

Finding a Place for Faith in Sexual Violence Advocacy

OAESV Annual Conference – Restoring Our
Roots

Emily Bernath

Introduction



Workshop Agenda

- **What is faith?**
- **What impact does sexual assault have on faith?**
- **How can faith play a role in a survivor's healing?**
- **How does all of this apply to our role as advocates?**

Workshop Agenda

- **What is faith?**
- **What impact does sexual assault have on faith?**
- **How can faith play a role in a survivor's healing?**
- **How does all of this apply to our role as advocates?**

How do you define
“faith”?

Faith: *noun* – Complete trust
(www.merriam-webster.com)

Workshop Agenda

- What is faith?
- What impact does sexual assault have on faith?
- How can faith play a role in a survivor's healing?
- How does all of this apply to our role as advocates?

Trust: *noun* – Assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something
(www.merriam-webster.com)



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY](#)

What does trust have to do with a survivor sharing their story, and how is a survivor's trust impacted by sexual assault?

8 out of 10 rapes are committed by someone the victim knows

Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2010-2016 (2017).

In juvenile cases, that number jumps to 93% of the reported cases where the victims knew their abuser

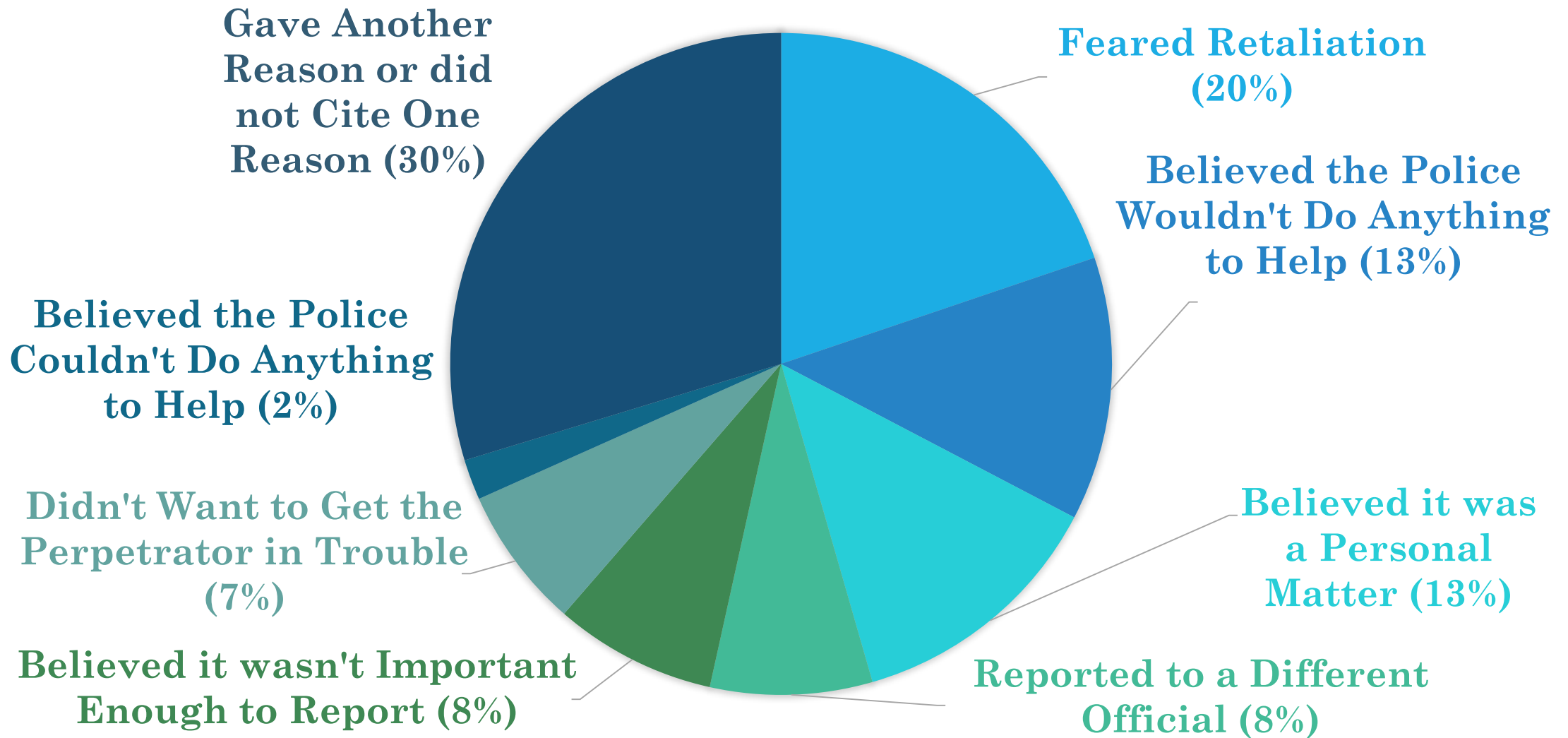
Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement (2000).

Sexual assault is a *betrayal of trust*.

Most survivors find it difficult to trust other people as well as themselves and their own perceptions.

