

# understanding sexual assault

**Sexual assault** is the term used in Canada to refer to **any form of sexual contact without voluntary consent**. This can include forced or unwanted kissing, fondling, vaginal or anal penetration, or oral sexual contact. People of all genders experience sexual assault, although women are disproportionately affected.

**Consent** is a voluntary, ongoing, and conscious agreement to engage in sexual activity. Consent or a “yes” that is obtained through pressure, coercion, force, or threats of force is not voluntary consent. Additionally, there is no consent when:

- it is given by someone else
- the person is unconscious, sleeping, highly intoxicated or high
- it was obtained through the abuse of a position of power, trust, or authority
- the person does not say “yes”, says “no”, or implies “no” through words or behaviours
- the person changes their mind

**Acquaintance sexual assault** is the most common type of sexual assault. In Canada, 87% of sexual assaults are committed by someone the survivor knew and trusted. The offender might be a friend, a friend of a friend, someone they just met, or someone they are close to such as a partner. In acquaintance sexual assault, survivors are often coerced into submitting or giving in through the use of pressure, threats, or intimidation.

**Labelling experiences as sexual assault** can be difficult, especially for those who were assaulted by an acquaintance. The media still portrays sexual assault as something committed by a stranger with a high degree of violence. The farther someone’s experience is from this stereotype, the harder it is for them to label or define their experience. Since these people are still likely to reach out for help, it is helpful to be aware of some of the ways people may disclose.

**Alcohol or drug facilitated sexual assault** occurs when the survivor was under the influence of drugs or alcohol when the assault happened.

- Being highly intoxicated or high can negate a person’s ability to give consent.
- Signs that a person’s ability to give consent is compromised include: loss of motor coordination, vomiting, blacking out, or passing in-and-out of consciousness.
- Ultimately, it is up to each person to ensure that who they are with is capable of consenting to sexual activity. If anyone is unsure if someone is too drunk or high to consent, they need to wait until that person is sober enough to give their voluntary consent.

**Disclosing a sexual assault** is the act of sharing information about an experience to someone who previously did not know. Disclosing is typically very difficult for most people — while some people are able to outright say they were sexually assaulted, others may talk about their experience in vague or more general terms. Examples of how a person might disclose include:

- “I had a bad sexual experience that is bothering me”
- “I was sexually assaulted a year ago and have been thinking about it a lot lately”
- “I don’t remember exactly but I think someone had ‘sex’ with me when I was drunk”
- “I didn’t want to but they wouldn’t stop”
- “I kept saying no but they did it anyway”
- “I was at a party this weekend and something bad happened to me”
- “I am going through something very personal”

## be part of the solution

As a campus community, there are many ways we can all work toward creating a community free of sexual violence.

### learn more

- Recognize that ‘non-consensual sex’ is sexual assault.
- Learn exactly what it means to consent, and share that knowledge with others.
- Critically reflect on the messages we receive in the media about sexual assault.
- Challenge your own beliefs around why sexual assault happens and recognize that no one is to blame for their own assault.
- Place the responsibility for sexual assault on those who commit it.

### educate

- Incorporate anti-sexual violence education into your curriculum.
- Share the U of A Sexual Assault Centre (SAC) video modules with your class, student group, faculty, or residence.
- Visit the bi-weekly booths in the forum hosted by ACAA and Augustana to learn about sexual violence, consent and more.
- Host an SAC training session for faculty members on responding to disclosures of sexual assault.

### take action

- Ask your sexual partners for consent and respect their answer...every time
- Work to identify situations in which sexual assault may occur, then intervene in instances where consent has not or cannot be given.
- Support survivors of sexual assault by using the information on the reverse side of this card any time someone discloses a sexual assault experience.
- Commit to being an advocate for change within your community.

# responding to a disclosure of sexual assault

University personnel can be among the most trusted people in a student's life and are often who students confide in after a sexual assault experience. Regardless of whether the experience was recent or historical, it is important that people receive a compassionate and supportive response to their disclosure. The following guidelines can encourage the person to talk about their experience, access supports, and seek justice.

## listen

The act of listening without judgment can help create a safe environment for the person to talk about their experience.

- Allow the person to share as much or as little as they feel comfortable — without interrupting.
- Avoid asking questions about what happened, especially those that begin with the word “why...” as it forces the person to defend their actions to you.
- Acknowledge the courage it has taken to talk about it.
- Be empathetic of the impact it's having on the person and express your care and concern.

## believe

Most people who disclose are worried that they won't be believed or that they will be blamed for what happened to them. Show you believe them by making simple statements such as:

- “Thank you for telling me”
- “I'm sorry that happened to you”
- “I believe you”

Not feeling believed will negatively impact the individual's recovery process. Our role is not to judge — all we need to do is fully support the person.

## ask how you can help

Disclosing a sexual assault is typically only done when assistance is needed to rectify a situation. Simply asking “What can I do to help you?” can open the door to exploring the type of assistance you can provide based on your professional role.

## explore options

Each person has the right to make their own decisions as to what to do next and to have those choices respected. Asking the person what they would like to do can help them re-establish some control after an experience where they had none. If you are U of A faculty or staff supporting an individual, please contact the U of A Sexual Assault Centre for advice.

### call or visit the U of A Sexual Assault Centre for:

2-705 SUB | 780-492-9771 | [www.uab.ca/SACentre](http://www.uab.ca/SACentre)

- Anonymous drop-in support for anyone affected by sexual assault or abuse, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking.
- Detailed exploration of options available, safety planning, strategies for coping, and self-care.
- Free, comprehensive psychological services for survivors of sexual assault or abuse.
- Follow-up support and/or accompaniment service for those who seek medical attention, want to report their experience to law enforcement or U of A Protective Services, or are involved in a campus or judicial complaint process.
- Advocacy to support students' personal well-being, safety, and academic success.

### choose to do nothing

Each person will know which, if any, of these options are best for them. The University of Alberta respects each person's right to make their own decisions regarding their personal recovery after sexual assault.

### seek medical attention

*For general medical treatment, pregnancy, or STI/HIV concerns, consider:*

**St. Mary's Hospital**  
4607 53rd Street  
780-679-6100

**Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) nurse**  
access through Edmonton-area emergency rooms  
within 7 days of the assault

**Visiting your personal family physician**

*For emergency contraception, visit any pharmacy*

### seek other counselling/support

**Personal Counselling**  
2-143 Learning Commons  
780-679-1511

**Sexual Violence and Wellness Coordinator**  
[uab.ca/AugHealth](http://uab.ca/AugHealth)

**Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton (SACE)**  
Suite 300 – 10339 124 Street NW  
780-423-4102

**SACE Support and Information Line**  
780-423-4121

**Employee & Family Assistance Program**  
780-428-7587

**Pastoral Counselling**  
F&L 2-335  
780-679-1535

**Association for Communities Against Abuse (ACAA)**  
1 (866) 807-3558

### report

**Camrose Police Service**  
6220 48th Ave  
780-672-8300

**University of Alberta Protective Services (UAPS)**  
4901 46 Ave-  
780-608-2905

**U of A Office of Safe Disclosure and Human Rights**  
300 Campus Tower, Edmonton  
780-492-7325

**To report anonymously through a third party report, contact the U of A Sexual Assault Centre**  
2-705 SUB, Edmonton  
780-492-9771

**Not reporting is a valid option.**



**UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA**  
OFFICE OF THE DEAN OF STUDENTS

**Sexual Assault Centre**  
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA