

***Untangling the PREA Standards:
Outside Reporting, Confidential Support,
and Third-Party Reporting
Fact Sheet: Case Study – Petra (Adult
Female)***



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Case Study: Petra — Adult Female

After Petra hangs up the telephone, a sick feeling forms in the pit of her stomach. A week has passed, and she still has not told her sister. Once again, she assured her sister that she's fine and that she's looking forward to her next visit, before changing the subject by asking about her niece and nephew. Hearing about the kids gives her hope and reminds her that she's an aunt, a sister — someone who is important to someone else.

Petra looks up and reads the phone number on the sign for the umpteenth time. She stifles a laugh at the thought of actually dialing the number. She's heard that all allegations will be investigated, even those made anonymously. She's looked at the sign so many times that she knows the number — supposedly to the local police — by heart. It's hard to believe that were she to call the number, it really would go to the police or that anything would happen — especially when Petra is certain that staff already know **(§115.51(b)/115.151(b)/115.251(b)/115.351(b), Inmate reporting)**. The air is thick and hot in the cell when Petra returns. Sally is sitting, shoulders tense, on the bunk. She's wringing her hands. She looks up when an involuntary sigh escapes Petra's lips.

"Come here," Sally says, smiling in a way that makes Petra's blood curdle. "I've had a bad day."

Sally is gone when Petra awakes. Petra makes up both bunks and gathers her things for the shower. She rolls up the clothes she was wearing last night and stuffs them into her laundry bag. She steps outside of the cell, exhaling slowly. Until now, she thought it couldn't get any worse.

Petra stands outside the showers, listening to the water run while she waits her turn. A poster hanging on the wall beside the row of showers catches her eye. She doesn't remember seeing it before. It reads, "If you need to talk to someone about sexual abuse or sexual harassment, call the rape hotline. Private, confidential, regardless of a report — information and support from trained rape crisis counselors" **(§115.53/115.253, Inmate access to outside confidential support services)**.

For the rest of the day, Petra can't stop thinking about the poster. When she's working, when she's eating — the pin number for the rape hotline echoes in her head, like the words to a familiar song. That night, she begins writing a letter to her sister, which always calms her. She starts the letter the usual way — complaining about the food, asking about her niece and nephew — but, without even thinking about it, she writes about her plan to call the hotline. Then she tells her sister the painful thing that she's been holding in for so long: Sally, her cellmate, has been sexually abusing her.

Sally has an AA meeting that evening. Without Sally monitoring her every move, Petra can leave the cell to make a phone call. She doesn't need to look at the poster: the number is etched in her brain. A woman named Geri answers the line. "Sexual abuse hotline, can I help you?" Petra holds her breath. Her mind has gone completely blank. As she starts to put the phone down, Geri says, "Take your time. I'm here to listen" (**115.53/115.253, Inmate access to outside confidential support services**).

Once she starts talking, she can't stop. Inmates only get 20 minutes per call, but she's able to tell Geri everything: how Sally blackmailed and threatened her, how she was sure she could handle it, how her plan was simply to count the days until she got home to her family. That was how she decided to cope, she told Geri, but then last night, she had realized that she couldn't go on anymore.

Petra barely remembers anything that Geri said, only that she listened. But she does remember a few crucial details from the call, including the steps for how to report sexual abuse, and what to expect should she decide to make a report.

Two days later, Petra leaves her cell and walks to the telephone. Her heart is pounding. It's late on a Friday evening, so she expects that her call will go to a voice mail. That's fine with her. She's not sure she'd be able even to say her name to a live person. The voice mail message asks for basic information — name, inmate number, the nature of the report. Petra shares these details in her message and then hangs up, relieved not to have had to get into specifics about the abuse (**§115.51/115.151/115.251, Inmate reporting**). When Petra returns to the cell, Sally is there. Petra feels dizzy — she's sure that Sally will know what she just did. But Sally is asleep and Petra chokes back a sob of relief.

Sally has not spoken to Petra in three days. Petra is sure Sally sees the silence as a punishment, but Petra is more anxious about what will happen next — when Sally breaks her silence. If that were not enough, the stress of wondering what will happen with the report she made is almost more than she can take.

Petra is on her way to GED class when her named is called, summoning her to medical.

At medical, Petra is greeted by a nurse, who walks with her to an exam room. Inside, there's a man and a woman, both officers. The woman is wearing the uniform of the prison investigative squad; the man is wearing a city police uniform. They ask her to sit down. The woman officer introduces herself,

but Petra's mind is racing so fast that she doesn't catch her name. What she does hear is that her sister called the facility to report what Petra wrote in her letter. The woman officer, from the facility, has Petra's letter in her hand (**§115.54/115.154/115.254/, Third-party reporting**). The police officer adds that the police picked up her voice mail message (**§115.51(b)/115.151(b)/115.251(b), Inmate reporting**). Then, before saying anything else, the police officer asks Petra whether she would like a rape crisis advocate for support during the interview. He hands her a brochure with the name and number of the sexual abuse hotline she called the other day.

Petra says she would like to talk to a counselor later, but is fine to start the interview now. Suddenly, she's never felt more ready for anything in her life.