This fact sheet describes how to respond to sexual assault as a victim or as a bystander; important reporting options; and how to access care.

**Can you respond to sexual assault?**

Learning what to do if you or someone you know is sexually assaulted can prepare you to take action, protect yourself from further harm, and begin healing. What reporting options are available to sexual assault victims? What should a victim do immediately after sexual assault? How do victims get assistance to help in recovery?

If you are sexually assaulted, the steps you take immediately following an attack can be crucial to preserving your reporting options and ensuring medical evidence is available for investigators.

**TAKE action immediately following sexual assault.**

1. Get to a safe place
2. Call the police, if needed.
3. Call a SARC to request information and services
   (A SARC will discuss your reporting options and help you get the care/services you need.)
4. Seek immediate medical attention
5. Preserve any evidence now (DNA evidence degrades quickly and should be preserved immediately.)

⇒ **Do NOT:**
   - Bathe, douche or urinate
   - Eat, chew gum, smoke, or drink
   - Gargle or brush teeth
   - Wash clothing or sheets
   - Clean, rearrange, or remove items from the scene of the assault

6. Write down the details about the offender and the sexual assault.
7. Select a (restricted or unrestricted) reporting option
   (military only).

A SARC describes reporting options and coordinates services, as follows:

- Assigns a Victim Advocate for support
- Refers medical services for treatment and counseling
- Initiates an Special Victims Counsel (SVC) assignment, if desired
- Provides ongoing case management services

**Preserving evidence is important.**

Even if a victim initially chooses restricted reporting, evidence will be kept for at least five (5) years and an investigation can be initiated at any time at the victim’s request.

**What immediate actions should be taken if sexually assaulted?**

If you are a victim of sexual assault, don’t blame yourself for a crime committed against you, and know you don’t have to deal with this alone.

**How do I preserve the evidence?**

At your request, allow for collection of forensic evidence. It could be very important in potential prosecutorial (legal) proceedings.

**How does the SARC or Victim Advocate (VA) help?**

A SARC describes reporting options and coordinates services (Victim Advocate, Medical, Special Victims Counsel, and case management)

**Who is my SARC?**


**Who is my SARC? (Call your SARC after securing your safety.)**

Locate and bookmark your SARC contact information, SARC at Office of Work-Life - Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program (SAPR), [http://www.uscg.mil/SAPR/sapr_contact.asp](http://www.uscg.mil/SAPR/sapr_contact.asp).
A victim of sexual assault needs care and may develop the following symptoms:

- Withdrawal
- Hyper-sexuality
- Irritability
- Inability to focus
- Emotional swings
- Sleeplessness
- Increased alcohol use

A Victim Advocate (VA) will be made available to sexual assault victims. The Victim Advocate is a trained volunteer who supports and informs victims; acts as a support person during recovery, investigative, and medical processes. (Note: After the initial meeting with the assigned VA, a victim does not have to accept the assignment.)

Special Victims’ Counsel (SVC): Effective 15 July 2013, Coast Guard active duty and reserve personnel who report they are a victim of sexual assault will be eligible to be assigned a Coast Guard judge advocate serving as a Special Victims’ Counsel (SVC). SVCs are active duty judge advocates who have recieved Victim Advocates (VA) training and will provide legal assistance to victims in a confidential attorney-client relationship throughout the investigation and prosecution processes. SVC's report to the Office of Special Victims’ Counsel (OSVC) and the Deputy Judge Advocate of the Coast Guard in Washington D.C. This means that no one in a victim's chain of command or the chain of command of the alleged offender will influence an SVC in providing legal support to a victim. Sexual assault victims can contact their local Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC) to make a request for an SVC.

Victims also have access to:

- A local Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC)
- Military health services for medical support
- Local rape crisis centers
- CG Support (CGSUPRT) Services
- USCG Legal Services
- USCG Investigative Service

Additional resources

- SAFE Helpline at 1.877.995.5247, https://www.safehelpline.org (search local service providers
- National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1.800.656.4673
- Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN), ( http://www.rainn.org/get-help (secure instant messaging and search for local help)
- Hope for Healing, http://www.hopeforhealing.org

USCG Sexual Assault Resources

- SARC, http://www.uscg.mil/SAPR/sapr_contact.asp (for contact information)
The Coast Guard is committed to ensuring victims of sexual assault are protected, treated with dignity and respect, and provided ongoing support. In addition, the Coast Guard is dedicated to ensuring that persons who commit crimes are held accountable.

Reporting options apply when sexual assault is reported or alleged and the victim or accused is a Coast Guard or other active duty military service member, Coast Guard Reserve member on active duty or in a drill status.

CG members and military members who are sexually assaulted during active duty service, regardless of when the incident may have occurred, have two reporting options as victims:

**Unrestricted Reports**
- Not confidential
- Activates victim support services: counseling, advocacy, and medical care services
- Activates an official formal Coast Guard Investigative Services (CGIS) investigation to pursue (and hold accountable) the alleged offender
- A victim is not required to participate with the CGIS investigation, but should understand that the investigation will still proceed.
- A victim can request geographic separation from the alleged offender.
- For more about reporting options, contact your SARC or see Commandant Instruction 1754.10 (series).

**Restricted Reports**
- Confidential
- Activates victim services (counseling, advocacy, medical care services) without initiating an official investigation
- Can be made only to Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC), Health Services Provider (HCP), or Victim Advocate (VA)
- A victim who files a restricted report can still get a forensic medical exam
- A military spouse sexually assaulted by his/her active duty spouse can file a restricted report
- In some instances, if you are in a dangerous unsafe situation, you cannot keep the report confidential/restricted

Once the command learns (intentionally or accidently) of the sexual assault, the report becomes unrestricted and is no longer confidential.

