

EMPOWERING SURVIVORS THROUGH RESOURCES

- Help a survivor find the best possible resources for emotional and practical support. [Refer them to your local sexual assault centre](#). [Refer them to school-based supports](#), such as a school counsellor or police department's school liaison.
- Receiving a disclosure of sexual assault can be a difficult experience. It may be helpful to [get support for yourself](#). However, it is important that details about the survivor and the assault remain confidential.

LOCAL SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTRE

Central Okanagan Elizabeth Fry Society

Central Okanagan Elizabeth Fry Society is a non-profit organization that supports and empowers those affected by sexual abuse, sexual assault, exploitation or violence in a relationship.

Specialized Victim Assistance Program

 **(250) 763 - 4613**

 649 Leon Avenue, Kelowna, BC

 For information or to donate visit www.coefs.ca



24-HOUR SUPPORT

VictimLink BC **1.800.563.0808**

VictimLink BC is a toll-free, 24/7, confidential, multilingual (10 languages) telephone service. They provide information and referral services to all victims of crime, as well as crisis support to victims of sexual and domestic violence.

TTY: 604.875.0885

Text: 604.836.6381

Email: VictimLinkBC@bc21.ca

Suicide Prevention **1.800.SUICIDE**

TTY: 1.866.872.0113 **(1.800.784.2433)**

Online Chat: 12pm - 1am

www.youthinbc.com

Mental Health Support **310.6789**

YOUTH-SPECIFIC RESOURCES

Youth Against Violence **1.800.680.4264**

TTY: 604.875.0885

Text: 604.836.6381

Email: info@youthagainstviolenceline.com

Kids Help Phone **1.800.668.6868**

Online Chat: Wed-Sun, 3 - 11pm

www.kidshelpphone.ca



United Way
Central & South
Okanagan Similkameen

We acknowledge the financial support of the Province of British Columbia.

Brochure adapted from Ending Violence Association of BC, Responding to Sexual Assault Disclosure.

COMMON RESPONSES OF SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS

[Everyone responds to sexual assault differently.](#)



IT IS DIFFICULT TO TALK ABOUT SEXUAL ASSAULT

It is not easy for someone to disclose that they have been sexually assaulted. A sexual assault most often includes profound feeling of **humiliation** and **shame** because sex and sexuality (including that which is healthy) are not talked about freely in society. Even though sexual assault is more about aggression, power and control, sexual assault involves a person's sexual body parts and behaviours that appear similar to sex, both of which most people are taught to be embarrassed or feel ashamed about. When there is physical violence (such as overpowering someone or using sex as a weapon), the trauma and shame can be deep. Sexual assault is intensely **dehumanizing**, and the survivor may feel that they **lack control** over their life.

A SURVIVOR OF SEXUAL ASSAULT MAY:

- Feel deeply **embarrassed**, **ashamed**, or **humiliated**, especially if the assault was committed by someone they trusted, or if there were drugs or alcohol involved.
- **Fear** they will **not be believed** or will be **blamed**, especially if this has been their experience in the past or they have seen this in popular culture (e.g., television, movies).
- **Be confused** about whether or not it was sexual assault (especially if the survivor is young and/or unaware of the law).
- **Fear for their safety** or the safety of their friends and family, especially if threats were involved.

- **Fear gossip, judgment, anger** or **alienation** from their friends, family, classmates or community, especially if the person who committed the assault is part of that community.
- **Feel conflicted** about getting the person into trouble, especially if they were assaulted by someone they know (e.g., intimate/dating partner, spouse, friend, family member, teacher, coach) or if the person is part of the same close community.
- **Fear the response of the police** and the justice system or fear nothing will come of reporting.
- **Avoid talking about it** or **avoid having contact with that person** in hopes to put the assault behind them quickly.



All responses to sexual assault are **adaptive** attempts to survive this traumatic experience, both physically and emotionally. These responses can be particularly **complex** for survivors who have experienced early and/or repeat trauma. You might hear a range of experiences and observe a range of emotional responses during a disclosure of sexual assault. **All reactions are normal responses to trauma; it is the survivor's way of coping with what has happened to them.**

WHEN DISCLOSING A SEXUAL ASSAULT:

A survivor may explain **feeling**:

- Anxiety, confusion, shock and disbelief.
- Anger, aggression, or urge to become violent.
- Depression, self-isolation, and self-blame.
- Fear, mistrust, and invasive memories
- Numb with no intense emotions.
- Disorientation, incoherence, and unable to articulate what happened.

A survivor may appear anywhere on a continuum from calm and collected to frantic and distraught. **All are ways of coping.**

A survivor may explain **reacting** by:

- Fighting back
- Trying to get away
- Feeling frozen — unable to move, unable to speak, or feeling mentally removed from their bodies.

These responses are known as “**fight, flight, or freeze**,” each is a common response to a traumatic situation.

A survivor may be able to **remember**:

- Only disorganized bits and pieces of the assault
- Only sensory details (e.g., sounds, smells)
- All aspects of the assault clearly

During a traumatic event, the brain is focused on survival rather than encoding memory. This affects the ability to accurately recall the event afterwards.

A survivor may explain **changes in behaviour** like:

- Nightmares and/or sleep disturbances
- Changes in appetite, self-control, or sex drive
- Attempts to numb emotions or regain a sense of control with drugs, alcohol, or self-harm

To cope with the assault, a survivor may drastically change their behaviours in day-to-day life.