



Sexual Violence
APPENDIX G – Secondary Wounding Information

Secondary wounding occurs when a response to a disclosure of sexual violence blames, shames, or in any way harms the survivor. Secondary wounding may increase the survivor's sense of self-blame, guilt, and shame.

Many survivors report that their secondary wounding experiences were more painful and devastating than the originally traumatic event because the shock of the original betrayal was exacerbated from those who were supposed to be sources of support. A growing body of research shows that those victimized by sexual assault are often denied help by their communities. What support they do receive often leaves them feeling blamed, doubted and revictimized. These experiences are sometimes called "the second rape/assault" or "secondary wounding".

Secondary wounding occurs when individuals or institutions respond to a disclosure by:

- Shaming/blaming the person for having been targeted:
 - "You need to be careful when you are drinking..."
 - "Why did you..."
 - "How did you get yourself in that situation?"
- Shaming/blaming the person for their reactions during/immediately following the sexual assault:
 - "Why didn't you tell someone right away?"
 - "Why didn't you report it to the police?"
 - "Why didn't you run away when you had the chance?"
 - "If it was really a rape, why did you let him spend the night?"
- Denial/disbelief/avoidance statements:
 - "You're overreacting."
 - "But he's such a nice guy, are you sure you aren't confused?"
- Discounting or minimization:
 - "Why aren't you over it by now?"
 - "You're letting what happened control you"
 - "Well, that doesn't sound like a *real* rape."
 - "It could have been worse."

It's important to note that secondary wounding includes not only the words we use but also the tone in which we speak and our body language.

To avoid the likelihood of secondary wounding, it is important to address the myths and realities of sexual assault, and to always work towards empowering the survivor in order to regain control. As service providers, we must commit to believing the survivor and to help them access support services in order to contribute to a positive and safe healing journey.