Responding to a Sexual Assault Incident

A RESOURCE GUIDE

OBJECTIVE
The purpose of this guide is to advise you of the resources available, the procedures in place, and the responsibilities you have if you are in a situation where someone discloses they have been sexually assaulted.

About Sexual Assault
Sexual assault is a violation of physical, psychological, and spiritual wellbeing. Sexual assault can leave a victim feeling unsafe, confused, and scared. When someone reports a sexual assault to you, you may help the victim by creating a safe environment and listening to them. You also have obligations as a “Responsible University Employee” under Title IX and the UWF policy on Sexual Misconduct.

Your Role as Faculty/Staff
In your role as faculty or staff, you may be perceived as someone who can lend a helping hand or be a good listener. Your expression of interest and concern may be critical factors in helping someone find appropriate assistance.

If a student or fellow employee discloses sexual assault, it is often difficult to know how to react and yet your reaction is crucial in helping them overcome this trauma and seek support. Faculty and staff members should determine for themselves their personal comfort levels with becoming involved with student problems. Becoming the main source of support can be overwhelming, frightening, and/or tiring. It is important that you know your own limitations in providing assistance and that you are aware of times when the best option is a referral. Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) and the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides consultation services to the entire UWF community and can assist you in making an effective referral. It is also important that you know and are able to communicate to students your obligations to report sexual violence to the UWF Title IX Coordinator.

CONSIDER:
- Assessing the student’s immediate safety.
- Listening without conveying judgment and be aware that victims can feel shame and anger.
- Letting them know you believe them.
- Encouraging them to get medical attention.
- Encouraging them to report the incident.
- Advising them of resources available and encourage them to use the resources.
- Advising them of your reporting obligations (if you are uncertain what your reporting obligations are, contact the Title IX Coordinator at 850-474-2175 and 850-474-2059).
- Thanking them for trusting you.

AVOID:
- Expressing judgment even when high-risk behaviors on the part of the victim were involved (e.g., intoxication).
- Pressuring the student to do anything they do not want to do, including filing a police report.
- Discouraging a medical exam even if they do not appear to have physical trauma.
- Initiating comfort in the form of physical touching (e.g., hugging).
- Asking for details of the incident.
- Promising a student that you will keep the information private.
- Comments like, “what were you wearing,” “why would you go along with someone like that,” or “you shouldn’t have . . .” are not helpful and can further victimize the victim.

FACULTY/STAFF REPORTING OBLIGATIONS and CONFIDENTIALITY

Do not INQUIRY about time, date, location or other incident details until you have informed the student of the following information:

- University faculty/staff are obligated to report the name of the student as well as the time, date and approximate location of the incident to the Title IX Coordinator, Karen Rentz (krentz@uwf.edu or 850-474-2175 and 850-474-2059).
- The University will do its utmost to protect the student’s privacy. Her/his name and other identifying information will not be released without her/his permission (unless the student is in imminent danger in which case 911 should be called whether the student consents or not).
- A community notice is possible in situations where the community is deemed at risk; the victim will be informed if this is to happen while preserving the victim’s anonymity.
- Counseling and Psychological Services can provide confidential counseling to students. Psychotherapists are not mandated to report incidents to the Title IX Coordinator. Students can be seen on an emergency and crisis basis. Call 850-474-2420, 24-hours a day to speak with a counselor.
- Employees can utilize the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), offered by Human Resources, 1-800-272-7252 (code for employees: UWF).
Checklist for Faculty/Staff
Assisting an Individual Who Disclose Sexual Assault

☐ SAFETY. Assess the immediate physical and mental safety of the student. If student appears to be in danger or crisis, contact the University Police (911 or 850-474-2415), Escambia Sherriff’s Office (911 or 850-436-9630), or Counseling and Psychological Services (850-474-2420).

☐ MEDICAL NEEDS. If emergency medical attention is required, students should call 911 or seek treatment at the closest emergency room.
  • Inform of the importance of medical care to screen/treat for injuries, sexually transmitted diseases (STIs) and pregnancy. These services can be completed at Emergency Rooms or at Urgent Care facilities as a walk-in. UWF Student Health Services offers primary care including testing for STDs and STIs by appointment at 850-474-2172.
  • FORENSIC EVIDENCE EXAM. All sexual assault victims should consider undergoing a forensic evidence exam “rape kit” as soon as possible and can be completed up to five days after the incident regardless of intent to press charges. All hospital emergency rooms are required to have specially trained Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE Nurse) available to provide these exams.
  • Inform that having a rape kit exam preserves the option to prosecute but that having the exam does NOT commit an individual to press charges. Rape kits will be held for a period of 4 years at the Escambia County Sheriff’s Office and will be available for processing if they choose to report at a later time.
  • The forensic exam collects evidence from the body and clothes of the victim. If the assault just happened, it is important to instruct the student not to wash, bathe, douche, or change clothes prior to requesting a rape kit exam. If student intends to complete a rape kit exam; have them bring a change of clothes to the hospital as their clothes will likely be taken into evidence.

☐ VICTIM ADVOCACY and COUNSELING. Advise the individual of victim’s advocacy resources available through the University and other local agencies.
  • University Counseling and Psychological Services (850-474-2420, listen to prompts)
  • Rape Crisis Center at Lakeview (850-433-7273 [RAPE], to access the 24/7 confidential hotline)
  • Employee Assistance Program (1-800-272-7252, code for employees: UWF)

☐ POLICE REPORTING. Whether or not the the individuals wishes to press charges, they can and should report the incident to police. Reasons for doing this include: 1) giving them the option of pressing charges later, 2) having an incident report on file in case the same assailant hurts someone else, and 3) making police aware of potential danger to others. Offer referral for reporting the incident to University and local authorities:
  • University Police (850-474-2415, ask for the victim advocate)
  • Escambia County Sherriff’s Office (850-436-9630)

☐ TITLE IX OFFICE. Contact the Title IX Coordinator, Karen Rentz at krentz@uwf.edu or 850-474-2175 and 850-474-2059