



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

What is sexual assault?

Sexual assault is any sexual act or attention that is uninvited or unwanted.

If you have been sexually assaulted you may be feeling:

- Shock/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 show my face again?'
- Guilt – 'If only I hadn't...'
- Betrayed – 'But I trusted them'
- Numb – 'I feel so hollow'
- Worried about your future – 'Will my life ever be the same?'

If you have been sexually assaulted it is not your fault!

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

The Sexual Assault Support Service (SASS)

SASS is a free and confidential service. The role of a SASS worker is to act as an advocate, support person and information provider for you if you have experienced recent assault.

In response to reports of a recent sexual assault, SASS can:

- Provide 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 practical crisis intervention including provision of psychological first aid; coordinate timely, thorough and professional forensic evidence collection, documentation and preservation of evidence
- Arrange follow up counselling
- Work with you to find ways you can protect yourself from further harm
- Enhance the ability of law enforcement agencies to obtain evidence and successfully prosecute sexual assault cases

'It's happened to me' – information for adults who have been recently sexually assaulted (continued)

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.

Options available to you are:

- Face-to-face support to talk through options in more detail
- Immediate medical attention/information without examination (e.g. for emergency contraception)
- Medical examination (often for reassurance)
- Forensic examination when you are not sure if you want to report the assault
- Forensic examination and reporting to the Police
- Making a Police Statement
- Ongoing support from SASS
- Any combination of the above
- To do nothing

Your Rights

- To be provided with information, support and advocacy to maximise your choices 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
- 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

The Sexual Assault Medical Service (SAMS) Unit

What is it?

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.

Forensic Examinations

A forensic examination can only be performed at the SAMS Unit. The purpose of this examination is to gather evidence, not to prove or disprove whether a sexual assault has occurred. The doctor's role is not to determine whether an offence has been committed. A forensic examination is very important in the gathering of evidence that may be used later if the case goes to court.

Because there are many implications for a person who consents to a forensic examination, such as police and legal involvement, you will be required to sign a specific consent form before you have this examination.

Ideally forensic examinations are performed within 72 hours of the sexual assault, but 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

The 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 will undertake the investigation. Although sexual assault is a crime, the choice about whether to proceed with a formal complaint to the Police should always rest with you.

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You have the right

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

To access the Sexual Assault Medical Service (SAMS) or to obtain more information and support you can ring SASS on 6231 1817 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. You can still use SAMS service even if you decide that you don't want to report to the police. If you go to a police station or the Royal Hobart Hospital, they will also contact us on your behalf.

Sexual Assault Support Service

Ingomar House, 34 Patrick Street, Hobart

03 6231 1811 (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 Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Australian Department of Social Services (DSS).

SASS holds Quality Improvement Council (QIC) accreditation.