

Sexual Assault Response Teams (SART) in Virginia

A Best Practice Model

What is a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART)?

A SART is a group of specially trained members of law enforcement, health care, community and systems advocacy, prosecution and others who implement and maintain a consistent, coordinated, trauma-informed, and victim-centered system of intervention and care to adult victims of sexual assault.

The main functions of SARTs are to:

- increase intra-agency and interagency collaboration and coordination when responding to sexual assault,
- identify inadequacies and limitations in and among systems,
- ensure appropriate, trauma-informed responses to support victims, and
- improve offender accountability.

SARTs focus on improving the coordination of services from local agencies that respond to sexual assault, both immediately after a disclosure of sexual assault and across the lifespan of a victim. This coordination strives to better protect victims rights, increase prosecution rates, and decrease secondary victimization such as victim-blaming. SARTs work together to increase victim-centered service provision to increase long-term health outcomes for individuals and reduce possible future costs on systems.

Important Elements of SARTs

- SARTs document their mission, goals, response, and practices in written, signed, and regularly updated protocols and/or Memorandums of Understanding (MOU).
- SARTs meet regularly with the goal of identifying gaps and barriers in the system of response and services, with a commitment to systems change and continuous improvement.
- SART members are specially trained in sexual violence dynamics and how trauma affects victims.

What are the Benefits of SARTs?

Communities with well-functioning SARTs show many improvements to their response to sexual assault, including:

- An increased percentage of victims reporting their assault to law enforcement and reporting more quickly.
- An increase in the number of reports taken and investigated by law enforcement, and referred for prosecution.
- An increase in victims being connected to an advocate and offered more services.
- Yielding more evidence.
- More medical and mental health follow-up services accessed by victims after the acute response.
- Better quality of evidence collection and a more consistent use of evidence and expert witness testimony during prosecution.
- Victims expressing greater satisfaction with the acute care they received from medical personnel and law enforcement, as well as a greater confidence in the legal system's ability to achieve a form of justice for them.
- SART intervention is also a factor in the identification and arrest of a suspect, the strongest predictor that charges will be filed, and helps to increase the likelihood of conviction.

What are the Characteristics of Effective SARTs?

- A clear mission and purpose
- A commitment to the model and active participation
- A culture of learning and improvement
- Collaboration and communication
- A focus on victim experience
- Trust between members
- A diverse membership

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What are the Characteristics of Effective SARTs? (Continued)

- Relationships that go beyond the boundaries of individual organizations
- Members that understand the benefit of SART
- Support from organizational leadership
- Formal processes

SART Online Toolkit, Literature Review: Efficacy of Sexual Assault Response Teams, May 2016

Code of Virginia Mandate

Virginia Code Section 15.2-1627.4 mandates the coordination of multidisciplinary response to sexual assault.

For the full *Virginia Code* and SART resources go to:
www.dcjs.virginia.gov/victims-services/sart

For More Information

Please contact the

Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services
Division of Programs and Services, Victims Services
1100 Bank Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219
www.dcjs.virginia.gov/victims-services/sart



The artwork for this brochure was inspired by Floriography

Floriography is the “Language of Flowers”. In traditional cultures throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa, plants and flowers were used as symbols, allowing people to express feelings which otherwise could not be spoken.

The flower in this brochure is Queen Anne’s Lace. In the “Language of Flowers” it represents sanctuary.