



RECENT SEXUAL ASSAULT

A Guide For Survivors

February 2024

If you have come across this booklet after having experienced sexual assault, know that you are not alone. There are dedicated and caring people who are here to help and support you. Be kind and understanding to yourself. Know that the sexual assault was not your fault.

You are not alone.

You are not responsible.

You are not to blame.

You are worthy.

You are strong.

Seeking medical attention after a sexual assault can be intimidating and overwhelming. This resource provides information and answers some common questions about medical care and support options following a sexual assault.

This information is general in nature and does **not** constitute legal advice.

TEL: 1-709-722-2805

TOLL-FREE/VRS: 1-833-722-2805

TEXT: 709-986-2801

EMAIL: support@journeyprojectnl.com

www.journeyproject.ca

Twitter: @JOURNEY_NL

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THINGS TO KNOW

If you are in immediate danger or an emergency situation, call 911.

A healthcare facility in Newfoundland and Labrador is required to call the police if a patient has been sexually assaulted and is under the age of 18, is a vulnerable adult in need of protection, or if a patient has sustained a gunshot or stab wound . There may be other circumstances in which hospital staff are required to report to the police. Please contact your hospital's emergency room for further information.

Depending on where you live in Newfoundland and Labrador, the process for seeking medical care for sexual assault may look different.

COMMON FEELINGS

There is no right or wrong way to feel after a sexual assault. There is a wide range of emotions and feelings you may experience. However *you* are feeling is valid.

Some common feelings *may* include anger, confusion, fear, guilt, self-blame, lack of trust, powerlessness, or hopelessness. You may feel calm or you may feel overwhelmed. You may feel confused or alert. You might feel numb. You might experience all of these things or none of these things. It is in no way an indicator of the degree of harm you experienced.

Absolutely nothing you did caused the assault. What happened to you is not your fault.

WHEN A RESPONSE IS NOT HELPFUL

If you decide you want to tell someone about the assault, how they respond can impact your healing and experience. We know that many survivors experience what is called 'secondary wounding'. Secondary wounding is any response to a disclosure that blames, shames, or in any way harms the survivor. This response might make you feel like what happened was your fault or something you should be ashamed of – it's not.

It does not matter what you were wearing, it does not matter if you were consuming drugs or alcohol, and it does not matter if you had an intimate relationship with the person who assaulted you. No one has the right to sexually assault you – ever.

You deserve to be listened to, believed, and supported.

GETTING MEDICAL ATTENTION

You always have a right to access medical attention, regardless of when an assault happens.

If you have experienced a sexual assault you may choose to see a health care professional to address medical concerns, injuries, or questions you have. There are several medical concerns you should be aware of including the possibility of physical injury, sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy. Physical injuries may be internal or not visible immediately after an assault.

When seeking medical care, your informed consent is required. To make an informed decision there are a few things that should be explained to you. This includes the type of service being provided; the limits to confidentiality clearly outlined; explanation of risks/benefits of participating; explanation of risk/benefits of not participating; being told how patient/client information is recorded, and who can see it or access it.

Every decision is yours to make.



SEXUAL ASSAULT NURSE EXAMINER

Depending on where you live in the province, some hospitals may have a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program. A sexual assault nurse examiner, or forensic nurse, is a registered nurse who is specially trained in performing comprehensive, objective assessments on patients who have been sexually assaulted.

Some hospitals in Newfoundland and Labrador may have staff who have received advanced training, or there may be staff with no advanced training. If this is the case, some hospitals may have the ability to transport you to the nearest hospital to be seen by a trained nurse.

St. Clare's Mercy Hospital in St. John's operates a SANE program through Eastern Health. It is available for people age 18 and over who have experienced a sexual assault. Even if you do not live in St. John's, individuals from anywhere in the province can go to the St. Clare's Mercy Hospital SANE site and be seen.

Western Regional Memorial Hospital has SANE trained nurses available.

St. Clare's Mercy Hospital
154 Lemarchant Rd,
St. John's NL
A1C 5B8

Emergency Department: 709-777-5502
SANE Direct Line: 709-777-5865
(available during office hours)

Western Regional Memorial Hospital
1 Brookfield Avenue
Corner Brook, NL
A2H 6J7

Emergency Department: 709-784-5524

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE HOSPITAL

When you arrive at the hospital you will be triaged for any emergency medical needs or traumatic injuries. You may be waiting at the hospital for some time, so you might want to bring a support person or comfort item(s).



VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

A volunteer from the ESV NL can accompany you to the SANE Program at St. Clare's Hospital 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can ask questions about the SANE program, request an accompaniment, and discuss your transportation or accessibility needs by connecting with an ESV NL volunteer.

You do not need to go through this process alone.

To connect with a volunteer, reach out to the ESV NL 24/7 Support and Information Line:

CALL: 1-800-726-2743

TEXT: 1-800-726-2743 (Monday and Wednesday 2:00-8:00pm and Friday 12:00-8:00pm)

Sexual Assault Response & Advocacy (SARA) operates a 24-hour telephone response line offering support and information to people in Corner Brook and surrounding areas who have experienced sexual assault. Volunteers with SARA provide inclusive and essential services to local individuals aged 16 and up. Volunteers can provide accompaniment to the hospital and police station.

CALL: 709-216-HELP (3257)

TEXT: 709-216-HELP (3257)

SEXUAL ASSAULT EVIDENCE KIT (SAEK)

You may want to have a Sexual Assault Evidence Kit (SAEK) done. A SAEK is used by health care professionals to collect forensic evidence after a sexual assault. Not every hospital in Newfoundland and Labrador has a SAEK on site. However, a hospital should be able to obtain one from the nearest RCMP or RNC detachment.

If there is something you are unsure of or not comfortable with, you have the right to ask questions, take a break, or say no. The health care professional should explain every step along the way, pause or take a break when you need it, and answer any questions you may have. You may choose to have some parts of the exam completed but not others. You are in charge of which parts of the exam you consent to.

EVIDENCE COLLECTION

Forensic evidence collection may include different approaches to look for injury or collect specimens that could be used for evidence. How evidence is collected may also depend on what equipment is available at the hospital, and what level of training the health care professional has received.

Evidence collection may include collecting the clothes you were wearing during the assault, collecting debris and foreign material, taking photographs, swabs, blood and urine samples, etc. You may want to bring a change of clothes with you, in case the clothes you are wearing are collected for evidence.

The health care professional may ask if you are comfortable with the following exams: physical, pelvic, genital, or anal. You may choose to have one, some or none of these exams performed. If available, the health care professional may use a special light called an Alternate Light Source (ALS) that can look for bodily fluids or bruising.

Evidence is best collected within **five days** of an assault. You may be provided with medications to prevent pregnancy and common sexually transmitted infections (e.g., gonorrhoea and chlamydia).

For evidence collection, it is recommended that you do not do any of the following:

- **Shower or bathe**
- **Change or throw away your clothes**
- **Eat or drink**
- **Brush your teeth**
- **Wash your hands**
- **Comb your hair**
- **Disturb the scene of the assault**

However, it is ok if you have done any of these things – you didn't do anything wrong. Many survivors often want to shower, change, and brush their teeth after an assault has occurred and it does not mean that an examination and evidence collection cannot take place.



COMMON QUESTIONS

How long will my SAEK be stored?

That depends. Some hospitals may have the ability to store SAEKs on site, while others will send the SAEK to the nearest RNC or RCMP detachment for storage.

The RCMP can store SAEKs indefinitely. However, the RCMP must attach a name to the SAEK in order to store it. You aren't required to provide a statement, but the SAEK belongs to the police, and a file is now created.

