getting the right support

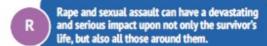
A Guide for Family & Friends





About this guide:

This guide aims to provide information and advice to help when a partner, friend or relative has just begun speaking out about their experience of rape, sexual violence or childhood sexual abuse, regardless of when it happened.



- And if left unsupported, can have serious consequences to the health and well being of the survivor and those around them.
- People take time to heal and feel safe.
- Every survivor deserves, and is entitled to have access to the right support to help them through difficult times, to then be able to live their lives free from the effects of the damaging crime of rape, sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse.



We would advise you to also read the leaflet in the 'Getting the Right Support Series'



Your support can be very valuable

- You may experience a wide range of mixed emotions and feelings that will require patience, care and understanding.
- You may find that you also need some help, to continue to offer a listening ear. Do not under estimate the impact on yourself.
- You can also access help and support. Our services are for both survivors and those around them.

Rape and sexual assault happens

Take some time to gain an understanding of the extent of rape, sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse.

Rape and sexual assault is much more common than people think

- Around 21% of girls and 11% of boys experience some form of childhood sexual abuse.
- 23% of women and 3% of men experience sexual assault as an adult.

Rape and sexual assault can cause severe and long lasting harm to survivors

- The direct physical health consequences of sexual violence and childhood sexual abuse include physical injury, sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy.
- Long term consequences of sexual violence and childhood sexual abuse include post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and panic attacks,

- depression, social phobia, substance and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, self harm and suicide, domestic violence and in some cases, offending behaviour.
- Childhood sexual abuse can also impact on educational attainment, school attendance, emotional and even physical development.

What to do when someone close to you discloses that they have been raped or sexually assaulted

- If your partner/relative/friend was raped or sexually assaulted, either as an adult or a child, you may feel unsure of how to support and help them. Your relationship may be affected, no matter how close and/or intimate you are.
- The response of the first person that they confide in will have a strong impact on their perceptions of the assault and how they view themselves.
- A whole range of emotions may be experienced from quiet and withdrawn to sudden angry outbursts. The assault may result in emotional shock and trauma, triggering many reactions.
- Everyone responds differently, there is no set pattern; try to be prepared for unpredictable behaviour which is out of character.

Rape Trauma Syndrome is a recognised reaction to rape and sexual assault and may include one or all of these responses:

Fear and anxiety

The survivor may become fearful and afraid of situations and places, even those that were previously safe. Random events, sights, sounds or smells could trigger a memory or flashback of the assault or violent experience. There may be issues around going out at night, going out alone, of intimacy with a partner or of sleeping at night (for fear of nightmares).

Blame

Self blame is a common response. Minutely analysing their movements and behaviour prior the assault to look for something that could have been done differently that would have prevented or stopped the assault. "I shouldn't have been... I should have... What if... If only."

Guilt & Shame

"It's my fault". I should have done something to prevent it. "I should have fought them off...... I should have been more in control." Feeling ashamed, and fear of being judged will often stop people disclosing what happened.

Confusion

"Why me?" "Is it something that I did or said?"

Reliving

It's happening again –flashbacks, nightmares, panic attacks, claustrophobia – a flashback in it's most severe form can result in someone believing that they are actually going through the experience again.

Avoidance

People will avoid doing something about what has happened, avoid going to places, seeing people, addressing the resulting problems or telling anyone. To do so will make what happened real and that may feel too painful, raw or frightening to have to admit.

Hypersensitivity

Extreme emotions and mood swings, from seeking the safety and security of your relationship to being resentful, mistrustful and anti – social. As a partner relative friend it can feel like you are being pushed away. This reaction can be caused by the survivors need to protect themselves in order to prevent the event from happening again. These feelings may be aggravated by sleep disturbance thus lessening the ability to cope. This is not about you, it is the survivors

Depression

reaction to the trauma.

Feeling sad, frequently wanting to cry, not wanting to get up and an inability to cope with the here and now or plan for the future. In some cases survivors will seek solace in alcohol, drugs or food as a distraction and coping strategy to forget. Some may suffer a loss of interest in their own appearance.

Relationships

Your relationships may be strained. Survivors may question who they can trust, this may impact on intimate or sexual relationships.

Control

During an assault control is taken away at a very fundamental level; control over the survivors own body. Being in control may then be taken to extremes as the survivor struggles to retain control over all aspects of their lives in order to feel safe.

You have feelings too

It is not easy to support someone through this difficult time. You may also be experiencing a range of emotions and feelings that you may have not felt before. Everyone deals with this in different ways; there is no set pattern or reaction.