(www.wcsap.org)

Of the sexual violence crimes not reported to police from 2005-2010, the victim gave the following reasons for not reporting:



Trust. *noun* – Assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something

(www.merriam-webster.com)

Reason Victim Did Not Report	Breakdown of Trust
Feared Retaliation	Character
Believed the Police Wouldn't Do Anything to Help	Ability
Believed it was a Personal Matter	Truth
Believed it wasn't Important Enough to Report	Truth
Believed the Police Couldn't Do Anything to Help	Ability

Building Trust – James Davis, TEDxUSU



Workshop Agenda

- What is faith?
- What impact does sexual assault have on faith?
- How can faith play a role in a survivor's healing?
- How does all of this apply to our role as advocates?

Applying the Concepts of Building Trust in Our Work with Survivors

- The essence of all relationships is trust
- Trust – choosing to be vulnerable and take risks
- Drivers of trust:
 - Ability – can they do what they say they can do?
 - Benevolence – do they care?
 - Integrity – having a set of values that you live by and people agree with

Applying the Concepts of Building Trust in Our Work with Survivors

- When survivors share their stories with us, they are being vulnerable and taking a risk with us
- Sharing experiences of sexual assault can be extremely painful for survivors, and we need to be people who are willing to be vulnerable and communicate trust in return. This is done by showing them we have the ability to listen, that we care about them, and that we have integrity.

How do we communicate this trust to survivors? First and foremost, we *believe* them.

Belief: *noun* – A state or habit of mind in which trust or confidence is placed in some person or thing
(www.merriam-webster.com)



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

How does sexual assault impact belief?

- When someone is sexually assaulted, their concept of belief is shaken
- With most assaults occurring from people the victim knows, someone they once believed in, or placed confidence and trust in, has violated their trust, leaving them unsure of what to believe anymore

Believing a survivor when they share their experiences with us is the beginning of both us establishing a relationship with them and us communicating to them that we are a person they can trust.

Our belief in a survivor makes for an environment that allows for healing

When survivors share their stories, it requires them to be vulnerable, and this vulnerability can be extremely painful for them.

Communicating our belief to survivors shows them that we are placing our trust or confidence in them.

If they can't see that we trust them, how can we expect them to trust us in return?

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16, NIV

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8–9 NIV

Workshop Agenda

- What is faith?
- What impact does sexual assault have on faith?
- How can faith play a role in a survivor's healing?
- How does all of this apply to our role as advocates?

Advocate: *verb* – To act as an
advocate for someone or
something
(www.merriam-webster.com)

Advocate: *noun* – One who
supports or promotes the interests
of a cause or group
(www.merriam-webster.com)



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA-NC](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

How do we, as advocates, create a safe space for survivors, to show that we believe them, support them, and promote their interests?

Why is it important for us to create a safe space for survivors, and show them that we believe them, support them, and promote their interests?

**Showing survivors
that we believe and
support them sets a
foundation that
allows them to
continue to heal**



The answer to how we support survivors may look different for each of us, depending on our profession. However, the one thing we *can't* do is nothing.

Faith and belief compel us to take action, and faith without action is dead.

If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

James 2:16–17, NIV



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-ND](#)

What does it
look like when
we don't take
action?

“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.

But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

Luke 6:46–49, NIV

What actions are we taking to show survivors that we care, and ultimately providing a platform, or firm foundation, to enable them to heal?

**How does creating this
space allow for
transformation?**

Transform: *verb* – To change in composition or structure; To change the outward form or appearance of
(www.merriam-webster.com)



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

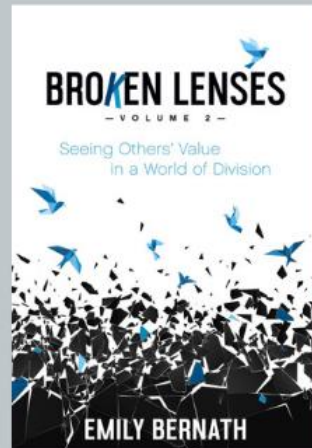
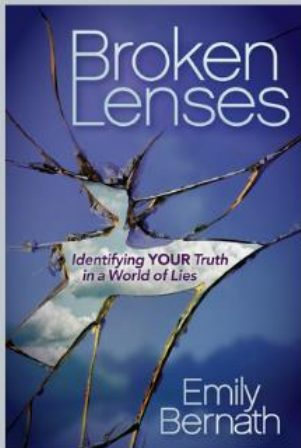
We do not have the power to transform survivors ourselves, or “will” them to transform, but by creating that safe space for them and supporting them how we can, it can create an environment that they feel comfortable exploring transformation in.

Thank
you!

Q&A

Connect with me at any/all of the following:

- **Website:**
www.emilybernathauthor.com
- **Email:**
emily@emilybernathauthor.com
- **Instagram:** [@emilybernathauthor](https://www.instagram.com/emilybernathauthor)
- **Facebook:** [@EmilyBernathAuthor](https://www.facebook.com/EmilyBernathAuthor)



EMILY BERNATH
author speaker advocate

