



Creating a Trauma-Informed and Victim/ Survivor-Centered SART Response

Adapted from Sexual Violence Justice Institute and MNCASA resource "[Becoming Victim Centered](#)."

Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs) are community-based multidisciplinary teams that work to create long-term improvements to local systems of response to sexual violence. SARTs enable communities to maximize the effectiveness of their available resources and responses, and improve relationships between institutions like law enforcement, victim/survivor services, prosecution, and local hospitals.

Applying a victim/survivor-centered approach places victim/survivor autonomy at the forefront of all victim/survivor interaction and decision making. When SARTs apply a victim/survivor centered approach, it fosters increased support for victims/survivors, enhances case outcomes, improves public safety, and strengthens accountability for perpetrators/offenders.

Trauma-informed SARTs approach their work with a deep understanding of the widespread impact of trauma on victims/survivors of sexual violence. This approach involves recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma, understanding the ways in which trauma can affect victims/survivors' behaviors and responses, and responding in a way that prioritizes safety, autonomy, and well-being.

Prioritizing the Needs and Wishes of Victims/Survivors

Victims/survivors know their situation best. SARTs can learn from engaging with victims/survivors and asking for their input/feedback. SARTs can provide them with access to resources, information, and support tailored to their individual needs.

Some suggestions for incorporating victim/survivor feedback into SART response include:

- Establishing a confidential feedback mechanism for victims/survivors to share their experiences with SART processes.
- Developing and conducting training sessions for SART members on ways to engage victims/survivors in providing feedback.
- Establishing a subcommittee made up of SART members and tasking the subcommittee with analyzing and addressing feedback received from victims/survivors.
- Conducting listening sessions, focus groups, and victim/survivor interviews to identify gaps and strengths within the community/system response.

Promoting Victim/Survivor Autonomy

Your SART can promote victim/survivor autonomy by providing accurate, unbiased information or resources that support informed decision-making. This includes confidential services, privacy protections, legal options, notification of offender's release, and policies/procedures that account for safety. SARTs can adopt a victim/survivor-centered approach that prioritizes the victim/survivor needs, preferences, and comfort levels in all interactions and interventions. This approach helps foster a sense of empowerment, choice, and self-determination.

Improving Victim/Survivor Experience Through Collaboration and Coordination

COLLABORATION

SARTs typically have several primary goals and emphasize collaboration among various agencies and organizations involved in the response to sexual violence

in the community. Coordinating across disciplines can improve a victim/survivor's experience and lead to better case outcomes. Collaboration should include a clear plan outlining how it will enhance experiences and improve case outcomes.

Some suggestions for how to align coordination efforts with your SART goals of collaboration include:

- Developing comprehensive documentation outlining SART goals and protocols to make sure there is a unified and consistent understanding among all team members and community partners.
- Scheduling regular cross-training sessions that focus on enhancing collaboration and coordination skills among SART members.
- Developing communication strategies on how the team will disseminate information about SART goals to all community stakeholders.

COORDINATION

Encountering the system for the first time as a sexual violence victim/survivor can be overwhelming and challenging.

SARTs can play a role in effectively streamlining the victim/survivor experience in the following ways:

- Conducting regular reviews of the quality of first system encounters (especially with law enforcement) and seeking feedback from victims/survivors to help identify areas in need of improvement.
- Establishing community partnerships to enhance the support victims/survivors receive from the moment of first contact.
- Developing a standardized trauma-informed training protocol for first responders.
- Facilitating opportunities for roundtable discussions between law enforcement and other agencies to foster a common understanding of what trauma-informed processes should look like.

Promoting a Uniform Trauma-Informed Response

A trauma-informed response is a crucial component of a victim/survivor centered SART. SARTs can implement principles of trauma-informed response into all areas of its practices. These practices support victims/survivors on their journey towards healing and justice, while also minimizing the risk of re-traumatization.

Some suggestions for how SARTs can promote consistency in trauma-informed response include:

- Developing trauma-informed response protocols that ensure consistent implementation across all agencies involved in the SART process.
- Providing ongoing training for SART members on trauma-informed promising practices.
- Regularly reviewing or assessing the effectiveness of training programs and updating training curriculums to stay up to date on victim/survivor feedback and emerging promising practices.
- Encouraging SART members to attend continuous education opportunities that focus on how trauma impacts victims/survivors and system responses.
- Creating a process for regular “check-ins” or reviews of trauma-informed response protocols to ensure the protocols remain relevant and effective to the changing needs of victims/survivors.

Identifying Gaps in Services

SARTs can address gaps by developing protocols that encourage consistent streamlined coordination, victim/survivor-centered approaches, enhanced collaboration, and system accountability.

Some suggestions for how SARTs can develop responsive support include:

- Streamlining SART protocol development to reduce timelines and encourage timely and consistent implementations.

- Establishing a process to monitor and evaluate the adherence to SART protocols to ensure there is a focus on victim/survivor advocacy.
- Facilitating regular feedback sessions among SART members to identify areas of need or improvement in established protocols.

Building Cultural Responsiveness

SARTs can meet the needs of victims/survivors in marginalized communities by identifying who engages with the criminal justice system and responders.

Some suggestions for how SARTs can build cultural responsiveness include:

- Creating outreach programs that intentionally consider the unique cultural backgrounds of various communities.
- Organizing cultural humility training for SART members designed to enhance cultural awareness and understanding. The goal of this training would be to enable SART members to interact more effectively and respectfully with survivors from diverse cultural backgrounds, especially survivors within the immigrant community.
- Developing a SART protocol or community outreach programs to bridge the gap between law enforcement and urban communities. This will assist in fostering trust through transparent communication and consistent collaboration.
- Completing SVJI's [LGBTQIA+ Cultural Humility Readiness Assessment](#) either by individual agency and/or together as a SART Team to highlight areas or gaps where improvement is needed for inclusion of the LGBTQIA+ community.
- Implementing community wide outreach efforts that address mistrust of the criminal justice system head on. Highlight efforts to improve responsiveness to immigrant, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ populations.
- Creating confidentiality protocols that emphasize confidentiality and safety for undocumented victims/survivors seeking sexual assault exams.

Team Accountability

SARTs can seek opportunities to step up, to learn, and to grow as individuals and as a team. It is important to routinely evaluate yourself, your team, and individual community organizations' response to sexual violence. A comprehensive evaluation and accountability framework of a SART's effectiveness should prioritize victim/survivor-centered approaches, continuous improvement, and accountability within the communities served.

Some suggestions for evaluating team effectiveness include:

- Establishing an evaluation tool or metric to measure the effectiveness of prevention efforts that focus on positive victim/survivor outcomes.
- Creating messaging to engage trauma-affected communities and clearly communicate the SART's goals.
- Regularly reviewing or assessing the effectiveness of training programs and updating training curriculums with current survivor feedback and emerging best practices.
- Encouraging SART members to attend continuous education opportunities that focus on how trauma impacts survivors and system responses. Be sure to take adult learning and collaborative learning opportunities into consideration for these trainings.
- Establishing an evaluation tool or metric to measure the effectiveness of prevention efforts that focus on positive survivor outcomes.
- Creating messaging to engage trauma-affected communities and clearly communicate the SART's goals.

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