

Survivors

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24-hour hotline: 800.841.8371

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I am a survivor

Healing after a sexual assault can be a complex process. You have your own way of coping, but it's also important to know that some feelings and thoughts after an assault are to be expected and many survivors share them. Feelings and thoughts about a sexual assault can bother you even if it happened a long time ago.

You might be feeling:

- **Distrust:** It may take a while to feel like you can trust people again. If you were assaulted by someone you know, you may question your judgment about people. If you were assaulted by a stranger, you may distrust the world.

“I didn't think that I would ever go on a date again. What I realize now is that I can date, but I plan for my safety a lot more consciously than I did before.”

- **Loss of control:** Sexual assault robs you of control over your body, so afterwards, survivors often feel powerless. An important part of healing is feeling that you have choices, and they will be respected.

“My parents did not know what to do to help me. After about a year of awkwardness, I asked if we could have a designated time each week to talk about the prosecution of my case. It felt great to know and say what I needed.”

- **Fear:** Sexual assault is frightening, and it is normal to feel scared. Some survivors are especially scared at night or in places like the one in which they were abused or assaulted.

“My goal at the beginning of the support group was to be able to sleep with my lights off. I did it. It wasn't easy but I did it.”

Read more about common reactions.

You can call our 24-hour hotline and speak to someone right now about any of these reactions and feelings.

Our counseling services can help you with any feelings and reactions that you may be having.

Teen survivor

Having survived a sexual assault you may feel scared, confused and overwhelmed and it may feel difficult to trust people in order to get the help you deserve. Here is some information that might be helpful.

The most important thing is that **you are not alone** in this. We can help. BARCC offers all young people, of all genders and sexual identities, ages 12 and older, free confidential counseling, medical accompaniment, legal services, and a 24 hr hotline.

BARCC's goal is to help you regain control of your life and feel empowered to make decisions about what you want to do.

Nervous about contacting us? Maybe answers to some of the questions that we have heard from other young people might help.

Q. What is rape?

A. Massachusetts law defines rape as penetration of a bodily orifice (vagina, anus, or mouth) by a penis or other body part, or an object, against a person's will or without his or her consent. Remember, this is a legal definition. It may not necessarily define your personal experience. If what happened to you or someone you care about does not appear to fit into this definition, **it doesn't mean you or they were not harmed**. BARCC's trained hotline counselors are available to answer your questions 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Q. What do I do if I was just sexually assaulted?

A. There are many ways to get immediate help.

1. Call or contact a friend or family member whom you trust, so you are not alone.
2. Call BARCC hotline and talk to a counselor about your options. You might want information about how to report the experience to the police or whether to go to the hospital.
3. Make an appointment to see a counselor at BARCC or get referrals for other emergency caregivers in your area.

Q. What do I do if a friend was just sexually assaulted?

A. There are many things you can do for a friend who is in immediate crisis.

1. Listen: Often, a person in crisis just needs someone to hear her/his story. You can show you are really listening by not judging them or questioning what you are hearing.
2. Be supportive: It's natural for you to have beliefs and attitudes that will be challenged by what your friend is telling you, but hold your opinions. Right now your friend needs to be heard.
3. Let your friend decide what s/he wants to talk about: Don't push your friend to talk about things s/he's not ready to discuss. Don't pry. Speak calmly and gently.
4. Respect your friend's privacy. Don't tell other people about what happened to your friend unless they tell you it is OK.
5. Remind your friend that you care: You can show affection by listening, speaking calmly and gently, believing them and keeping an open mind.
6. Have your friend contact us about getting services.

Q. Is it my fault if I was partying with the person who hurt me?

A. No. Regardless of what you were doing or where you were, it was not your fault. Nobody has the right to hurt you.

Q. Why do I feel like I'm going crazy?

A. Individual responses can vary from person to person. Your brain is trying to sort out what happened to you. It's important that you recognize that your feelings, whatever they are, are valid and matter. Some common reactions, but not the only reactions include:

- Memories of the experience come into your mind spontaneously
- Difficulty trusting others
- Shame and self blame
- Anger and rage
- Feeling guilty and/or responsible for what happened
- Feeling betrayed and alone
- Feeling the need to isolate yourself from family and friends
- Fear, terror, feeling unsafe
- Sadness and grief
- Feeling powerless, out of control, overwhelmed, anxious or depressed
- Experiencing nightmares or difficulty sleeping at night

Q. What can I do if I feel I am being sexually harassed in school?

A. There are a lot of things you can do to get help if you feel you are being harassed.

1. Don't blame yourself. Harassment is unwanted and can make you feel trapped, confused, helpless, embarrassed or scared. You didn't ask for any of those things.
2. Keep a written record of the incidents.
3. Let the harasser know that you don't like the behavior and the comments, if this feels safe.
4. Tell someone you TRUST who can help you take the kinds of actions you want to take. This can be a friend, teacher, doctor, neighbor, family relative, parent, religious or community figure, or BARCC.
5. Find out who at your school is responsible for dealing with complaints about sexual harassment. Talk to a teacher, principal, nurse and or guidance counselor. Find someone you TRUST. BARCC's legal advocates can help you do this.

