

Women's Health Care Centre Hours & Contact Information

Monday through Friday
8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
and 1:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Peterborough Regional Health Centre
One Hospital Drive,
Peterborough, ON K9J 7C6

telephone: 705-743-4132
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Form #XXXX, Revised September, 2021



Caring for Yourself

A guide to recovery
following sexual assault

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What to do when you've been assaulted

"I can't even think straight.

"I don't know who to call or what to do."

It's hard to think clearly when you've just been sexually assaulted. You may find yourself doing things that you would not usually expect yourself to do. This can be a very confusing and overwhelming time.

You may need some help answering some very difficult questions, like:

- **What kind of medical care do I need?**
- **Should I report the assault to the police?**
- **How do I get the support I need?**

If you don't know who to call or where to turn for help, visit www.sexualassaultsupport.ca/support/ and get contact information for a centre near you. This includes 24 hour sexual assault crisis line or the nearest hospital based Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Care and Treatment Centre. These services will provide you with emotional support as well as information about medical care and what's involved in reporting an assault to the police.

What kind of medical care do I need?

After a sexual assault, you may be worried about sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, or any injuries you may have received during the assault. You may decide you want to be tested for sexually-transmitted diseases, to take medication to prevent pregnancy, or to be examined to see if you have any physical injuries.

Most hospitals and communities have Sexual Assault Care and Treatment Centres with staff who have been specially trained to care for people who have been sexually assaulted. It's a good idea to call your local sexual assault crisis line or hospital emergency department before you leave home so that they can give you information about where you can get the care you need.

Some people decide not to get medical care because they think the hospital staff will report the assault to the police. You need to know that the hospital staff cannot report the assault to the police without your permission.

Should I report the assault to the police?

Some people know right away that they want to report the assault to the police. Others know right away that they don't want to report the assault. Others aren't sure what they want to do. You may need additional information before you make this important decision. For example, you may want to know what is involved in making a statement, how decisions are made about whether the case goes to court, what's involved in testifying in court, and so on. A sexual assault counsellor can help you to explore your options and to answer any questions that you may have.

"I don't know anything about the legal process"

Under Canadian law, there are three types of sexual assault:

Sexual assault occurs when "any form of sexual activity is forced upon another person without that person's consent" (with no physical injury).

Sexual assault with a weapon occurs when a person is sexually assaulted by someone who;

- a) has a weapon or threatens to use a weapon, imitation or real;
- b) threatens to cause bodily harm to a third person (e.g., a child or friend);
- c) causes bodily harm to that person; and
- d) is party to the offense with any other person:

Aggravated sexual assault occurs when "a person wounds, maims, disfigures, brutally beats or endangers the life of a person during a sexual assault."

Depending on the circumstances of your assault, the person who assaulted you could be charged with more than one crime. If, for example, you were forced into a car and then taken to another location and sexually assaulted, the person who assaulted you could be charged with both kidnapping and sexual assault.

Don't allow anyone to pressure you to make a decision about legal matters before you're ready. You need to be given enough time to make the decision that's right for you.

How do I get the support I need?

“My way of dealing with the assault was to throw myself into my work. I didn’t want to talk to anyone about it: not family, not friends, no one. I now know that I needed to get my feelings out, but at the time, I just wanted to retreat into a cocoon where I could feel safe again.”

“I spent hours talking to my sister about what had happened. They didn’t really understand what I’d been through, but they listened to me. That’s all I really needed – a listening ear.”

As much as you may want to avoid thinking about what has happened to you, it’s important to seek out the help and support you need. This is a way of taking care of yourself. It can also help to determine how well you are able to recover from the assault.

Talking about the assault can take you past the self-blame that some people feel and help you to start the healing process. Some people who have been assaulted choose to seek out the services of a professional counsellor to help them work through their feelings about the assault. You can find such help by contacting your local sexual assault centre, community mental health agency, or counsellors and therapists in your community.

Other people prefer to talk to friends and family members about the assault. If you think you would like to discuss the sexual assault with a friend or family member, it’s important to think about the best person to tell. You might want to ask yourself the following questions when you’re making this decision:

- Would this person respect my privacy?
- Would this person listen without blaming me for what happened?
- Would this person feel like they should tell me what to do?
- Would this person be prepared to support me during this difficult time in my life?

How you may be feeling

“I remember sitting in the examining room at the hospital and thinking, ‘This can’t be happening to me. There must be some mistake.’”