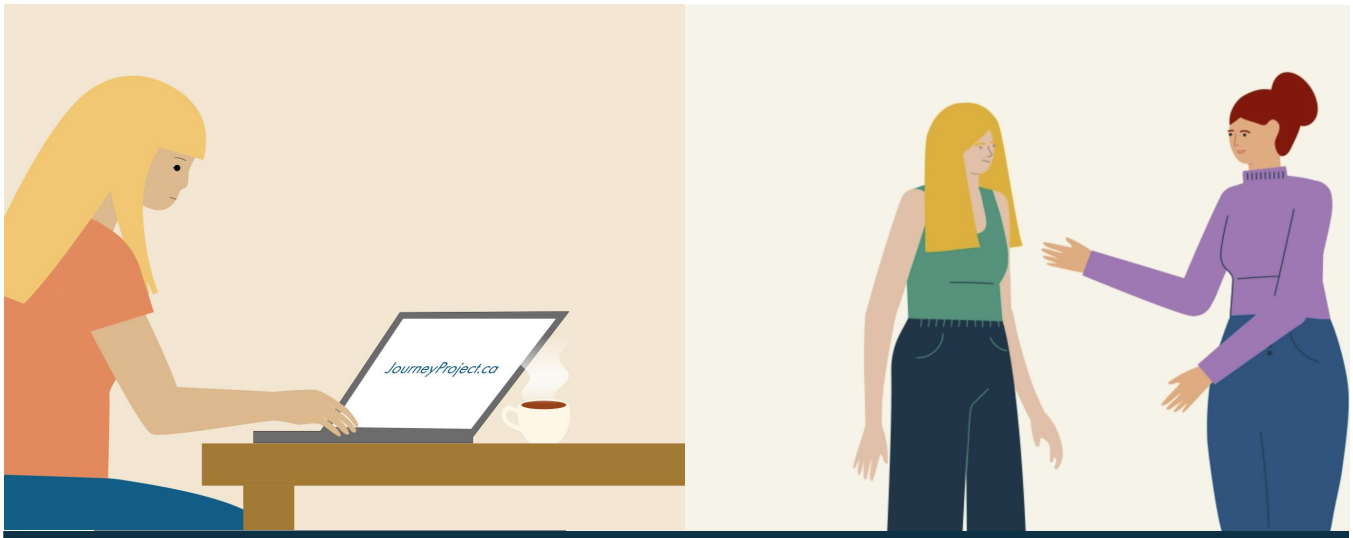
In St. John's, the RNC can store SAEKs indefinitely. Your kit is stored anonymously; a file number is attached to your kit, but none of your identifying information is given to the police.

Is there a time limit on reporting sexual assault to the police?

No. There is no time limit on when you can report a sexual assault to the police. If you change your mind at a later date you can still report.

Can The Journey Project support me?

Absolutely. The Journey Project is available to anyone who has experienced sexual assault and is navigating a legal process or wondering about their legal options. This can absolutely include the SAEK process and any ongoing support you might need.



IF YOU ARE SUPPORTING SOMEONE WHO EXPERIENCED A RECENT SEXUAL ASSAULT

Ensure the person you are supporting is safe and not in immediate danger or requiring emergency medical care.

Whether you are a friend, family member, or service provider who is supporting someone who has experienced sexual assault, there are tools and resources available to you. Our staff are available to answer any questions you may have, provide information and supportive resources.

If someone you know tells you they have been sexually assaulted, supportive responses may include:

- **Thank you for telling me and trusting me with your story.**
- **I'm here to listen and support you in any way I can.**
- **I believe you; this was not your fault.**
- **How can I support you in this moment?**

How you respond may have a great impact on the person you are supporting. They have trusted *you* with their experience and story; it is a privilege to provide care and empathy. Take a deep breath, remain calm, and know that this person has trusted you for a reason.

Take care of yourself.

If you are in need of immediate support, you can speak with a volunteer on the ESV NL's 24/7 Support and Information Line at 1-800-726-2743.

To reach a Legal Support Navigator at the Journey Project, Monday to Friday 9:00am – 4:00pm
TEL: 1-709-722-2805
TOLL-FREE/VRS: 1-833-722-2805

EMAIL: support@journeyprojectnl.com
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The Journey Project exists to strengthen justice supports for survivors of sexual violence and intimate partner violence.

The Journey Project was founded in 2017 as a collaborative initiative of Public Legal Information Association of NL and End Sexual Violence NL.

Journey supports survivors of any age and any gender and is provincial in scope. This means people living anywhere in Newfoundland and Labrador can access our services. It also means that anyone who has experienced sexual violence and/or intimate partner violence in Newfoundland and Labrador can access our services – even if they are living in another province, or another country.

The Journey Project team is grateful to every survivor who has informed this project and our work.

www.journeyproject.ca

