

Sexual Harm Tip Sheet

What is sexual harm?

Sexual harm is any non-consensual sexual contact. According to the United Nations, sexual violence is “any violence, physical or psychological, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality.” This can include:

- Unwanted sexual touching/fondling/activity;
- Any act that uses the victim for the perpetrator’s sexual gratification;
- Coerced nudity and sexually explicit photography;
- Forced intercourse or rape;
- Forcing a person to perform a sexual act(s);
- Sexual harassment, indecent exposure or sexual threatening of any kind.

Some people are impacted by sexual harm in the following ways:

- Depression – guilt/shame, low self-esteem, grief;
- Anxiety – phobias, flashbacks, trauma symptoms;
- Sexual difficulties;
- Interpersonal problems – destructive relationships, problems sustaining relationships, distrust, isolation, poor social skills, parenting problems;
- Substance abuse, eating disorders, self-mutilations, suicide attempts, self-defeating behaviour.

Symptoms you may see or recognize:

- Bruising around breasts, inner thighs, and/or genital areas
- Unexplained genital infections or disease
- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Anal and vaginal bleeding
- Sleep disturbances
- Uncharacteristic change in attitude toward sex

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Take the Quiz: Is this Myth or Fact?

Myth Fact

Older women and older men are equally vulnerable to sexual harm.

An older adult with diminished mental capacity is incapable of consenting to an intimate relationship.

Older adults living in long-term care do not have the right to be intimate with another resident.

Women are usually the perpetrators of sexual harm against others.

Older adults do not have to worry about sexual harm.

If you are married, your partner has the right to have sex with you at any time without your consent.

How Do I Respond to Someone Who Has Been Harmed?

Responding with empathy is an important first step. Here are some ideas about what to say:

- Thank you for trusting me.
- I am sorry this has happened.
- I believe you.
- How can I help you right now?
- You are not alone and we can connect you with people who can help.

We recommend that the person be encouraged to contact the nearest Sexual Assault / Domestic Violence Response Centre at a regional hospital (www.satontario.com) and / or to contact a sexual assault centre (SAC) crisis line for consultation and referral.

Who Do I Call if I Need Help?

Seniors Safety Line.....	1 866 299 1011
Assaulted Women's Help Line.....	1 866 863 0511
Long-Term Care ACTION Line.....	1 866 434 0144
Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres.....	sexualassaultsupport.ca
Ontario Networks of Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Centres.....	416 323 7327
Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority.....	1 855 275 7472
Support for Male Survivors	1 866 887 0015
Talk 4 Healing A helpline for Aboriginal women.....	1 855 554 HEAL(4325)