

Victim Reporting Factsheet

Reporting child sexual abuse to the police

If you have been a victim of child sexual abuse, you may not yet have reported what happened to you. There may be a number of reasons for this, and to take this step may be painful for you and require courage. You may, or may not, be ready to take this step now.

There are a number of routes you can take to report child sexual abuse to police, there are:

- Going to a police station,
- Dialling 101,
- Reporting online via a police website.

Whichever route you choose to report through, you will be listened to and believed. Any report made through any of the channels will be investigated based on what you have spoken about. It will also be shared with Operation Hydrant, the national policing team set up to coordinate the investigation of non-recent child sexual abuse.

Why should I report what happened to me?

Many victims and survivors of child sexual abuse have said that simply telling someone about what happened to them, being listened to and believed, was a relief – even though the act of doing that can be painful and upsetting.

If the person you name in your account is alive, the police will consider whether there are safeguarding issues that need to be addressed. Many child sexual abusers continue to abuse, often into older age. Reporting what happened to you may help to protect other potential victims.

News of an investigation or arrest will often result in other victims and survivors coming forward. For the survivor of child sexual abuse it may be a huge relief to know that you are not alone.

Not every report to the police will result in a criminal trial. However, every week across the country it is a fact that people who have abused children are sent to jail by the courts. Many victims and survivors attend court to see the person who abused them sentenced and held publicly to account for what they did.

What will happen when I make a report to the police?

When you first make contact with the police, they will take an initial report, a 'first account'. The force will then make contact with you to take more detailed information. This could be in a matter of days or weeks, depending on the force. You can request how you would prefer to be contacted, and this will be passed on. However, there may be occasions when the local police force may contact you in a different way. This might be because they are unable to contact you through your preferred method, or they may need to speak to you more urgently due to a safeguarding issue. You can request to speak to a male or a female police officer.

First account

The police will ask you to provide a 'first account' – they will ask you questions so that they can understand what happened to you. This might be over the phone, or an officer may come to speak to you at a time and place convenient for you. After this, you are required to provide a more detailed account to the police – this can be done through a range of ways, from a written statement to a video interview, however is best for you.

Will I have to go to a police station?

If you have made your report to the police at home, and you are happier in that environment, the police will come and speak to you there to take more details.

After providing your first account

When you have provided your account to the police, they will launch an investigation, which will seek to uncover any evidence relating to the allegations you have made. At the appropriate time, police will approach the person you have accused of abuse. The police will refer to the person you are accusing as “the suspect”.

Depending on the length of time since the offence(s) took place, the current status of the suspect, and your safety, the police will decide whether to arrest the suspect, or interview them “under invite”. The police need to meet strict criteria before they can arrest someone, therefore they may decide that “under invite” is more appropriate. However, this does not mean that they are treating the offence less seriously. The police will ask for your view on this, as it is recognised that this may not be the action you want taken, depending on the circumstances. However, they will also need to weigh up your views against other considerations, such as whether there is a continued threat to others.

Support

The officer who is assigned to your case will make contact with you as soon as possible. They are known as the “officer in the case” or OIC.

The OIC will give you help, support and address any specific needs or wishes you have. They can also make referrals on your behalf to other agencies who are independent of the police who may be able to support you and meet your needs.

There are many groups who provide support – your OIC will be able to provide you with information regarding what is available in your area. This might include your local Independent Sexual Violence Advisor Services (ISVA). ISVAs can provide emotional and practical support to victims and survivors of rape, sexual abuse, and sexual assault.

The Investigation

The pathway of investigations will vary, depending on the practice of the local force and the specific details of your case.

Once the suspect has been interviewed, all of the witnesses or people with relevant information spoken to, and all the evidence collected, the investigation will be complete.

A decision will be made regarding whether there is sufficient evidence to charge. This is made by either the police or the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) dependent on the particulars of the case.

If the decision taken is not to proceed to charge the suspect, the reasons for this will be explained to you by the officer in the case, and you will have the chance to ask questions and understand why. If you disagree with the decision that no further action should be taken against the suspect, you may challenge this decision via the Victims Right to Review Scheme. This gives you the right, under certain circumstances, to have the decision not to charge or prosecute a suspect reviewed.

The Trial

If the police investigation results in charges, the case will proceed to court.

How long will a trial take?

How long a trial will take can depend on a number of things, but may include the number of charges the accused faces, and the number of victims and witnesses giving evidence. Trials can range from a few days to several weeks.

Will I be identified?

It is against the law for newspapers or television to use your name or any details that would identify you. All sexual offence victims have an absolute right to anonymity by law, regardless of whether a suspect is charged, and found guilty or not guilty. This means that while the news media may report on the criminal trial, and the evidence which is heard, they will not say or report anything which could lead to you being identified. If you choose to waive your right to anonymity, your OIC can discuss what this might mean for you.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if the person who abused me is dead?

Although a deceased person cannot be subject to a criminal trial, you should still consider reporting what happened to the police. This allows the police to check whether the person you are accusing was linked to any other abusers who may still pose a risk to children. You will also have the opportunity to receive the same support offered to victims and survivors where the accused is alive.

I reported the offences against me previously but nothing was done – why should I bother?

The police service, other agencies, and society have recognised that victims and survivors were not always listened to and believed in the past.

The police service has worked hard to change its approach, and to gain the trust of

victims and survivors to come forward and report non-recent child sexual abuse. The fact that so many victims and survivors have come forward in recent years is partly as a result of that change in approach. Victims and survivors know that they will be listened to and believed, and an investigation will be launched.

What happened to me was so long ago – will I be believed if I come forward now?

The police service understands the importance of listening to, and believing, victims and survivors when they find the courage to come forward and report offences. National policy and guidance says that officers must believe the victim when they provide their account, and then launch an investigation. The police service also understands the many reasons why a victim or survivor of child sexual abuse may not report what happened to them until they are an adult – this will in no way detract from what you have to say.

Will Operation Hydrant investigate my allegations?

Operation Hydrant is the national policing operation which coordinates all investigations of non-recent child sexual abuse for the whole country. It does not undertake the investigations which may follow from your allegation. This is done by the force local to where the abuse took place. Operation Hydrant will pass the details provided to the local force

Criminal Injuries Compensation

[The Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme](#) is a government funded scheme designed to compensate blameless victims of violent crime in Great Britain. The scheme can compensate blameless victims of violent crime or people whose loved ones have died as a result of violent crime, but to be eligible it requires all incidents to be reported to the police. If the crime for which you are seeking compensation has not been reported to the police the scheme cannot make a payment.