

LAW ENFORCEMENT CAN HELP END THE CYCLE OF SILENCE

Most victims of sexual assault do not report the crime to law enforcement. Many never tell anyone. Then because so few assaults are reported – most perpetrators walk free.

It's time to end this cycle. As a law enforcement officer, you can take the lead.

WHAT IS START BY BELIEVING?

Start by Believing is a public awareness campaign designed to end the cycle of silence and change the way we respond to sexual assault. It was first launched in April 2011. Since then, thousands of professionals across the country and around the world have made their own personal commitment. This includes many law enforcement professionals such as yourself:

My name is Ken Morley. I am a husband, father, family member, friend, and a police officer who tries to make a difference in society; both personally and professionally. When someone tells me they were raped or sexually assaulted, I Start by Believing.

My name is Denise. I am a criminal investigator who has heard one too many stories of victims not wanting to report because of issues like this. Breaks my heart. When someone tells me they were raped or sexually assaulted, I Start by Believing.

My name is Officer Don Kirk. I am a Police Officer at the University of Utah, Department of Public Safety. When someone tells me they were raped or sexually assaulted, I Start by Believing.

But it's more than just a personal pledge. By transforming personal and professional responses to sexual assault, we can help victims pursue justice and healing.

Failed responses... additional victims.

Stop the cycle and make our communities safer.



WHY IS THE PLEDGE IMPORTANT?

Decades of research demonstrates that sexual assault victims are often doubted or blamed, and these negative responses have a number of harmful effects. They also decrease the chance that victims will report the crime and reach out for help.

I told my high school police officer and he said it didn't matter because I dated him so no one would believe me... he said don't even bother to press charges. I consented to sex while we were dating, so it's my fault.

This is why the message of Start by Believing is so vital - outcomes will only change when sexual assault reports are investigated from an initial presumption of merit.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT?

Anyone can make a commitment to Start by Believing in their personal life. But for those working in the criminal justice system, some have questioned whether it is appropriate to make the pledge in a professional capacity. We believe it is perfectly appropriate, and in fact, it is the starting point for a fair and thorough investigation.

First, it is important to clarify that this does not necessarily mean saying the exact words, "I believe you." Many law enforcement professionals use phrases like, "I'm sorry this happened to you." The important issue is not the exact words that are used, but the fact that victims are treated with compassion and respect, and their reports are handled professionally and fairly – instead of communicating the message that they are not believed. This undermines the ability of law enforcement to conduct an effective interview, which then limits the chance of successfully investigating the report.

Want to learn more? Our [Training Bulletin](#) addresses this question in detail.

TAKE THE PLEDGE

Start by making your own personal commitment to Start by Believing.

- I pledge to Start by Believing when someone tells me about their sexual assault.
- I pledge to help survivors on the road to justice and healing.
- I pledge to help end the cycle of silence.

[Pledge now](#)



Denver, Colorado
Police Department
Major Crimes Division



SPREAD THE WORD

Then share the message with others. We have all the tools you need. Check out our [personal action kit](#) and [community action kit](#) to learn how to get started.

Encourage Police Chiefs, Sheriffs, and city leaders to make the pledge: When the message comes from the top, it trickles down into daily actions that have a powerful impact on the community. You can encourage strong leadership in your agency and community.

Central Virginia
Chiefs of Police



Challenge others to join you: In a unique effort to inspire his colleagues in Texas law enforcement, Travis County Sheriff Greg Hamilton issued a challenge to see which law enforcement agency could get the highest percentage of their employees to make a [commitment](#) to Start by Believing. The winners were announced at a press conference hosted by the Sheriff's Office. Manor Police Department and Bee Cave Police Department tied with 100% participation.



Travis County Sheriff
Greg Hamilton



Display posters or brochures with the Start by Believing logo in prominent areas where victims and their loved ones will see them, such as the waiting area, interview room, and your agency website.

Start by Believing Room
Canyon County, ID
Sheriff's Office



Create a video: Let victims know: If you come to us with a disclosure of sexual assault, we will [Start by Believing](#).

The Travis County, Texas Sheriff's office created this [message](#) of support for victims.

Connect with the Chiefs of Police Associations: In Kansas City, reaching out to the Metropolitan Chiefs and Sheriffs Association paid off – 17 cities and counties formally proclaimed their commitment to Start by Believing.

Kansas City Metropolitan
Chiefs and Sheriffs
Association



Use social media: Let your virtual audience know about your agency's commitment to Start by Believing. And don't forget to use #StartbyBelieving.

MPD midnight shift
believes! #startbybelieving
Merriam Police Department
Merriam, Kansas



Inspire the community to get involved: After hearing about the campaign at our 2013 annual conference in Seattle, the Denver Police Department was inspired to bring the message home. With a goal of making the campaign as inclusive as possible, officers immediately went to work to secure the partnerships that galvanized Denver government, and the entire community to [Start by Believing](#).

Craft a powerful press release: Follow the lead of Chief Lee W. Russo in [West Valley City, Utah](#).

Put a (bumper) sticker on it: Create a Start by Believing bumper sticker for patrol cars. What better way to communicate directly with victims and their loved ones? Come to us, and we will treat you with respect.



Lake Havasu City, Nevada
Police Department



Kick off your campaign with a press conference: Follow the example of Denver, Colorado, where their event was a true representation of what multidisciplinary collaboration looks like. Participants included Mayor Michael B. Hancock's office, the Denver District Attorney's Office, the Denver Department of Public Safety, the Denver Police Department, the Denver Sheriff's Department, the Denver Fire Department, Denver Health Medical Center, the Sexual Assault Interagency Council, and The Blue Bench (a community-based sexual assault advocacy program). [Also featured was a young male survivor and his mother.](#)

Use creative marketing to reach thousands: In Denver, the campaign message was prominently displayed on three billboards throughout the city, as well as 50 bus shelter advertisements, and 20 Yellow Cab displays. An additional 2,000 Yellow Cabs had bumper stickers proclaiming the Start by Believing message.

Yellow cab displays



Need more support? Submit a request for [technical assistance](#). Thank you for becoming a Start by Believing Ally!

