



Sandwell Women's Aid
we listen, we support, we care

Black Country Rape and Sexual Violence Support Service is a part of Sandwell Women's Aid

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getting the right support

A guide for survivors



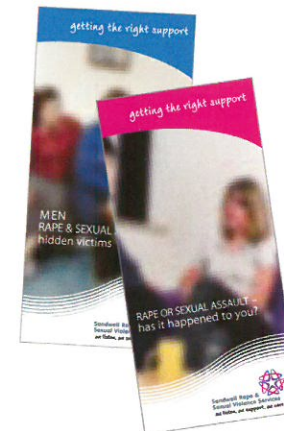
Black Country Rape & Sexual Violence Services
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About this guide:

This guide is designed to provide information and guidance to survivors of rape, sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse. This guide will support you if you are thinking about sharing or disclosing your experience of rape, sexual violence or abuse, regardless of when it happened.

The guide can help you to explore your choices and get the right support.



R Rape and sexual assault can have a devastating and serious impact upon not only the survivor's life, but potentially also those around them.

A And if left unsupported, can have serious consequences to the health and well being of the survivor and those around them.

P People take time to heal and feel safe.

E 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 entitled 'Getting the Right Support Rape and Sexual Assault – Has it Happened to You?'

“we listen,
we support,
we care”

- You are not to blame – it is not your fault
- You have nothing to be ashamed of or feel guilty about
- You could not have done anything to prevent it

Sexual violence happens

It is important to realise that this experience has tragically been shared by many.

Being able to share your experiences, thoughts and feelings is one way to start to get through this difficult time. Keeping the trauma to yourself may affect your life in many ways. With the right help and support you can start the process of healing and moving forward positively.

What do I do?

There is no right or wrong way to respond. Everyone's response will be different. What is important is to feel and know that you have options and choices. What has happened to you is a crime. Everyone has the right to live free from violence and abuse where ever and who ever they are.

We can provide professional support, advice, and if necessary counselling. Being helped to regain your sense of personal power can be a huge step towards dealing with the trauma you may be feeling.

**DON'T LET IT
AFFECT THE REST
OF YOUR LIFE!**

Telling someone

The majority of the incidents of rape and sexual assault that occur go undisclosed and unreported. It is difficult to tell someone about what has happened and it may feel safer for you to remain silent. Telling someone really does help.



**With the right help
and support you can
start the process
of healing and moving
forward positively.**



It may be that you have, or are considering sharing your experiences. Black Country Rape and Sexual Violence Service has trained professionals that include highly skilled Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs) who are specially trained to support survivors of rape, sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse, whether the assault happened recently or is in the past. An ISVA is independent of all other services.

If the assault happened recently...

Talk to someone. The earlier you seek help the quicker you will receive the support you need to keep you safe. You may need medical help and attention. You will not be pressured into disclosing to any other agencies.

Your safety is our priority. Help can be given to secure vital forensic evidence without making a report to the police, leaving the option to make a report at a later date, without having to lose the evidence.

Reporting to the Police

Reporting the crime may help to regain a sense of personal power and control. The ISVA will not force you into making decisions that you do not want to, however, if you are ready and willing to report to the police, we will support you in making your statement and track follow up actions.

The police have Specially Trained Officers (STO's) who can sensitively deal with the reporting of rape and sexual assault whenever it happened. If the incident happened recently you may be taken to a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) where vital forensic evidence will be gathered. A formal statement will then be taken at an agreed location. The SARC is a very supportive environment and you will continue to be supported by our service after the work at the SARC is finished. The police are committed to keeping you safe and free from violence and abuse.

How do you feel now?

An assault is a traumatic experience that can result in emotional shock and may trigger many reactions. No two people will experience rape, sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse in the same way. Everyone will have different thoughts and feelings and you will have responded and reacted in your own way.



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RAPE TRAUMA SYNDROME

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

Fear and anxiety

You may become fearful and afraid of situations and places, even previously safe places and situations. Random events, sights, sounds or smells could trigger a memory or flashback of the assault or violent experience. Fear of going out at night, going out alone, of intimacy with a partner, of sleeping at night (for fear of nightmares).

Blame

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

Self-image

You may find you are feeling more critical or negative about yourself. You may wrap yourself up in clothes to cover your whole body. You may experience negative emotional pressure, reliving the experience and thinking "if I hadn't been so weak or stupid, this wouldn't have happened to me", "if only I had...", "I should have..." etc...

