



SEEK THEN > SPEAK

A Survivor-Centered Alternative Pathway
to Justice and Services

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EVAWI works to improve professional responses to sexual assault. Yet most victims do not turn to professionals first. Instead, they reach out to friends and family members, steeling themselves as they utter those heartbreaking words, “I was raped.” Our Start by Believing campaign prepares professionals and loved ones to react supportively when a survivor discloses, so victims get the help they need. But what happens next?

SEEK THEN SPEAK offers a way for sexual assault survivors and support people to gather information, explore options, and take action – including beginning the process of reporting to police. This interactive web-based tool was developed with grant funding and pilot tested in several diverse communities. Both survivors and professionals expressed how much promise it holds. With future outreach, we will be able to help more survivors to **pursue justice and healing on their own terms.**

Support Isn't Reaching Survivors

We know that our support systems aren't currently reaching most survivors. Less than one half of sexual assault victims access health care¹ and about one-third use mental health services.² This means most survivors never experience the benefits these crucial services can offer for their physical and mental health,³ as well as practical needs like housing and education.⁴ Fewer than one in five report their sexual assault to law enforcement,⁵ which means police have no way to hold sexual assault perpetrators accountable and prevent future attacks. However, even with a report, officers need detailed information from victims to conduct a thorough investigation. Unfortunately, police officers are frequently ill-equipped for this task, without sufficient training and skills in effective victim interviewing.⁶ In addition, law enforcement agencies often lack timely access to the interpretive services and assistive communication devices they need to serve diverse populations and conduct effective interviews and investigations.

Barriers to Access

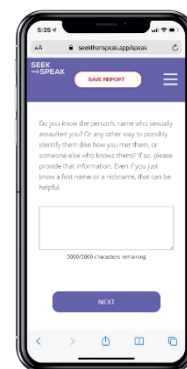
Services reach even fewer survivors among communities that have been historically underserved or marginalized. This includes survivors of color, who must decide whether they can trust service agencies to meet their needs. Survivors with limited English proficiency may not have access to information in their primary language, and they may question whether their voice will be heard without effective interpretive services. Undocumented immigrants, and victims who are incarcerated, homeless, or lacking economic resources, as well as LGBTQ survivors, may also hesitate to trust service providers and reach out for help, despite higher rates of sexual assault victimization.⁷

For survivors with disabilities, such concerns may be further compounded by barriers of physical mobility, limitations affecting cognition or communication, and sometimes total dependence on caregivers who may be the very people sexually abusing them.⁸

Alternative solutions are needed to increase access to justice and services.

SEEK: Explore Options

SEEK THEN SPEAK is an interactive website now publicly available on any digital device, at [SeekThenSpeak.app](https://seekthenspeak.app). It offers sexual assault survivors and their loved ones a way to gather information, explore options, and begin reporting to police, if they choose.

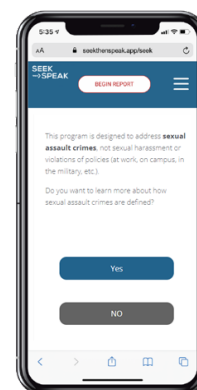


In **SEEK**, survivors explore options for crucial services like medical care, victim advocacy, and reporting to police, as well as information about their rights as a crime victim. SEEK answers real-world questions survivors are likely to have about these options, including how to initiate them, whether there are any costs involved, and whether they can bring a support person with them.

This type of online tool may be especially helpful for adolescent victims, since technology is often their primary means for privately gathering information and engaging with others.⁹ However, it can also provide vital access for any survivor who is isolated by geography, culture, homelessness, incarceration, fear of illness, or threat of violence. SEEK paves the way for survivors to connect with service providers, increasing access for short-term crisis assistance and long-term help to recover from sexual assault.¹⁰

SPEAK: Begin Reporting

If they choose, survivors can then begin the process of reporting to police by completing a detailed, self-guided investigative interview in **SPEAK**. Interactive questions were crafted by national experts to reproduce an interview conducted by a law enforcement officer who is well-trained in the neurobiology of trauma and best practices in sexual assault investigations. Prompts guide survivors through careful documentation of the evidence most critical to the investigation.

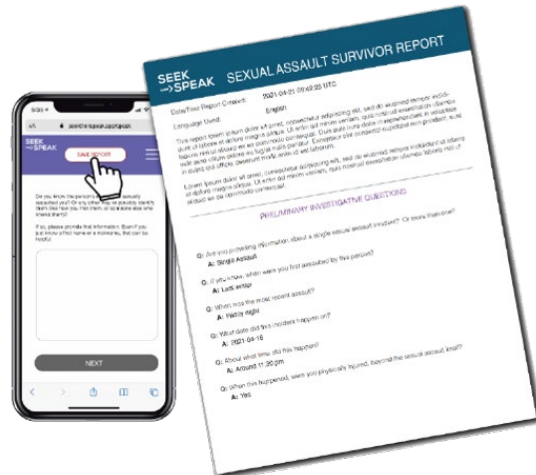


The interview also serves an educational function, explaining why questions are asked, how the information will be used, and what the survivor's rights are throughout the process. Survivors are repeatedly reminded that they can provide as much or as little information as they choose, and they can remain anonymous if they want. This means that in addition to capturing a detailed statement of their sexual assault, the self-guided interview process leaves survivors better prepared to participate in a follow-up interview and investigation conducted by law enforcement.

