

Victim Support

Rape and sexual assault

Information for women

Coping after rape or sexual assault

Being raped or sexually assaulted is a shocking experience and the effects can last a long time. Everyone reacts differently 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. Most people do come to terms with their experience in time, especially if they get support and understanding. Friends and family can be very helpful. But many people find it easier to speak to someone they don't know, and who understands what they have been through.

A few facts

There is a myth that only strangers carry out sexual attacks. But many assaults are committed by someone the woman knows, including partners, and close friends. Whoever the attacker was, the important thing to remember is that it is not your fault.

How we can help

Victim Support is the independent national charity for people affected by crime. We help thousands of victims of rape and sexual violence every year. Our specially trained volunteers give information, practical help and emotional support.

Our services are confidential, free and available to everyone. We can help, regardless of whether you have told the police or anyone else about the attack.

Our volunteers can visit you at home (if you want us to, and if doing so will not put you at further risk) or somewhere else if you prefer. If you don't want to see anyone face-to-face, you can also talk to us on the 'phone, either to your local Victim Support service or to the national Victim Supportline on 0845 30 30 900 (calls charged at the local rate).

If you choose to report the attack, we can go to the police station with you. If you give evidence in court, our Witness Service can help you to cope with the experience. We can also give you information about compensation.

Health issues

You may be worried about pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections (STIs) after an attack. If you are over 16, 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 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 which offer free and confidential testing and advice.

Risk of pregnancy

If you are worried about being pregnant after a sexual attack, you can get free treatment and advice from family planning clinics, young persons' clinics, Brook Advisory Centres or your GP.

You can get free and immediate testing and emergency contraception to help prevent pregnancy. If you chose contraception, it will either be the 'morning after pill' (which must be taken within three days (72 hours) of unprotected intercourse) or an emergency coil (IUD), which must be fitted within five days.

You can also get emergency contraception at some genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinics and hospital accident and emergency (A&E) departments.

Sexually transmitted infections

Even if you have no symptoms, a check up for STIs is a safeguard. You can get help and advice from your GP or practice nurse, family planning clinics or Brook Advisory Centres.

Any of these can refer you to a GUM clinic where you can be tested. Or you can contact your nearest large hospital and ask for an appointment with the GUM clinic yourself.

You can choose to have an HIV test separately. This will usually happen at a GUM clinic and you will normally be offered counselling before the test. Your GP can arrange the test for you, but if you are worried about confidentiality you can go direct to the GUM clinic.

For confidential advice about HIV, call the THT Direct helpline on 0845 12 21 200 (10am - 10pm Monday to Friday, 12pm - 6pm Saturday and Sunday), www.tht.org.uk or the free 24-hour Sexual Healthline on 0800 567 123.

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 with 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 be gone if you report the crime later. A police officer (usually a woman) will take basic details from you. If the assault happened recently, the police will arrange an examination by medical staff to collect evidence.

You may be near one of the growing number of sexual assault referral centres (SARC). These are local partnerships between the police, health services and voluntary organisations set up to focus on your immediate support needs. They are independent one-stop centres where victims of sexual assault can receive medical care and support while at the same time having the opportunity to assist any police investigation (if you choose to report the crime). The centres include facilities for forensic examination to collect physical evidence. If appropriate, the police will ask you if you'd like to be referred, or you can go

directly to the SARC yourself if you do not want to report the incident.

The police will take further details from you only when you feel ready. The statement you make will be used as the main evidence if your attacker is caught and there is a court case. The police should arrange an interpreter for people who have difficulties with English.

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.

If the police charge someone with rape or indecent assault, they pass the evidence to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) who prepare the case for court.

If you wish, Victim Support can help you in your contact with the police and the CPS.

The court process

You may have to wait a few months for the case to go to court. The police will send you a letter telling you the date of the hearing. If the person pleads 'guilty', you will not have to give evidence but you can still choose to go to court if you want to. The police or CPS should tell you what sentence has been given. If the person pleads 'not guilty' you may be asked to go to give evidence. If this happens, remember that you can take a friend for support, or we can arrange for one of our volunteers to go with you (see the information on the Witness Service below).

Going to court

If you have to go to court in connection with the attack, we have information on what to expect and how we can support you. Talk to one of our staff or volunteers or ask for a copy of our *Going to court* leaflet. There are also a range of measures to help protect you and your privacy through the court process - we can give you details.

The Witness Service

Victim Support runs the Witness Service in every criminal court in England and Wales. Trained volunteers can support you and anyone who you wish to bring with you at the court. They can give you information about what to expect. They can usually arrange for you to see a courtroom before the trial, and can make sure that you do not have to sit near the defendant and their family and friends while you are waiting. But they are not allowed to discuss the evidence you are giving as a witness.

Other legal action

It is possible to take out a private prosecution for rape or sexual assault or to go to the civil court to sue the alleged attacker for damages. If you think you might want to do this you should consult a solicitor. If you are worried about your safety you should tell the police and you may be able to obtain an injunction to help make sure that your attacker stays away from you.

When an offender is released

If your attacker is sentenced to one year or more in prison, the Probation Service must ask you if you want to be informed about plans for his or her release. You should tell the Probation Service if you have any concerns about this.

Compensation

As a victim of sexual violence, you may be able to get Criminal Injuries Compensation. Normally the crime must have been reported to the police for you to qualify, but we can give you more information about this.

Other useful addresses:

At the time of printing there is no national contact for Rape Crisis, but check the yellow pages for details of local centres.

National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC)

0800 085 33 30

www.napac.org.uk

To find a solicitor or advice agency contact

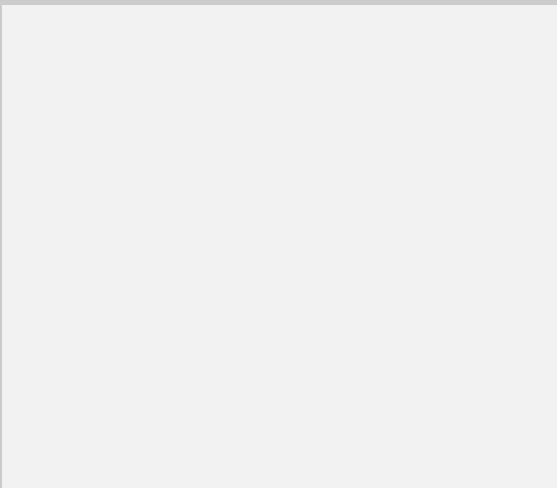
Community Legal Service Direct

0845 345 4 345

www.clsdirect.org.uk

Your local Victim Support may be able to give you details of other organisations in your area.

Contact your local Victim Support branch



0845 30 30 900

Victim Supportline

Information and support for anyone affected by crime

Victim Supportline can also put you in touch with your local Victim Support branch.

Published by Victim Support
President HRH The Princess Royal

Victim Support National Office, Cranmer House,
39 Brixton Road, London, SW9 6DZ
Telephone: 020 7735 9166 Fax: 020 7582 5712
Web: www.victimsupport.org

Charity registration: 298028 Company no: 2158780
Registered in England Limited by guarantee
Registered office as above.