

The UFPD Advocate

NEWSLETTER OF THE OFFICE OF VICTIM SERVICES
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA POLICE DEPARTMENT
(352) 392-5648
SUMMER 2009



DEMYTHIFYING THE OFFICE OF VICTIM SERVICES

Myth 1: Meeting with a victim advocate is the same as talking to an officer.

Talking to a victim advocate is NOT the same thing as talking to a police officer. Victim advocates cannot make arrests. Also, when a victim speaks with a victim advocate, s/he does not have to file a police report if s/he chooses not to.

Myth 2: If I talk to a victim advocate, everyone will know.

A victim can feel comfortable knowing that anything discussed with the victim advocate will be kept completely confidential, allowing them to explore all of their options in a safe, non-judgmental environment.

Myth 3: Once I tell the victim advocates my situation, they will make a decision for me.

The role of the victim advocate is to educate a victim of crime on what options are available, and to support and assist him/her in whatever option s/he chooses. A victim of crime has already had power taken away from him/her through a violent act. A victim advocate seeks to empower the victim by allowing him/her to make his/her own decisions.

Myth 4: If I decide to press charges, I will have to go through the justice process alone.

If a victim decides to press charges, s/he will not be alone. A victim advocate will help him/her to write a victim impact statement, assist him/her when filing for an Injunction for Protection, and also accompany him/her to court hearings. If the case is brought to Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution, the victim advocate can arrange for the victim to participate in the hearing somewhere other than the Dean of Students Office so s/he will not have to face his/her assailant.

COMMON REACTIONS TO VICTIMIZATION

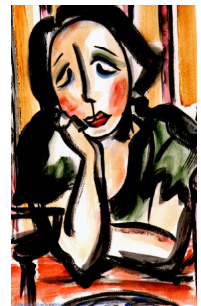
Victims of crime may experience many physical, cognitive, and emotional reactions as a result of the victimization. The time of onset and the duration of these symptoms will vary by individual.

Physical Reactions:

- Headaches
- Stress related illnesses, such as nausea, diarrhea, and hives
- Sleep disturbances or nightmares
- Hyperactivity
- Lethargy
- Appetite changes
- Lowered immunity

Cognitive Reactions:

- Forgetfulness
- Inability to concentrate
- Memory loss of the event
- Flashbacks of the event



Emotional Reactions:

- Terror
- Anger or rage
- Guilt
- Grief
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Mood swings
- Emotional numbness
- Social withdrawal
- Feelings of helplessness



These, and many others, are normal reactions to experiencing a traumatic event, such as being the victim of a crime. You do not have to go through the healing process alone. If you or someone you know is experiencing such symptoms, talk about it with a trusted family member or friend. Or seek help from one of the resources available to you on campus such as the University Counseling Center, (352) 392-1575, or Student Mental Health Services, (352) 392-1171. Take the first step towards healing by reaching out.

Did you know... the University of Florida Police Department's Office of Victim Services is starting a Peer Advocacy Program? After training, peer advocates will be responsible for delivering presentations on sexual battery, intimate partner violence, stalking, alcohol and consent, and other topics to classes and various student organizations. Peer advocates will also be responsible for coordinating and implementing various campus awareness/outreach activities. Preferred qualities for this position include basic knowledge of victimization issues; excellent oral and written communication skills; public speaking experience; outstanding interpersonal skills; ability to work independently; and a passion for education and outreach regarding sexual violence. Peer advocates can use their hours to earn college credits (check with your department to see if this option is available to you). If you are interested in becoming a peer advocate, please submit a resume and cover letter explaining your interest in the position by July 31, 2009 to judithaw@ufl.edu or tvanderv@ufl.edu. An advocate will contact you to schedule an interview.

FORENSIC NURSE EXAMS

One of the options available to victims after a sexual battery is a forensic exam. In previous years, a victim would have to file a police report in order to receive a forensic exam. However, as a result of legislation passed during the 2007 session, victims are no longer required to report a sexual battery in order to have the physical evidence collected.

Medical evidence that may be present following a sexual battery can only be collected up to 96 hours after the sexual battery has occurred. Therefore, victims wishing to have an exam must do so within 96 hours of the incident.

Certified Forensic Nurse Examiners are trained to provide specialized, quality care to victims of physical and sexual abuse. The nurse takes a narrative account of the victim's story while assessing for injuries. The evidence collection process includes a pelvic exam and swabbing areas for DNA. The Forensic Nurse Examiner also provides the victim with emergency contraception and emergency antibiotics to try to prevent an STD infection. After the exam has been completed, the victim has the option of filing a police report for 90 days. If the victim decides not to file a police report during the 90 day period, the evidence kit will be destroyed. If the victim decides to file a police report, the kit will be submitted as evidence. The nurse can also be called to court to testify about the evidence she collected.

It is the victim's choice whether or not to have the exam, but without the exam the case is harder to prosecute because of the lack of physical evidence.

In Alachua County, trained Forensic Nurse Examiners are available to complete forensic exams at the Alachua General Hospital Emergency Room (801 S.W. 2nd Avenue, Gainesville, FL 32601) until November 1st, 2009. After November 1st, victims should be seen at the Shands at UF Emergency Room.

There are many other options available to victims of sexual battery. If you would like to learn more about these options, please call (352) 392-5648 from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. or (352) 392-1111 after hours and on weekends.

CAMPUS SPOTLIGHT: THE COUNSELING CENTER

At the time of a traumatic event, the person experiencing the event might feel numb and, therefore, not know how to respond. Later on, memories of the trauma can bring out feelings of helplessness, fear, even horror (like s/he is reliving the trauma all over again). To try to resolve such feelings and move forward after a trauma, it is helpful to discuss the events and feelings. After being victimized, a person can choose to go to counseling as a way to deal with the stress associated with the experience and the change it has brought in his/her life.

If you find you are often worried by a concern, persistently experiencing anxiousness, sadness or anger, or finding yourself more isolated and having difficulty with focusing on your studies, you may benefit from using counseling services.

The University of Florida Counseling Center is located at 301 Peabody Hall. The Counseling Center provides confidential services consistent with State of Florida and professional standards. Client records are not part of a student's educational record. The services of the Counseling Center are free to currently enrolled UF students. The Counseling Center offers group counseling as well as individual counseling. The counselors have had training and experience working with college students.

You can inquire about services or make an appointment by calling (352) 392-1575 or coming by the Center which is located on the 3rd floor of Peabody Hall (next to Criser Hall). The Center is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. If a person is in need of immediate help, the counseling center offers emergency walk-ins.