Q. Do my parents have to know that I'm getting help at BARCC?

A. Under certain circumstances, minors under the age of 18 can receive medical and counseling services without their parents' consent. Some hospitals, medical providers and rape crisis centers can provide brief support and treatment without parental consent.

I am a male survivor

In the United States, approximately 1 in 6 boys is sexually abused before age 16. One in 12 men say that they have been raped or assaulted as an adult.

Boys and men experience many complex thoughts and feelings after being sexually assaulted. It may be difficult to admit that you have been victimized, even to yourself. You may feel like your masculinity is gone.

You are not alone if you are feeling:

- afraid or embarrassed
- like it's your fault
- confused or ashamed because you got an erection or ejaculated
- confused about your sexuality
- angry
- sad or lonely
- like you want to hurt yourself or someone else
- like you don't care about anything
- like you are not a man

Some men let these feelings stop them from getting help.

BARCC offers counseling services and groups especially for men. We have trained counselors who will understand what you are going through. We can also refer you to other professionals who have experience helping male survivors.

At BARCC, you will be treated with respect and understanding.

I am a college student survivor

If you are a college student, you may have special concerns after a sexual assault.

- Is your housing safe?
- Who on campus can you tell?
- Is there a campus office that can help you?
- Can you make up classes you've missed?
- Can you take a leave of absence from school?
- How can you withdraw and protect your GPA?

BARCC counselors, legal advocates and case managers can help you find the answers. You can call our 24-hour hotline and speak to someone right now.

Learn more about resources on your campus. We can help you navigate the resources on your campus, or you can come to BARCC directly for services. If your college is not listed, it may not have on-campus resources that we know about, or it may not be in our service area.

I am a GLBT survivor

No one deserves to be sexually assaulted.

In addition to the complex thoughts and feelings common to many survivors of sexual assault, members of the GLBT community may have special concerns.

- The sexual assault may have happened as part of a hate crime if you were targeted because of your sexual orientation or gender identity.
- If you have experienced intolerance, hate, or other violence at an earlier time in your life, a sexual assault can add to the pain of the past.
- You may be worried that the assault will "out" you if you talk about it or report to the police. You may feel like people who are supposed to help you will judge you instead.
- You may fear you'll be seen as a traitor to your community if the perpetrator is also part of the community.
- You may fear that if you reach out for help, you will be rejected or misunderstood, which will make the hurt worse.

BARCC offers counseling services especially for members of the GLBT community. We can also refer you to other professionals with expertise that fits your needs.

At BARCC, you will be treated with respect and understanding.

Survivor legal issues

After a sexual assault, people often feel they have lost control of their lives. They are often afraid that getting involved in the criminal or civil justice system will take away more control over what happens to them.

Our legal advocates' goal is to help survivors get accurate information about their options so they can make the decisions that are right for them. Some legal issues that survivors may be concerned about include:

- **Privacy:** In Massachusetts, many laws protect the privacy of sexual assault survivors. For example, all police reports related to sexual violence are strictly confidential. In cases of rape and attempted rape, the survivor's name is kept private, including being blacked-out in written records. A survivor may also request that information like an address, telephone number, place of employment, or school be kept private. It's best to make this request as early as possible.
- **Reporting to the Police:** Filing a police report is a personal decision for you to make. Under Massachusetts law, you have rights as a victim and it is important for you to understand your legal rights and options before filing a report. BARCC legal advocates can help you understand these rights.

If you decide to file a report, you should go to the police department in the city/town where the incident occurred. A BARCC legal advocate can help you find out where to go and can accompany you to the police station.

In Massachusetts, you have fifteen years from the date of the sexual assault to file a police report. If the assault happened when you were under 18, you have 27 years since the incident to file the report. There are exceptions to these limits. A BARCC legal advocate can help you understand these exceptions and all the laws that might effect your decision to report to the police.

- **Evidence Collection:** If you want evidence collected, you must be seen in a hospital within 5 days of the assault. Our medical advocates can go with you to the hospital. The evidence kit will be held anonymously in the crime lab for up to 6 months or until you file a police report. When you file a police report it may be analyzed. If you need more then 6 months to make a decision about filing with the police you can request an extension. Our legal advocates can help you do this. Both the prosecution and the defense will have access to any results from the evidence that is collected.

- **Safety:** There are several ways to be protected from further contact with a perpetrator. We can help you understand your options.
- **Immigration status:** There are protections and services available to immigrant crime victims. We have services in Spanish, French, and Haitian Creole. If you need help in another language, please let us know.

Our legal advocates can help you with these and any other legal issues you may be facing after your assault.

