

Montana Department of Justice
Sexual Assault Kit Initiative
Course “Initial Contact and Rapport Building”

Intro

Slide 2: Welcome to the course: Initial Contact and Rapport Building

Slide 3: Content Warning: We will be talking about sexual violence which may trigger personal feelings. Please remember to take care of yourself and do what you need to help yourself.

Slide 4: Disclaimer: This project was supported by Grant No. 2017-AK-BX-0022 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice."

Slide 5: Objectives: In this course, you will learn the basics of how to interact with a sexual assault survivor. You will learn what to consider when making initial contact, and how to build rapport to have a successful survivor-centered interview.

Slide 6: Due to the particularly intimate and intrusive nature of sexual assault, the initial interview process may be difficult both for the survivor and the officer. Recognize the significance that the survivor's initial interview will have on their trust of the criminal justice system. The treatment the survivor receives during this initial contact may impact their decision to go forward with the case, feeling of safety, and decisions to engage with community resources.

Initial Contact

Slide 7: Meet the survivor where they are in their experience. Understand that you are responding to a traumatic event. Allow the survivor empowerment and choice.

- Understand that survivors might put up a "trauma bubble" to help them cope and may not want to say anything.
- Realize that the survivor may display disinterest, withdrawal, unresponsiveness, or other behaviors, when in fact they are trying to process what has happened to them.
- Understand that the survivor may feel they are on trial during the interview process.
- Remember that, as you talk, the survivor may be hearing but not mentally processing what you say.
- Be aware of anxiety – the survivor may have been threatened to not say anything.
- Be patient – don't push for information.

Build Rapport

Slide 8: One of the biggest obstacles to effective investigations of sexual assault is the fact that officers often lack the skills and experience to engage in the difficult conversation with the survivor.

Slide 9: Rapport building is a necessary process. It can be a matter of moments to several minutes. Be aware of extensive small talk. First, take a deep breath, calm yourself, then do the following:

- Introduce yourself by first name.
- Ask for the survivor's name. Ask the name they prefer you use.
- Ask if they need medical attention.
- Ask if they need anything.
 - Maybe an advocate, a friend, or a relative to be present
 - The survivor might have immediate needs, like children, pets, work, or family
- Ask if they feel safe. If not, find out why.
 - Is there a direct threat? Locate the suspect and ask for help in doing so.
 - Ensure the survivor is safe with you and in a safe location.
- Find a commonality with the survivor. Finding something in common provides a connection with a survivor to help them talk and feel at ease.
- Explain your role.
- Reassure the survivor it is okay not to remember certain details initially.
- Explain why you are doing certain things, such as
 - Taking notes to help you remember
 - Recording the interview
 - Repeating what they say to ensure you that have the facts right (this also helps them feel heard). Tell the survivor it's okay to correct you.
- Explain that every piece of information helps.

Slide 10: In the following audio clip you will hear the interaction between Officer Bryan Ross and sexual assault survivor Bobby. Officer Ross contacted Bobby as soon as possible after the assault. Listen carefully and pay attention as he builds rapport.

Slide 11: Audio Clip 1

Bobby: Yeah, come in.

Officer Ross: Hey. May I come in?

Bobby: Sure, yeah.

Officer Ross: Thank you. Are you okay?

Bobby: Oh. I've been better.

Officer Ross: Well, let me introduce myself. I'm Officer Ross. I'm with the Helena Police Department. Is it okay if I take a seat right over here?

Bobby: Sure.

Officer Ross: Thank you. I can see you seem to be in a little bit of pain. Like I said, my name is Officer Ross, but you can call me, Brian. What may I call you, what's your name?

Bobby: My name is Bobby.

Officer: Is it okay if I call you, Bobby?

Bobby: Yes, sure.

Officer Ross: Bobby, I just want you to know that you're safe here. Okay, nobody's going to get in, I'm right here. We're going to take care of everything that you need. I know you're here in the medical facility, but I see that you're a little bit uncomfortable. Are you okay? Are you in pain?

Bobby: Oh, just, just a little. I'm okay. Sore, yeah.

Officer Ross: Sore? Do you mind me asking where are you sore at?

Bobby: Well, kind of all over. But really, I've got some, some bruises on my legs; the inside of my thighs are really tender. And I was, I was actually bleeding a little bit, you know, from, from inside. I don't think I am anymore but that's a little bit, a little bit sore there too.

Officer Ross: Do you need to be seen by a doctor or has anybody come to see you at all?

Bobby: Nobody's come yet, no. And I, you know, it's no emergency or anything. I'm fine right now, I think.

Officer Ross: I just wanted to make sure that you're okay. All right, now you're not going to be here, I want you to understand you're at the focal point here, okay? Everything is going to be around you. So just a couple of quick things. I know that you came in, you're seeking help. I just want to make sure do you need anybody here for you right now?

Bobby: No, no, I really don't want anybody to know about this right now.

