

Start by Believing

FAQs



Q. WHAT IS START BY BELIEVING?

- A. Start by Believing is a public awareness and action campaign launched by End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI) in April 2011. It was created to end the cycle of silence and change the way society responds to sexual assault. The campaign focuses specifically on changing the response to survivors of sexual assault by expressing belief and support, rather than doubt, shame, or blame.

Q. WHY DO WE NEED TO START BY BELIEVING?

- A. Sexual assault victims often face reactions of doubt and blame when they report the crime or reach out for help. These reactions can increase the trauma survivors experience and decrease the likelihood they will pursue justice and healing. This also means that perpetrators are not held accountable for their crimes, and they remain free to hurt more people.

Q. IS START BY BELIEVING APPROPRIATE FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROFESSIONALS?

- A. Start by Believing is appropriate for criminal justice agencies because case outcomes will only change when police and prosecutors start from the presumption that a sexual assault report has merit, and then follow the evidence through the course of a fair, impartial, and thorough investigation. This reflects the basic logic of why we describe individuals as “victims,” “suspects,” and “witnesses” during a preliminary investigation. If there was no starting presumption that a crime report had merit, no investigation would be conducted at all.

Q. WHAT IMPACT DOES START BY BELIEVING HAVE ON SURVIVORS?

- A. When someone has been sexually assaulted, they often turn first to family members or friends. If the response to their disclosure is disbelief or blame, this can increase the trauma of the assault and reduce the chances that the victim will report to law enforcement or seek other services. On the other hand, victims who are treated with respect and whose accounts are taken seriously will often feel more comfortable reporting or seeking additional help. When survivors have the support of friends and family, as well as positive interactions with law enforcement, victim advocates, medical providers, and others, it can decrease the long-term effects of trauma.

Research shows the two things that have the most positive impact on survivors are: (1) having someone to talk to, and (2) being believed. In other words, Start by Believing.