You may feel:

- Confused
- Angry
- Helpless
- Frustrated
- EmotionalDistressed
- Shocked
- Impatient
- Vengeful

It is common that partners, relatives or friends feel that they should or could have done something to prevent the assault from happening. Whilst these feelings are normal and understandable, be aware that you too may need help and support before, during and after the support you are providing.

Quite often people do not tell those close to them because they then have to deal with their reactions. This may result in them protecting you by burying or denying their own feelings.





Do's

Don't

Be there

- Being there when they need you is the best support you can give. You may feel like protecting them and keeping them safe during this vulnerable time, but take their lead.
- Do ask them what they want or need.
- Do reassure them that you do not think any differently about them after what they have shared with you.
- Do allow them space to work through what happened to them in their own time.

- Don't expect them to react in any one way. All people react differently.
- Don't expect them to recover within a certain or set amount of time. It may take weeks, months or even years.
- · Don't rush them.
- Don't say "it happened a long time ago, so why does it suddenly bother you now?"
- Don't tell them to forget about it.

Listen

- Just listen. To listen to some one can be the key to helping them through their trauma.
- When they are ready they will talk.
- Do reassure them that they are not a burden on the people that they talk to. They may need to repeat their experience over and over remembering different details. They may feel reluctant to ask for more help or feel that you have "had enough of them".
- Do provide as much opportunity as they need to talk about the experience and their feelings.

- Don't put words in their mouth, don't say things for them or say that you know how it feels, you don't.
- Don't try and take control.
 Control has been taken away at a fundamental level. Control can be very important to maintain for them.
- Don't try to offer advice, just listen and follow their lead.
- Don't push them talk about things.



Do's

Don't

Believe

- Do believe what they are saying. People rarely lie about rape, or childhood sexual abuse.
- Don't question or interrogate how ever inquisitive you are about what happened.

Respect

- Do respect their feelings and decisions.
- Do respect their confidentiality; they have trusted you with some of their most intimate experiences, thoughts and feelings, respect that.
- Do respect their decision of whether to report the rape or abuse, that choice must always be theirs.
- Don't take any actions without first getting permission.
 Your best intentions could be the opposite of what they wanted to do.

Getting the Right Help

- Do find out about services nearby that might help and make contact.
- Consider each others needs and how you can both be supported.
- Call for help and support when you need it.

Don't feel isolated and alone.



Some frequently asked questions

Question:

Should or could I have done something to prevent it? Could I have stopped this from happening?

Why didn't they tell me before?

What if it is someone I know who abused my partner/relative/friend?

When is it OK to resume a sexual relationship?



Answer:

Often there is nothing that anyone could have done. Abusers will select their moment carefully to ensure that they don't get caught. Thinking in this manner takes away the responsibility of what happened from the attacker to their victim. The only person responsible for what happened is the person who chose to commit this crime.

If the assault happened when the survivor was young, they may have tried to tell someone but were ignored or disbelieved. They may have been threatened or been too frightened to say anything. Most people whether it happened along time ago or recently will try to tell someone at sometime. It doesn't matter when someone shares their experience, it's what happens next that matters.

A criminal offence has been committed and other people may be at risk. You can always ring Crimestoppers (0800 555 111) which is completely anonymous and confidential.

If your partner has been attacked or remembered some past incident which they have blocked out, they may find sexual and intimate contact difficult. It is important to realise that it is not something relating to you, it is to do with the feelings and memories they have. You may feel really confused. Your partner may have difficulty trusting you or be uncomfortable with any intimate contact. Reassure them and take things at their own pace, be guided by what feels comfortable for them.





Sandwell Rape and Sexual Violence Service is a skilled and experienced provider of support and counselling services to both male and female survivors of rape, sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse.

For the survivor

This service is not just for survivors who wish to report or work within the criminal justice system. We support survivors both inside of and outside of the criminal justice system.

Please Note - all services are independent of any other agency, this includes statutory (Councils, police, courts etc.) and voluntary services.

The following range of services is available:

- Emotional and practical support on a one to one basis
- Access to an Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA)
- Culturally sensitive services, we respect equality and diversity and are sensitive to the needs of the LGBTT and BME communities
- · Access to interpreting services
- Advocacy, ensuring that the views, opinions, wishes and feelings are respected and listened to by all agencies and people involved

- Support through the legal process to working within the criminal justice system this includes police, crown prosecution service, witness care and courts
- Counselling
- Support to complete the Criminal Injuries Compensation award, if eligible

For the Partner, Relative or Friend A range of services include:

- One to one support, being there for you, someone to talk to in confidence and to listen to you
- Offering guidance on how to navigate difficult situations and emotions and how to access the best support for the survivor
- Information to help you understand the impact and effects of rape and sexual violence
- Explanations and understanding of the roles and responsibilities of agencies who may be involved in supporting the survivor
- Support for both vulnerable and or intimidated witnesses

Survivors or those supporting them will not be forced or pressured to do or say anything that they do not want to.

