

Supporting Men in Healing from Sexual Violence: Tip Sheets



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Walking with men in their healing journey

This series includes practical tips on how to work with survivors who are men.

Healing from sexual assault is a journey. It is not just forward progress, but also includes setbacks, detours, and moments of pause. By acknowledging that the healing process is a journey we can alleviate the pressure of measuring success solely in terms of engagement and retention. Instead, we can focus on building meaningful relationships, fostering learning, and creating safe spaces, which sets more realistic expectations and can help individuals on their healing path.

We will understand more when stories are shared.

No matter how it happened, the fact that the men in your community have chosen you to join them on their healing journey is significant. Speaking out as a survivor is already a big step, but it can be even harder for men who have been socialized to feel ashamed and keep secrets for generations.

Shame and secrecy have been part of our lives for so long that we often have a hard time recognizing the subtle ways it shows up.

Masculinity work is both cultural and generational.

Our experience has shown that many advocates struggle to create safe spaces for men not because they lack the skills, but because they themselves have internalized narratives about men that remain unexplored and unresolved. Furthermore, many advocates have not witnessed men expressing vulnerability, pain, or softness, which can be unfamiliar and uncomfortable when encountered. Therefore, it is crucial to examine our own biases and experiences. We must lean into discomfort as part of the process of engaging and supporting survivors who are men, especially those who are most marginalized.

Although abuse can happen to anyone, the story of our identities can influence the justice and healing we receive.

Regardless of the level of experience you have working with men, we hope these reminders will be a helpful companion to you in your work with men.

Don't move too fast.

Take your time engaging and supporting the survivor, and avoid rushing through tasks like intake, action planning, and referrals. The goal isn't to finish quickly, but to give enough time for the individual's story to unfold. During the initial encounter, it's important to focus on seeing, hearing, and supporting the person, as this can increase the likelihood of a second visit. Keep in mind that the man in front of you is not only grappling with the pain of abuse, but also facing conflicting messages about seeking help, adherence to gender and cultural scripts, and socialization across generations. Unexplored narratives can impede relationship-building and healing. Consider this process like a book, with multiple chapters full of insights and lessons. Take a moment to pause, sip your cafecito or iced coffee, and listen actively while asking clarifying questions to learn more.

Safety first and the rest can wait.

As with your approach toward any survivor, the safety of the person seeking support must come first and foremost in any interaction. Safety planning has no gender, so continue with the exploration of a safety plan that considers their cultural and environmental context. Once that is completed, remain flexible to the process. If you've only been able to explore the initial "tell me more about you and why you're here" portion of an intake, you've already done a great job by establishing a foundation for building a relationship. Many culturally-specific organizations integrate a multi-approach intake process that prioritizes relationship building. Pay attention to your body, posture, and any topics that may be difficult for you as you engage with men seeking support. Take note of how your body feels during the conversation, and adjust your posture as needed to maintain a relaxed state. If there are topics that make you uncomfortable and may be hindering your ability to fully explore the individual's story, reflect on them and consider incorporating reflection questions after your encounters with men that will help you improve your practice.

Embrace "the rainbow" - embrace multiple healing modalities.

Men who exist at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities must navigate numerous interlocking factors. This complexity may require multifaceted healing strategies that cater to their needs. However, our own gender biases can impede advocates or institutions from exploring other modes of healing. Essential healing modalities can include those that emphasize boundaries, grounding, breathing, and emotional awareness. Such modalities may include practices like reiki, tarot readings, grounding elements like oils and crystals, altar creation, journaling, and more. (These options may not be available for all men who are survivors, including those who are incarcerated.) Additionally, it is important for men and survivors to talk through how to reconnect with and redefine sex. Beyond providing pleasure, sex can serve as a means of connection, oneness, compassion, openness, playfulness, and energetic exploration.

Understand the importance of taking a pause.

Pausing can serve as a practice of reflection, allowing us to consider what we have learned and what we still need to learn. Additionally, it is crucial that we prepare and ground our institutions to promote shared learning and elevate cultural wellness and wisdom. In order for these practices to thrive, it is essential

that the organization is fully committed to the work. This means prioritizing sustainability over a checklist approach and being willing to uproot any harmful systemic practices that may be in place. To learn more on how to enhance services and increase organizational capacity to serve survivors see the Sexual Assault Demonstration Initiative (SADI) website: <https://www.nsvrc.org/sexual-assault-demonstration-initiative>

To learn more about resources related to reaching and working with men, visit: <https://www.nsvrc.org/working-male-survivors-sexual-violence>

Reaching Men

Some of the barriers that men face in healing from sexual assault and harassment have to do with the misperceptions about what sexual violence is, and what rape crisis centers do. Men may not see themselves as eligible for services at your program, even though you're charged with providing free and confidential services to all survivors.

