

## Exploring Common Challenges: A Scenario Based Discussion

The scenarios below are examples of challenges VALOR and JDI hear about regularly from PREA advocates. The goal of this exercise is to identify the challenge, develop a response, and to recognize and utilize the resources available. Some answers may not apply to your agency or program, we encourage folks to adapt them to fit their needs.

### **Scenario 1: Institutional Advocacy**

Dear Mrs Counselor  
I've been writing to everybody.  
Why wont anyone help? I was  
raped by another guy in here.  
I told staff but they dont want  
to do anything. They wont tell  
me anything. Can you find out what's  
going on with my report?  
That guy is still here. He keeps  
trying to get at me. I'm not even going  
out of my room anymore. I'm not  
eating. I want go to the shower.  
I'm going crazy.  
Did you get this?  
I wrote to the OIG and all kinds  
of other places. Nobody writes back  
My mail isn't getting out.  
I'm done. Nobody cares. Nobody want  
to help me  
I'm gonna give up

[share scan of letter]

A survivor reaches out for support after reporting sexual abuse by another

incarcerated person. In their letter, they share that they tried to follow up on their PREA report, but staff won't tell them anything. They ask if you can find anything out for them.

The person they reported is still housed in the same unit and keeps trying to contact them. The survivor shared that they're not leaving their room. They're not going to meals or showering to avoid contact with the perpetrator. Their mental state is deteriorating.

They have written to the state OIG and to other organizations but haven't gotten a single response. They're worried their mail is not getting out. They wrap up their letter by saying that they want to give up because nobody cares about them.

#### CHALLENGES:

What is challenging about this experience for the survivor and the advocate? What biases or goals could be at play here for all parties involved, survivor, and staff?

- Survivor has been let down by many people/the system. Trust is shattered
- Letters can slow down the advocacy and informed consent process and can leave advocates feeling like they're not doing enough, quickly enough
- Advocate has little say/power to affect the housing situation of survivor.
- Challenges with Safety Planning
- "I'm gonna give up?" - how serious is this? Duty to act/report? How do you assess?

#### RESPONSES

What steps would you take to approach this challenge in the moment and in the future?

- Reach out to facility contacts - ask hypothetically how you might get information about a report that was made by an incarcerated person.
- RESPOND RIGHT AWAY

- Validate
- Share what you learned from facility contacts and offer to get more information (do ROI)
- Assess suicidality, be clear about your responsibilities
- Offer coping
- Offer safety planning ideas
- Be quick and consistent with responses

## RESOURCES

Who and what resources might you need to be involved to support you?

- JDI/VALOR
- Management if you need additional support
- MOU
- PREA Standards
- PREA Advocate email group

## Scenario 2: Forensic Exam

You are accompanying a survivor during a forensic exam. The survivor, forensic nurse, and detention staff are in the exam room. The room has a hospital bed, a privacy curtain in the corner, and various medical devices and materials needed for the exam. You provide a blanket to the survivor and begin to introduce yourself. You give your name, pronouns, and the name of your agency. The survivor greets you and says “Thanks for the blanket. My name is Jay, I use he/him pronouns.” The officer is in the room and snorts and says “Her name is Jessica Sanchez.”

While the nurse is doing paperwork before the exam begins, you’re talking with Jay about advocacy, support, and their rights. Jay tells you they’re really scared to go back and they don’t have anyone to talk to. He does not feel safe giving the names of the people who assaulted him because he says they’ll just do it again. The forensic nurse interrupts to demand that Jay disclose the names of the perpetrators, saying that Jay “has to” tell her.

## CHALLENGES:

What is challenging about this experience for the survivor and the advocate? What biases or goals could be at play here for all parties

involved, survivor, staff, and forensic examiner? In what ways can we advocate for the survivors dignity, confidentiality, and autonomy?

- Culture of corrections, lack of confidentiality, misgendering, dehumanizing language
- Identifying survivors priorities/needs in real time when it comes to comments or issues to respond to (or not)
- Forensic nurse creating an expectation that the survivor must disclose the name of the perpetrator

### RESPONSE:

What steps would you take to address this at the moment? What steps (if any) would you take at a later time?

- Ask for the officers to step outside (might not agree to do so, but worth asking)
- Prioritize the safety and comfort of survivor (which may mean ignoring comment or correcting comment), validate their feelings, and mirror what you want the officer to act like
- Center the survivor's wishes and priorities, look for non-verbal or verbal cues and approach with intention
- Communicate to the room (survivor and nurse) that it's your understanding that the survivor doesn't need to disclose in order to continue with the forensic exam.
  - If the nurse continues to insist, ask to pause for a break to communicate with the nurse separate from the survivor.
- Check-in with the survivor privately afterwards & offer follow up after the exam is completed. Share affirmations and allow space to process.
- Check-in with the officer and nurse afterwards.

### RESOURCES:

Who and what resources might you need to be involved to support you?

- Communicating during meetings with nurses - speaking with the leader SART Nurse

- Communicate with management team/JDI/VALOR with regards to advocating to provide staff training regarding the role of the advocate and/or trauma-informed care
- Debrief with your peers to help process.
- JDI/VALOR
- Management if you need additional support
- MOU
- PREA Standards
- PREA Advocate email group

### **Scenario 3: Justice for Survivors**

A survivor has been regularly calling the hotline for support. They report that they were sexually assaulted by a staff member during a pat-down search. They initially made a PREA report but say that soon after, officers on the unit started treating them differently. They're getting called names and their stuff is getting regularly "tossed" (searched). They think it's retaliation.

The survivor was moved to another housing unit "for their safety," but they say the new unit is more isolating and they feel like they're being punished. They report ongoing anxiety, trouble sleeping, and physical pain they believe is related to the assault, but they're hesitant to request medical care because they don't trust staff.

During a recent call, the survivor tells the advocate they are thinking about withdrawing their PREA complaint altogether because "it's not worth it."

Sometimes when they call, they want you to talk to the facility and try to get them moved, but then they call back and say they wish they'd never reported and that they just want it all to go away.

The survivor also asks if their calls are truly confidential and feels like

someone is listening.

## CHALLENGES:

What is challenging about this experience for you as an advocate? What biases could be at play here for all parties involved, advocates and correctional staff?

- Powerlessness of only talking with them over the hotline
- Wanting the survivor to continue the report because it feels like the “right” thing to do
- Hard to know what’s really happening, and what the survivor really wants
- Survivor doesn’t trust the system
- Can’t be 100% sure someone isn’t really listening in

## RESPONSES

What steps would you take to approach this challenge in the moment and in the future?

- De-escalate caller if in crisis
- Provide validation, emotional support
- Discuss frustrations and options
- Remind survivor of their autonomy and agency when it comes to reporting
- After call, discuss with supervisor if necessary
- After call and with survivor permission, begin dialogue with detention facility contact
- After call, document call and communicate with others on crisis line about potential calls from survivor

## RESOURCES

Who and what resources might you need to be involved to support you?

- Your skills, emotional support, validation
- JDI/VALOR
- Management if you need additional support
- MOU
- PREA Standards
- PREA Advocate email group
- Facility PREA Compliance Manager (PCM)
- Facility mental health, healthcare provider (Wellpath, etc)
- Facility correctional counselor