

Core Messages for B-SMART Agencies

The B-SMART team created this list of core messages as a tool for anyone who comes into contact with a victim of sexual assault. It is not intended to be used as a protocol process to follow step by step, but rather a general approach to helping a victim. One should keep these core messages in mind every time they are presented with a new sexual assault case.

1. Importance of involving advocacy early and often
 - a. Offer services more than once along with an explanation of the role of advocacy.
 - b. Call an advocate and inform the victim that the advocate is available for a face-to-face meeting. This has been shown to increase the acceptance rate of advocacy services. A statement to consider using: "There is an advocate here, would you like to see her?"
 - c. Explain that if they or someone they knew did not have a good past experience with advocacy other community options are available or a different advocate can be requested.
2. Always be patient with the victim and the process.
3. Ask the victim their needs, desires and wants. Being victim centered is our goal, and it will also give the victim back some of the power they lost during the assault.
4. Present the victim with their rights, the process and all options to encourage informed decision making.
 - a. Provide realistic expectations regarding the process and the system. Explain the lengthy process, professional limitations, responsibilities of each discipline, etc.
 - b. Explain that the process can be drawn-out and that professionals take these cases very seriously. They just want to ensure a careful, comprehensive and thorough response.
5. Understand the emotional state of the victim, that s/he may be in crisis and that victim response varies from person to person. Encourage to take one step at a time, and help the victim realize that not all decisions need to be made immediately.
6. Tell the victim it is not their fault.

7. Regardless of the victims choices (e.g. not to report), address any safety needs the victim may have.
8. Address pre-existing circumstances (e.g. alcohol use and warrants). Inform the victim that they could talk to advocate about concerns they may have regarding underage drinking, warrants or drug use. The advocate may be able to help the victim resolve any pre-existing circumstances. Inform the victim that the primary concern of law enforcement will be the sexual assault