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Boston Area Rape Crisis Center

## Covering Sexual Assault Tips for Reporters

Social stigma and discomfort combined with shame or reluctance on the part of a survivor make sexual assault, rape, and sexual harassment difficult topics to cover, even for the most seasoned reporter. Following are five tips chosen by BARCC staff from [Reporting Sexual Assault: A Guide for Journalists](#), published by the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence.

1. In your published pieces, **provide information** about local resources and where survivors can go for help.
2. **Balance** the victim's right to privacy with the public's right to know.
3. **Judge** when details are needed for public safety and when they only serve to retraumatize the survivor or reinforce myths about the survivor's role in the attack.
  - **Details about the offender are relevant:** physical description, how access was gained, whether a weapon was used, and if additional physical violence was involved.
  - **Details about the victim's private life are *not* relevant;** habits, sexual history or physical appearance, for example, do not contribute to the public's safety and usually lead to victim blaming.
4. **Carefully choose words and phrases** to avoid furthering the notion that the survivor is culpable for the crime. Consider using alternative terms:
  - "Victim" (or even better: "survivor") instead of "innocent victim"—all crime victims are innocent.
  - "Reported rape" instead of "rape allegation." The word "allegation" is not a neutral term and strongly implies doubt.
  - "Acquaintance rape" instead of "date rape."
5. **Reflect trends and realities** of sexual assault, including the frequency with which it occurs, and the frequency with which it is committed by an acquaintance as opposed to a stranger. Go to [barcc.org/information/statistics](http://barcc.org/information/statistics) for up-to-date statistics.

**Dedicated to healing. Advocating for change.**

99 Bishop Allen Drive, Cambridge, MA 02139

Phone: 617-492-8306 | Fax: 617-492-3291 | Hotline: 800-841-8371

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