There isn't one right way to reach men, but some of the tips below can help.

Talk about sexual violence in a way that includes men as survivors eligible for your services.

- Review advocate training and community education materials to make sure you specifically refer to men as survivors of sexual violence. Ensure that these references reflect men with various identities and life experiences.
- Make sure that everyone at your organization is able to talk about men as survivors eligible for your services.

Make it clear in your outreach materials and at your facility that your program works with men.

- Use images of men with various expressions of masculinity on brochures, webpages, and social media.
- Think of whether and how the artwork, posters, and magazines in your facility communicate that you work with men.
- Think of whether and how your organization's logos, branding, name, and descriptions of services communicate that you work with men.

Form partnerships in your community that help reach men who may not seek out your program.

- In addition to making your space welcoming to men and survivors of all genders, provide services in the places that men already go in your community.
- Consider partnering with LGBTQ community centers, drug treatment facilities, correctional facilities, reentry programs, shelters, faith communities, father's groups, barbershops, bodegas, and more.

Listen to men in your community to find out how they would like to be engaged.

- Ask for feedback from men about your efforts to reach survivors who are men.
- Actively build relationships with men from marginalized communities, including men of color, queer and transgender men, men with disabilities, and men who are immigrants.

Addiction, Mental Health, and Recovery

Men who have experienced sexual trauma at any point in their lives are likely to not seek help for many reasons, including stereotypes around masculinity and sexual abuse. When trauma goes unrecognized or untreated, many men may self-medicate through [substance abuse](#). Resulting adverse consequences may include a range of mental illnesses (National Institute on Drug Abuse [NIDA], 2020). Recognizing this connection, and providing outreach and services in response, can help your program reach men who could benefit from your services.

Focus on the impact of trauma on substance use/abuse, and a range of mental health issues.

- Survivors of sexual violence experience a range of impacts, including long-term trauma symptoms. Men may experience these symptoms differently and more acutely.
- Learn about the impact of trauma and the connections between experiencing sexual violence and [addiction](#) (Vierthaler, 2019).
- Explore with survivors how their drug/alcohol use may be impacting their life.
- Treatment programs for mental health and drugs, and for alcohol and dual diagnoses, are skilled at addressing those issues, and may not have the capacity or training to address trauma specifically related to sexual violence.

Learn more about treatment for addiction and mental health.

- Active addiction and recovery communities have shared language. Understanding terminology and structure of services is helpful to reaching survivors who are part of these communities.
- The same is true for mental health service providers.
- Have brochures and pamphlets in your waiting room about addiction and recovery resources available in your community.



Form partnerships in your community.

- Consider reaching out to inpatient and outpatient drug treatment facilities, correctional facilities, halfway houses, reentry programs, shelters, mental health facilities, 12-step and other recovery programs, needle exchanges, homeless shelters, drop-in facilities, LGBTQ organizations, and other places in your community offering similar services.

- Partnership can mean many things, including offering on-site services, talking with staff about your services so they provide referrals (and learning more about their services in return), presenting to clients about sexual violence and your services, leaving materials about your services, tabling and participating in local events, joining their team in community outreach efforts, and more.
- Make it clear to partners that your program works with men.
- Offer your space to 12-step or other recovery programs to hold meetings.

Transmasculine Survivors

[Transgender](#) people experience violent crime like sexual assault at a much higher rate than cisgender people (Flores et al., 2021), with 47% of transgender people experiencing some form of [sexual violence in their lifetime](#) (James et al., 2016). Transgender people are also more likely to experience [barriers and discrimination](#) when seeking care and support (Seelman, 2015).

Transmasculine survivors of sexual assault deserve the same acceptance and understanding as cisgender survivors when seeking help and advocacy. Here are some steps you can take to provide affirming and trauma-informed support.

In this section, we use the term transgender as “an umbrella term describing individuals whose gender identity differs from the one assigned to them at birth,” and the term transmasculine to describes a transgender person “whose gender identity and/or expression leans toward the masculine side of the gender spectrum” (Trans Lifeline, n.d.).