It is very important, that you first contact your SARC for making a confidential, Restricted Report. SARCs and VAs are required to maintain confidentiality and can be penalized if they breach your confidentiality.

This means that the CO of a command cannot question the VA’s about either restricted or unrestricted reports.
**What are the reporting options and services for civilian victims?**

Sexual assault may be reported to a unit commander or watchstander, SARC, VA, HCP, CGIS, or local law enforcement.

**Civilian** employees, dependents and civilian visitors on a Coast Guard Unit may report a sexual assault to:
- A unit commander or watchstander
- A Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC), Victim Advocate (VA), or Health Care Provider (HCP)
- CGIS or local law enforcement

In cases where the victim is a civilian employee, dependent, or civilian visitor, **CG personnel** receiving the report of assault shall contact the CGIS and cognizant SARC, who will ensure that the victim is provided initial crisis intervention and is then referred to civilian resources.

If sexually assaulted by a military member, the civilian victim can receive medical care without disclosing the assault. But once the assault is reported to the Coast Guard or law enforcement, an investigation will be initiated. An offender who is active duty will receive legal support.

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**Civilian resources for immediate crisis intervention and support**

- CG Support, [www.cgsuprt.com](http://www.cgsuprt.com), at **1.855.247.8778**
- SARC, [http://www.uscg.mil/SAPR/sapr_contact.asp](http://www.uscg.mil/SAPR/sapr_contact.asp) (for contact information)
- National Sexual Assault Hotline at **1.800.656.4673** [http://www.rainn.org/get-help](http://www.rainn.org/get-help) (local help & secure instant messaging)
- Hope for Healing, [http://www.hopeforhealing.org](http://www.hopeforhealing.org)

Would you be prepared if a sexual assault victim came to you for help? What if you felt that someone was in danger of being sexually assaulted? Or if you witnessed an attack? Would you know what to do? Do you know the appropriate measures to prevent sexual assault?

If you witness an assault or a potential assault, become an **active bystander**, look for safe and effective ways to intervene. If you are in a situation to act, remember these ABCs:

- **Assess the situation for safety**: Ensure the victim’s safety and your own safety. Avoid violence. Call the police if the situation is too risky to intervene, they are specifically trained for such situations.

- **Be with others**: Don’t intervene alone. Approach both the victim and offender in a courteous manner but be firm. By working with others, you will likely have greater influence over the outcome, as well as increased safety.

- **Care for the victim**: Even if you perceive a behavior as an assault, be sure to verify this perception by asking the victim how they feel about the behavior. (Be aware that if alcohol (or drug) use is involved, the victim may not be able to consent to or appraise the nature of the behavior.) Also, ask whether they need medical care, want to talk to a Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC), or need help getting home.

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**The ABCs of Bystander Intervention**

**Assess the situation for safety — Be with others — Care for the victim**
What do I do if someone tells me they’ve been sexually assaulted?

All members of the Coast Guard (who are not able to accept restricted reports) are required to report both suspected and actual sexual assault occurrences as such acts are a violation of the law, as well as, the Coast Guard’s Core Values of honor, respect, and devotion to duty.

If alcohol is involved, do I risk an alcohol incident by reporting a sexual assault?

If you intervene to prevent a sexual assault and alcohol was involved . . . commands are supportive of their members doing the right thing . . .

What if I’d like to be more involved in assisting sexual assault victims?

A volunteer opportunity as a Victim Advocate (VA) may be an option for you.

If someone tells you that they have been sexually assaulted:
- Make sure the victim is safe.
- Listen to the victim.
- Ask what you can do to help.
- Ask the victim if he or she needs medical care.
- Transport the victim to receive assistance (such as to the SARC or to medical care), if able and if requested.
- Contact a SARC, Health Care Provider (HCP), or Victim Advocate (VA).
- Don’t be judgmental; set aside your own beliefs about what may or may not have happened.
- Offer to stay with the victim.

All service members (except VA’s/HS’s) are required to report rumors/reports of sexual assault. Every member has an affirmative duty to intervene in a developing situation . . . They will be . . . held accountable for not taking action when doing so would prevent an assault. (COMDTINST M1754.10D)

If alcohol is involved, fear of an alcohol incident is one of the reasons people do not report a sexual assault. Other reasons for not reporting include: fear that they will not be believed; that their career will be affected adversely; or that they will be blamed for it by other unit members.

However, if you report a sexual assault and collateral misconduct involving alcohol was involved, commands take that into consideration and will typically not deal with the alcohol issue until after the sexual assault issue has been addressed. If you intervene to prevent a sexual assault and alcohol was involved in the situation, commands are supportive of their members doing the right thing to help their shipmates out of a potentially serious situation and will not automatically document an alcohol incident.

A volunteer opportunity as a Victim Advocate (VA) may be an option for you. A Victim Advocate is a trained volunteer that gives support and information to victims, acts as a companion during a victim’s recovery and during medical and investigative processes, and helps to ensure the victim’s safety.

Interested? If you are interested, contact a SARC for details. Requirements for potential VA’s include, at least two years remaining at your unit, command endorsement, the ability to become a credentialed Victim Advocate, and the ability to pass a background screening. As a Victim Advocate, you have the maturity to maintain confidentiality and can demonstrate good communication and interpersonal skills.

In conclusion:
- You must be able to prevent and respond to sexual assault.
- Take precautions, especially when alcohol is involved.
- Use the Coast Guard’s reporting options as required.
- Help others in risky situations by assessing the situation, being with others, and caring for the victim.
- Listen to victims, make sure they are safe, and to the best of your ability help them get the assistance they want and need.