

Children & Young Person Information

Following a sexual assault, you may experience a wide range of emotions that can be distressing, surprising and difficult to cope with. **You're not to blame.....**

Sometimes, it can be hard to make sense of what has happened. But knowing what the law says about rape and sexual assault may help you to understand, and see that you are not to blame. If you have had **any** sexual contact that you **did not want** or ask for, this is a sexual assault or, in some cases, a rape.

This is 100% not your fault. The blame falls only on the person who assaulted you. You are not to blame.

Below are some facts about rape and sexual assault that may be helpful if you are feeling unsure about what has happened to you.

Each person reacts differently. You may feel; tearful, withdrawn, depressed, numb, anxious, panicky, or have nightmares and flashbacks of the assault. For many people these emotions pass within a few weeks. If they persist you may need professional help to overcome these traumatic responses. Being able to recognize these reactions is helpful, especially when you realize that they are normal and you are not going crazy or mad. The following emotions are common.

Anxiety

We all experience anxiety at certain times, for instance you may recall feeling anxious when speaking with new people. When you are anxious your heart can beat faster, you breathe more quickly, and your skin becomes clammy and sweaty. You may feel dizzy or shaky and have '*butterflies*' in your stomach. If you are really anxious, and in a state of near panic, you may feel as though you are having a heart attack and hyperventilate or over breathe. If you do experience these symptoms they will usually pass within 20 minutes.

After an assault many people feel anxious and afraid that something might happen again, and see the world as a dangerous place with no one you can trust. You may find you are always watching out and constantly on edge, waiting for something else to happen. You may be jumpy, especially if someone is too close or touches you unexpectedly. Anything that reminds you of the assault can trigger anxiety and this can be smells, colours, sounds, as well as more specific reminders.

What can I do about anxiety?

First try to notice what is making you feel anxious. Is it what you are thinking, doing, or a reminder of the assault? Our body usually reacts to what we are thinking so if you can distract yourself, or think more helpful thoughts, this can help stop the panic rising. You could try listening to music, counting objects or thinking and imagining a favourite place. Relaxation and deep breathing exercises may also help. If the anxiety is becoming overwhelming seek help before it becomes a problem.

Nightmares and sleeping problems

Nightmares, which can be replays of the assault or other distressing images and dreams, are common and can really affect your sleep. Nightmares are one way your mind tries to make sense of what has happened. You may find yourself waking up suddenly feeling very afraid and anxious. If you then try and avoid sleeping, for fear of having a nightmare, lack of sleep can affect your mood, you may become irritable, have difficulty concentrating and feel depressed. Even if your sleep is not being disturbed by nightmares, you may find that you have difficulty getting to sleep, wake early, or experience fitful waking.

What can I do if I can't sleep?

It is important to try and maintain a normal routine so go to bed at your usual time and get up at the same time even if you haven't slept. Avoid napping in the afternoon to catch up on your sleep as this will make it harder to sleep at night. Try relaxing before going to bed, have a bath or listen to music. Try not to go over and over what has happened, or force yourself to recall what you can't remember, or worry about what you should or should not have done. This can make you more agitated and may make it harder for you to sleep. If you do wake up during the night, don't lie in bed tossing and turning. Instead get up and have a warm drink, as long as it is not tea or coffee which contain caffeine and can make you more alert.

Flashbacks

These are very vivid images that make you feel as if the assault is happening again. Flashbacks occur because a traumatic experience is so shocking and so different from your everyday experience that you can't fit it into what you know about the world. Your mind keeps bringing the memory back in order to understand what happened. You will probably want to try and push these images away as they are distressing and very uncomfortable. Unfortunately, this can increase the power of the images. Instead try and focus on where you are and bring yourself back into the here and now by reminding yourself that you are safe and are not still being assaulted. Flashbacks should become less frequent but if they do not, psychological therapy can help.

Guilt

People sometimes feel guilty or ashamed. These feelings are related to you taking personal responsibility for the assault, the feeling, '*I did something to deserve this*'. You may also feel guilty for how you are feeling, '*I should just get over this*', or guilty that others are upset or angry. Remember you are **not** to blame for being sexually assaulted.

Anger

Many people who have been assaulted feel angry, not only with their assailant but also with themselves and others. You may feel that the world is not fair place. If you are not used to feeling angry this can seem scary and confusing, particularly if your anger is directed towards those who are closest to you. Although being angry can be a positive sign in the healing process, it can sometimes mask other feelings such as sadness and pain. Try not to block up your anger as this may result in it spilling out when you don't want it to. Try and talk about how you are feeling and remember it's a normal reaction.

