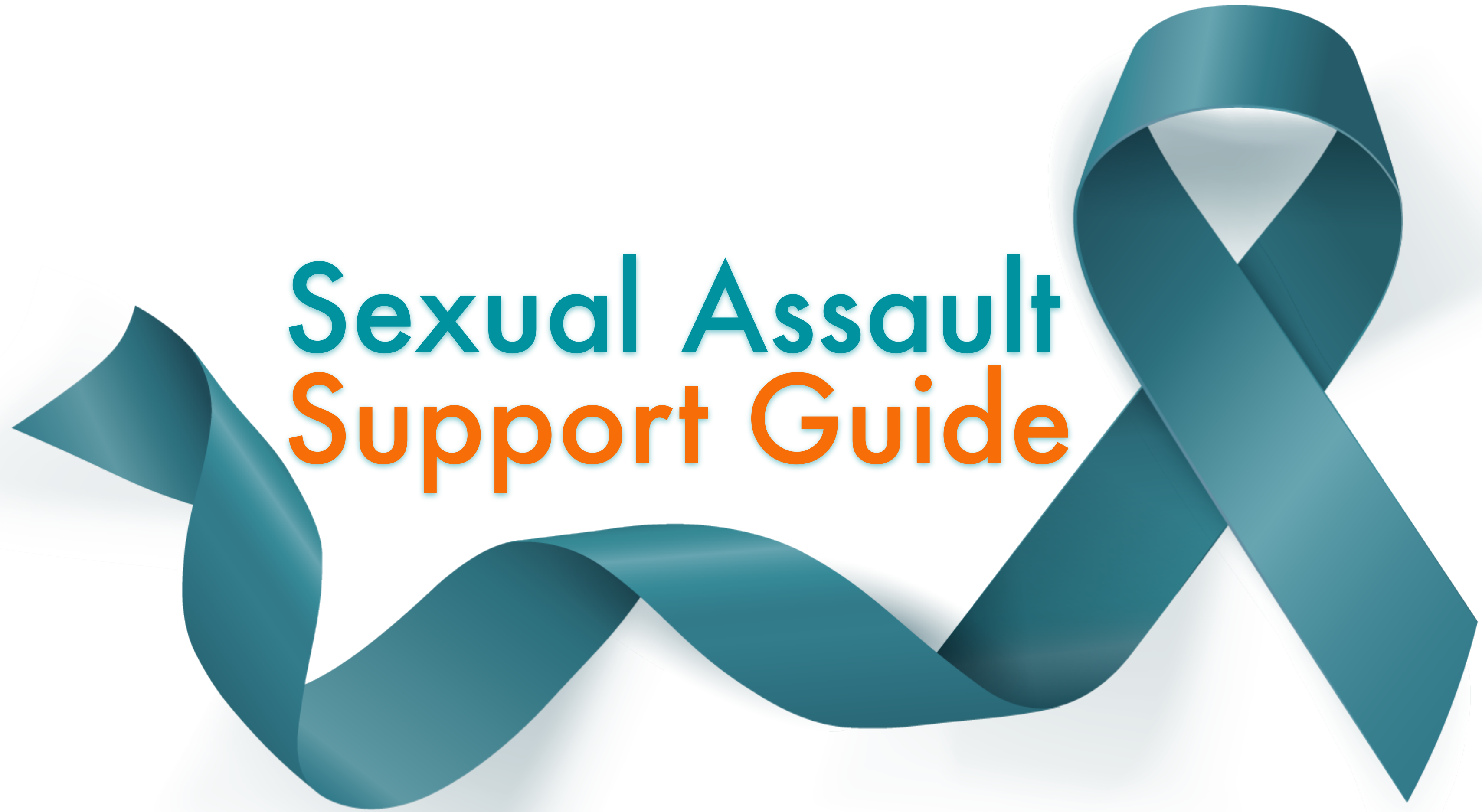




Sexual Assault Support Guide





Sexual Assault Affects Everyone

#MeToo

Over the past several years, the **#MeToo** movement has brought increased public attention to the issues of sexual harassment and assault.

Whether or not you have experienced sexual harassment or assault yourself, you most likely know someone who has.



What is Sexual Assault?

- Sexual assault is a term used to describe a wide range of unwanted sexual activities.
- Sexual harassment includes both physical and verbal unwanted sexual behavior.
- Although sexual assault can happen to anyone, individuals who hold marginalized identities (e.g., people of color, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA) are more at-risk.
- Many people who have experienced some form of unwanted sexual activity may not think of themselves as a victim of sexual assault.

