response. It is a surprise emotion, a memory that our body holds, one that may feel like it comes out of nowhere....

A trigger tells our body that danger—or something we perceive as dangerous—is close or here. Sometimes it actually is; however, we can also be triggered when we are perfectly safe. Our body just may not know that, even if we know that nothing bad is happening.

Triggers can cause us to go into flight or fight mode, with our heart racing, stress, energy, and can bring up feelings of anger or the sudden need to leave a space. They can also cause us to go into freeze mode, where we feel checked out, low energy, and we may even feel like we’re not in our own bodies.

All of these reactions are our bodies trying to protect us. Any reminder of something bad that has happened to us calls our nervous system into action. The nervous system is literally programmed to keep us safe. Framing it in this way can help us feel less shame (which just triggers more survival responses) and helps us understand why our bodies are reacting how they are, which ultimately helps us feel more in control.

# Coping with Triggers

When we are triggered, our body begins a stress response cycle. This means that our nervous system has jumped into action and released stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. When we create time and space for our bodies to release the stress energy and hormones, it tells our body we don't need to be in a survival response anymore. We can complete the cycle with any action that feels releasing. This may be different for everyone, but some ideas are below:

## Physical Movement

Physical movement releases stress hormones. When we feel like we have extra stress hormones in our body, or feel super checked out from them, movement can be a helpful tool. It moves some of those stress hormones through our bodies and brings us back into ourselves. Finding the movement that works best for you is a process. It is highly recommended that you choose something that makes you feel good about yourself in the process and not something that will add on top of everything else feelings of not being good enough.

## Grounding

Focus on the space you are in, the sensations on your body (wind, temperature, weight, smells) to remind yourself that you are in the present and you are safe.

**5, 4, 3, 2, 1:** Identify 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you smell, and 1 thing you taste.

Push your feet into the ground. Focus on the sensations this causes in the body.

## Your Feelings

The deep impact of sexual violence can result in a wide range of feelings, thoughts, and ways of understanding the world. There may be some days when you feel 'normal', and others when you don't recognize yourself. You can both feel anxiety and joy, excitement, and sadness, or even anger and hope. All feelings are welcome. Many of these feelings that seem good or bad will surface and that is okay. Remember your feelings deserve to be recognized, acknowledged and respected.

### Breath Work

Experiment with what kinds of breath feel relaxing or grounding during or after a trigger. Breath awareness is very grounding, so try noticing how you are breathing with curiosity and not shame. Counting while breathing invites the front of our brain to.

**Box Breath:** inhale for 5 seconds, hold for 5 seconds and release for 5 seconds. When we hold our breath, we tell our bodies that we are in control.

**Fire Breath:** inhale through the nose deeply and exhale through the mouth making a loud noise through the back of the throat. Notice how it feels to breathe powerfully, especially if you've been made to feel small.

### Connection

When we connect with anything inside or outside of ourselves (our friends, partners, the earth, pets, our inner child) we activate a part of our nervous system that brings us back into the safe window, where we are feeling and thinking, but not too much or too little. Feeling connected, watching people's faces respond and the loving tone of their voice, cuddling with an animal, all of these signal to our bodies that we are cared for and can come back into the present moment.

*Information adapted from  
Andrea Glik, LMSW*

# About ACAA

A colorful hummingbird with a green body, red breast, and blue wings is perched on the letter 'A' of the ACAA logo.

ACAA is the primary sexual assault centre serving East Central Alberta. ACAA has office locations in Stettler and Camrose, with Support, Counselling and Education offered in additional communities across the region (Hanna, Oyen, Drumheller, Tofield) and online.

## ACAA offers:

### • **Counselling and Support** •

Providing specialized treatment services including crisis support, therapeutic counselling, and family support for survivors of sexual abuse, assault and other forms of trauma.

### • **Specialized Police and Court Support** •

Empowering survivors as they navigate the Criminal Justice System by providing information, support, and advocacy from before they choose to report to the end of the process.

### • **Education and Training** •

Educating and engaging the public, students, parents, and professionals on sexual violence through inclusive and accessible training sessions.

### • **Community Coordination** •

Building leadership and skill capacity – enhancing organizational and community capacity to respond to sexual abuse and assault.



[acaahelps.ca](http://acaahelps.ca)

**For more info:**

 [@acaalberta](https://www.instagram.com/acaalberta)

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