

# WHAT NEXT? A SUPPORTIVE GUIDE TO SEXUAL ASSAULT INVESTIGATION

## IF YOU HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ASSAULTED

It is important for you to have support for yourself during this challenging time. You may confide in a trusted friend or family member. You can also contact King County Sexual Assault Resource Center and ask for a Legal Advocate is a trained staff person who is sensitive to your needs, knowledgeable about criminal justice procedures, and can provide you with non-judgmental support and information as you are recovering from the sexual assault. Your advocate can also provide referrals for individual and group counseling support.

A medical examination can reassure you that you are physically sound, can test for STDs and provide any needed treatment. If you choose to report within 72 hours of the assault, a forensic examination should be done to collect evidence.

Your reactions to the assault may confuse or frighten you. Talking to a counselor can help you sort through the feelings and reactions you may be experiencing, such as:

- Sleep disturbances
- Eating disturbances
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Depression

## THE INVESTIGATION

Even when the criminal justice system works as intended, it is a difficult process. Most police departments have a “Special Assault Unit” that conducts criminal investigations of sexual abuse. The goals of the investigation are:

- Protecting the victim from further abuse
- Determining if the abuse meets the legal definition of a crime
- Identifying the perpetrator of the crime
- Successful prosecution in the criminal courts
- Every investigation is unique, but it may include:
  - An interview with the victim to ascertain the details of the abuse
  - Documenting the facts given by the victim
  - Written statements from persons to whom the victim initially reported the abuse
  - Written statements from persons the offender confessed to, or persons who corroborate the offenders’ alibi
  - An interview with the offender
  - A specialized medical examination of the victim

## IF YOUR CHILD HAS BEEN SEXUALLY ASSAULTED

You are very important to the success of the investigation. You should:

**Protect the child.** The offender should have absolutely no contact with your child. If the offender lives with you, he or she must leave. Get a court order to legally keep the offender away. Contact the Prosecutor’s Office or your Legal Advocate for help.

**Listen to your child,** but do not ask detailed questions of him or her. Be open to what your child says and continually give your child support and validation. The details of the abuse will likely come out in bits and pieces as your child learns

to trust you with what may have been a secret. Your child may report more details, or may deny the event – especially if they feel responsible for “getting the offender into trouble,” or if they think you don’t believe them.

**Keep notes** if your child told you about the abuse. Include:

- Exact words your child used to describe the abuse
- When your child told you, and the circumstances of the disclosure
- Your child’s emotional state and behavior when talking about the abuse
- A description of behavior changes
- If your child has been abused before or made prior reports
- General medical history of your child

The detective may request a specialized forensic medical examination for your child. The detective will tell you whom to contact to schedule the exam. Tests for pregnancy and STDs may also be done. Even when there is no physical evidence, you and your child may be reassured by the results. The results of the examination are needed for the investigation. You will be asked to sign a waiver so the medical records can be obtained.

**Get counseling for your child.** You cannot erase the abuse, but you can help your child cope with it.

**Do not interrogate your child.** Respect your child’s privacy and be discreet when discussing the case with others. Do not conduct your own investigation. Do not tell the offender that the investigation is in progress.

## WHAT TO EXPECT NEXT

The investigation will take from several weeks to several months. As part of the investigation, the Prosecutor will want to meet with the victim. When the victim is a child, a meeting with a specially trained Child Interviewer may occur. The victim will also meet with a Legal Advocate who can provide information and support throughout the criminal case. When the investigation is complete, it will be sent to the Prosecutor’s Office for a filing decision. If charges are filed, the offender may be arrested and held or released on bail.

If the offender contests the charges, a trial may be held. If so, the victim may be interviewed by the defense attorney. We suggest that victims contact the Prosecutor’s Office before talking with the defense attorney or private investigator. The Legal Advocate can assist with these arrangements.

If a trial does happen, the victim or other involved individuals may be called to testify. The Prosecutor’s Office will assist with the court process. If the offender is found guilty, he or she may be ordered into treatment, pay a fine, and/or serve time in jail or prison.

## VICTIM ADVOCATES

Legal Advocates are available for sexual assault victims of all ages. They will assist and support victims and their families during the investigation and can be present during any interviews with the victim.