



EVAWI
End Violence Against Women International

145 S Main | Colville, WA 99114
P- 509.684.9800 | F- 509.684.9801
www.evawintl.org | info@evawintl.org



EVAWI Statement on Sexual Assault Response and Investigation

As a professional training organization dedicated to improving sexual assault investigations, we know that the crime of sexual assault is complex and often misunderstood. Most sexual assault victims don't report the crime to law enforcement, and when they do, it is often weeks, months, or years later.

There are many reasons why survivors don't come forward, but primary among these is a fear of not being believed. Negative responses can have devastating consequences for victims, and they can decrease the chance of reaching out for further support or assistance. At [EVAWI](#), we recognize that it takes extraordinary courage to come forward and report sexual assault under any circumstances.

We also recognize it is more difficult to investigate a report of sexual assault committed long ago. However, it is not impossible, and dedicated law enforcement professionals across the country do it every day. Particularly in cases of child sexual assault, investigators frequently corroborate reports of abuse that took place years ago, even without physical evidence or eyewitnesses to the crime. Other types of evidence and testimony can often be documented even decades after the original assault.

Yet the starting place for a sexual assault investigation is typically a victim interview. To get the best information from that interview, it is essential to follow standards of practice that are based on an understanding of trauma and the common dynamics of sexual assault victimization and perpetration. This includes creating a safe and nonjudgmental environment, establishing trust and rapport, and providing advocacy services or other support. It also requires a great deal of time and patience.

The most effective way to accomplish this is to [Start by Believing](#). This doesn't mean investigators make a premature judgment, or reach a preordained conclusion. It simply means that investigators listen carefully to the victim's report, without communicating an attitude of doubt or blame. The next step is then to follow the evidence, by conducting a thorough, professional, and impartial investigation.

[EVAWI](#) offers a wealth of training resources for sexual assault investigators. But the most important step is the first one. When someone says they were sexually assaulted – whether in a report to law enforcement, or a disclosure to friends and family members – it is critical to [Start by Believing](#).

#StartbyBelieving