

Healing Journey

**Sexual Violence Survivor
Support Program**



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Written by: Leah Healey
CSFS Health and Wellness Program
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Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is a broad term that describes any violence, physical or psychological, that is carried out through sexual means or targets sexuality. It arises from attitudes, beliefs, and justifications in those beliefs to belittle or dehumanise the person experiencing the sexual violence. It is a form of power and control that happens more frequently than one might assume, as survivors are often silenced through fear, intimidation, violence, threats, or other forms of coercion. Eighty percent of the time, the accused is known to the survivor as a friend, family member, intimate partner, person of power, or acquaintance. Sexual violence is a negative experience that can happen to anyone at any point and inhibit their ability to control what happens. Experiences of sexual violence can also change a person's outlook on who they are, their ability to trust others, and their personal boundaries. This can leave survivors feeling alone and as though they have no options or anyone to turn to. Talking to someone can help with working through the traumatic experience and moving towards healing.

Sexual violence is used as an umbrella term for all-encompassing sexual violence experiences. Sexual assault is defined under the Criminal Code of Canada as any "unwanted sexual act done by one person to another or sexual activity without one person's consent or voluntary agreement." The Criminal Code further details the crime of sexual assault in terms of levels as they relate to the degree of force used in the sexual assault (Department of Justice Canada, 2010).

Sexual harassment is intimidation through comment or gesture, bullying or coercion of a sexual nature, unwelcome or inappropriate comments, or promises of rewards in exchange for sexual favours. Sexual harassment is unwanted, often coercive, sexual behaviour directed by one person towards another. Sexual harassment can progress to sexual assault when non-consensual touch becomes involved (Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton, 2023).

What is Consent?

Consent is a mutual agreement giving permission to engage in sexual interactions. It is enthusiastic, informed, and ongoing, enabling communication to inform individuals of whether they would like to move forward or not with the sexual interaction, as consent should never be implied. Consent cannot be given when coerced, threatened, forced, asleep, or under the influence. Giving consent once does not mean that you are consenting to all sexual activities; it is something that is required in every situation, even if you are in a relationship or married and have given consent in the past. It is also alright to change your mind at any time, both at the start or during the sexual activity, as individuals may not be aware of what they are consenting to. Everyone has the right to refuse any unwanted sexual activities, and if someone changes their mind, the sexual activity should stop.

Consent is not silence, passivity, immobility, or a lack of resistance. Consenting to sexual activity is a decision made without pressure, manipulation, or being under the influence of drugs or alcohol. It is the responsibility of the person initiating or pursuing the sexual activity for their behaviour and for ensuring consent was received. If a person is avoiding eye contact, crying, walking away, shaking their head 'no,' and not being responsive, this implies consent was not given. If the communication is unclear, ask for clarity. If the person does not say 'no,' it does not mean they are saying 'yes' and is not a green light to proceed.

If consent is denied or not given freely, the experience is considered sexual violence, which can have harmful impacts. When individuals experience stressful, frightening, or dangerous events, their bodies respond to protect themselves for survival. Our bodies automatically respond with fight, flight, or freeze stress responses. The fight or flight responses involve fighting back in any way possible or trying to escape the situation. The freeze response, which is a more common response, immobilizes the body from fear of perceived danger, all of which are natural responses to sexual violence. This is our body's automatic way of protecting us from further harm to survive dangerous situations and is not a form of giving consent.

Impact on Survivors

The impact of sexual violence on survivors can be lasting and have physical, emotional, psychological, behavioural, and spiritual impacts. Each survivor has different responses to their experience of sexual violence. There is no right or wrong way to feel or react; our bodies and minds process traumatic experiences in different ways. There can be a variety of stress responses that show up at any time following experiences of sexual violence. Survivors may respond to certain sights, sounds, smells, or touch that remind them of the sexual violence they experienced, while others can also have flashbacks, nightmares, and emotional reactions. Individuals may also try to avoid situations that remind them of the sexual violence they experienced. They may withdraw from family, friends and work, or lose interest in activities they usually enjoy. They may also engage in the abuse of alcohol, drugs, or other behaviours to help them avoid the feelings related to the trauma.

Survivors may also become overwhelmed with feelings about what happened and why. Being left with feelings of guilt, shame, fear, anger, sadness, shock, and self-blame, all of which can lead to depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), to name a few. Survivors can also be left with the physical impacts of personal injury, the risk of pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections, among others. The impacts of sexual violence experiences can lead to lifelong difficulties and an increased risk of suicide, alcoholism, violence, and mood disorders. Reaching out and accessing support can help prevent negative thoughts and behaviours that survivors may experience from sexual violence.

