

RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

How we can help you after a crime
Information for women

Anyone can be affected by rape and sexual assault, and it can be a very frightening and traumatic experience.

Everyone reacts differently to these types of crime, and your feelings may change from day to day. The important thing is to be aware that you may be affected in many different ways, both mentally and physically.

It can be difficult to talk about what has happened, and many people find it easier at first to speak to someone outside of their circle of family and friends.

We're here to help you in this difficult time. You can call us weeks, months or even years after a crime. We are always here to listen and help.

How we can help

We are an independent charity offering free, confidential support to people affected by crime and traumatic incidents.

You do not have to report a crime to receive support from us. We can help in the following ways:

- Personal support with a specially trained person, in a way that works for you. Speak in confidence, ask questions and get advice and emotional support
- Putting you in touch with other specialist help, services or support
- Advice and support in applying for compensation or financial assistance

if you are eligible. (You will need to report the crime to the police in order to apply)

- Practical information and help to make you feel safer and be safer. In some areas, this can be help to secure your home
- Information about reporting to the police, the criminal justice system and courts procedures. If you choose to report a crime, we can accompany and support you to do that
- We know that crime affects the whole family. We offer support to everyone directly affected, and we help parents and carers to support children coping with the impact of crime.

A few facts

There are several myths around rape and sexual assault, and it is important to know the real facts and to remember that it is never your fault:

- It is a myth that only strangers carry out sexual attacks. In most incidences of rape and sexual assault the attacker is known – it may even be a partner, family member or close friend
- Whatever the circumstances of the attack, it is never your fault that it happened. It makes no difference if you had been drinking or taking drugs before or around the time of the assault, and what you were wearing is irrelevant. The attacker made the choice to assault you and so it is their fault, not yours

- Sexual crimes are about violence and power rather than desire and sexual attraction
- Women can be, and are, sexually assaulted by other women
- Some women can be upset and confused because they became physically aroused while being raped or sexually assaulted. This physical response does not mean that you consented to or enjoyed the attack, and it can result from a kind of reflex reaction to physical contact
- Even if you had previously consented to sexual contact with your attacker, it does not mean that they can ever automatically assume your consent. You also have the right to change your mind about sexual contact at any point during it, and the other person must stop if you want them to.

Your health

We can give you information and support related to your health. Here is some key information that may be helpful:

- If you are over 16 years old, hospitals and doctors must see you in complete confidence and will not tell the police unless you ask them to
- Even if you are under 16 years old, most doctors will try to keep what has happened to you as confidential as

possible. If you prefer not to use your own GP there are many clinics that offer free and confidential testing and advice

- If you are worried about being pregnant, you can get advice and free, immediate treatment – including pregnancy testing and emergency contraception – from your GP or practice nurse, family planning clinics or Brook Advisory Centres. You can also get emergency contraception at some GUM (genito-urinary medicine) clinics and hospital A&E departments
- If you choose to use emergency contraception, it will either be the ‘morning after pill’, which must be taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex, or an emergency coil (IUD), which must be fitted within five days
- A check-up for STIs and an HIV test is a sensible precaution, even if you have no symptoms. You can get help and advice from your GP or practice nurse, family planning clinics or Brook Advisory Centres. Or you can contact your nearest large hospital and ask for an appointment with the GUM clinic
- If you may have been exposed to HIV, you should seek medical advice quickly as there is medication that can prevent HIV from taking hold in some people – but only if it is taken quickly after infection. This treatment, called post-

exposure prophylaxis (PEP), may be available from your nearest GUM clinic or hospital A&E department. You can find out more about PEP on the Terrence Higgins Trust website (www.tht.org.uk)

- Try to find out, or ask us to find out, if there is a sexual assault referral centre (SARC) in your area. SARCs are independent one-stop centres where you can receive medical care and support, and report a crime if you want.

Telling the police

- Only you can decide whether or not to report the assault to the police. If you don't know what to do, we can talk to you about what it would mean and what your options are.
- You can report the attack to the police straight away, later, or not at all if you choose. If you report an attack soon after it has happened, however, it may give the police an opportunity to get physical evidence against your attacker that might not be available if you report the crime later.
- If you choose to report the crime, a police officer will take basic details from you. If the assault happened recently, the police will arrange an examination by medical staff to collect evidence. The police will take further details from you only when you feel ready.

- You will be told the name of the officer dealing with your case. The police will let you know if someone is caught and charged and whether or not they are released on bail. You should tell the police if you are worried that the attacker will harass or intimidate you.

Diversity matters and we value it

We are committed to supporting the needs of the diverse communities we serve. We can provide interpreters and information in alternative formats. If you have additional needs please let us know so we can put the right support in place.

How to get in touch

Our contact details are on the back cover of this leaflet. Visit **victimsupport.org.uk** for more information and to find services near you.

Other organisations that can help

Rape Crisis

0808 802 9999

www.rapecrisis.org.uk

National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC)

0808 801 0331

www.napac.org.uk

Where to go for support:

We are an **independent** charity offering **free, confidential** support to people affected by crime and traumatic incidents.

For information and support, contact us by:

- calling: Supportline **08 08 16 89 111**
- using our 24/7 live chat service:
victimsupport.org.uk/live-chat
- using BSL: **victimsupport.org.uk/bsl**
- Online: **victimsupport.org.uk**

To find out how you can help us, visit
victimsupport.org.uk/get-involved

 **VictimSupport**

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Victim Support, Building 3, Eastern Business Park, Wern Fawr Lane,
Old St Mellons, Cardiff CF3 5EA
Telephone: 020 7268 0200

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