

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 cut 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 die

[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 on 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?

RESPONSES

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

RESOURCES

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

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?

RESPONSE:

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

RESOURCES:

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

Scenario 3: Justice for Survivors (Hotline Call)

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?

RESPONSES

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

RESOURCES

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