There is no shame when a loved one dies, your house is burglarized, or you’re diagnosed with cancer. Friends and loved ones gather around you for support. They don’t blame you for “brining it on yourself.”

It should be the same with sexual violence. Rape and sexual assault are just as unpredictable, just as devastating. But all too often, victims who have the courage to tell someone are not believed, or they are blamed. A terrifying attack becomes a source of shame, not support. And the pain—and shame—ripples with destructive effects on families, communities, and the very fabric of our society. Sexual violence hurts everyone.

End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI) is dedicated to changing the way we respond to rape and sexual assault in our communities. Our goal is to pave the way for survivors to have a voice and healing, so the decision to come forward and seek help is a safe one. Please join us, and transform this vision to reality.

ABOUT END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN INTERNATIONAL (EVAWI)

EVAWI was founded in 2003 by Sergeant Joanne Archambault (Retired, San Diego Police Department), with the goal of improving criminal justice responses to sexual assault and other forms of gender-based violence. Working with professionals both inside and outside the system, we strive to improve the way survivors are treated, pursue accountability for perpetrators, and prevent future attacks.

Yet most victims of sexual assault never report the crime to law enforcement, often because of the responses they receive from friends and family members. Our Start by Believing campaign is designed to change this. By preparing both professionals and loved ones to respond appropriately to sexual assault disclosures, we are working to improve outcomes for survivors, one response at a time.

As EVAWI, we envision a world where gender-based violence is unacceptable—and the victims whose lives, families, and communities are torn apart, receive the compassion, support and justice they deserve. When we create a system that helps survivors to heal, and thrive, they will transform our world with strength, hope, and joy.

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EVAWI focuses on connecting professionals and improving the criminal justice and community response to sexual assault. We provide a wealth of expertise, resources, tools, and models for best practices. We also offer numerous opportunities for multidisciplinary professionals to engage in collaborative learning through national and international conferences, live and recorded webinars, online training courses, a comprehensive resource library, and other forms of training and technical assistance.

Yet most victims do not turn to professionals first. Instead, they reach out to friends and family members, when they utter those terrible words: “I was raped.” Our Start by Believing campaign prepares loved ones to react positively to a sexual assault disclosure, so victims get the support they need.

But what happens next? After we Start by Believing, how do we help?

Seek Then Speak provides victims and their support people with the tools they need to gather information, explore options, and take action. Victims can even begin the process of reporting directly to law enforcement and requesting supportive services, using an agency portal called Victim Link. In other words, Seek Then Speak and Victim Link help to close gaps in service delivery and promote justice and healing.

EVAWI is dedicated to improving both personal and professional responses to sexual violence. Why? Because we recognize the many steps a survivor must take on the road to justice and healing. Reaching out to a friend or loved one to say they’ve been sexually assaulted... Contacting law enforcement and being interviewed... Submitting to a medical forensic exam... Posing questions about an incredibly painful experience... Participating in a difficult and disgusting criminal justice process... All to hold a perpetrator accountable, so everyone can live in a safer community.

There are so many steps. And each step is a link in the chain of support. But like any chain, one weak link can compromise the strength of the others. A friend or family member doesn’t believe, and accuses the victim of “crying rape.” A police officer doesn’t believe, and refuses to conduct an investigation. A doctor or nurse doesn’t believe, and fails to provide an exam. Just a single negative response can mean the whole chain falls apart.

What’s worse, the means is victory for the perpetrator, who remains free to rape again. And statistics show that rapists don’t just attack once. They re-offend, often multiple times. It’s a frightening equation: One failed response can mean additional victims.

We must do better. At EVAWI, we know how. We have the expertise, the resources, the tools, and the models for best practice to help communities strengthen every link in the chain of response.

Our vision is to end the silence, stop the cycle of repeat offenses, and hold perpetrators accountable.