Why Does Sexual Assault Happen?

- Sexual assault occurs because one person feels entitled to whatever they want (such as touching or having sex) regardless of the other person's feelings and needs.
- Most sexual assault is committed by someone the victim knows, such as an acquaintance, date, friend, family member, co-worker, etc.
- People who cause harm often target vulnerable people who society views as less valuable and less credible due to their identities or circumstances.



It's NOT Your Fault

■ Even if you didn't fight back or explicitly say "no," unwanted sexual activity is still sexual assault.

■ Feeling like you had to "give in" to be physically or emotionally safe is not the same as giving consent.

■ Sexual activity without consent is sexual assault.

■ If you didn't freely say "yes," you did not consent.

■ You can change your mind and withdraw your consent.

■ No matter what the situation, no one deserves to be victimized. It was not your fault. The responsibility belongs to the person who chose to assault you.





Reactions and Recovery

There is no “right way” to deal with sexual assault

Common feelings often include a mixture of emotions such as: shock, confusion, fear, anger, depression, self-blame, guilt, embarrassment, shame, numbness, anxiety, and disbelief.

Common physical reactions often include soreness, muscle tension, headaches, stomach problems, tiredness, or sleeplessness.

Survivors may experience additional impacts because of the identities they hold (e.g., race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, age, religion, or social status). These identities may affect the way that survivors are treated by individuals and systems as well as what resources and options may be available to support them in healing.

Sexual assault can cause a great deal of disruption in a survivor’s life. Allow yourself the time and assistance you may need to heal. Be gentle and patient with yourself. It can take weeks, months and even years to recover from what happened, and for many survivors healing does not happen in a straight line. There is no “right” timeline.



Medical and Reporting Options

It is common for survivors to have no visible injury from a sexual assault. However, injuries are not the only health concern. Survivors may be worried about pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV.

In Colorado, victims of sexual assault can get medical care and connect with other supportive services, such as counseling, whether or not they want to make a report to police.

Victims of sexual assault can choose to have evidence collected (aka “rape kit”) without having to report to police.



For more information about reporting options and to find resources, visit [YouHaveTheRightCO.org](https://www.YouHaveTheRightCO.org)



How to Support Someone

If someone you love has been the victim of sexual violence, there are a number of things you can do to help with the healing process.

Sometimes the most supportive thing you can do is to LISTEN. You do not have to (and probably cannot) “fix it.”

Give your ideas, but allow your loved one to make decisions. Regaining a sense of control over one’s life is an important step towards healing.



How to Support Someone

- Believe the survivor.
- Be yourself – treat the survivor as you typically do. Try to avoid being overly protective.
- Express your caring and concern for the survivor.
- Allow the survivor to have and express feelings.
- Reassure the survivor that confusing and painful feelings are common.
- Reassure the survivor that the assault is the perpetrator's fault, not the survivor's fault.
- Do not blame or judge the survivor or the survivor's actions.
- Do not minimize the sexual violence or convey that it was not a "big deal."
- Encourage, but do not force the survivor to talk. Follow their lead.
- Respect the confidentiality of the survivor.
- Take care of YOURSELF. Make sure YOU have emotional support to deal with your own feelings.

Educate Yourself and Others

The best way to prevent sexual violence is to educate yourself and others.

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. In Colorado, one way to raise awareness and show your support for survivors of sexual assault is to participate in **Colorado Denim Day** on the last Wednesday of April.

Denim Day began in response to a court case in Italy where a judge declared that, because the victim wore tight jeans, she must have helped her perpetrator remove them and, therefore, consented. She did not consent.

Since then, people wear denim each year as a sign of their support for survivors and to challenge myths about sexual assault.

Denim Isn't Always Denim

Colorado Denim Day uses denim as a symbol to represent all the ways that survivors aren't believed and are blamed for what happened to them, and to declare, "I believe and support survivors."

For example, we know that Black and brown people have been hypersexualized in the United States. Black and brown people's claims of sexual assault are not believed because the color of their skin is synonymous with "lying" or "asking for it." Denim isn't always denim, especially for people of color.

To learn more about Colorado Denim Day, visit ColoradoDenimDay.org





CANNABIS
CREATIVE MOVEMENT

The Sexual Assault Support Guide is brought to you in collaboration with **Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault**. We're encouraging those who find support from this guide to donate to Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault and join **Denim Day** which directly supports sexual assault survivors. This guide is part of a series created by the Cannabis Creative Movement, a joint effort fueled by **PufCreativ** and **The 9th Block** agencies.



THANK
YOU.