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# SUPPORTING A STUDENT WHO HAS EXPERIENCED A SEXUAL ASSAULT ON A STUDY ABROAD TRIP

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## IMMEDIATE CONCERNS & RESPONSES

### Medical Needs

- Find out if they have injuries that need to be treated immediately.
- Find out if the hospital or clinic conduct exams for the purpose of collecting evidence. If they do, ask the following questions:
  - What happens to the kits/how long are they kept?
  - Do they have trained sexual assault advocates available?
  - What is their time limit after an assault in which the exam must be completed?
  - Will they automatically inform law enforcement?
  - Do they provide any immediate treatment vs. testing later for STIs?
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- Ask the student if she is concerned about a possible pregnancy? If so, find out if emergency contraception or Plan B is accessible in that country? Plan B prevents pregnancy and should be taken within 72 hours of the intercourse but can be taken up to 120 hours after. Effectiveness depends on time between intercourse and ingestion of the pill. Encourage students to buy it over the counter in the U.S. before they go or find out if the country you are traveling to has it available over the counter.
- If you are associated with a university, find out if they have campus health services and if they provide any of the services above.

Keep in mind that the student does not need to have an evidence exam done. You can tell them that having it now may give them more options later in a criminal proceeding if the country you are in does them. The advantages or disadvantages of this are going to vary from country to country

### Reporting Options

- Know the laws about sexual assault in the country and explain this to the student.
- Find out if they have trained sexual assault or crime victim advocates or services.
- Find out how much input the victim will have in the criminal process and what rights a sexual assault victim has.
- For more information, contact the number for U.S. State Department Victim Assistance at **1-888-407-4747 during business hours** or at **202-647-5225 after hours**, or visit their website at <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/emergencies/victims.html>
- Allow the victim to decide whether or not to report to law enforcement.
- If you are on a campus, find out what the reporting options are.

Be aware that some countries may not afford sexual assault victims any rights in the reporting process and reporting may not always be the best for the student. Gather information and provide honest information to the student.

### University Contacts – Who You Need to Call

Please keep in mind as you make the needed calls to SCSU, only share the name of the student who was victimized with individuals that need to know. As a faculty member, you are required by law to report this to the Title IX Coordinator, Chocoletta Simpson. See details below. You can tell the student that the Title IX Coordinator will make sure the student is receiving all of the resources necessary and will invite them to talk about campus investigations if the accused is connected with our campus.

## **Gender Violence Prevention Coordinator**

Rebecca Kotz

320-308-3995

[rebecca.kotz@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:rebecca.kotz@stcloudstate.edu)

Provide the above contact information to the student so they can access confidential resources. If you suspect that a student has experienced a sexual assault but the student is not comfortable talking with you, please let the student know that when they contact the Gender Violence Prevention Coordinator, she serves as a confidential resource and cannot share any information about the student without their permission.

The Gender Violence Prevention Program Coordinator is also available to assist faculty in dealing with a sexual assault that occurs on a trip. Due to each situation being unique, it is best to call as opposed to following a protocol that may not be applicable in your situation.

## **International Studies - Education Abroad**

Rachael Gardner, Associate Director: 320-308-6078

## **Equity and Affirmative Action Officer & Title IX Coordinator**

Chocoletta A. Simpson

320-308-5123

[chocoletta.simpson@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:chocoletta.simpson@stcloudstate.edu)

All SCSU employees are obligated under Title IX to report instances of discrimination; including harassment, rape, and coercion based on sex or gender; to the SCSU Title IX Coordinator. When on a study abroad trip, it may be best to contact the Title IX Coordinator directly, but if you have limited access to phone or computers you may ask one of the other university contacts to alert the Affirmative Action Office. When you make contact, be prepared to provide information on how the student is being assisted and what resources have been made available. If the individual who committed the sexual assault is another SCSU student, it may be a student conduct code violation. The Title IX Coordinator can assist in determining if the student accused needs to return home based on a conduct code violation. The Title IX Coordinator is also available if the victim/survivor needs assistance in returning home. However, be aware that based on the healing stages and the type of assault, the victim may not always want to return home and is not required to do so.

## **SUPPORTING THE STUDENT**

### Safety

The most important role that a faculty can play after a student has experienced sexual violence is to assist them as soon as possible and begin creating an environment where they can feel safe.