Language practices for all survivors:

- You don't know someone's gender identity based only on observing their gender expression, or how they outwardly express gender.
- Allow survivors to self-identify. When fielding a hotline call or working directly with a survivor, don't assume their gender identity or pronouns. Make space for survivors to provide their pronouns while still leaving them with the choice to share. If a survivor uses a name that is different from their legal name, refer to them by their chosen name. Ask the survivor what name they would like to be called, and then use that name.
- Default to they/them pronouns or use their name. If someone does not provide their pronouns or feels uncomfortable to do so, refer to that person by their name or use they/them pronouns to avoid assigning a gender identity to that person.

General advocacy practices:

- Ensure your community knows that your services are for everyone, regardless of gender identity or expression. When communicating about sexual violence and your services, include specific information about transgender men.
- Have transgender-affirming providers on your referral lists (Marven & Munson, 2021).
- When helping transgender survivors navigate systems (for example, when seeking a forensic exam), ask the



survivor questions like, “How would you like me to advocate for you? What is it that you would like me to do?” Be prepared for a range of responses, including, “I don’t have any energy to come out to anybody else as transgender. Could you do that for me?” or, “I want to initiate my story. Do not tell anybody that I’m trans.” (Marven & Munson, 2021).

- Work to create safe and affirming spaces for people of all genders.
 - Be mindful of language on signage, social media, hotline posters, and other distributed materials.
 - Employ inclusive language and wording on intake forms and any other paperwork that survivors might encounter. For example, include space for pronouns and chosen names.

Sexual Assault Forensic Exam Accompaniment

Men who experience sexual violence have unique needs during a sexual assault forensic exam, and there are barriers to men at the hospital. The tips here not only benefit men but also all survivors.

All survivors have the right to a forensic medical exam following a sexual assault.

Barriers to men:

- Lack of information on anal exams.
- Stigma of going to a forensic exam and seeking medical care, or lack of awareness that a forensic exam is an option.
- Men who have experienced sexual assault may fear that a forensic exam could be retraumatizing or trigger additional anxiety and distress.
- Some providers may have not received training on working with men specifically.



Before the exam:

- Introduce yourself to the survivor, the nurse, and anyone else present.
- Explain to the survivor what your agency does and any limits to confidentiality.
- Ask the survivor what name and pronouns they would like you to use. Never assume someone's pronouns, and default to using they/them pronouns for all survivors.
- Let the survivor know that the exam is completely voluntary and free of charge, and that they can stop at any time.

During the exam:

- Assure the survivor that you believe them, that they are not alone, and that what happened to them is not their fault.
- Check in about the survivor's physical comfort; provide things like blankets or food if possible.
- If appropriate, make small talk to help relax the survivor or take their mind off the exam.

After the exam:

- Provide gender-neutral clothes such as sweatpants that are unisex, and that fit all body types.
- Let the survivor know how they can continue to receive support through your agency.
- Provide approved support materials specific to men that they can take back with them.

Peer-to-peer accompaniment options for men like a [promotores](#) program (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2019) may help a forensic exam seem more accessible.

To learn more about forensic exams see the National Sexual Violence Resource Center's (NSVRC) SART Toolkit: <https://www.nsvrc.org/sarts/toolkit/5-9>

Supporting Incarcerated Men

An Overview of Sexual Abuse in Detention

Most people who are incarcerated in the United States are men. In 2018, [93%](#) of people in state and federal prisons were men, and the imprisonment rate of Black men was 5.8 times that of white men (Carson, 2020). We know that incarcerated people face an enormous amount of trauma prior to incarceration, while behind bars, and after release.

Sexual Abuse in Detention

- One in 10 formerly incarcerated adults reported being sexually abused while in a detention setting (Beck & Johnson, 2012).
- Roughly half of all sexual abuse in adult detention facilities is committed by staff. 70% of staff sexual misconduct in men's facilities involved female staff or both female and male staff sexually assaulting incarcerated men (Beck & Johnson, 2012).
- Men with mental illness; men who have been previously sexually victimized; and men who are gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex have an increased risk for sexual victimization in prison (Beck & Johnson, 2012).

