



find the strength

# **Rape and sexual assault**

Information for  
women

[www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

## **Coping after rape or sexual assault**

Being raped or sexually assaulted is a shocking experience for anyone and the effects can last a long time. Everyone reacts differently to a crime like this 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**

It is a myth that only strangers carry out sexual attacks. Often the victim knows their attacker – it may even be their partner or a close friend. 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 over 1 million people affected by crime every year, including thousands of victims of rape and sexual violence. We give information, practical help and emotional support to help people find the strength to carry on after crime.

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 specially-trained volunteers can visit you at home (if it's safe and if you want us to) 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 office or to the national Victim Supportline on 0845 30 30 900 (calls charged at local rate) or you can email us at [supportline@victimsupport.org.uk](mailto:supportline@victimsupport.org.uk).

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 give 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 sex) 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 (STIs)**

Even if you have no symptoms, a check up for STIs is a sensible precaution after a rape or sexual assault. 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.

If you may have been exposed to HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), you should seek medical advice quickly as there is medication which can prevent HIV from taking hold in some people – but only if it is taken quickly after infection. This treatment, called post exposure prophylaxis (PEP), may be available from your nearest GUM clinic or hospital A&E department. You can find out more about PEP on the Terrence Higgins Trust website ([www.tht.org.uk](http://www.tht.org.uk)).

For confidential advice about HIV, call the THT Direct helpline on 0808 802 1221 (10am - 10pm weekdays, 12pm - 6pm weekends), 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 help

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 want, we can help you to deal with the police and the CPS.

## **The court process**

You may have to wait a few months for the case to go to court. You'll be told of the court date by the Witness Care Unit (run jointly by the police and Crown Prosecution Service) and can also tell them of any dates that are a problem for you. If the person pleads 'guilty' before the trial, 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, ask for our leaflet or see our website. There is also a range of measures to help protect you and your privacy through the court process - we can give you details and help make the necessary arrangements.

## **The Witness Service**

We run the Witness Service in every criminal court in England and Wales. We can support you and anyone you bring to court with you. We can explain what to expect and can usually let you see a courtroom before the trial. In many courts we have private waiting areas.

## **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 get 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:**

### **Rape Crisis**

[www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk)

0808 802 9999 (12-2.30pm and 7-9.30pm every day).

Co-ordinates the national network of Rape Crisis centres across England and Wales.

### **National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC)**

0800 085 33 30

[www.napac.org.uk](http://www.napac.org.uk)

## **To find a solicitor or advice agency contact**

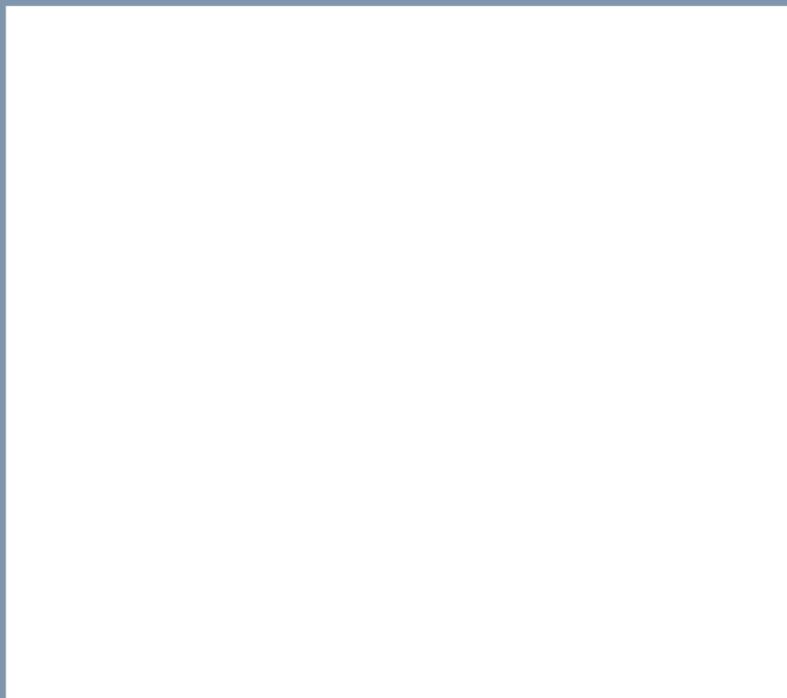
### **Community Legal Advice**

0845 345 4 345

[www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk](http://www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk)

We can also give you details of other local organisations that can help.

Contact your local Victim Support office



Our Victim Supportline **0845 30 30 900** gives information and support for anyone affected by crime.

You can contact us using Text Relay by adding 18001 before any of our phone numbers.

Help us support other victims and witnesses. Text **VISU13** and an amount to **70070** to make a donation.

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