“For the longest time, I was totally numb. I think I was too afraid to allow myself to feel anything.”

If you have been sexually assaulted, you may be surprised by your emotional reactions. You may be alarmed by the intensity of your feelings or shocked by how calm you feel.

“I was so embarrassed and so ashamed. When I got back home from the hospital, I stood in the shower for hours. I couldn’t make myself feel clean again.”

There’s no right or wrong way to feel after you’ve been sexually assaulted. The emotions you are experiencing are the right ones for you.

“I spent the first few days crying, and then I got really angry. I was enraged that he would do this to me. I trusted him!”

“I feel like this is all my fault.”

Some people who have been sexually assaulted have nightmares or feel like they are reliving the assault. This is a common experience as your brain tries to process what happened to you. Some strategies that might help include:

- Sleep with a nightlight
- If you wake up from a nightmare, remind yourself that you are safe now
- If you feel like you’re reliving the assault, bring yourself back to the present by telling yourself today’s date, reminding yourself that you are safe now, and using the grounding techniques on the back of this booklet.

You may feel that what has happened to you is your fault - that you did something to cause the assault. You didn’t. You did not make this happen.

Recovering from sexual assault

This booklet has been written to provide you with some of the information you may need to take care of yourself if you have been sexually assaulted. As you read it, you will get some ideas about the things you need to think about and what you might expect as you begin the process of recovery.

What is sexual assault?

“Could what happened to me really be sexual assault?”

The term sexual assault is used to describe any form of sexual touching that happens without your consent. You have been sexually assaulted if someone forces you to kiss or fondle them; to have anal, oral, or vaginal intercourse; or to participate in any other type of sexual activity without your consent.

Sexual assault happens to people of all genders and in all walks of life. You can be sexually assaulted in your home, at your workplace, or on the street. You can be assaulted by a trusted friend, a close relative, or a complete stranger. There’s no such thing as a “typical” sexual assault.

Making a new beginning

“Will I ever feel safe again?”

It may take time and energy to heal after you have been sexually assaulted. Don’t expect yourself to feel better right away. Be patient with yourself and give yourself the time you need to figure out how this experience has affected you. In the days following the assault, you may find yourself experiencing a range of physical and emotional reactions, including:

- A feeling of being lost, alone and out of touch with the rest of the world
- A belief that no one understands what you are experiencing
- Confusion or an inability to think clearly
- A change in eating habits and/or nausea
- Fatigue
- Changes in your sleeping patterns
- Headaches and tension
- A feeling of being unclean
- A sense of grief and loss
- Not being able to stop thinking about the assault
- A change in the way you feel about sex
- An unwillingness to be touched by anyone
- An inability to trust others
- Feelings of fear, such as a fear of being alone or going out at night
- Nervousness and anxiety
- A lack of self-confidence.

It’s important to recognize that the emotions that you are feeling are part of the healing process. These reactions can help you to understand how the sexual assault has affected you. Taking the time to understand these reactions is an important part of the recovery process.

When you’ve been sexually assaulted, it’s important to take care of yourself, to seek out support, and to obtain answers to any questions you may still have after reading this booklet. While the journey to recovery isn’t made in a day, a week, or a month, with support and caring from friends, family, and your community, you will begin to feel better again.

Taking care of yourself

There are lots of ways to take care of yourself, what works for one person might not work for another. The following list gives some examples, try to find something that works for you.

Grounding & Self-Soothing Strategies

Grounding strategies help to bring you back to the present moment. Self-Soothing strategies help you manage overwhelming emotions.

- Remind yourself of the date, remind yourself that you are safe now (if this is true, if it's not refer back to your safety plan).
- Put your feet firmly on the ground.
- Rub your palms, clap your hands, focus on sounds to bring you to the present.
- Look at art or photos you find visually appealing.
- Listen to music, make a playlist of songs that you find soothing or empowering.
- Put essential oils in a diffuser, focus on the smell.
- Have some tea or coffee, focus on the taste and temperature.
- Hold a fuzzy blanket, cuddle a pet, hold a stone.

