

Frequently Asked Questions: Reporting Sexual Assault in Seattle

You can report a sexual assault through several ways:

1. Dial 911 for immediate assistance, especially in cases where the assault just occurred, you may have injuries or safety concerns.
2. Visit an emergency room, where you can tell a professional about the assault and receive medical care and a forensic exam.
3. Visit www.seekthenspeakseattle.com to complete a self-guided interview in “Speak”, which generates a pdf report that you can email to SPD: seekthenspeak@seattle.gov. For more information about reporting through Seek Then Speak, see the FAQs below on page 2.

Q: I’m worried about telling others about my assault.

A: Many survivors have concerns about reporting the assault, such as fear of not being believed, worry about proof, or concerns about the perpetrator’s relationship to them. It’s important to know that all reports are taken seriously, and there are trained professionals to guide you through the process. If you wish to speak with someone about your concerns, confidential advocates are available at local agencies such as King County Sexual Assault Resource Center (24/7 hotline: 888-998-6423).

Q: I’m not sure if I want to report to law enforcement yet.

A: That’s okay! You can receive general medical care following an assault with or without choosing to get a sexual assault rape kit. You don’t have to decide which choice you want before you go to a hospital. Staff at the hospital can help with some of your decision making. Also, you don’t need to make a police report to receive a SANE exam. These exams are free, and their costs should not be a barrier to accessing them.

Q: The assault occurred a few days ago, and I’ve showered since.

A: While it is true that evidence is best collected within 120 hours of the assault (5 days), you can still seek general medical care following an assault. Even if you have already taken a shower or cleaned up, it does not mean that you cannot have a forensic exam.

Q: I don’t have any bruises or injuries from the assault. I’m worried there’s not enough proof.

A: Most sexual assaults do not result in external injuries. It’s important to still receive medical attention to check for internal injuries. Medical care following an assault also includes a physical exam to determine any injuries, tests for Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), medication to prevent HIV and other STIs, and emergency contraception to prevent pregnancy. Toxicology testing is only done as part of a forensic exam. If you think you were drugged, tell your doctor.

Q: I’m not sure where to go for an exam.

A: Not all hospitals provide Sexual Assault Rape kits (SAK), which are usually done by a specialized Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE). In Seattle, the following hospitals provide sexual assault exams: Harborview Emergency Department (for patients of all ages), Swedish First Hill (for patients 13 years old and up), Seattle Children’s (for patients up to 21 years old) and Virginia Mason Medical Center (18 years and older). For more information about SAKs, visit: www.wasafe.org

Frequently Asked Questions: Reporting Through 'Seek Then Speak'

"Seek Then Speak" offers a supportive, confidential platform for survivors to gather information, explore options, and initiate the reporting process at their own pace.

Q: How does the reporting option work?

A: The "Speak" feature asks you questions to gather important information about the assault. After finishing, you can download your answers as a PDF. You can keep this report for yourself or email it to Seattle Police at seekthenspeak@seattle.gov.

Q: What happens after a PDF report is submitted?

A: The SPD's Special Assault Unit (SAU) supervisor reviews the initial report to determine next steps and an advocate will reach out to gather your wishes and offer support.

Q: What are the benefits of using this reporting option?

A: The tool helps explain why questions are asked, how the information will be used, and what survivors' rights are throughout the process. This can help you prepare for the in-person interview and investigation, if you decide to provide the report to law enforcement.

Q: Can I report without starting an investigation?

A: You can request to simply submit your report without triggering an investigation, and SPD follow the victim's wishes whenever possible. However, there are exceptions, such as cases involving very young or elderly victims, serious injuries, serial offenders, or intimate partner violence.

Q: Will a Seek then Speak report always lead to an investigation?

A: Not necessarily. SPD carefully reviews each report to see if there's enough information to open an investigation. It depends on the details you provide, the nature of the incident, and related laws.

Q: How is my privacy protected?

A: No information is stored or uploaded to the Seek Then Speak website. Report data is temporarily stored on your device, so it is recommended that you clear your device's history after submitting a report to maintain your privacy. It is also important to note that once you send your PDF to SPD, it becomes a part of official police record and can be accessed in potential future legal proceedings.

Q: Can I report anonymously through Seek Then Speak?

A: Yes, you can submit an anonymous report. You decide how much information you choose to share. However, please note that anonymous reports can't be used to investigate or prosecute.

Q: Who can I contact with questions about submitting a Seek then Speak report?

A: Crime Victim Advocates are available at the seekthenspeak@seattle.gov email to answer questions, provide support and connect you with resources.