The Trauma of Detention

Daily life inside a detention facility can be traumatizing for anyone (Widra, 2020), but survivors are especially likely to be triggered by conditions of confinement. Including (California Coalition Against Sexual Assault [CALCASA] & Just Detention International [JDI], 2020; Martynuik, 2014; Quandt & Jones, 2021; Widra, 2020):

- Lack of privacy and autonomy
- Minimal access to mental health and other services
- Isolation from loved ones and lack of community social support
- No control over noises, lighting, and the level of crowding
- Witnessing violence
- Loss of identity
- Ongoing contact with perpetrator(s)
- Retaliation and/or threats of retaliation after making a report



Survivor Services in Detention

The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) standards call on detention facilities to take concrete steps to prevent, detect, and respond to sexual abuse and sexual harassment. As an advocate, you have the ability to provide and set up these services for survivors behind bars. One of PREA's key provisions requires facilities to ensure incarcerated survivors receive care that is consistent with what is available in the community by working with local service organizations to make available confidential advocacy services, including (National PREA Resource Center & Just Detention International [JDI], 2016):

- Confidential emotional support via phone or letter
- Medical forensic exam and accompaniment
- Confidential follow-up services
- Accompaniment during investigatory interviews
- Access to medical and mental health care for emergencies and ongoing care and at no cost to survivor

Resources for Survivors Who Are Men

Men who have had unwanted sexual experiences can use the following resources in their healing journey. These are organizations and online resources that can support your work with men, and books you may decide to have available in your facility for men to borrow.

Organizations:

[lin6](https://lin6.org/) helps male victims of unwanted or abusive sexual experiences find healing. They offer free and anonymous weekly chat-based support groups, facilitated by a counselor. <https://lin6.org/>

[Just Detention International](https://justdetention.org/) (JDI) is a health and human rights organization that seeks to end sexual abuse in all forms of detention, and provides resources to survivors who are incarcerated. <https://justdetention.org/>

[MaleSurvivor](https://malesurvivor.org/) provides resources for male survivors through a support forum and chat, and through webinars and live events. <https://malesurvivor.org/>

[MenHealing](https://menhealing.org/) is dedicated to providing help for male survivors of sexual assault, sexual abuse, and sexual trauma during childhood or as adults. They conduct healing workshops for men, ages 18 and older, who have experienced sexual abuse or sexual assault as a child and/or as an adult, including through their Weekend of Recovery and Day of Recovery events. <https://menhealing.org/>

[Stop It Now!](https://nsvrc.co/StopItNowResources) provides resources to adult survivors of child sexual abuse, including resources to aid in recovery, resources on prevention, information on how to report, and information on what to do if you are worried about the safety of others. <https://nsvrc.co/StopItNowResources>

[Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests](https://www.snapnetwork.org/) (SNAP) is a support group for men and women abused by religious and institutional authorities. <https://www.snapnetwork.org/>

Books:

[Breaking Through the Silence: #Me\(n\)Too](#) by Marissa Cohen (2022): Stories of 27 men on their experiences of sexual assault and how they recovered from the trauma they experienced.

[Evicting the Perpetrator: A Male Survivor Guide to Recovery from Childhood Sexual Abuse](#) by Ken Singer (2010): This book offers men a way to move forward after childhood sexual abuse through exercises and assignments.

[Healing the Man Within: Hope for Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse](#) by Randy Boyd (2015): In this book Boyd talks about what it took for him as a man to heal from the impacts of child sexual abuse. He also explores the connection between sexual abuse and addiction.

[Joining Forces: Empowering Male Survivors to Thrive](#) by Howard Fradkin and Tyler Perry (2012): This book is written to empower men who are survivors of sexual victimization to overcome the effects of trauma and learn to thrive. The book is based on over 750 men who participated in MaleSurvivor Weekends of Recovery.

[Naming our Abuse: God's Pathways to Healing for Male Sexual Abuse Survivors](#) by Andrew Schmutzer, Daniel Gorski, and David Carlson (2016): This book provides a four-step model for a path towards healing including journaling exercises.

[Victims No Longer: The Classic Guide for Men Recovering from Sexual Child Abuse](#) by Mike Lew (2004): The first book written specifically for male survivors, examining the challenges male survivors face. This second edition offers practical advice for men to identify and validate their childhood experiences, and explore strategies of healing.