Irritability

After your assault you may feel under significant physical and emotional stress. As a result, you may find yourself become irritable very easily and reacting to things that normally wouldn't have bothered you.

With both anger and irritability, it is important to try and look after yourself. Use the support of others and try to relax. Exercise can also help to release some of the tension.

Depression

This is a common reaction to sexual assault and can include feeling down, sad, hopeless or despairing. You may cry more often or find it difficult to cry at all. You may lose interest in people and activities you used to enjoy. Plans you had for the future don't seem to matter anymore and you feel life isn't worth living. You may also be grieving for what you have lost because of the assault. If you feel like this try and discuss it with someone you trust. Focus on the reasons why life **is** worth living, you can overcome depression. If your feelings lead to thoughts of wishing you were dead, or doing something to hurt or kill yourself, it is better to go to your GP, seek therapeutic support or if an emergency go to Accident & Emergency as they will be able to help.

FAQs

What is Sexual Violence?

Sexual violence is any sexual act, or attempt to carry out a sexual act, that takes place without consent (agreement) of the person who has experienced it. This can include;

- **Rape** is when a person intentionally penetrates a vagina, anus or mouth with a penis without the consent of the other person. Penetrate means to put inside or to insert into. Only a person with a penis can commit a rape, but boys, girls and transgender people can all be raped.
- **Assault by penetration** is when a person intentionally penetrates the vagina or anus of another person with any part of their body, or any other object, without that person's consent. This can be committed by someone of any gender and also anyone of any gender can be a victim.
- **Sexual assault** is when a person intentionally touches another person in a sexual way without their consent. This includes things like someone touching or groping your breasts, your crotch or your bottom. This can be committed by someone of any gender and also anyone of any gender can be a victim.

It is not uncommon for a victim of sexual assault to have no physical injuries or signs of their assault. But sexual assault is still a crime and can be reported to the police in the same way as other crimes.

What is consent?

If you give consent, it means that you agreed to something. In the example of sexual consent, the person who engaged you in the sexual act must have got your consent. If you said no, you **did not** give consent. If you didn't say anything but also didn't say yes, you also **did not** give your consent. It is also not consent if you say yes but only out of fear for what will happen to you if you say no. If you feel you were forced to say yes, you **did not** give consent.

It doesn't matter who the person is. If you did not give your consent, they have committed a sexual offence. Even if it is someone you are in a relationship with, you do not have to engage in any sexual activity you do not want to. **If you did not say no, you are still not to blame.** The other person still must make 100% sure that they have your consent. If they did not, they are the only person to blame.

What about my age?

It does not matter how old you are, if you did not want sexual contact, it counts as rape or sexual assault. It also does not matter how old the person who assaulted you is. If you did not give consent, it is an offence.

There are a few simple rules about age and consent that you should also remember:

- If you are under the age of 13, you cannot agree to sex or any sexual contact. If anyone has any sexual contact with you, this is an offence
- If you are under the age of 16 and somebody over the age of 16 had sexual contact with you, this is an offence
- If you are under 18 and someone who is in a position of trust has sexual contact with you, this is an offence, even if you are over 16 and give your consent. Some examples would be a teacher, care worker or social worker

If you contact us because you feel you have been raped or sexually assaulted, you will not be in any trouble. Your age does not matter. If you did not want something sexual to happen to you, you will not be blamed.

What about my gender?

It does not matter if you are a boy, girl or transgender. It does not matter if the other person who assaulted you was a boy, girl or transgender. Anyone can commit a sexual offence and anyone can be raped or sexually assaulted.

It is often believed that only girls are raped and this is not true. Too many people think of rape and sexual assault as something that happens to girls. Again, ANYONE can be raped or sexually assaulted. Nobody should feel guilty, ashamed or to blame for what has happened to them. **The only person who should feel guilty, ashamed or to blame is the person who assaulted you.**

What if I had a drink or took drugs?

It does not matter if you had been drinking alcohol or taking drugs when the incident occurred. If someone engaged in a sexual act with you that you did not consent to, you should not feel guilty or as though you are to blame because you were drunk or on drugs. You will not be in trouble because you were under 18 and drinking. You also won't be in any trouble because you had taken drugs. **Too many people don't get the help they need after a rape or sexual assault because they are worried they will get into trouble, but you should always come forward to get the support you need.**

What if people think I was asking for it?

Simply, you are not “asking” for sex unless you are literally asking for it. **It does not matter if you were wearing revealing clothing. It does not matter if you had been flirty or friendly with the person who assaulted you. It does not matter if you were walking alone late at night.** If you did not want to engage in sexual activity, none of these things matter. A rape or sexual assault is still a rape or sexual assault regardless of anything like this and none of these things make you to blame.

