

SEXUAL ASSAULT PART TWO

Providing support around sexual assault

A QLIFE GUIDE
FOR HEALTH AND
SOCIAL CARE
PRACTITIONERS,
SERVICE PROVIDERS,
AND FOLKS WHO
CARE

Contact QLife

Health professionals wanting to know more can contact

ask@qlife.org.au

QLife is available 365 days a year, 3pm - midnight.

call 1800 184 527 | webchat

www.qlife.org.au

QLife acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout this land now known as Australia, their diversity, histories and knowledge and their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. Work for this QGuide was completed across Yuin, Gadigal, and Whadjuk Noongar Countries. QLife pays our respects to Elders and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples across this country we know as Australia. This QGuide was developed in collaboration with Kai Noonan.

June 2024

What can you do if someone you are supporting has experienced sexual assault?

Even if they are seeking help from you, it's important that they choose what happens next.

Believe them.

It is not your role to question whether a sexual assault occurred or the severity of the act and its impact.

Listen to them.

Let them know that they can talk to you about their experience, either now or at a time when they feel ready.

Validate them reaching out.

Speaking out about experiences of sexual assault can be very distressing and can take a lot of courage. Validate this strength and let them know they are not alone.

Reassure them.

Tell them that sexual assault is not their fault. The only person responsible for what happened is the perpetrator.

Never blame them.

No-one ever deserves to be sexually assaulted. It doesn't matter what they wore, where they were, how many times they have had sex before, whether they were drunk or high, at a sex on premises venue, play party, if they were in a relationship, were hooking up with the person who assaulted them, or are a sex worker. These messages are in our society and mean that people who are sexually assaulted often feel responsible for assault that was committed against them.

Focus on the impact of the assault.

Don't ask them for unnecessary details, instead ask them what support they need right now.

Explore options.

Don't try to take control of the situation or pressure them to do what you think they should do. People may choose to seek medical attention, take legal action, or follow up with police or sexual assault services, and others may not. All options are okay and up to the person who has experienced the harm.



SEXUAL ASSAULT: PART TWO

What can you do if someone you are supporting has sexually assaulted someone?

All professionals will encounter people who use violence, whether they realise it or not. Sex is a topic that many people feel uncomfortable speaking about, and open and honest conversations about sex and consent are rare in most contexts. For this reason, most people won't know if they come in contact with a perpetrator of sexual assault.

It is rare for someone to explicitly state that they sexually assaulted a person/s instead they may hint at an incident by saying something like "I got carried away", or they might speak to an experience, without taking responsibility, by saying something like "someone accused me of rape". In these situations, they may be far from taking responsibility for their actions, however there is an opening for support which should be explored.

You may also notice red flags and suspect that someone has or is at risk of sexually assaulting another person. A red flag could include:

- Describing a sexual partner who showed hesitation or reluctance or had to be persuaded.
- Showing little regard or care for someone they have had sex with, mocking them, dismissing their feelings, or not respecting them in any way.
- Using sex to feel more powerful.
- Suspecting they had or want to have sex with a minor.

- Treating sex as a 'notch on the belt', a game or something to conquer.
- Having sex to impress other people who may be violent.
- Expressing feelings of anger, jealousy or revenge as motivations for sex.

Working with people who have perpetrated violence is complex and nuanced work and requires specialist skills to ensure that you are not unintentionally complicit in their use of violence.

In saying that, every person who has contact with a perpetrator has a role to play linking them into interventions that can hold them accountable for their actions.

The most important thing you can do is hold a firm line that there is no excuse for sexual assault and that the only person responsible for the abuse is the abuser.

If possible, try to establish any potential risks of harm, such as:

- Whether they have any contact with the person they assaulted.
- If they are likely to be in a similar situation where the assault happened.
- Any excuses or justifications they are making for their actions.

Ask them if they are willing to get help for their behaviour? If they are not willing to get help to change their behaviour, then they are not taking accountability.

Perpetrator Interventions

If you suspect that someone has sexually assaulted a child or young person, you should report it immediately to the police and/or the department of child services in your state. In some states, a failure to report is a criminal offence, even if you are not reporting in a professional capacity.

Most perpetrator interventions fall into 2 categories: police and legal responses, and behaviour change interventions. Men's Behaviour Change Programs are the most common interventions for people who use violence. Unfortunately, there are very limited behaviour change options that are inclusive of LGBTIQ+SB people and even less for women.

Men and trans-masculine folk can access behaviour change interventions for men, however there are no guarantees that a program is safe and inclusive. Women, trans-femme and non-binary people may need to contact their local LGBTIQ+SB organisation for local referral options.

Resources and Support

All Australian states have local and state-wide sexual assault support services. Go to <https://www.dss.gov.au/ending-violence/help-and-support> to find the most appropriate service.

Not all hospitals have a forensic and medical sexual assault examination unit. Go to <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au> to find the closest location.



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National support services for victim/survivors

[1800 RESPECT](#): Provides confidential sexual assault and family and domestic violence counselling via phone and webchat.

Phone: 1800 737 732. Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

[Rainbow Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence Helpline](#): Provides 24/7 telephone trauma counselling to support anyone in Australia who is from the LGBTIQ+ community and has experienced domestic, family or sexual violence. Phone: 1800 497 212. Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

[Blue Knot Foundation](#): Provides phone and email-based support for adult survivors of childhood trauma and abuse, as well as for their supporters and the professionals who work with them.

Phone: 1300 657 380. Available 9 am to 5 pm AEST/AEDT, seven days a week.

[National Sexual Abuse and Redress Support Service](#): Provides 24/7 telephone and face-to-face counselling for people impacted by institutional child sexual abuse.

Phone: 1800 211 028. Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

[QLife](#): Anonymous and free LGBTIQ+ peer support and referral for people in Australia.

Phone and webchat are open from 3pm – midnight every day.

Phone: 1800 184 527 or chat:

[www.qlife.org.au/contact-us](http://www qlife.org.au/contact-us)

Support services for perpetrators of sexual violence

[The Men's Referral Service](#): provides 24/7 support for men who have used or continue to use violence and who are seeking support to change their abusive behaviours.

Phone: 1300 766 491

[Futures Free From Violence](#): (Victoria Only) offers women, trans, and gender diverse people (18+) who have used force and/or violence in family and intimate partner relationships the opportunity to work towards change in both a supported group and one-to-one therapeutic environment.

Phone: 9663 6733 or email: fffv@ds.org.au

National Resources

[Say It Out Loud](#): provides information and support relating to sexual, family and intimate partner violence in the Australian LGBTIQ+ community. www.sayitoutloud.org.au

[Transfemme](#): Stories, tips and resources to support healthier relationships between trans women and men. www.transfemme.com.au.

“A lot of gay men think they can't be violent or sexist because they are a minority themselves, but just because they are gay or queer it doesn't negate the violence they are perpetuating”.

“His MO was meeting them when they were under 18 and then as soon as they turned 18 and he couldn't manipulate them like that, he dumped them”.

“I was looking for a resource or some sort of help in finding my own sexual identity away from him, because I guess that was the long-term goal, but the short-term goal was just getting away from him”.

“Gender, consent and violence means very different things to the gay community”.

“There are a lot of services that think they're inclusive but they're not”.

Source: Anonymous participants in community consultations conducted by LGBTIQ+ Health Australia, June 2024. Quoted with permission.

