

## Sexual assault and rape

You might be reading this because you have experienced a sexual assault, rape, sexual abuse or another form of sexual violence. If so, you may have mixed feelings about what happened, and whether you want to tell anyone, including the people closest to you. Some people are very certain that they want to report what has happened, while others may be less sure. Decisions can also change over time so confusion about reporting is not unusual.

### How should I feel?

No two experiences are the same. It is not unusual to experience a delay in emotional response to what has happened, or for emotions to change, sometimes quite frequently. If you have been subjected to a sexual assault you may feel:

Numb	Confused	Afraid	Angry	Guilty
Ashamed	Depressed	Powerless	Lacking confidence	

It can feel destabilising and any part of your life can be affected. Your eating and sleeping patterns can be disturbed; it can be hard for you to concentrate, affecting your ability to do your academic/professional work.

As sexual violence is inter-personal it is not unusual for it to have an effect on your relationships with others. Not everyone will experience all these feelings, or to the same degree, and there is no right or wrong to how you feel.

However guilty you may feel about what has happened to you, it can be important for you to know that if you have been subjected to rape or sexual assault it is not your fault.

### Some facts

Many believe that there is a greater risk of sexual violence from a stranger but in fact the vast majority of sexual assaults are committed by someone the person knows.

Unwanted sexual attention is not uncommon. Sexual violence affects people from all backgrounds, sexualities and gender identities.

### What to do after a rape or sexual assault

Please see below the checklist of steps to consider:

- 1• Are you in a safe environment?
2. • Do you want to take some time to think things through?
3. • Time limits to be aware of

4. • Police procedures
5. • Who can you talk to?
6. • External agencies

### **1. Are you in a safe environment?**

If the assault has just occurred, you might want to consider whether you feel safe where you are. If you or others feel at risk or consider the situation to be an emergency, you can call the Police or an ambulance on 999.

### **2. Do you want to take some time to talk or think things through?**

If the situation is not an emergency, you may want to take some time to think things through, or to talk to someone you trust. You might want to contact a friend for support. Each person's reaction to sexual assault or rape can differ as will the effect that it has on you. You might be in shock so trying to be somewhere that feels safe and warm might help.

### **3. Time limits to be aware of:**

- If you suspect you were given any type of drug, it is best to be tested within 24 hours.
- If you want emergency contraception, there are two kinds of emergency contraceptive pill. Levonelle has to be taken within 72 hours (3 days) of sex, and ellaOne has to be taken within 120 hours (5 days) of sex. Both pills work by preventing or delaying ovulation (release of an egg).
- If you would like HIV prophylaxis, the medication should be started within 36 hours.
- Any forensic evidence collected can be stored whilst you decide what to do next.

Please see section below on the collection of forensic evidence. It is up to you to choose what kind of support you want to access, but you might want to consider getting medical attention even if you do not want to report the assault to the Police.

### **4. Police procedures**

- See the police website for more information on reporting:  
<https://www.herts.police.uk/Information-and-services/Advice/Rape-and-sexual-assault/Reporting-sexual-assault>
- Reporting at a police station or attending a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) can be a very lengthy process that can take many hours and can be upsetting. So bringing a supportive friend or relative along might be helpful. It might be worth

bringing a set of spare clothes if you have not changed since the assault, as the Police might need to keep them as evidence.

### **Reporting immediately**

- You can call the Hertfordshire Constabulary on 101. The line is staffed 24 hours a day by trained operators. You can request to talk to the Rape Investigation Team directly, but it might take longer to speak to them.
- Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) a specialist centre providing centralised 24-hour professional and sensitive care and support for any victim of sexual assault and rape, including those not wishing to report the assault to the police. An Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) is available to support all victims. Phone: 0808 178 4448 for self referrals Monday to Friday 8 – 4pm

To help get the best quality forensic evidence, the SARC recommends that you try not to eat, drink, smoke, wash, change your clothes, go to the toilet or clear up the area where the assault took place. If you have done any of these things, don't worry – it is often still possible to get some forensic evidence, so this should not stop you reporting.

- If you believe you were drugged, or your drink spiked, you can have urine or blood tests done to prove this, the sooner the better.
- When you give your statement to the police, try not to leave anything out, however embarrassing or painful it may be. If you can't remember something, it is okay to say so. Don't be afraid to tell the truth about things like how much you had to drink, or using recreational drugs, because if the truth comes out later it may harm the chances of prosecution.
- Another option is to report anonymously. It can put the perpetrator on the police radar. They might not be arrested, but it can help make another reported case stronger.

### **Reporting later**

- Many people do not wish to report immediately but decide after a while that they want to do so. This is perfectly acceptable and there are steps you can take to make this easier.
- If you are not sure what to do, you can go to the SARC or Rape Crisis. They can talk you through the different options available to you. SARC can store forensic evidence for you until you make up your mind about reporting. If you wish, they can keep DNA results on record and let you know if it matches with other reported assaults,

still with no obligation on you to report. The SARC also provides medical and emotional help, which you can access without reporting to the police.

- If you do not wish to see anyone, information on this Rape Crisis website states that it is possible to preserve some evidence yourself. They recommend putting your clothes (including e.g. sanitary pad) in a clean bag in the freezer can help preserve evidence, as can brushing your teeth and then freezing the toothbrush.

(<http://www.hertsrapecrisis.org.uk/gettinghelp.html>)

## **5. Who can you talk to?**

If you experience an incident of sexual harassment, sexual assault, you are strongly encouraged to tell someone about your experience and seek support. This could be a school/college nurse, tutor, colleague, family member or friend. You don't need to be alone with your feelings and it is important for you to have support and understanding. There are a number of agencies that are able to help you, including:

## **6. External agencies**

For expert advice on these issues, you can contact the following agencies:

Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) : Telephone, 0808 178 4448, E-mail [herts.SARC@nhs.net](mailto:herts.SARC@nhs.net) Website, [www.hertssarc.org/](http://www.hertssarc.org/) Address, 98, Cotterells, Hemel Hempstead, Herts , HP1 1JQ

Rape Crisis: <http://rapecrisis.org.uk>

Survivors UK – support for male survivors. Helpline: 0845 1221201, Mon, Tues and Thurs 7-10pm <http://www.survivorsuk.org/>

M-Power – for male survivors, Helpline: 0808 8084231, Thurs 8-10pm

Broken Rainbow – for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans) people, experiencing domestic abuse <http://www.brokenrainbow.org.uk/>

National Women's Aid <http://www.womensaid.org.uk/>