SEEK THEN SPEAK
Frequently Asked Questions

This document was designed for law enforcement, advocates, prosecutors, health care providers, and other professionals interested in adopting Seek Then Speak as a tool for sexual assault survivors.

Q: What is Seek Then Speak?

A: Seek Then Speak is a free public website created by End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI). It provides survivors and support people with valuable information about services and options available in the aftermath of a sexual assault. Seek Then Speak also offers a self-guided investigative interview that survivors can use to begin the process of reporting to law enforcement, if they choose. Because the tool is available online, Seek Then Speak can be accessed by survivors and support people any time and place they choose.

Q: What type of information is available in Seek Then Speak?

A: The "Seek" portion of the website provides helpful information about sexual violence and the services and options that are available to a survivor in the aftermath of an assault. The information in Seek is designed to answer real-world questions that are commonly asked about victim advocacy, medical and forensic care, reporting options, and more. There is also information in Seek specifically developed for support people to help guide them through the process of supporting any loved ones who may have been sexually assaulted.

Q: How does the reporting option in Seek Then Speak work?

A: The "Speak" feature of the website guides survivors through a series of interview questions designed to collect critical information about their sexual assault. At any point, survivors can generate a PDF report, which they can save for themselves or provide to law enforcement as an initial step in reporting the crime. For law enforcement agencies that adopt Seek Then Speak, a specific email address can be designated for survivors to submit their reports. Or, survivors can print the PDF and give it directly to a law enforcement officer. Some law enforcement agencies allow survivors to complete and submit a Seek Then Speak

report instead of reporting directly to a patrol officer. Because the "Speak" feature is fairly comprehensive, it will allow detectives and other members of law enforcement to take initial investigative steps without a survivor having to recount the same facts again. Instead, the investigator can focus on follow up questions during their interview. This can be a helpful option for some survivors who may not feel comfortable interacting with law enforcement right away or in situations when patrol response is delayed. Whichever option they choose, Seek Then Speak allows survivors to maintain control over whether and how they report to law enforcement, while documenting critical information about their sexual assault.

Q: Why do we need a new way for survivors to report sexual assault?

A: Fewer than 25% of survivors report to law enforcement, dramatically reducing the criminal justice system's ability to address sexual violence. In many jurisdictions, survivors face long wait times for patrol response to their call. Other survivors may have limited access to transportation, making it difficult to get to the police station to file a report. Still other survivors decide not to report their sexual assault because they fear they'll be blamed for the assault or mistreated in the criminal justice process. Survivors of color, LGBTQ+ survivors, those with limited English proficiency, and survivors with disabilities often face more barriers and concerns about whether they can trust the criminal justice system to support them. Survivors therefore need additional options to access justice and services. Alternative reporting options like Seek Then Speak can provide many survivors with a safer, more comfortable way to begin to engage with the criminal justice system, minimizing many of the barriers that have so often closed off this path.

Q: Does Seek Then Speak send a report directly to law enforcement?

A: No, the website does not send a PDF report to anyone. The information that survivors enter in response to the interview questions will simply be stored on their own device (for 30 days through the use of web cookies) in order to generate the PDF report. The survivor can then save or print the report, providing it to law enforcement only if and when they choose. Survivors are encouraged to contact a victim advocacy agency for information and supportive services throughout the process.

Q: Can survivors use this tool to report sexual assault anonymously?

A: Yes, Seek Then Speak can be used to report anonymously if survivors do not provide their name (or other identifying information) in response to the interview questions. That way, the information will not be included in the PDF report the program creates. Survivors are informed of this option while they are completing

the self-guided interview in Speak. Survivors are also advised that reporting anonymously may limit law enforcement from taking any next steps in the investigation. But there is no guarantee that law enforcement will not start an investigation based on the information in the report, regardless of the survivor's wishes. If survivors want to ensure they remain anonymous, the program advises them to not provide their name or any other identifying information within Speak.

Q: If our community adopts this tool, do all survivors need to use it?

A: No. Seek Then Speak is not intended to replace existing reporting and response procedures, but rather to enhance support for survivors and provide an alternative to current reporting practices. If a survivor prefers to report through traditional law enforcement response procedures, they can still do so. Seek Then Speak is simply another tool that communities can utilize to make sure that survivors have as many choices as possible in the aftermath of sexual assault.

Q: How can law enforcement use a Seek Then Speak report in an investigation?

A: Law enforcement agencies can use Seek Then Speak reports the same way investigators and detectives use any other type of initial victim statements. For example, they can use the report to inform and guide next investigative steps, including identifying potential witnesses to interview and critical evidence to preserve (e.g. social media posts or security camera footage.) Investigators can also use the report to inform what questions to ask of a survivor during a follow-up interview, without requiring them to repeatedly recount their assault. Some agencies refer survivors to Seek Then Speak as a tool to help them better understand what to expect from an investigative interview. The program notifies survivors who submit a Seek Then Speak report that they will likely still need to meet with an investigator to answer additional questions. They are also informed that if they complete a Seek Then Speak report, it will likely be added to the investigative case file and that a copy may be provided to defense counsel during the discovery process if charges are filed in the case.

Q: Who developed the interview questions in Seek Then Speak?

