

Guide One – Being sexually assaulted

Whether it has just happened or happened decades ago, being a victim of sexual assault can be a difficult and traumatic experience. This guide will help you understand your options and make choices about how to move forward.

The most important thing to remember is that **it is not your fault** that you have been sexually assaulted.

Your rights as a victim of crime are set out in the Victims' Code, which you can read in full on this website. **You're entitled to support to help you cope and recover, whether or not you decide to report the assault to the police.** If you want to know more about how to get support please take a look at Guide Two.

You may be thinking about reporting the crime to the police. To do this, you can:

1) Call 999.

You, or a family member or a friend on your behalf, can choose to call the police. The police will put the report on their system as soon as you make the call. You will then be asked to give a formal statement, and the police may ask you to provide physical evidence, like the clothes you were wearing or swabs from your body. You can find out more about what happens when you report a crime in Guide Three, or in Guide Four if the assault happened a while ago.

2) Tell a medical professional, like a doctor or nurse or report at A&E.

You might tell a nurse, doctor or GP about your assault if you've gone to the hospital after the assault for care, or if you have been having continuing physical or emotional issues. It might also be because you don't feel able to call the police yourself.

Visiting a medical professional straight away after a sexual assault can be a good idea as you could be pregnant or have a sexually transmitted infection. They can also help to collect forensic medical evidence, like swabs from your body.

If you let a medical professional know that you have been sexually assaulted, whether it is immediately or a long time after the assault, they should ask you if you want to report it to the police. A medical professional isn't allowed to tell the police what has happened to you unless you give your permission, or unless there is an immediate danger to you or someone else.

Anything you tell a medical professional will go on record and might be used to build a case against the person who attacked you or at trial if your case goes to court.

Once a medical professional reports the sexual assault to the police, the process is the same as if you had reported it yourself.

3) Call or visit a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC).

Sexual assault referral centres (SARCs) can give medical, practical and emotional support and have specially trained doctors, nurses and support workers. If you go to a SARC and are thinking about reporting the assault to the police, the centre can arrange for you to have a chat with a specially trained police officer to explain what might happen. SARCs can also help by talking with you about what you might be feeling and give you a forensic medical exam, if you want one.

Once you have reported to the police through a SARC the process is the same as if you had reported it yourself.

4) Call, email or visit any victim support organisation

In Guide Two you can find information about the different support available to you after a sexual assault. All of the organisations that provide these services can advise you on reporting to the police and some will be able to go through the process with you.

You can still report the crime and get help from services during the coronavirus pandemic. You may be offered help over the phone or in person.

Reporting to the police

As a victim of sexual violence, you should also be asked if you want someone of the same sex as you to conduct your interview with the police. If you aren't offered this, you can ask for it. The police will arrange this as long as it won't affect the investigation.

If you choose to report to the police, you should get clear information from the police about how they're dealing with your case. This includes written confirmation that you've reported a crime and the basic details, and information (this can be a link to a website) of what to expect from the criminal justice process. You're also entitled to updates from the police throughout your case, including when a decision is made whether or not to charge. For more information on what happens when you report to the police please take a look at Guide Three, or if the assault happened a while ago, Guide Four. You can ask for extra support (called special measures) if your case goes to court. Guide Seven will give you more information about preparing for court.

You don't have to report a sexual assault to the police if you don't want to, it is completely up to you. You may not feel ready now or may think that you will never want to report it. Just in case you do want to report it later you might want to go to a doctor or SARC and let them collect forensic medical evidence. You may also want to think about keeping the clothes you were wearing, unwashed in a plastic bag, so you have the best chance of prosecution if you decide to report the assault to the police in the future. Guide Four gives you more information about what happens if you choose to report an assault to police later.

You might want to claim compensation for being sexually assaulted to help you move on. Take a look at Guide Nine for more information on how to do this.