Guilt and 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 can stop people talking about what has happened. Fear of being judged often stops people disclosing what happened. Some people believe that they should have fought off the abuser and blame themselves for the assault. Feeling guilty about the assault means that you are taking responsibility for what the abuser did. Guilt can also lead to feelings of helplessness and depression.

Confusion

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

Reliving

It's happening again - flashbacks, nightmares, panic attacks, claustrophobia. You may be regularly reliving the experience and can't get it out of your thoughts. Flashbacks are vivid mental images (sometimes physical memories), as if the assault is occurring again. Some take the form of words, phrases or sounds that were heard during the assault, which can be accompanied by intense feelings of fear, shame, sadness, anger, or physical sensations known as 'body memories'. Flashbacks can happen at any time and often occur without warning.

They can be triggered by the time of year or day, a TV programme or film, smells, words or phrases, a song, someone who reminds you in some way of the abuser, pictures, taste, a particular fear or anxiety, having sex or being intimate with your partner. These sensations can occur instantly or sometime later.

Nightmares are also common. These symptoms occur because this traumatic event is so shocking and so different from every day experiences that the brain struggles to find somewhere to store or file away what happened. The memories become free floating and can intrude at anytime.

Avoidance

You may avoid confronting what has happened and do and say anything that will avoid dealing with the situation and its impact. You may avoid doing something (denial of what happened), going to places, seeing people, addressing the resulting problems or telling anyone. To do so might make what happened real and that may feel too painful, raw or frightening to have to admit.

You might push away or bury the pain that this incident has caused. Sometimes painful thoughts or feelings may be so intense that your mind just blocks them out altogether and you may not be able to remember parts of the assault.

Hypersensitivity

You may feel jumpy, jittery and shaky, or be easily startled. You may experience difficulty in sleeping or concentrating and as a result you may become impatient, irritable and have extreme mood swings. These feelings may be aggravated by sleep disturbance, lessening the ability to cope with what has happened.

Depression

You may feel down, withdrawn or despairing. You may find that you are crying unexplainably even after a significant amount of time. You may lose interest in the people and activities you used to enjoy. You may feel that plans you had made for the future don't seem to matter and that life isn't worth living or you may have thoughts of wanting to die or harm yourself.

Thoughts of suicide are common but that doesn't mean that you want to die, just that you feel so bad and believe you have run out of options. You just want the pain and hurt to stop.

Your behaviour may swing between very outgoing and very withdrawn. This type of behaviour may have been out of character before the incident. Wanting to sleep a lot and losing interest in your own appearance are also indicators that you may be depressed.

Relationships

You may find it difficult to feel sexual or maintain sexual intimacy. This may have an impact upon your relationship. You may experience a lack of trust in your relationships with others; even the ones you love most can become tense. You may find it difficult to become intimate with people, as your trust is affected.

Control

During an assault control is taken away at a very fundamental level, control of your own body. Feeling in control may then be taken to extremes as you struggle to retain control over all aspects of your life in order to feel safe.

Drugs facilitated rape

While alcohol remains the number one drug of choice, there are over 20 other drugs (legal and illegal) being used by abusers to facilitate sexual violence. There is a reported increase in the use of specific drugs. Many campaigns have focused on keeping you safe when out and about and in particular about keeping your drinks safe and away from others.

Some of the Drugs used and their effects

WHAT DOES IT DO?

GHB This is a synthetic drug that acts as a depressant on the central nervous system. It is commonly made into a clear liquid but can also be a white powder.

ROHYPNOL Rohypnol is a controlled substance and usually white in colour, found in tablet form. It is the size of a one pence coin and dissolves quickly in beverages, such as soft drinks.

KETAMINE Ketamine is an anaesthetic. It is found in liquid, powder and tablet form. The liquid can be injected, applied to smoke able materials or consumed in drinks.

HOW WILL I KNOW?

You will not know. There is no taste or smell to GHB. You will not remember or be able to recall what has happened.

When dissolved in alcohol, it can leave a bitter taste. It is a sedative and its effects may be noticeable within 20 to 30 minutes.

Its potential for a drug rape is not very high due to the aromatic nature of the compound.

EFFECTS?

Dizziness, nausea, vomiting, confusion, seizures, respiratory problems, depression, suppression of the gag reflex, intense drowsiness and possible unconsciousness.

