

Rape and sexual assault: Has it happened to you?

If someone intentionally grabs or touches you in a sexual way that you do not like, or you're forced to kiss someone or do something else sexual against your will, this is sexual assault.

If you are forced to have sex with someone, or someone has sex with you without your consent or agreement, this is rape.

If this has happened to you, it is important to remember that it is not your fault. No-one ever asks to be raped or assaulted, or deserves it. Rape and sexual assault are criminal offences, and the blame lies with the abuser.

Frequently asked questions

Was it my fault? No. Whatever the circumstances, nobody has the right to force you to have sex, sexually assault or harass you. This includes if you had been drinking alcohol or taking drugs; had been kissing or touching that person beforehand; were with someone of the same sex; didn't say 'no' or didn't fight back, or can't really remember it properly.

What if I was or am in a relationship with the person? You always have the right to say no or withdraw consent to sexual activity, regardless of whether you are in a relationship or have had consensual sex with that person in the past. Sex without consent is rape.

It happened a long time ago. Is there anything I can do? Yes. It can feel very difficult to talk about it or get help. But it's never too late. Our services can support and advise you whether the assault happened recently or many years ago, and whether you were an adult or a child at the time.

Can this happen to a man? Yes, men can be sexually harassed, assaulted or raped. This could happen to gay or straight men, and you can be sexually assaulted by a male or a female.

How you might be feeling... The impact of rape and sexual assault

Rape and sexual assault are very traumatic events, and people can respond very differently to trauma. Not everyone reacts in the same way but some common reactions that people may have are:

- If the assault happened recently you might be in shock. This could mean that you feel numb, unemotional or in denial, or it could mean that you are crying, laughing, shaking or feeling sick;
- You might have flashbacks to what happened;
- You might feel guilty or ashamed, that you are to blame or should have done something to prevent the assault;
- You might be too afraid to tell people;
- You might fear that people will not believe you; will blame you or judge you;
- You might have nightmares, or trouble sleeping;
- You might feel depressed, upset and tearful; or feel worthless or critical of yourself or your actions;
- You might find it hard to trust people or to make friends;
- You might be afraid of people, places or of being alone;
- You might feel angry or irritable with people around you, and your relationships might become strained or break down;
- You might find it hard to cope at work or with your studies;
- You might feel you have lost your confidence and find it hard to cope with everyday life;
- You might think about hurting yourself, or suicide;
- You might want to use drugs or alcohol.

You might be feeling one of these things, or all of them. However you are feeling, you are having a valid response to what has happened to you.

Talk to someone... it can help Black Country Independent Sexual Violence Advice Services

We know it is difficult to talk about what has happened, but telling someone really can help.

Contact us, and our Black Country Rape and Sexual Violence Service will help you get the support that you need. We will believe you. We will listen to you, support you, advocate for you and give you time and space to decide what you want to do. We won't judge you because of what you say or force you to make a decision you do not want to make.

Our support is available whether the abuse happened recently or years ago, and whether or not you choose to report what has happened to the police. We can never take away what happened to you, but there is life after rape and sexual assault. We can help you with choices on how to move forward.

How we can support you

Our ISVAs (Independent Sexual Violence Advisors) are trained specialists who can work with you one to one and offer you emotional and practical support based on your needs. This might include:

- Someone to talk to in confidence who will listen to you and believe you;
- Sensitive services which respect your individual needs and your gender, culture, ethnicity and sexuality;
- Sharing information with you so that you feel empowered to make the right decisions for you. Your ISVA will not put pressure on you to make any decisions or take any action you're not comfortable with;
- Help to understand how the criminal justice process works, explaining what will happen if you choose to report to the police and if you choose not to;

- If you do choose to report, we can support you through the legal process, at court, and afterwards;
- Advocacy, ensuring that your views, opinions, wishes and feelings are respected and listened to by agencies you come into contact with;
- Support with other practical issues that might have arisen as a result of the sexual violence you've experienced, such as accessing housing, education or healthcare;
- Explaining the Criminal Injuries Compensation Award, and supporting you to apply if you are eligible;
- Access to counselling and support groups.

Although ISVAs work closely with other organisations to ensure you get the best support, they are independent of all statutory agencies including the Police, Local Authority and Social Services.

Support for your partner, relative or friend

It is not easy to support someone through this difficult time. We can also talk to friends, family members and partners who may also be struggling to understand your experience or know what to say or do to support you.

If something has happened to you and you are not sure whether it was rape or sexual assault, you can still call us to speak to a support worker to get some advice.

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

WHAT DO PEOPLE SAY ABOUT OUR SUPPORT SERVICES?

"My ISVA was easy to talk to and very kind. She listened to me and answered any concerns I had... she didn't [leave me] until I said I was ready to carry on without her... I trust her and she has been there throughout"

"I have been given the tools to be able to cope, to move from being a victim to a survivor. Understanding that I was not to blame, helping to deal with all the negative issues and giving me self-confidence has helped me feel that I could now achieve anything"

"I didn't know what to say. I stayed silent for years, I looked for someone to tell. When I did, I felt a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I was not alone. Sharing my experience with people who understand has been difficult, challenging and hard work. But most of all it has been the most liberating experience of my life"

"My life changed completely when I became involved with the ISVA service. I no longer felt alone, I was never judged, and everyone was most supportive. Ups and downs, we all have them, but when you crash down, you always climb back up higher than before."



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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Independent Sexual Violence Advice Service

GETTING THE RIGHT SUPPORT

"They touched my life with hope, strength and empowerment"



The Cedar Centre



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