



edinburgh women's rape and sexual abuse centre

support, advice and advocacy for women and girls

information about rape and sexual assault

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about sexual violence

The legal definition of rape is penetrative sexual intercourse with a woman without consent. Sexual violence takes many forms, which do not all fit into this narrow definition. These include: unwanted touching, fondling, sexual harassment, threats of violence, pressurised sex, flashing, penetration by objects, childhood sexual abuse and sexual assault. Sexual violence is any kind of unwanted sexual behaviour.

Most forms of sexual violence are criminal offences in Scotland, and all of them have a significant and harmful impact which can be just as distressing as rape itself. Sexual violence is an abuse of power and a form of control which causes humiliation, pain, fear and intimidation.

Instances of sexual violence occur more commonly than is realized; and as many as 1 in 4 women are estimated to experience sexual violence at some point during their lives. Women of every age, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion and cultural background experience sexual violence.

healing and support

It may be very difficult to talk about what happened to you and you may fear not being believed. Some women do not want to tell anyone, and some never will. However, as a survivor of sexual violence it can be very hard to just forget about what has happened, no matter how hard you try. As part of the healing process, breaking the silence and talking about your thoughts and feelings can help. Only you will know when the time feels right for you. Taking this step can be the beginning of regaining control over your own life and moving on. Even if it happened a long time ago, your feelings are still important.

Healing can take time and it is important to be patient with yourself and take things at your own pace. There is no right or wrong way and the most important thing is to trust your own feelings, and if you are able to, talk to someone you trust. It may be painful at first but it can help. If you don't want to talk to your family members or friends about your experience you can contact us at Edinburgh Women's Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre (EWRASAC) on 0131 556 9437. We will listen to you, believe you and support you.

We offer confidential, emotional and practical support, information and advice to female survivors aged 12 and over who have experienced sexual violence at any time in their lives. This includes rape, sexual assault, childhood sexual abuse and other forms of sexual violence. We offer helpline, face-to-face and group support.

Our helpline is open at various times. When the line is not staffed, the answering machine will tell you the times of the next lines. You can either call back then, or leave a message and we will call you back. We will not say who we are unless we speak directly to you. **Remember, you don't have to go through this process alone.**

feelings and coping after a sexual assault

Everyone reacts and feels differently after experiencing a traumatic event and whatever you are feeling is a normal response to what has happened to you. Some common feelings a survivor of sexual violence may experience are: anger, numbness, fear, self-blame, guilt, crying, anxiety, panic attacks, flashbacks (reliving the events), sleeping problems, isolation, powerlessness or denial. This list of effects can be endless, and some women may experience all or none of these feelings.

A sexual assault is a traumatic experience and some of the long term effects can be: recurring nightmares, relationship problems, flashbacks or depression. Some women cope by using drugs and/or alcohol to try to block out the memory of what happened, controlling their eating or self-harming. Whatever you are feeling, or however you are coping, you are surviving what has happened to you in your own way.

if you are supporting a survivor

If you are supporting someone who has been raped or sexually assaulted it can be painful and confusing at times. It is often difficult to know how to act or what to say. The following may give you some guidance: believe her and listen to her, stay as calm and supportive as you can be, never blame her for what happened, don't try to take charge and respect her desire to be private or silent. Don't insist she gives you details of the assault and understand that healing can take time.

You may find our information leaflets for family, friends and partners helpful please contact us on 131 556 9437 to request a copy.

myths about rape and sexual assault

MYTH: 'Real' rape only occurs at the hands of strangers in dark alleys at night, behind bushes or in lonely places.

TRUTH: Contrary to popular belief, research shows that in the majority of cases the rapist is known and trusted by the woman. This could be a husband, friend, partner, ex-partner, relative, acquaintance, work colleague or anyone else known to the woman. In the 2000 British Crime Survey, strangers accounted for only 8% of rapes. The survey also showed that women are far more likely to be sexually assaulted in their own homes than any other location.

MYTH: Women and girls make up stories about rape and sexual assault.

TRUTH: It has been proven that the level of false reporting of rape is about the same as that of any other crime – 3%. The nature of the physical examination a woman is required to undergo when reporting rape, and the intimate questioning about her life, make it unlikely that any woman would lie about being raped or assaulted. Why would anyone put themselves through this without just cause?

MYTH: Rape is just sex when you don't want it.

TRUTH: Rape and sexual assault are not just sex; they are criminal acts. They involve the total humiliation of a woman. Forcing a woman to take part in sexual acts against her will is not about sex. It is used to hurt women emotionally and physically, and take control away from the woman against her will. Research shows that rapists themselves say that rape is more about power and violence than about sex.

