



'It's happened to me' – information for adults who have been sexually assaulted

This fact sheet provides an overview of support and options available if you have been sexually assaulted.

For more detailed information on any of the topics below, please see our SASS booklet '*What are my options?*' (available on our website, or by contacting SASS).

What is sexual assault?

Sexual assault is any sexual act that is uninvited or unwanted, including any form of sexual contact that you weren't able to give consent to (for example if you were too drunk to consent, asleep or otherwise incapacitated).

Sexual assault includes a range of unwanted acts including rape (penetration of the anus, vagina or mouth with a penis, fingers, tongue or an object) or attempted rape; sexual touching, fondling and kissing; being forced to watch or engage in pornography, including being made to pose for pictures or videos; being made to perform sexual acts, participate in masturbation or stimulate another person; having another person show you their genitals or 'flash' at you; forced prostitution or being made to have sex with another person.

If you have been sexually assaulted you might be feeling some or all of the following:

- Shock and disbelief – 'I never thought this could happen to me'
- Fear – 'Will the perpetrator hurt me again?'
- Anger – 'How dare they do this to me?'
- Shame – 'How can I talk about this with anyone?'
- Guilt – 'If only I hadn't...'
- Betrayal – 'But I trusted them'
- Confusion – 'What should I do now?'
- Numb – 'I feel so hollow'

- Worried about your future – 'Will my life ever be the same?'
- **Feeling unworthy**

These are all completely normal reactions. Many survivors of sexual assault also blame themselves, and question whether they could have done something to prevent the assault.

Remember - if you have been sexually assaulted it is not your fault. The only person responsible for the assault is the perpetrator.

If you have survived a sexual assault you are a strong, resourceful person who has the right to be treated with respect.

If you have been assaulted, options available to you are:

- Phone or face-to-face support with a SASS counsellor to talk through options in more detail.
- Immediate medical attention/information at the hospital without physical examination (e.g. for emergency contraception).
- Medical examination at the hospital.
- Forensic medical examination at the hospital.
- Making a police statement or informal report.
- Ongoing support from SASS (for example for counselling, advocacy or support through the criminal justice process).
- Any combination of the above.
- Taking no action.

The Sexual Assault Support Service (SASS)

SASS is a free and confidential service for people who have been sexually assaulted, as well as their families and support people. SASS provides information about support, medical and reporting options, and can help to arrange service responses based on your decisions. If you have been recently sexually assaulted, SASS can:

- Provide you with information regarding the choices available to you (eg; emergency contraception, STD treatment/ prevention, forensic medical examination, medical examination, police report and/or statement, or any combination of these).
- Provide you with practical crisis support, including facilitating hospital and police responses.
- Provide you with follow-up counselling.
- Help connect you with other services you might need.
- Support you through any court proceedings.

If you were sexually assaulted in the past, SASS can:

- Provide you with crisis and/or ongoing counselling.
- Assist you to make an informal report or a formal statement to police.
- Help connect you with other services you might need.
- Support you through any court proceedings.

The Sexual Assault Medical Service (SAMS) Unit

SASS works with a dedicated team of on-call doctors and nursing staff at the Royal Hobart Hospital Sexual Assault Medical Services (SAMS) Unit who provide forensic and medical examinations to victims of recent sexual assault.

What is the SAMS unit?

The SAMS unit is located within the Royal Hobart Hospital. It has a private and confidential room that is kept locked and is only used for examinations conducted as a result of sexual assault. No examination will be performed unless you are willing to proceed, except in a medical emergency. The choice is yours. You can still use SAMS service even if you decide that you don't want to report the assault to the police.

Forensic Medical Examinations

A forensic examination can only be performed at the SAMS Unit. The purpose of this examination is to gather evidence in case you want to make a formal statement about the assault.

Whilst a forensic medical examination can't prove or disprove whether a sexual assault has occurred, it is very important in gathering evidence that may be used later if the case goes to court. You will be required to sign a specific consent form before you have this examination. As an adult, you can decide to have an examination with or without contacting police.

Ideally forensic examinations are performed within 72 hours of the sexual assault, but they can be performed up to a week later. The more time there is between the assault and the examination, the less likely it is that useful evidence will be found.

Reporting the assault

Tasmania Police are responsible for the detection of crime. They do this by investigating reported crime and gathering evidence from victims, witnesses, suspects, offenders and other physical and/or scientific sources. The CIB and/or Victim Crime Unit Senior officers undertake sexual assault investigations.

Although sexual assault is a crime, the choice about whether to proceed with a formal complaint to the Police always rests with you. There are no time limits for reporting sexual assault to police.

Your rights

You have certain rights that all services need to respect. These are:

- To be provided with information, support and advocacy when making decisions about legal, medical and support services.
- To be treated in a sympathetic and constructive manner, respecting your personal health, rights, dignity and safety.
- To be accompanied by a support person of your choice.
- To confidentiality and privacy.
- To make your own choices about having or refusing any form of care or treatment.
- To give informed consent for any procedure.
- To withdraw consent for any procedure at any time without duress, even after giving informed consent.

If your case is being investigated by the police, you also have some additional rights:

- To be informed if the charges are dropped or reduced and to be given reasons for the decision.
- To be informed, upon request, about the progress of the case.
- To have a support person in court.

Sexual Assault Support Service

Ground Floor, 31-33 Tower Road

New Town, 7008

03 6231 0044 (9am–5pm, Mon–Fri)

admin@sass.org.au | www.sass.org.au

24 hour sexual assault response and

counselling service: **1800 MYSUPPORT**

1800 697 877

Sexual Assault Support Service (SASS) Inc. receives funding from the Tasmanian State Government and the Federal Australian Government. SASS holds Quality Improvement Council (QIC) accreditation.