Drowsiness, confusion, slurred speech, impaired motor skills, dizziness and disinhibition, impaired judgement, difficulty walking and a reduced level of consciousness.

The drug can affect the senses, judgement and co-ordination for 18 to 24 hours.

Who

**Independent Sexual Violence
Adviser ISVA
Black Country Rape And
Sexual Violence Services**

**Counsellor
Black Country Rape And Sexual
Violence Services**

Sexual Assault Referral Centre

**Russells Hall Hospital Dudley
New Cross Hospital Wolverhampton**

**Genito Urinary Medicine (GUM)
Dartmouth Clinic Sandwell Hospital**

**Brook Advisory
Sandwell & Dudley**

Police

PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP

Here is a list of some of the support services who can help you through this difficult time. It may be useful to use this table to write the names and any other details of the people involved in your support.

What do they do

- Provide support, advice and guidance on all aspects of rape, sexual violence and assault. ISVA's are professionally trained specialists that will start to work with victims shortly after an attack has been reported - initial contact might take place after a visit to the SARC Sexual Assault Referral Centre.
- The ISVA will then continue to offer help throughout the legal process that may follow, and beyond. The ISVA also works with victims who have not reported to the police.
- Part of their role is to link with other essential services such as victim and witness organisations, counsellors and health agencies. The advisors will work with those organisations to ensure the safety of the victim is taken into account throughout the process but remain independent from them all, including the police.

Black Country Rape and Sexual Violence Services has a team of professional counsellors available to provide therapeutic counselling.

A Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) is where you may be taken by the police if you report an incident that happened recently, where vital forensic evidence is collected. You can choose to go to the SARC

without reporting to the police and collect evidence anonymously if you prefer. Once finished at the SARC a formal statement may be taken and you will then be referred to the nearest support agency to your home address for ongoing support, advice and guidance.

- Sexual health advice
- Same day testing for HIV
- Vaccinations
- Contraception / emergency contraception
- Diagnosis / treatment of STDs

Provision of sexual health and advice for those aged up to 24 years old:

- Contraception / emergency contraception.
- Pregnancy testing / termination referrals.
- Termination counselling.

If you choose to make a report to the police, Specially Trained Police Officers will take details and a



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Black Country 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 service
- Advocacy, ensuring that your views, opinions, wishes and feelings are respected and listened to by all agencies and people involved
- Support through the legal process working within the criminal justice system including 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 your pace, when you are ready.

Helping Yourself to Heal

Patience -

Be patient with your self. There may be days when you don't feel like doing anything or even getting out of bed.

Friends -

Friends can be an important source of support, as a way of keeping a sense of normality in your life, even if you don't feel like going out, just having the company of a trusted friend can be a source of comfort.

Work -

Some may find that going back to work actually helps them to cope and gives them something else to focus on other than the incident? For others they may find that they need time from work, and again, you need to do what is right for you. You need to be in control of your, choices and decisions

REMEMBER

1. It is not your fault.
2. No one EVER asks to be raped or assaulted or deserves it.
3. The blame always lies with the abuser.

LIFE AFTER RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

We can never take away the experience of rape and or sexual assault.

Many brave and inspirational people have shared their experiences, asked for help and rebuilt their lives positively.



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.



MYTHS & FACTS ABOUT RAPE...

There are 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: Fighting back is not a criterion for rape – rape is being forced to have sex. Any threat or use of force, which prevents an individual from resisting the attack, is defined as 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 sometimes due to shock, fear of the attacker, or fear for their lives.

MYTH »

RAPISTS ARE STRANGERS «

FACT: When most people think about how rapes occur, 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 «

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

A guide to SURVIVORS

Contact Us

Black Country Rape and Sexual Violence Service:

Sandwell & Dudley:
0121 553 0090

Wolverhampton:
01902 554598

Sexual Assault Referral Centre

Horizon SARC
0808 168 5698

West Midlands Police

0345 113 5000

Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM Clinics)

GUM at Dartmouth Clinic,
Sandwell General Hospital
0121 507 3094

GUM Dudley, Russells Hall Hospital
01384 456 111 ex 3900

Snow Hill Contraception &
Sexual Health Centre (Wolverhampton)
01902 444444

GUM at New Cross Hospital
(Wolverhampton)
01902 695 000

Brook Pregnancy Advisory Service 0808 802 1234

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