

Guide Four – Reporting a sexual assault to the police that happened a while ago

You can report a sexual assault directly to the police, or if you're worried about doing so there are lots of other organisations that can help you decide if you want to report and then help you do so. Take a look at Guide Two if you want to know more about this. If you do want to report directly to the police, you can do so no matter how long ago the assault took place. You can report to the police in the following ways:

1) Call 101

You can call 101 for any non-urgent crime, so you might want to call this number if the crime didn't take place recently, or you are not currently in danger or in need of emergency support. The operator will advise you on what will happen next.

2) Online

You can contact the police online by contacting your local police force. You can find out the contact details for your local police at this link www.police.uk/contact/force-websites which will take you to their websites. Just like when you report over the phone, if you report online the police will be in touch to make arrangements to see you. You can also access the police online to get advice if you have been assaulted and who else you can turn to other than the police.

You can also report anonymously via online reporting. If you report anonymously it can be hard to prosecute as there won't be a victim to make the case, but it can help the police keep other people safe and monitor the person who assaulted you. This also helps the police understand if the person who assaulted you has done it before and is likely to do it again.

3) Make a report at a police station

You can walk in to a police station to make a report. You can find out where your local police station is at this link which helps you find the website for your local police force www.police.uk/contact/force-websites. If you walk in and report directly there might not be a specialist officer there, so they might have to take some details from you and wait for a specialist officer to help you.

4) Crimestoppers

If you don't want police to know your identity you can report to Crimestoppers by phoning 0800 555111 or by visiting www.crimestoppers-uk.org. Just like if you report anonymously online, it can be difficult for the police to make a case this way, but can help keep other people safe.

If you have been sexually assaulted recently but you don't feel ready to report it, you can report it later. You may want to keep any physical evidence, like the clothes you were wearing, unwashed and in a plastic bag to keep as much evidence as possible. You may also want to have a forensic medical exam because this can be kept as evidence until later too. You can do this through a sexual assault referral centre or at a hospital. For more information on this, and the support you are entitled to regardless of whether you report the crime or not, take a look at Guide Two.

However you choose to report, it's a good idea to write down the name and number of the officer taking your report and keep it somewhere safe. This will help you later in the case if you want to find out more about what's happening or if you need to give this information to other professionals you're in contact with.

If you want to report a sexual assault which took place abroad you can do it through the local police or in the EU through 112 whilst in the country. The police in the UK might not be able to help – it depends on what country the assault took place in. In some countries being the victim of sexual assault can be illegal. You may wish to seek advice from the UK embassy or FCO before making a report to the local police. You can contact the UK embassy here or in the country. **You can still seek support no matter where the assault took place**, have a look at Guide Two for more information.

Once you have reported

Once you have reported a sexual assault the police will then begin an investigation. Once you have made the report you can choose not to support the prosecution process but the case can keep going without you if the prosecution decide that there is still enough evidence, but this is very rare in rape cases. If you choose not to support the prosecution and the case doesn't go to court, the police will still use the information you have provided to keep other people safe. If the case does go to court and you have withdrawn your support then it might help the defence.

To investigate your report the police will ask for a witness statement from you, they may also ask for physical, forensic medical and/or digital evidence. This is so that the police can work out if there is enough material to make a case, it may also be used in court if the case is prosecuted.

Giving a statement

The police will ask you to give a witness statement. This is a written or video recorded account of what happened to you. As a victim of sexual assault you have the right to have someone of your gender taking your statement. If this isn't offered you can ask for it.

You do not have to provide a witness statement if you do not want to. It can be hard for police to make a case without this as this is a key piece of evidence in a case. As you are reporting an assault that took place some time ago this is especially important as it is likely to be the only piece of evidence. If you don't give a statement to the police you might not be able to claim compensation for the crime. Take a look at Guide Nine if you want to know more about this.