Healing

Healing from sexual violence is a journey that survivors can move through with the support of friends, family, communities, support workers, and counselling to enable long-term, sustainable healing. The Sexual Violence Survivor Support Program supports survivors of sexual violence through the use of traditional Indigenous practices and Western-based approaches to support healing, known as Two-Eyed Seeing. Two-Eyed Seeing uses Indigenous ways of knowing from one-eye and western-based approaches through the other eye to holistically benefit survivors. The inclusion of traditional healing offers a culturally appropriate pathway to support healing and restore balance to the “spiritual, emotional, physical, and social realms of life,” while Western-based practices offer support, connections to resources, and counselling. The Sexual Violence Survivor Support Program uses both ways of knowing how to support a person’s wellness in regard to their entire being and experience, rather than focusing on one facet. In this way, holistic wellness creates an approach that is multi-layered and personalized to improve mental and physical health.

Many find talking about their sexual violence experience as being an essential part of the recovery process, as it takes great courage to come forward and tell their story to move towards healing. We offer a safe, non-judgmental space to support individuals as they disclose their sexual violence experience. Talking about the experience can be a way of taking care of yourself, and is an important part of the healing process. We are here to support healthy healing with connections to counselling, medical care, legal and community support or other supports that may be needed. You are not alone.

"Some survivors feel that if they tell someone, they won't believe them or receive the support they require. Sexual violence can eliminate feelings of safety and trust, preventing people from reaching out and accessing support. By reaching out and finding strategies to support healing, survivors can overcome the negative effects of sexual violence."





*Be kind to yourself as you move towards
healing.*



Sexual Violence Survivor Support Program

The Sexual Violence Survivor Support Program is available to individuals 19+ who have recently or historically experienced sexual violence. We offer support with practical information, emotional support and referrals to community resources. The sexual violence experience does not have to qualify under the Canadian Criminal Code for survivors to receive support, if individuals feel that they would benefit from accessing our support, we are here for you.

We are here to support and advocate for survivors as they move through their healing journey to restore balance. We offer a safe, non-judgmental space for disclosures of sexual violence, through holistic, inclusive, and respectful practice. We honour the strength and courage that survivors have in coming forward to disclose their experience of sexual violence. The negative experience of sexual violence can impact survivor's in many different ways and require different levels of support to heal.

Some of the supports we offer include:

- Court accompaniment
- Liaison between community agencies and law enforcement
- Referrals
- Advocacy
- Emotional support
- Education
- Safety planning

Accessing Services

Our goal is to provide culturally appropriate support to individuals ages 19+ from the 11 member Nations that Carrier Sekani Family Services serves. The services can be accessed in person, by phone, or via video conference. The referral forms can be found on the Carrier Sekani Family Services web page under the Sexual Violence Survivor Support Program and can be faxed or e-mailed.

Through our “every door is the right door” policy, individuals can access the program. Individuals can self-refer or have a community member or agency support the referral process. We are here to support you and your healing from sexual violence.

Office hours are generally:

Monday-Friday from 8:30am-4:30pm

Contact information:

Address: #301-1705 3rd Avenue

Prince George, BC

V2L-3G7

Office Phone: 250.564.4079

SVSSP Cell: (778) 349.0242

Fax: 250.561.7097

E-mail: svssp@csfs.org

CSFS Website: www.csfs.org

REACH OUT TO SEEK HELP

KUU-US INDIGENOUS CRISIS LINES:

Youth/Kids:

1-250-723-2040

Adults/Elders:

1-250-723-4050

Toll Free:

1-800-588-8717

SUICIDE PREVENTION:

1-800-SUICIDE

OR:

1-800-784-2433

Northern BC Crisis Lines

24/7 Crisis Line:

1-888-562-1214

MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS LINES:

310-6789

No Area Code - simply call that number

Texting Crisis Lines

Youth/Adult:

text HOME to 686868

Kids Help Phone

1-800-668-6868

There are non-crisis Carrier Sekani Family Services mental health and addiction recovery supports available for children, adults, and families in our member communities and in the urban communities of Prince George, Vanderhoof, Fort Saint James, Fraser Lake, and Burns Lake. Please check with your health centre or call the Health and Wellness Program at 1-800-889-6855 for more information.



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