All services available are delivered at their pace, when they are ready.

"Talk to someone -,, it can help."



Myths and facts about rape

There are a numerous myths about rape and its victims.

→ MYTH

RAPE WON'T HAPPEN TO ME OR ANYONE I KNOW



FACT

Women, children, men, young and old, across all races, religions, economic and geographical divides can all be victims of rape.

Rape is the most under reported crime.

→ MYTH

VICTIMS ASK FOR IT. THEY PROVOKE OR DESERVE AN ATTACK BY THEIR BEHAVIOUR, ATTITUDES OR DRESS

FACT

No one asks to be the victim of sexual violence – you are not responsible for someone's violent behaviour. By blaming yourself you take the responsibility away from the person who decides to commit this very serious and damaging crime.

→ MYTH

THE VICTIM MUST FIGHT BACK FOR IT TO BE CALLED RAPE

FACT

Rape is being forced to have sex. Any threat or use of force, which prevents an individual from resisting, is coercion and is rape.

→ MYTH

A RAPE VICTIM ALWAYS NEEDS TO SAY 'NO' TO SHOW THEY DON'T CONSENT

FACT

The reality is that some victims will 'freeze' during a sexual attack or behave in a submissive manner. This is due to shock, fear of the attacker, or fear for their lives.

→ MYTH

RAPISTS ARE STRANGERS

FACT

When most people think about how rape occurs, they imagine desolate dark alleyways late at night and that the attacker is a stranger. The truth is the majority of people who commit rape know their victims and in some cases are relations, friends or work colleagues.

→ MYTH

MEN CANNOT BE SEXUALLY ASSAULTED

FACT

Men can and are sexually assaulted. Rape and sexual assault are traumatic for both men and women and may have long lasting and very damaging after-effects. Men may find it difficult to talk about their experience for fear of being ridiculed and not believed.

→ MYTH

MALE RAPE IS A GAY CRIME &

Research shows that the majority of sexual assaults are committed by heterosexual males.

Contact us

Black Country Rape and Sexual Violence Service

We support women and men who have experienced sexual violence. Our services cover Sandwell, Dudley and Wolverhampton, and are based in our specialist abuse centres called Cedar Centres. The services are part of Black Country Women's Aid.

in Sandwell call 0121 553 0090 in Dudley call 01384 455 411 in Wolverhampton call 01902 554 598

Other useful numbers

Helplines If you need to talk in confidence:

- National Rape Crisis helpline 0808 802 9999
- The Samaritans 116 123

Genito-urinary medicine (GUM) and Sexual Health Clinics

For confidential screening and treatment of sexually transmitted infections

- Dartmouth Clinic, Sandwell General Hospital: 0121 507 3094
- Russells Hall Hospital, Dudley: 01384 456111 (ext. 3900)
- Embrace Sexual Health Service, New Cross Hospital, Wolverhampton: 01902 695000

Horizon SARC (Sexual Assault Referral Centre): 0808 1685698

Specialist unit supporting anyone who has been a victim of sexual violence, providing medical examinations and forensic evidence collection.

Brook www.brook.org.uk

Free and confidential sexual health advice and contraception to young people under 25.

British Pregnancy Advisory Service: 03457 30 40 30 Sexual health, contraception and abortion care advice and services

Dial 999 if you are in immediate danger or if an incident has just taken place.

Alternatively, call your local police on 101



Black Country Women's Aid (formerly known as Sandwell Women's Aid) is an independent charity which has supported survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence in the West Midlands for 30 years.

We offer sensitive and holistic support services which help victims of abuse to escape from violence, cope with trauma and rebuild their lives.

We believe that no-one should have to live in fear of violence and abuse. We listen, we support, we care.



The Cedar Centres are our centres in Sandwell, Dudley and Walsall which bring together a range of support services for survivors. They are based on values of protection and healing: a safe space to enable survivors to rebuild their lives. You can find out about services at your local Cedar Centre by calling 0121 553 0090.





















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Registered Address: 1st Floor, Lanchard House, Victoria Street,
West Bromwich B70 8HY