Officer Ross: Well, nobody's going to know but I know that sometimes these things can be a little bit difficult; they can be somewhat scary, but to have somebody here for you, that's what I was wanting, to make sure that if you want somebody, I can get somebody here for you.

Bobby: Thank you I appreciate that. But no, I, I think I'll be okay.

Officer Ross: Okay. Now the other thing is that, is there anything that you need to have taken care of? Do you have a job that you need to be worried about? Do you have errands to run? Animals?

Bobby: No, I just, I called into work already and I will. I'm okay. I don't have kids at home or anything, so...

Officer Ross: Well, I just want you to, and talking about calling work it's not that we would tell them what was happening, but you know we can give them an excuse to let them know, but just take care of those things for you.

Bobby: I appreciate that.

Officer Ross: You're welcome. Now, just a couple of things that, that I kind of wanted to get through that. You said about your injuries and medical, anything of that nature. I just want to make sure you're going to be okay sitting there; Do you need, you know, is there anything that else that you may end up needing before we get started?

Bobby: I don't think so. Thanks. I just kind of want to, you know, get through this.

Officer Ross: I can understand wanting to get through; that it's a kind of, in my experience, can be a very difficult thing. So, let me start off, first of all, by just kind of giving you a description of what I'm here for.

Okay, this is something that I am responsible for, having a conversation. That conversation may include some things that are intimate, may be difficult to discuss; it's not meant to be an embarrassment to you, but it's part of my job to determine if a crime has been committed or not. Then I have to ask some questions, and some of those questions can get kind of personal. And it does not mean that I want you to have to relive that, but I do have to get some information, so, I just want you to understand that I'll be asking questions like that. Okay? And you are going to be in control of this interview. You tell me if you feel you want to continue, if something doesn't feel comfortable to talk about, please tell me that we can take breaks it anytime you feel comfortable and need to. And for you. We'll just go that way; you feel comfortable in talking to me now?

Bobby: Yeah, and I understand. You're not, you know, nothing I really wanted to talk about what I know I need to.

Officer Ross: Well, I know that it's a very difficult thing to talk about again, but I do want to say that I appreciate you coming forward, and I think that you're very strong for saying what you're about ready to say.

Slide 12: You've just listened to the beginning of a survivor interview, in which officer Bryan Ross uses his trauma-informed, survivor-centered training to build rapport and make the survivor feel more at ease. Let's take this interview step-by-step and explore different sections.

Slide 13: Select an option to highlight different parts of the interview.

- Survivor Control
- Survivor Safety
- Survivor Support
- Explain Role
- Health Concerns
- Needs

Slide 14: Survivor Control 1:

Officer Ross knocks.

Bobby: Yeah, come in.

Officer Ross: Hey. May I come in?

Bobby: Sure, yeah.

Officer Ross: Thank you. Are you okay?

Bobby: Oh. I've been better.

Officer Ross: Well, let me introduce myself. I'm Officer Ross. I'm with the Helena Police Department. Is it okay if I take a seat right over here?

Bobby: Sure.

Officer Ross: Thank you. I can see you seem to be in a little bit of pain. Like I said, my name is Officer Ross, but you can call me, Brian. What may I call you, what's your name?

Bobby: My name is Bobby.

Officer: Is it okay if I call you, Bobby?

Bobby: Yes, sure.

Slide 15: Did you notice?

Officer Ross knocked (instead of barging in), which gave Bobby a moment to collect herself.

He asked if he could enter the room, which gave Bobby choice.

He thanked Bobby for allowing him in, which reassured Bobby.

He asked Bobby if she is okay, which opened the dialogue.

He introduced himself and asked Bobby if she was comfortable with him sitting down.

He gave Bobby a choice to use his first name, which created familiarity.

Although he probably already knew her name, he asked Bobby to introduce herself, so she could choose her name preference. Then, he confirmed her name, to give her a choice.

Slide 16: Survivor Control 2:

Officer Ross: Well, I know that it's a very difficult thing to talk about again, but I do want to say that I appreciate you coming forward, and I think that you're very strong for saying what you're about ready to say.

Slide 17: Did you notice?

Officer Ross acknowledged Bobby coming forward and encouraged her to speak out. This will give Bobby more confidence and might let her open up to his interview.

Slide 18: Survivor Safety:

Officer Ross: Bobby, I just want you to know that you're safe here. Okay, nobody's going to get in, I'm right here. We're going to take care of everything that you need.

Slide 19: Did you notice?

By reassuring Bobby that she is safe, Officer Ross made her feel more comfortable to come forward and he checked if there was a concern for the suspect.

Slide 20: Health Concerns:

Officer Ross: I know you're here in the medical facility, but I see that you're a little bit uncomfortable. Are you okay? Are you in pain?

Bobby: Oh, just, just a little. I'm okay. Sore, yeah.

Officer Ross: Sore? Do you mind me asking where are you sore at?

Bobby: Well, kind of all over. But really, I've got some, some bruises on my legs; the inside of my thighs are really tender. And I was, I was actually bleeding a little bit, you know, from, from inside. I don't think I am anymore but that's a little bit, a little bit sore there too.