Create PDF Report

SEEK THEN SPEAK is available to users in **over 100 languages** with a built-in Google Translate API accessible on any digital device (laptop, tablet, mobile phone). The program can then generate a PDF report which the survivor can:

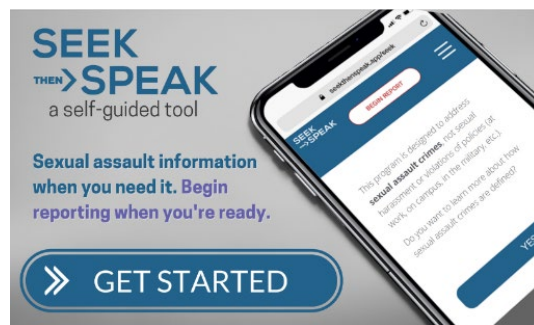
- (1) **Save** for now
- (2) **Email** to the police department
- (3) **Print**, either to give to police or simply to store while they decide, or
- (4) **Give** to a sexual assault advocacy center to submit on their behalf.



The program does not save information; all data is deleted after report generation.

Increasing Access

No other tool exists that gives survivors such extensive information about their options, rights, and services, and offers a way to begin reporting to law enforcement at a time and place of their choosing.



SEEK THEN SPEAK therefore increases access for survivors to pursue justice and healing. Both survivors and support people can access the program safely and privately, using any device of their choice. Health care providers and other responding professionals can also offer SEEK THEN SPEAK while victims are waiting for services or when interpretive services are lacking. All this can help support holistic healing for survivors and their families, as well as criminal justice participation – to prevent re-perpetration of violence in our communities.

There are people in neighborhoods who are being sexually assaulted and will never call 911 for help. They don't want a patrol car showing up at their house, and they're not going to walk into a police station. But maybe with this tool, they'll be more willing to let us know what happened. I want to build trust with residents, so we can keep people safe.

- Deputy Chief, Chicago Police Department

Impact for Survivors

Survivors have already told us how valuable they find SEEK THEN SPEAK, especially the opportunity to complete a self-guided interview at their own time, place, and pace.

It was nice to be able to enter things at my own pace.

Very direct, concise statements about how to help survivors.

I find the entire program incredibly helpful, particularly the language. I love how SEEK THEN SPEAK is easy to read and understand, and I am so glad something like this is available to victims and their families.

Pilot Testing

In May 2022, Kansas City became the first community to offer SEEK THEN SPEAK for public use. The tool was posted on the Kansas City Police Department (KCPD) website, and promoted in TV news stories.¹¹ Early experiences using the tool with survivors were very positive, as described by Victoria Pickering, a victim advocate in Kansas City:

We've been using the platform with clients for the past couple months and the experience has been overwhelmingly positive. We've heard from survivors and advocates that people feel much more prepared for detective interviews and it has helped alleviate a lot of stress during the process.

- Victoria Pickering, Victim Advocate in Kansas City

Almost a year later, Pickering described SEEK THEN SPEAK as their “go-to tool” to help survivors

prepare for interviews with law enforcement. Sex Crimes Sergeant Erica Oldham at the Kansas City Police Department echoed the same favorable sentiment, highlighting the importance of the tool for preparing survivors and assisting investigators:

We love it! It has been a great tool for us so far, and the detectives that have had cases with it said it is so useful for preparing for the survivor interviews.

- Sgt. Erica Oldham, Sex Crimes Section Supervisor, Kansas City Police Department

With future outreach, SEEK THEN SPEAK will offer countless sexual assault survivors the opportunity to pursue their own healing and potentially hold offenders accountable within the criminal justice system, thereby preventing future attacks in our communities.

