

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Including rape and sexual assault

**How we can help you after a crime
Information for women and girls**

Anyone can be impacted by Sexual Violence, including rape, sexual assault and exploitation, regardless of your sex, gender or sexuality. It may have happened when you were a child, teenager or as an adult.

It is estimated that one in four women have been raped or sexually assaulted as an adult, with one in two rapes against women carried out by their partner or ex-partner. One in six children within the UK are estimated to have been sexually abused*.

There is no 'right' way or 'wrong' way to react or feel following sexual violence. No one should ever be made to feel that they should 'just get over it' or that they are making a 'big deal' out of it. Everyone's experience will be different, but it is possible to move forward following sexual violence, with the right support.

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

We're here to help you at your own pace.

You can call us weeks, months or even years after a crime. We are always here to listen and help.

*Statistics taken from Rape Crisis England and Wales. 2023.

What is Sexual Violence?

Sexual violence is an umbrella term which covers all forms of sexual activity which has happened without consent. Sexual crimes are about power and control rather than desire and sexual attraction.

Rape happens when someone didn't want to have sex or didn't give their consent for sex to happen. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 states that someone commits rape if all of the following happens:

- They intentionally penetrate the vagina, anus or mouth of another person with their penis.
- The other person does not consent to the penetration.
- They do not reasonably believe that the other person consents.

Sexual assault happens when someone touches another person in a sexual manner without their consent. Or when someone makes another person take part in a sexual activity with them without consent. It includes unwanted kissing and sexual touching.

Sexual harassment is any kind of unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature that leads to feeling humiliated or intimidated. Such as the use of insulting sexual names, speaking in a sexual way that makes an individual feel uncomfortable, or spreading sexual rumours.

Image-based sexual abuse (sometimes referred to as 'revenge porn' or 'sextortion') is when someone shares, or threatens to share sexually explicit images or videos of another person without their consent. This can also include digitally altered images (also known as 'deepfakes'). Materials can be shared both online and offline.

What is consent?

Consent happens when all people involved in any kind of sexual activity agree to take part by choice. They also need to have the freedom and capacity to make that choice.

Without consent, any kind of sexual activity is sexual violence.

Consent is specific, ongoing and can be withdrawn at any point. If consent has been given to one sexual act, it cannot be assumed that it is given for another.

Consent should never be automatically assumed.

Some women may find that their bodies became physically aroused while being subjected to sexual violence. This does not mean that consent was given or the victim-survivor enjoyed what happened. This can be a natural response to physical contact.

Myths around sexual violence are prevalent within society and can make many victim-survivors feel some self-blame.

It is important to remember that Sexual Violence is never the victim-survivors fault. The blame should always be placed on the person who has chosen to commit sexual violence:

- *'I can do what I want because we are in a relationship and had sex before...'*
 - That being in a relationship and gives you rights over your partner's body (**Consent must be gained, and never assumed**)
- *'They wouldn't be dressed like that if they didn't want it...'*
 - That wearing certain clothing suggests you're consenting to sex or 'asking for it' (**Clothes do not equal consent**)
- *'They never said no though...'*
 - The belief that just because someone does not explicitly say the word 'no' they are consenting to sex (**Silence is not the same as consent**)
- *'It took some convincing but I got a yes eventually...'*
 - That pressuring someone to say 'yes' counts as consent (**Consent has to be given freely and without pressure**)
- *'We did it before so what's the problem...'*
 - That consent is permanent, and that if you've had sex together before, you don't need to receive consent again (**Consent is never permanent and can be withdrawn at any time**)

- *'Only strangers carry out sexual offences...'*
 - The belief that the majority of sexual violence is perpetrated by someone unknown to the victim-survivor. (Statistics show that the majority of victim-survivors report that the person who chose to harm them are known to them)
- *'Women are never perpetrators of sexual violence...'*
 - The belief that women do not perpetrate sexual violence. (Although the majority of perpetrators are male, women can also be perpetrators of sexual violence)

Your health

There may not always be physical injuries following sexual violence, however some victim-survivors may feel sore, have bruises or cuts.

If you feel hurt or injured, it may be useful to get medical advice and support for a doctor.

If you need urgent medical attention, please call 999 for an ambulance or go to your local A&E department. If it isn't an emergency, you can contact **111**.

If you have been recently raped or sexually assaulted you can visit your local Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC). SARCs

provide medical and practical support such as forensic medical examinations, medical help for any injuries, pregnancy and STI tests. You should be able to visit your local SARC without reporting to the police. You can find the details of your local SARC on the NHS website (www.nhs.uk)

If there are concerns about pregnancy, 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 free emergency contraception at most sexual health clinics and hospital A&E departments. Some pharmacies provide emergency contraception tablets at a cost. The NHS website has more information.

If you feel you may have been exposed to HIV, you should seek medical advice quickly as there is medication (post-exposure prophylaxis – PEP) which can prevent HIV – but only if it's taken quickly after infection. This may be available at your nearest sexual health clinics or hospital A&E department. You can find out more about PEP on the Terrence Higgins Trust website (www.tht.org.uk)

Following sexual violence it is common to experience a range of feelings and emotions that can impact on your physical, mental and emotional health.

Victim-survivors may experience interruptions to sleep and thought processes.

Victim Support has a range of interactive self-support guides that contain videos, techniques, tips and activities on My Support Space which you can access at www.mysupportspace.org.uk

Your safety and talking to the police

If you are concerned about your immediate safety, call the police on 999.

Only you can decide whether or not to report to the police. We know that the majority of victim-survivors do not tell the police what has happened, however many feel accessing independent support can help them to move forward.

If you are unsure if you would like to report, Victim Support can discuss your options and rights which may support you to make an informed choice.

Remember that victim-survivors are not to blame for the sexual violence they have been subjected to, and all victim-survivors have the right to report what happened.

There are no time limits to report sexual violence to the police.

If the crime is reported immediately, the police will arrange a forensic medical examination by medical staff to collect any evidence (keep any clothes which were

worn at the time of the assault unwashed in a bag, if you can).

How to report:

- Contact the police on 101 (or 999 if you are in danger or it's an emergency)
- At your local police station in person
- Contact a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC)

How to get in touch

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

How we can help

Victim Support offers free, confidential and independent support to all victim-survivors who have been subjected to any form of sexual violence at any point in their lives, regardless of whether the crime has been reported to the police.

Support is tailored to victim-survivor's individual needs including emotional reassurance and practical support. This may include advocating with other services, safety planning without blame, signposting to relevant external services and providing information to help navigate the criminal justice system.

Within our ISVA services we have to ensure that the ways we work are safe for victim-survivors and the services are

meeting their needs. In order for us to do this, Victim Support is unable to offer ISVA support to those who have been charged, or convicted of sexual offences, unless in exceptional circumstances.

Where we receive a referral of an alleged perpetrator in an active criminal justice investigation, we will risk assess the most suitable support method.

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.

Other organisations that can help

Rape Crisis England and Wales

24/7 Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Line

0808 500 2222

www.rapecrisis.org.uk

National Association for People

Abused in Childhood (NAPAC)

0808 801 0331

www.napac.org.uk

Galop

National Helpline for LGBT+ Victim-Survivors of Abuse and Violence

0800 999 5428

www.galop.org.uk

Revenge Porn Helpline

Supporting adults 18 years and over experiencing intimate image abuse

0345 6000 459

www.revengepornhelpline.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

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