

Judicial System

For many, this may be the first involvement with law enforcement or the judicial system. It's very common for people to expect what they have seen on television or movies to apply to their current circumstances. Unfortunately, these expectations are often unrealistic or a distorted snapshot of how things truly operate.

Texas has laws and regulations in place aimed at protecting victims. For cases involving prosecution, court advocates can provide you with information, education, and support that will help reduce fears and uncertainties.

Criminal case resolution by plea agreement is a practice that is often utilized. Through both negotiation and agreement, this approach to resolution can prevent the need for testifying in court.

Education and information regarding how the judicial system operates can assist victims and their family in the reduction of trauma.

Benefits of Counseling

If it is safe to do so, consider seeking help from a counselor. Some of the benefits are:

- Reviewing and processing the situation can help you clarify what is happening
- Counseling can help develop coping skills and strategies—allowing for the continuance of school, work or relationships.
- Establishment of a support network can help to decrease the negative psychological, physical, and emotional effects that often result from abuse
- Safety planning and options for the future can be discussed in a confidential setting

The experience can be utilized to build and practice assertiveness, confidence, and protective instinct skills and reduce isolation.

Who can help?

The Victim Services Unit within the Travis County Sheriff's Office can provide assistance with information about your case status, Crime Victims' Rights, Crime Victim Compensation, navigation of the criminal justice system and referrals to appropriate helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.



Resources

SAFE Alliance
512.267.SAFE
www.safeaustin.org

VINE
(Victim Information and Notification Everyday)
1-877-894-8463
www.vinelink.com

Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network
1-800-656-HOPE(4673)
www.rainn.org

Office for Victims of Crime
1-800-851-3420
www.ovc.gov

Jane's Due Process
1-866-999-5623
www.janesdueprocess.org

Teens and Sexual Assault

Victim Services Unit

5555 Airport Blvd
Austin, TX 78751
512-854-9709



Name/ID Number:

Direct Number:

Mailing Address:

PO Box 1748
Austin, TX 78767

Age of Consent

Age of Consent for Sexual Activity

17 years of age = Age of consent

14-16 years of age = Age of consent with an Affirmative Defense.

- Affirmative Defense = spouse or offender is less than 3 years older (and sex is factually consensual)

Advocacy, Counseling, & Medical Treatment

At any age, you can access:

- Advocacy and counseling for physical or sexual abuse
- Medical and psychiatric exams if abuse is suspected
- Health care, including testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections/diseases (such as HIV/AIDS) and pregnancy-related health care (excluding abortion)
- Contraceptives—including Plan B

16 years of age:

- Can refuse a SAFE (even when parents request)
- Can consent or refuse medical care from a physician or mental health care provider without parental knowledge (if the minor is living independently).

Although you can consent to health care without parental knowledge as a minor, parents can still request medical/counseling records.

18 years of age:

- Can consent to all medical care from a physician and mental health care provider without parental knowledge or consent
- Can seek an abortion

What's Next?

If you've been sexually assaulted, remember that it's okay to have fears or worries about what will happen next. It's also okay to ask questions.

There may be many people involved and it's important to remember that your thoughts, feelings, and choices matter.

Some things you may want to focus on:

- Identify a support system

This may be your family, it may be your friends, it may be a counselor at school or it may be someone who is completely removed from the situation. It may be tempting to pretend that nothing happened, but it's important to surround yourself with trusted people.

- Address health concerns

Consider meeting with a medical professional. This may occur in the form of a medical forensic exam—this exam is a place for you to ask questions about your health. It's also a process during which evidence of the assault is collected. You may also need additional follow-up medical appointments.

- Prepare for the investigative process

This will involve talking with a detective or someone who is specially trained in speaking with young people. It may be difficult to talk about what happened. Someone from Victim Services can help answer your questions about the investigative process and what you can expect. It may also be helpful to talk to a counselor or therapist during this process for added support.

- Take care of yourself

Try your best to get plenty of sleep, eat well, avoid alcohol/drug use, and participate in as much of your normal routine as possible.

Safety Concerns

You can apply for a Protective Order to seek protection from the person who harmed you. This application process can feel overwhelming and lengthy, so it's helpful to have someone with you if you apply for one.

Stay-away plans can also be put into place at school if you have safety concerns with anyone you go to class or activities with.

What if I'm pregnant?

This is a natural concern after experiencing a sexual assault. If you are pregnant, it's important to know you have choices.

- Parents/guardians are responsible for you until you turn 18. This includes decisions related to your health, where you live, and your overall well-being.
- If you are pregnant, you have a legal right to choose to parent your baby or make an adoption plan.
- You can also choose to terminate a pregnancy with the consent of your parent/guardian. If parent/guardian consent cannot be obtained at least 48 hours before the procedure, your decision to terminate a pregnancy will require a legal process called Judicial Bypass.

Considering your options under these circumstances can be extremely difficult and feel overwhelming. It may be helpful to seek out additional support. Victim Services can help connect you with resources that can help.