Do I need to report what happened to the police?

No, you do not have to report the matter to the police. A C&YP ISVA can inform you of your rights and is here to help and respect you whatever your decision. If you want to report to the police, the C&YP ISVA can help you. Don't worry if you did not go to the police straight after you were assaulted, that does not mean you won't be taken seriously or believed. Many people don't report these events straight away for lots of reasons. Sometimes, they were assaulted by someone they know and think they are protecting them. Some people are too scared to come forward because they fear their attacker. Some people go into shock and it takes them a little while to come to terms with the fact they have been sexually abused. It doesn't matter when it happened, **if you tell us you were raped or sexually assaulted, we will take it very seriously.**

What if I was raped/assaulted a long time ago?

You can still get support from C&YP ISVA. You can still report to the police if you want to.

Where can I get counselling on the Isle of Wight?

Frankie Worker – Counselling Service for children and young people who have been affected by sexual exploitation, child sexual abuse and female genital mutilation. Telephone 01983 408718 or email southwight@barnardos.org.uk

Barnardos Talk2 Service is a confidential therapeutic counselling service for children and young people aged 0-19 that provides support for mental health and wellbeing that is child directed, systems focused, strengths based and outcome informed.

<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/talk-2-service>

Youth Trust offers a range of support for children, young people and their families. They provide one-to-one counselling and group work. <https://www.iowyouthtrust.co.uk/>. Telephone 01983 529569. Download the app 'thinkninja'. Free app for 11-17 year olds on the IOW.

<https://www.relate.org.uk/hampshire-and-isle-wight/children-and-young-peoples-counselling>

CAMHS

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) service provide a service to children and young people aged 0 – 18yrs, and their families, who are experiencing emotional health and wellbeing difficulties. The community mental health clinic offers support, consultation and training to children's services and provides primary and specialist mental health services in the community and to inpatient treatment services as required.

<https://www.iow.nhs.uk/our-services/mental-health-services/CAMHS/camhs.htm>

<https://www.isleofwightccg.nhs.uk/health-and-services/mental-health-services/crisis-support.htm>

For online counselling

<https://themix.org.uk> Freephone:0808 808 4994 (daily 13.00 – 23.00)

Provides a confidential helpline, email, webchat and telephone counselling service for young people under the age of 25. Advice and information on support services for young people including counselling.

All4kidsuk Psychological support information

<https://all4kidsuk.com/psychologists-therapists-childrens/isle-of-wight>

Where can I get support and information to help myself?

Ask your C&YP ISVA as they have lots of information.

Look at these websites:

<https://www.supportline.org.uk> Helpline 01708 765200. Email info@supportline.org.uk

<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/>

Local directories [Isle Find It](#) and [Isle Help](#) currently hold a lot of information and signposting to local and national support organizations and groups.

Barnardos If you are a child or young person you can contact us via: Email: b4u@barnardos.org.uk Text: 07809 100967 Phone: 01489 796684.

<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-young-people>

NSPCC 24hour child protection helpline providing information and advice to anyone worried about a child's physical and emotional safety. Helpline: 0808800 5000 Text/phone: 0800 056 0566 Email: help@nspcc.org.uk www.nspcc.org.uk



Young Minds Emotional and mental health. www.youngminds.org.uk. YoungMinds Crisis Messenger; This service provides free, 24/7 crisis support across the UK. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis and need support, you can text YM to 85258

Childline A free, private and confidential service where you can be you. Whatever your worry, whenever you need help, however you want to get in touch. We're here for you online, on the phone, anytime. <https://www.childline.org.uk/> Phone Number: 0800 11 11

Kidscape Support for children who are being bullied. Office: 020 7730 3300 Email: webinfo@kidscape.org.uk www.kidscape.org.uk

Childnet International Providing tips and advice on how to use the internet safely. 0207 639 6967 Email: info@childnet.com www.childnet-int.org

Samaritans Support line: 116 123, open 24 hours a day Samaritans

Survivors UK <https://www.survivorsuk.org/young-people/>

Papyrus <https://papyrus-uk.org/>

Lucyfaithfull Where abuse has already taken place, we work with all those affected including adult male and female abusers; young people with harmful sexual behaviour; children with concerning sexual behaviours; victims of abuse and other family members. But we also work in families and with adults and young people where there has been no abuse, to help them keep themselves and others as safe as possible. <https://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk/>

Victim Support <https://www.youandco.org.uk/>

Southern Health NHS- Chat Health; Advice for Teens (aged 11-19years old) in Hampshire; Text: 07507 332 160; Response time: Within 24 hours, 8.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday (except bank holidays); <https://www.healthforteens.co.uk/health/about-chathealth/>