Healing cannot start until the student begins to feel safe.

### Control

Allow the student to be in as much control of the situation as possible, even in small ways. Don't decide everything for the student.

- For example, ask: "Do you want to drink a soda or have some water?"; "Where or with whom would you feel safe spending the night tonight?"

The student has just lost all control by being sexually assaulted and is likely to be very sensitive to control issues right now. The survivor needs to get the message from those around him or her that he or she is back in control to the extent possible.

## Supportive Messages

- There are three basic messages that the student needs to hear verbally and behaviorally from everyone who is in a supportive role:
  - You are not alone. We are with you.
  - I am so sorry this happened to you.
  - It was not your fault.

At this stage it is NOT helpful to point out ways that the victim may have used poor judgement. Avoid all statements or attitudes that would imply blame, criticism, or judgement and do not ask why questions. Remember that no matter what the victim did or did not do, they did not ask to be attacked. The rapist is to blame for the sexual assault.

If the student placed themselves in a vulnerable position and a sexual assault occurred, this issue can be addressed later. If addressed now, it can adversely affect healing and damage your relationship with the student.

## Advocacy

The student needs to be accompanied to the police station or to any legal proceeding. Never have them go alone. Find out if that country has sexual assault or crime victim advocates available to the victim. If possible, allow the student to have input into who will be accompanying him or her.

Based on federal law and Department of Education guidelines, the student needs to be offered alternatives to completing the trip or credits, be shielded from contact with the accused, and provided with information about resources.

## Privacy & Confidentiality

Except for those who “need to know”, respect the student’s need for privacy. Do not tell others that the student has been assaulted without getting the student’s permission or explaining to them why you may need to tell others. You can tell the student that the three offices on campus that he or she can talk to confidentially are the Women’s Center Gender Violence Prevention Program, Health Services, and Counseling and Psychological Services. In some instances, the student may want help in talking to the whole group. The Coordinator of the Gender Violence Prevention program is available to assist faculty in deciding if this is the best way to proceed and in how to facilitate the meeting.

- **Gender Violence Prevention Program Coordinator**  
(320)308-3995 - [rebecca.kotz@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:rebecca.kotz@stcloudstate.edu)
- **Health Services**  
(320)308-3191 - [healthservices@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:healthservices@stcloudstate.edu)
- **Counseling and Psychological Services**  
(320)308-3171 - [counseling@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:counseling@stcloudstate.edu)

Everyone’s right to privacy needs to be respected. For assault victims, it takes on even greater meaning as a result of their boundaries of mind, body, and spirit being violently invaded.

## **Vicarious Trauma**

It is very stressful to care for someone who has been sexually assaulted. Hearing the student’s story can cause a secondary trauma for you. Please be sure you are caring well for yourself and your own needs so that you can be at your best for the student. This may include getting enough rest, taking turns being with the victim/survivor, having someone you can talk to about the feelings you are experiencing, and recognizing your limits.

You may feel:

- Guilt that you should have prevented it in some way.
- Sad – grief is understandable when someone you know is hurt.
- Angry – wishing you could get your hands on the rapist, mad at the cultural response to sexual assault, angry at the country.
- Hopeless
- Denial – trying not to think about it, avoiding conversation, avoiding the victim/survivor, pretending nothing happened, minimizing the trauma.

All of these feelings are understandable in the face of trauma. The more honest you are with yourself about your own responses, the more likely you are to work through them. Utilize the resources you have available to you through the university.

When someone you know is assaulted, it is difficult to manage your own responses, much less know how to be supportive and helpful to the victim of such a horrible attack. Sexual Violence is not just an assault on the body, it is an assault on the mind and spirit as well. Left untreated, a victim of sexual violence is much more likely to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and have lingering, perhaps even debilitating symptoms. Most common among these symptoms are nightmares, flashbacks, avoidance of sexual intimacy, impaired concentration, and mood fluctuations, and changes in sleep and appetite.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is hoped that the information provided in this guide will be useful to effectively support victimized students experiencing the physical and psychological consequences of assault. Your support is very important. The way a victim of assault is treated by the support people around them immediately following the attack greatly affects their healing. The tools described in this guide can help prepare you to act with compassion, understanding, and effectiveness.

You are always welcome to contact the Gender Violence Prevention Program via e-mail or phone for guidance and consultation.