

## Guide Two – Support following a sexual assault

Being a victim of sexual assault can be traumatic and, whether it happened yesterday or years ago, leave you feeling frightened, upset and overwhelmed. It is important to remember that no matter what happened, **it isn't your fault.**

As a victim, **you're entitled to support whether you report the crime or not.** Your rights are set out in full in the Victims' Code, which you can find on this website. **You can access different types of support depending on how you're feeling and what you decide to do next.**

The types of support that you may want to have can include group therapy, individual therapy, support deciding whether to report the assault to the police, help understanding the criminal justice system, and support in court if the case goes to trial.

Support organisations will be able to explain your choices and help you decide the best support for you. **You do not have to have support if you don't want to.**

### **Seeking support**

If you do report a crime the police should show you how to get support. Some police forces have specialist teams who are trained to deal with rape and sexual assault. All police forces will be able to tell you which support services are in your area. The police should refer you to victim support services when you first report the crime, if you want them to. If the police don't refer you, you can ask them to.

**You can also get in touch with victim support services yourself.** You may want to do this if you haven't reported the assault to the police, or if you didn't want the police to refer you to services. Support services can also help you decide whether you want to report an assault to the police. If you're not sure yet. These services remain open and available during the coronavirus pandemic, and have adapted to provide support remotely, using helplines, webchats and online information and resources.

However you seek help, the support available to you will be based on where you live. You can use the postcode finder on this website to find out what support is available in your area. If you don't want to use the website then you can ask your GP, any other medical professional, or a voluntary organisation to help you find support. All of these people will be able to direct you to the kind of support you need and won't tell the police about the assault unless you want them to.

Some key organisations who can provide or signpost you to support are:

#### 1) Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs)

SARCs offer medical, practical and emotional support after a sexual assault. They have specially trained doctors, nurses and support workers to care for you. SARCs can take care of your health needs and conduct forensic medical exams, so if you are injured or worried about sexually transmitted infections or pregnancy then this might be the best place to seek support.

There are also specially trained advisers available in some SARCs to help people who have been sexually assaulted – you might hear them called independent sexual violence advisers, or ISVAs. They can help you access any other support services you need. They will also support you through the criminal justice system if you decide to report the assault to the police. This includes supporting you through the trial, if the case goes to court.

To find your local SARC, use the postcode finder on the NHS website at this link [www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Rape-and-sexual-assault-referral-centres/LocationSearch/364](http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Rape-and-sexual-assault-referral-centres/LocationSearch/364). The NHS website tells you more about what you can expect at a SARC: [www.nhs.uk/live-well/sexual-health/help-after-rape-and-sexual-assault](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sexual-health/help-after-rape-and-sexual-assault).

You can still get help from a sexual assault referral centre (SARC) during the coronavirus pandemic. You may be offered help over the phone or in person.

2) Victim Support

Victim Support is a charity that provides free and confidential support to people affected by crime or traumatic events. Support is available to anyone in England and Wales, no matter whether the crime has been reported or not, or how long ago the assault took place.

You can contact Victim Support on 0808 1689 111. If you prefer, you can ask for support through the online form on their website. The location finder on their website will also give you a phone number for or the option to live chat with someone in your area. You can still access this support 24/7 during the coronavirus pandemic. [www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

3) The Survivors Trust

The Survivors Trust is an agency for specialist rape and sexual abuse services in the UK. They work with 124 agencies who provide information, advice, support and therapy to victims and survivors of sexual violence, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation.

You can contact The Survivors Trust by calling 0808 8010 818. This helpline is open 7 days a week during the coronavirus pandemic. More information on the support they can offer can be found on their website at [www.thesurvivorstrust.org](http://www.thesurvivorstrust.org).

4) Rape Crisis England and Wales

**Rape Crisis England & Wales** is a network of independent Rape Crisis Centres which are in areas across England and Wales. All Rape Crisis Centres provide specialist support and services for victims and survivors of sexual violence and can support you in your area.

You can contact Rape Crisis by calling 0808 802 9999 or by visiting their website at <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help/want-to-talk/>, where you can use their chat function or find your local centre. The helpline, chat function, and many local Rape Crisis telephone support, text and email services are currently available as usual during the coronavirus pandemic.

If you want gender or domestic abuse specific support then you might choose to contact one of the organisations below:

5) SurvivorsUK

SurvivorsUK is a service for male survivors. They are an inclusive service and welcome anyone who identifies as male, trans, non-binary, has identified as male in the past, or who feels that a male service is the right fit for them. They support those who have experienced sexual abuse at any age. They are based in London but provide a national helpline and do provide support or signposting to support across the UK.

You can contact Survivors UK on 0808 800 5005 or you can visit their website where you can talk to them through a live chat option. These services are still available during the coronavirus pandemic. [www.survivorsuk.org](http://www.survivorsuk.org).

6) Women's Aid

Women's Aid is a network of over 370 local domestic violence organisations, providing refuges, outreach, advocacy and children's support services to female victims of domestic abuse. They support women and children. They can support you if the sexual violence you have or are experiencing is related to domestic abuse.

You can contact Women's Aid through their website, where you can use their live chat, access a forum of other domestic abuse survivors, or look at the survivors' handbook which will signpost you to support. You can find their website at [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk). You can email them at [helpline@womensaid.org.uk](mailto:helpline@womensaid.org.uk) and they will reply within 5 days. These services are still available during the coronavirus pandemic.