A: EVAWI has been working to create and refine the text in Seek Then Speak since 2016. Thousands of hours, and decades of professional expertise, have gone into developing the text, along with perspectives from the lived experiences of sexual assault survivors and support people. Specifically, feedback was incorporated from experts representing a range of professional disciplines (including prosecution, law enforcement, victim advocacy, health care, clinical psychology, Title IX, and

civil legal representation). A diverse group of subject matter experts also reviewed the program specifically with a cultural competency lens. Focus groups were then conducted with sexual assault survivors, support people for survivors, and various criminal justice professionals. Moving forward, EVAWI will continue to update and enhance the dialogue based on feedback from users and community partners, including investigators, prosecutors, and culturally-specific service providers.

Q: What if a survivor isn't ready to report yet?

A: Seek Then Speak can be a helpful tool for survivors who are uncertain about reporting, or who want to document information about their sexual assault in case they decide to report later. Survivors can work through the self-guided interview questions in Speak at a time and place of their choosing, taking as long as they need, without feeling pressured to make a reporting decision right away. Then when they complete the report, the PDF will have a time and date stamp to indicate when it was finished.

Q: How can advocates support a survivor using Seek Then Speak?

A: Seek Then Speak offers a new way for survivors to document information, explore options, and take action, including beginning the process of reporting to law enforcement if they choose. Throughout that process, advocates can offer the same type of services that they always do, including providing survivors with information, emotional support, and various forms of tangible assistance. For example, advocates can offer support to survivors while they are completing a Seek Then Speak report, just as they would if the survivor was participating in a traditional in-person interview with law enforcement. Advocates can also refer survivors and their loved ones to Seek Then Speak while they are providing support in other settings, such as the hospital or medical forensic exam facility. Advocates can also use Seek Then Speak to help a survivor prepare for the types of questions they may be asked in an investigative interview.

Q: Can someone else fill out a Seek Then Speak report for a survivor?

No, the interview in Speak should only be completed by the survivor in their own words. Advocates and other support people should take care not to do anything that can be perceived as assisting with the substance of the report. For example, they should not type, translate, or paraphrase any responses for survivors, nor suggest any wording for survivors to use while they are completing their report. This would taint the integrity of the Seek Then Speak report, which becomes part of the official case file once it is submitted to law enforcement. This type of

participation could also negate any confidentiality that was previously held between an advocate and survivor in their private conversations.

Q: How can a Seek Then Speak report be used in court proceedings?

A: Any written statement, including a Seek Then Speak report, can be used in a variety of ways during court proceedings (including criminal court, civil court, family court, etc.). For example, when law enforcement agencies receive a Seek Then Speak report, they will likely include the report in their case file when submitting a case for review by prosecution. If charges are filed in a criminal case, the Seek Then Speak report will then be provided to the defense attorney during the process of discovery. Typically, the Seek then Speak report itself will not be entered into evidence during a criminal trial, because it cannot be used as a substitute for live victim testimony. If the case goes to trial, a survivor will likely have to testify and be cross-examined regarding their responses in a Seek Then Speak report, just as they would for any other statement made to law enforcement about the crime. The program advises survivors to keep these various uses in mind while they are completing their Seek Then Speak report and making a decision about reporting.

Q: Can Seek Then Speak be used outside the criminal justice system?

A: Yes. Seek Then Speak was designed as an investigative interview that could be used within the criminal justice system, to help survivors report their sexual assault to law enforcement. But that is not the only use. Some colleges and universities have adopted the program to help survivors report their sexual assault for Title IX purposes. Other survivors use the program, not to report to law enforcement, but to document their information in case they decide to report in the future. Some go through the self-guided interview in Speak for therapeutic purposes, to help make sense of what happened to them and explain it to others. Regardless of the specific use, Seek Then Speak can help survivors to explore their options, better understand what to expect from an investigation, and document information about their assault while they make decisions that are right for them.

Q: Is Seek Then Speak available in languages other than English?

A: Yes. When someone visits the Seek Then Speak website, the text can be translated into many different languages, using browser-based features that are available for anyone accessing the internet. If a survivor accesses the site on their own device, the text will appear in whatever language is selected in the browser settings. However, there is also a drop-down menu for Google-based site translation that includes the 14 languages most commonly spoken in the US. This

can be used if a survivor prefers to use a language for the Seek Then Speak website that is different than the default browser settings, for example, if they are using someone else's device (e.g., friend or family) or a computer in a public location (such as the public library or on campus). Seek Then Speak is also compatible with common accessibility programs such as screen readers.

Q: How is survivor privacy protected on the Seek Then Speak website?

A: Survivor information is not stored on the Seek Then Speak website. Data that is entered by a user is temporarily stored on their device for 30 days through the use of web cookies. That data is used to generate the PDF report, so survivors are advised to clear their data (by clicking the CLEAR button) after the report is created and saved. This will ensure survivor privacy is maintained. However, it is important to understand that if a survivor provides a Seek Then Speak report to law enforcement, it will become part of the official case record. This report, and all the information contained in it, will then be available to other criminal justice professionals and other parties involved in any future legal proceedings.

Q: What can a survivor do if they don't have internet access or prefer not to complete the Speak interview online?

A: If a survivor doesn't have reliable internet access, or would generally prefer not to complete the interview online, a blank PDF version of the questions in Speak can be printed (using the "Preview Questions" option on the side menu). The survivor can then use this paper version to complete the interview, either by handwriting their responses or guiding their own process for documenting the information. Survivors may also use the paper version simply to gather their thoughts and prepare for reporting to law enforcement. When survivors complete the report offline, however, they should be advised to record the date the report was completed.