You might be concerned that, as the sexual assault took place some time ago, you can't remember accurately everything that happened. You can still give a statement with what you do remember and it is fine for you to tell the police officer if there are things you have forgotten.

If you make a written statement a police officer will ask you questions and write down what you have said. You will be asked to read what is written and make changes if you don't think it is correct then sign it. If you make a video statement you can watch it back and then sign papers agreeing to it.

When you sign a witness statement or agree to the contents of a video statement you are saying that you agree it is a true account of your experience. You can add more later if you remember something else but you can't change the original statement. What you say can be used in court. **You can withdraw a witness statement once it is given but the case can still continue without you if the police think there is enough evidence without your statement.**

You should be given the name of the officer taking your statement and their number. You should also be given the name of the officer who will be in charge of the case and their contact details. In some cases this may be the same person.

Sometimes people are afraid of making a witness statement, they might be afraid of the person who committed the crime or their friends. If you are worried about giving a statement for this or any other reason then you should explain that to the police. They might be able to explain why you don't need to worry, or to keep you safe if you are in danger.

You will be given a leaflet 'Giving a witness statement to the police - what happens next?'. This leaflet explains who to contact to find out how the case is progressing and what happens next.

Providing evidence

You do not have to provide any evidence if you do not want to. As the sexual assault took place some time ago you might not have physical evidence. If you kept any evidence from the time you can still provide it to the police. You can still report the crime even if you don't still have physical evidence, or never did.

Physical evidence - The police may also ask you to provide physical evidence, such as the clothes you were wearing or items you had with you. This is so they can look for DNA, or match evidence to the crime scene. If you kept any physical evidence from the time you were assaulted it might still have DNA on it, depending on how it was stored, and it may still be useful in the investigation. Any evidence you give the police will be returned. This might take longer if they are needed as exhibits in court – you should be told if this is the case.

Forensic evidence - This evidence can make a stronger case if it supports what you are saying in your statement or contains DNA to link you to the person who committed the crime. As the sexual assault took place some time ago there will no longer be forensic medical evidence on your body. If you had an early evidence kit or a forensic medical exam at the time you can let the police know and they can still use that exam as evidence. You can still report the crime even if you did not have forensic evidence collected at the time.

Digital evidence - The police may also ask for digital information, such as your mobile phone and access to your emails and social media accounts as they have a duty to follow all 'reasonable lines of enquiry'. This is in case there is any digital material which could prove what you said in your witness statement, or sometimes be helpful in understanding any explanation the person who has assaulted you has given to police of the assault. Sometimes the police will have to take your phone to collect the digital evidence. Before the police do this, they will ask you to complete a form to give your permission. **You do not have to hand over any devices if you don't want to.** The police will try to return the device to you as quickly as possible but this can take a while as it can take some time to review all the data. In certain cases the police might be able to provide you with a replacement device, you can ask the police if this is possible.

It can feel quite intrusive to have the police looking at your personal conversations but this can be very important material in a case. It can also take a long time for police to investigate this kind of material as they have to read a lot of messages to see if anything is relevant to the case.

Any evidence collected by the police must be provided to the defence if the case is charged as it is being used to prove to case and to make sure the trial is fair. Take a look at Guide Five if you want to know more about providing evidence during a case. This will only happen if the case is charged. **If the case does not get prosecuted the information will not be provided.**

Providing a victim personal statement

As the victim you will also be given the opportunity to make a victim personal statement. This is your chance to explain how you feel about the crime and how it has affected you and your family. This is separate to your witness statement. This statement is to help people in the criminal justice system understand how you have been affected and can help the judge decide what sentence to give if the person who assaulted you is found guilty. **You do not have to give a victim personal statement if you don't want to. Not giving a victim personal statement does not affect any part of the case.**

What happens next

Once the police have your statement and any evidence they have collected from you they will continue to investigate your report. If you want to know more about what happens when the police investigate your report, please take a look at Guide Six.