Self-Care

- Try to get enough sleep and to rest when you need it
- Remember to eat regular meals
- Let the people in your life know what you need (space, someone to listen, practical supports)

24 Hour Crisis Lines

- Kawartha Sexual Assault Centre - 1-866-298-7778
- Four County Crisis - 705-745-6484

Information and Support in Your Community

Brantford	Brant Community Healthcare System	519-751-5544 x. 4449
Brockville	Brockville General Hospital	613-345-3881
Burlington	Nina's Place, Joseph Brant Hospital	905-632-3737 x. 5708
Chatham	Chatham-Kent Health Alliance	519-352-6400 x. 6382
Cornwall	Cornwall Community Hospital	613-932-3300 x. 4202
Dryden	Dryden Regional Health Centre	807-223-7427
Durham	Region Lakeridge Health, Oshawa	905-576-8711 x. 3286
Guelph	Guelph General Hospital	519-837-6440 x. 2758
Hamilton	Hamilton Health Sciences, McMaster University Medical Centre	905-521-2100 x. 73557
Kenora	Lake of the Woods District Hospital	807-468-9861 x. 2428
Kingston	Kingston General Hospital	613-549-6666 x. 4880
Lanark County	Perth & Smiths Falls District Hospital	613-283-2330 x. 1258
London	St. Joseph's Health Centre	519-646-6100 x. 65007
Mississauga	Trillium Health Partners	905-848-7580 x. 2548
North Bay	North Bay regional Health Centre	705-474-8600 x. 4478
Orangeville	Headwaters health Care Centre	519-941-2702 x. 2519
Orillia	Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital	1-877-377-7438
Ottawa	The Ottawa Hospital, Civic Campus Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario	613-798-5555 x. 13770 613-737-7600 x. 2939
Owen Sound	Grey Bruce Health Care Services	519-376-2121 x. 2458
Peterborough	Peterborough Regional Health Centre	705-743-4132
Renfrew	Renfrew Victoria Hospital	613-432-4851 x. 818
Sarnia	Bluewater Health	519-464-4522
Sault Ste. Marie	Sault Area Hospital	705-759-5143
Scarborough	The Scarborough Hospital, Birchmount Campus	416-495-2555
Sioux Lookout	Meno Ya Win Health Centre	807-737-6565
St. Catherines	Niagara Health System, St. Catherine's Site	905-378-4647 x. 45300
Sudbury	Ramsey Lake health Centre, Health Sciences North	705-675-4743
Thunder Bay	Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre	807-684-6751
Toronto	Women's College Hospital The Hospital for Sick Children (SCAN)	416-323-6040 416-813-6275
Trenton	Quinte Health Care, Trenton General Hospital	613-392-2540 x. 5024
Waterloo Region	St. Mary's General Hospital	519-749-6994
Windsor	Windsor Regional Hospital	519-255-2234
York Region	Mackenzie Health	1-800-521-6004
ON Network of Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Centres		416-323-7327

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Caring for a Friend or Family Member After Sexual Assault

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“I want to help, but I don’t know what to do or say. I’m afraid of making her feel worse.”

You may experience some powerful emotions when you learn that your friend or family member has been sexually assaulted. You may feel anger and sadness that this has happened to someone that you care about, guilt that you weren’t able to do something to prevent the assault, and confusion about what you can do to help.

“I feel so helpless because I wasn’t able to protect them. I feel like I let her down somehow.”

It’s important for you to understand that a person who has been sexually assaulted may experience some or all of the following:

- A feeling of being lost, alone and out of touch with the rest of the world
- A belief that no one understands what you are experiencing
- Confusion or an inability to think clearly
- A change in eating habits and/or nausea
- Fatigue
- Changes in your sleeping patterns
- Headaches and tension
- A feeling of being unclean
- A sense of grief and loss
- Not being able to stop thinking about the assault
- A change in the way you feel about sex
- An unwillingness to be touched by anyone
- An inability to trust others
- Feelings of fear, such as a fear of being alone or going out at night
- Nervousness and anxiety
- A lack of self-confidence

“I feel so awkward talking to them about something so personal, but I know they need my support.”

Your friend or family member may need help and support in redeveloping her trust in the world around her. Building a new sense of trust and safety is one of the most difficult steps in recovering from sexual assault.

Their reaction to the sexual assault may be strong enough to lead to difficulties in your relationship with them. You may feel hurt and upset by their new-found distrust or detachment from you and angry that this situation has occurred at all. Try to be patient and gentle with them as they struggle to come to terms with the assault. Support their efforts to make changes and help them to find the resources they need.

It’s important to take care of yourself, too, during this difficult time. You may find it helpful to talk to a counsellor about your feelings as you support your friend or family member.

For additional emotional support and information, contact your 24 hour sexual assault crisis line (listed in the front of your phone book), or the nearest Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Care and Treatment Centre.