

# What to do if you are a victim of sexual abuse or assault

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**Whether it happened  
recently or some time in the  
past, help is available.**



**sexual**violencesupport.co.uk

## An incident less than 10 days ago

You may be feeling a mixture of emotions: angry, confused, scared, numb and shocked. Whatever you are feeling, it is okay. Support is available to help you!

If the incident just took place, you might want to consider a few things to help you feel safe:

- Try to get to somewhere you feel is safe.
- Try to keep warm as you may be experiencing shock which can alter your body temperature.
- Talk to someone you trust and tell them what has happened.
- Try not to be alone.
- If you are injured and need medical attention, go to the nearest A&E department, or call an ambulance. If you feel in danger, do not hesitate to call 999.
- If you're considering a forensic medical examination, try to preserve any evidence as best you can by not washing, brushing your teeth or changing clothes. If you have done any of this already, do not worry! Evidence may still be detected, and the most important thing is making sure you get the support you need.

If you do not want to report the incident yourself, a friend or family member can contact the police or a specialised organisation on your behalf. You can also go to your GP, a walk-in centre, or your local A&E department.



### If you DO want to report the incident to the police:

All rape and sexual assaults reported to the police are taken seriously and will be investigated in a sensitive and supportive way.

- You can call the police on 101 or 999 and a Specially Trained Officer (STO) will arrange a time to speak to you. The police will support you (and your family) and will ensure that you have the right help from the appropriate services, with your wishes remaining at the forefront.
- Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) are available and can help support you through the process. The police may refer you to someone or you can request this yourself. There may also be specialist Children's ISVAs available.
- If you want to be examined and forensic evidence collected, the police may refer you to a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC). It is best to try and arrange this within 72 hours if possible and try to preserve any evidence as best you can by not washing, brushing your teeth, or changing clothes. If you have done any of this already, do not worry! Evidence may still be detected, and the most important thing is making sure you get the support needed.

If you decide to change your clothes, put everything you were wearing into a clean plastic bag without washing them if you can.

### If you DO NOT want to report the incident to the police:

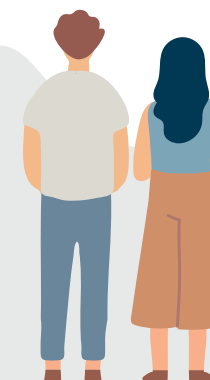
Organisations are available to ensure your sexual health is taken care of, emergency contraception is provided, and you have access to both emotional and practical support.

**You can find your local specialist support organisation via our website:**  
**[www.sexualviolencesupport.co.uk](http://www.sexualviolencesupport.co.uk)**

You can still attend a SARC even if you do not wish to report the incident to the police. It is recommended to try and arrange this within 72 hours if possible to try and preserve any evidence.

SARCs can address any medical or sexual health concerns and forensic samples can be taken and stored to give you time to think about what next steps you wish to take.

If you decide to report to the police at a later date, the police can obtain any samples that have been stored at the SARC and use this as evidence within the investigation.



## An incident more than 10 days ago

Speaking about sexual violence can be challenging but you are not alone. There are lots of specialists available to guide, advise and support you through this difficult time.

Whether the incident happened a few weeks ago or a long time in the past, it is never too late to seek the support you need. You will not be judged for reporting an incident that took place a while ago!



### I DO want to report to the police:

- You can call the police on 101 or 999 and a specially trained officer will arrange a time to speak to you. The officer will listen to you and arrange for you to complete a video interview. Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) can support you throughout this process and the police may provide you with contact details for one. Alternatively, you can request one yourself.
- Because the incident took place some time ago, there may be limited evidential benefits for a forensic medical examination. However, you may wish for one anyway to either set your mind at rest regarding an injury or to secure some evidence of historical injury. This is entirely your choice.
- Support and advice is available on Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and practical and emotional support. Do not hesitate to mention any concerns to the officer in charge or your ISVA.

### I DO NOT want to report to the police:

You can self-refer to a local specialist sexual violence support organisation for help and advice.

**Details on your local provider can be found on the website:**

**[www.sexualviolencesupport.co.uk](http://www.sexualviolencesupport.co.uk).**

You will then be able to speak to a specially trained individual who will listen to you and provide emotional and practical support. Sexual health advice and counselling is also available.

There may be many reasons why you do not want to report to the police, such as fear of not being believed, repercussions, re-surfacing pain etc. Whatever your reasons it will be respected.



## How you might feel

You may be experiencing a mixture of emotions right now. However you are feeling, there is no right or wrong way to deal with sexual violence. This was not your fault!

You may have been threatened, asleep, unconscious, or your body frozen and helpless to respond. It may have been someone you know and trusted or a stranger. It is okay, support is available!



People experience various feelings, and every situation is unique. You are not alone! You may feel:

- Anger
- Confusion
- Frustration
- Loss of control
- Strangely calm
- Self-blame/guilt
- Anxiety
- A sense of feeling numb
- Hyper sexuality or an increased desire for sexual contact

These are not limited, and your feelings are likely to change as time passes. You may be feeling overwhelmed and confused about what to do, but there is support available to help you deal with this.

### Aftercare support

Aftercare is available to you no matter what your circumstances are or when the incident took place. This can be in the form of counselling, group therapy etc. But, it will depend on the area you live in and what your local provider offers.

Once you decide to seek support, specialists will be able to advise you on the options available to you.

If you did not report the incident, you can self-refer to many of the sexual violence support services within the North West. These work in partnership with the police but operate independently, meaning your information will not be passed onto the police unless you ask, or if a safeguarding risk is identified.

**Find local support services near you using our website:**

**[www.sexualviolencesupport.co.uk](http://www.sexualviolencesupport.co.uk)**

### What are Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs)?

Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) are trained and professional sexual violence specialists who work independently from the police.

They are available to support you by providing advice, information, and both practical and emotional support. If required, they can stay with you throughout your journey.

By operating independently, ISVAs can offer impartial advice and information to help you make well-informed decisions.

Here are some of the services provided by an ISVA:

- An assessment of your support needs.
- Help to access other services including (but not limited to) housing, counselling, healthcare, and making referrals.
- Provide information on reporting options, the criminal justice system and court processes. They can also attend court if requested.
- Liaise with other organisations on your behalf such as the police, Crown Prosecution Service etc.
- Support with advice and information about Criminal Injuries Compensation.

## What is a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC)?

A Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) is a specialist medical and forensic service for anyone who has been a victim of sexual violence.

SARCs provide services to survivors regardless of whether they decide to report the incident to the police or not.

The commissioning responsibility of SARCs is led by NHS England's regional Health and Justice team. Together, police forces, Police and Crime Commissioners, local authorities, and the wider NHS co-commission services to ensure the continued existence of care pathways for victims and referrals.

There are currently 47 SARCs across England.

**Use our website to find your local specialist support service: [www.sexualviolencesupport.co.uk](http://www.sexualviolencesupport.co.uk)**



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