Officer Ross: Do you need to be seen by a doctor or has anybody come to see you at all?

Bobby: Nobody's come yet, no. And I, you know, it's no emergency or anything. I'm fine right now, I think.

Officer Ross: I just wanted to make sure that you're okay. All right, now you're not going to be here, I want you to understand you're at the focal point here, okay? Everything is going to be around you. So just a couple of quick things. I know that you came in, you're seeking help. I just want to make sure do you need anybody here for you right now?

Bobby: No, no, I really don't want anybody to know about this right now.

Slide 21: Did you notice?

Officer Ross used his observation to notice Bobby seemed uncomfortable, which was a good starting point to ask if she was okay or in pain. This is an important question not only to see if Bobby has some immediate medical needs, but it can be a good lead in to understand what part of her body was assaulted and if force was used.

When Bobby mentioned she was sore, he tried to zone in where she was sore.

Officer Ross again makes sure that Bobby has no immediate health concerns.

Slide 22: Survivor Support:

Officer Ross: All right, now you're not going to be here, I want you to understand you're at the focal point here, okay? Everything is going to be around you. So just a couple of quick things. I know that you came in, you're seeking help. I just want to make sure do you need anybody here for you right now?

Bobby: No, no, I really don't want anybody to know about this right now.

Officer Ross: Well, nobody's going to know but I know that sometimes these things can be a little bit difficult; they can be somewhat scary, but to have somebody here for you, that's what I was wanting, to make sure that if you want somebody I can get somebody here for you.

Bobby: Thank you I appreciate that. But no, I, I think I'll be okay.

Slide 23: Did you notice?

Officer Ross reassured her that she was going to be his priority, then he asked her if she would need someone to be there with her. This gave Bobby an option to call a friend or family member, or to let Officer Ross contact an advocate.

He then reassured Bobby that no one would know without her consent, but that she could have that support when she needs it.

Slide 24: Survivor Needs

Officer Ross: Okay. Now the other thing is that, is there anything that you need to have taken care of? Do you have a job that you need to be worried about? Do you have errands to run? Animals?

Bobby: No, I just, I called into work already and I will. I'm okay. I don't have kids at home or anything, so...

Officer Ross: Well, I just want you to, and talking about calling work it's not that we would tell them what was happening, but you know we can give them an excuse to let them know, but just take care of those things for you.

Bobby: I appreciate that.

Officer Ross: You're welcome. Now, just a couple of things that, that I kind of wanted to get through that. You said about your injuries and medical, anything of that nature. I just want to make sure you're going to be okay sitting there; Do you need, you know, is there anything that else that you may end up needing before we get started?

Bobby: I don't think so. Thanks. I just kind of want to, you know, get through this.

Slide 25: Did you notice?

Officer Ross wants Bobby to be able to fully concentrate on herself and the interview right now, which is why he offers to make calls for her, take care of kids or pets, or contact her place of work. When Bobby declines, he also makes sure to explain that he would not breach her confidentiality.

Throughout the interview, Officer Ross will continuously make sure that Bobby's needs don't change.

Slide 26: Explain Role:

Officer Ross: I can understand wanting to get through; that it's a kind of, in my experience, can be a very difficult thing. So, let me start off, first of all, by just kind of giving you a description of what I'm here for. Okay, this is something that I am responsible for, having a conversation. That conversation may include some things that are intimate, may be difficult to discuss; it's not meant to be an embarrassment to you, but it's part of my job to determine if a crime has been committed or not. Then I have to ask some questions, and some of those questions can get kind of personal. And it does not mean that I want you to have to relive that, but I do have to get some information, so, I just want you to understand that I'll be asking questions like that. Okay? And you are going to be in control of this interview. You tell me if you feel you want to continue, if something doesn't feel comfortable to talk about, please tell me that we can take breaks at anytime you feel comfortable and need to. And for you. We'll just go that way; you feel comfortable in talking to me now?

Bobby: Yeah, and I understand. You're not, you know, nothing I really wanted to talk about what I know I need to.

Slide 27: Did you notice?

Officer Ross explains his role to Bobby and reassures her that she is in control and can stop or take a break at any time. This will give Bobby a feeling of empowerment and will help her feel in control again, which is an important step of rapport and trust building.

Slide 28: Let's review:

- Introduce yourself by your first name.
- Ask for the survivor's name. Ask the name they prefer you use.
- Ask if they need medical attention.
- Ask if they need anything or anyone.
- Find out if they are feeling safe.
- Explain your role

How the initial officer interacts with the survivor establishes cooperation and trust. In the next course, Survivor Centered Interview, we will use our established rapport to ask questions that will help us build the narrative of our investigation.

Slide 29: Objectives: In this course, you learned how to lay the groundwork and build rapport in the initial contact with the survivor.

Slide 30: Thank you for completing this course. Select "Close" to exit.