Virtual Communities:

[1in6 Weekly Online Support Groups for Men](#): Free, anonymous chat-based support groups for male survivors of sexual abuse who are looking for community support. Daily online support groups available Monday through Friday. <https://supportgroup.1in6.org/>

[MaleSurvivor Forums](#): Online support forum for male survivors of sexual assault. <https://forum.malesurvivor.org/>

[Pandora's Project](#): An online message board and chat room for survivors of sexual violence. Includes peer-to-peer support for survivors through specific forums for men, teens, older adults, LGBTQ people, and many others. <https://forums.pandys.org/>

[Safe HelpRoom Sessions for Military Men](#): An online community of sexual assault survivors in the military that meets to support each other in taking the next steps after a sexual assault. The Sunday sessions are for male victims and provide a safe and confidential platform for men to share and talk with other survivors. <https://www.safehelpline.org/safe-helproom>

[SNAP](#): An online support group meeting for men abused by priests and other religious authorities. <https://www.snapnetwork.org/events>

Quick Reference Links for Advocates

Advocates can use this quick reference list to increase capacity in serving survivors who are men in your community.

NSVRC's Working with Male Survivors of Sexual Violence Online Toolkit:

[Working with Male Survivors Online Toolkit](#) (NSVRC, n.d. b) - The landing page for an online toolkit, which includes pieces on understanding socialization and stigmas that impacts men, reaching and engaging men who are survivors, creating partnerships to support men, and services that support men's healing from sexual trauma.

- [Assessing our Capacity for Serving Male Survivors of Sexual Violence](#) (NSVRC, 2021a) - Use this self-assessment tool to reflect on your current work on serving men who have unwanted sexual experiences. It offers questions related to individual and organizational capacity to serve male survivors.
- [Here's how you can use our Working with Male Survivors Resources for Group Learning](#) (Marven, 2021a) - Use this six-session sample curriculum on how to can use the Working with Male Survivors Online Toolkit.
- [How Often are Men Sexually Harassed or Assaulted?](#) (NSVRC, 2020a) - Infographic with statistics on the prevalence of sexual violence of men.
- [How we Talk About Working with Male Survivors of Sexual Assault, Harassment, and Abuse](#) (NSVRC, 2021b) - How we talk about sexual violence matters. This resource suggests how you can communicate to your community that sexual violence is something that men experience and that services are available to them.
- [Lessons on Serving Male Survivors Through Sexual Assault Services Program](#) (NSVRC, 2021c) - Read about lessons learned from sexual assault services programs who receive funding from the Sexual Assault Services Program (SASP) Formula Grant and serve a large percentage of male survivors. We interviewed several centers to learn what they did to reach and serve men in their communities and published the findings in a [three-part blog series](#) (Marven, 2021b).
- [Who are male survivors of sexual harassment and assault](#) (NSVRC, 2020b) - Infographic with statistics on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disabilities of men who have experienced sexual assault.
- [Working with Male Survivor Podcast Series](#) (NSVRC, 2021d) - In this podcast series, hear from advocates about how to best support male survivors of sexual violence.

Working with Men of Color:

- [Boys and Men of Color Healing from Systemic and Interpersonal Trauma](#) (National Resource Center on Reaching Victims, 2020) - Virtual roundtable on violence that boys and men of color have experienced and how to support survivors in healing.
- [Healing of Boys and Men of Color Training Curricula](#) (Smith, Purnell et al., 2020) - Training

curricula supporting providers in implementing a holistic healing framework for boys and men of color.

- [Holistic Healing Framework for Boys and Men of Color](#) (Smith, Kirk et al., 2020) - The National Resource Center for Reaching Victims and Common Justice developed a Holistic Healing Framework using a Restorative Integral Support model. This model is specific to addressing the adversity and trauma that men and boys of color experience and fosters their resilience and recovery.
- [Reaching Latino Male Survivors of Sexual Violence](#) (Diaz de Leon, 2018) - Recorded webinar on considerations to enhance outreach efforts to Latino male survivors of sexual violence.

Working with Survivors Who Are Incarcerated:

- [Just Detention International \(JDI\) - Publications for Service Providers](#) (JDI, n.d. a) - Publications from JDI on serving incarcerated survivors on a wide variety of topics. See also recorded [webinars](#) (JDI, n.d. b).
- [Returning and Healing Toolkit](#) (Rini & Roth-Katz, 2020) - Recommendations for rape crisis centers working with sexual violence survivors coming home from incarceration.

[Our library](#) (NSVRC, n.d. a) has many resources on male survivors. Search the library collection or see our special titles list on [male survivors of sexual assault](#) (NSVRC, 2022). If you need help locating an article please contact us at libraryteam@respecttogether.org. Interested in learning about new resources that are added to our library collection on male survivors? Contact libraryteam@respecttogether.org to sign up for our Male Survivor Acquisitions email digest.

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