Endnotes

- ¹ Feldhaus, K.M., Houry, D., & Kaminsky, R. (2000). Lifetime sexual assault prevalence rates and reporting practices in an emergency department population. *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, 36 (1), 23-27; Resnick, et al. (2000). Predictors of post-rape medical care in a national sample of women. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 19 (4), 214-219; Zinzow, et al. (2012). Receipt of post-rape medical care in a national sample of female victims. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 42 (2), 183-187.
- ² Coker, A.L., Derrick, C., Lumpkin, J.L., Aldrich, T.E., & Oldendick, R. (2000). Help-seeking for intimate partner violence and forced sex in South Carolina. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 19, 316-320; George, L.K., Winfield, I., & Blazer, D.G. (1992). Sociocultural factors in sexual assault: Comparison of two representative samples of women. *Journal of Social Issues*, 48, 105-125.
- ³ Campbell, R., Patterson, D., & Lichty, L.F. (2005). The effectiveness of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) programs: A review of psychological, medical, legal, and community outcomes. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 6 (4), 313-329; Parcesepe, A.M., Martin, S.L., Pollock, M.D., & Garcia-Moreno, C. (2015). The effectiveness of mental health intervention for adult female survivors of sexual assault: A systematic review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 25, 15-25; Russell, P.L. & Davis, C. (2007). Twenty-five years of empirical research on treatment following sexual assault. *Best Practices in Mental Health*, 3, 21-37.
- ⁴ Campbell, R. (2006). Rape survivors' experiences with the legal and medical systems: Do rape victim advocates make a difference? *Violence Against Women*, 12 (1), 30-45; Patterson, D. & Tringali, B. (2015). Understanding how advocates can affect sexual assault victim engagement in the criminal justice process. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 30 (12), 1987-1997; Wasco, S., Campbell, R., Howard, A., Mason, G.E., Staggs, S.L., Schewe, P.A., & Riger, S. (2004). A statewide evaluation of services provided to rape survivors. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 19 (2), 252-263.
- ⁵ Fisher, B.S., Cullen, F.T., & Turner, M.G. (2000). *The Sexual Victimization of College Women*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs (NCJ 182369); Kilpatrick, D.G., Resnick, H.S., Ruggiero, K.J., Conoscenti, M.A., & McCauley, J. (2007). *Drug-Facilitated, Incapacitated, and Forcible Rape: A National Study*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice (NCJ 213181); Lindquist, C.H., Barrick, K., Krebs, C., Crosby, C.M., Lockard, A.J., & Sanders-Phillips, K. (2013). The context and consequences of sexual assault among undergraduate women at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 28 (12), 2437-2461; Tjaden, P. & Thoennes, N. (2000). *Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (NCJ 183781); Wolitzky-Taylor, K.B., Resnick, H.S., Amstader, A.B., McCauley, J.L., Ruggiero, K.J., & Kilpatrick, D.G. (2011). Reporting rape in a national sample of college women. *Journal of American College Health*, 59 (7), 582-587.
- ⁶ Schwartz, M.D. (2010). *National Institute of Justice Visiting Fellowship: Police Investigation of Rape – Roadblocks and Solutions*. National Institute of Justice, US Department of Justice.
- ⁷ Amstader, A.B., McCauley, J.L., Ruggiero, K.J., Resnick, H.S., & Kilpatrick, D.G. (2008). Service utilization and help seeking in a national sample of female rape victims. *Psychiatric Services*, 59 (12), 1450-1457; Bureau of Justice Statistics (2013). *Sexual Victimization in Prisons and Jails Reported by Inmates, 2011-2012*; Santa Maria, et al. (2019). Gaps in sexual assault health care among homeless young adults. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 58 (2), 191-198; Stander, et al. (2006). Ethnic differences in sexual victimization and revictimization among female US Navy recruits: A prospective study. Naval Health Research Center; Ullman, S.E. & Brecklin, L.R. (2002). Sexual assault history, PTSD, and mental health seeking in a national sample of women. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 30, 261-279; Walters, et al. (2013). *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey 2010: Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation*; Weist, M.D., Pollitt-Hill, J., Kinney, L., Bryant, Y., Anthony, L., & Wilkerson, J. (2007). *Sexual Assault in Maryland: The African American Experience*. U.S. Department of Justice.
- ⁸ Browne, A., Agha, A., Demyan, A., & Beatriz, E. (2016). *Examining Criminal Justice Responses to and Help-Seeking Patterns of Sexual Violence Survivors with Disabilities*. Vera Institute of Justice.
- ⁹ Kachur, R., Mesnick, J., Liddon, N., Kapsimalis, C., Habel, M., Ferdon-David, C., Brown, K., Gloppen, K., Tevendale, H., Gelaude, D.J., Romero, L., Seitz, H., Heldman, A.B., & Schindelar, J. (2013). *Adolescents, Technology and Reducing Risk for HIV, STDs and Pregnancy*. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- ¹⁰ Among other general information about what victim advocates are, and how to access services, survivors are advised that "You can find a victim advocacy center by calling RAINN, the national sexual assault hotline, at 1-800-656-HOPE (4673). Or you can search for victim advocacy centers by state or zip code. Just go to the RAINN website using the button below. The RAINN website also offers helpful information about healing, safety planning, and talking to loved ones about your assault."
- ¹¹ Kansas City Police Department Unveils 'Seek Then Speak' Tool, *KCTV 5 News*, April 28, 2022; Seek Then Speak: KCPD Announces New Initiative for Sexual Assault Survivors. *Fox 4 News*, April 28, 2022.