Myths about sexual violence are dangerous and hide the real causes of rape. They take the responsibility away from the men who commit the attack and blame the women for the attacks which are made against them. This serves to minimise women's experiences and make excuses for the men who commit crimes of sexual violence.

These myths can lead women to believe that they have brought the attack on themselves, shaming them into silence and preventing them from speaking out about their experiences or seeking help. Many survivors find it difficult to talk about their experiences. They may fear not being believed or being blamed for the attack perpetrated against them. However, no matter what a woman was wearing or doing, wherever she was, whether she was drunk or under the influence of drugs – she does not deserve to be sexually assaulted. The responsibility always lies with the attacker. Sexual assaults are crimes, and women should be able to live their lives free from fear and from attack.

about a recent rape or sexual assault

Following a sexual assault you may have many issues to consider. It is important to consider the possibilities of injury, pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections, and whether or not to report the assault to the police. The amount of support and help you receive at this time can help you to overcome the initial shock and disruption to your life.

Following a sexual assault you may be in shock, which can display itself in many different ways: you may feel numb, in disbelief, be shaking, laughing hysterically or being physically sick. You might continue with your daily routine as usual. Remember, everyone reacts and feels differently. Your feelings may keep changing over time, and whatever you are feeling is a 'normal' response to what has happened. You may feel it was your fault. It wasn't. What happened to you should not have happened. It is important to try to look after yourself. Try to be patient and kind to yourself. Remember you are not responsible for anyone else's feelings.

Physical injuries

If you have any physical injuries you should consider getting them treated by your doctor or local Accident and Emergency Department. You may need medical attention, especially if you are bleeding or in pain. If you feel worried or nervous it may help to take a friend for support. Some women find it helpful to have all their questions written down. Remember, no-one has the right to make you go through anything you don't feel you are able to, and you don't have to tell the doctor about the assault if you don't want to.

Pregnancy

If there is a possibility of pregnancy you may want to take the morning after pill (effective for up to 72 hours after) or have a coil fitted (effective for up to 5 days after). If this course of action is right for you, go to your Family Planning Clinic or GP. You may want to take a pregnancy test. You can ask your GP or the Family Planning Clinic (0131 343 6243) to do a pregnancy test, or you can buy a home pregnancy-testing kit for around £6, which is accurate 2-3 weeks following conception. They are available from any chemist, have clear instructions, and are reliable.

If you know that you are pregnant, you may want to talk to someone about what to do next. If you are comfortable talking to your GP s/he will go through the options with you, or you may prefer to talk to an EWRASAC worker first. It is important that you know about all the options available and make the right decision for yourself. You might decide you want an abortion or you might decide that you want to continue with the pregnancy. It's your life, and nobody should try to pressure you into any decision. Access the support you need to make the decision that feels right for you.

Sexually transmitted infections

If you are worried that you may have caught a sexually transmitted infection (STI) it is a good idea to be tested. If you do have an STI, treatment can prevent you from becoming more seriously ill later on. Some infections don't display symptoms right away; only tests show them up. You can go to a specialist clinic (GUM clinic, Lauriston Buildings, Lauriston Place) to have tests done. Their telephone number is 0131 536 2104. You can also speak to one of their health advisers directly on 0131 536 2108.

reporting a sexual assault to the police

It is your decision whether you want to report what has happened to you to the police or not. You can report to your local police station, or you can phone the Amethyst Team (formerly known as the Family Protection Unit) based at the Gyle on 0131 316 6600. You can arrange to speak to an officer first and then decide if you want to report a crime. You can ask to speak to a female officer.

If you are considering reporting a rape or sexual assault which has just happened the more evidence you preserve the greater the chance of conviction:

- Ring the police as soon as you are able to – if you are in any danger ring 999
- Try not shower or bathe – even though this may be your first instinct
- Try not to clean your teeth
- If possible ring someone you trust, and see if they can be with you
- Do not change your clothes. If you do, put everything you were wearing into a plastic bag and keep it somewhere safe
- Avoid eating or drinking, especially alcohol
- Don't comb your hair
- Try to avoid going to the toilet until you have been examined
- If the rapist used a condom don't get rid of it

You can still report at a later time if you choose to and have not done any of the above.

The GUM clinic provides confidential testing and women only sessions. They run a clinic once a week on a Wednesday afternoon for people who have been raped or sexually assaulted – but you can go on any clinic day. It doesn't matter whether the assault happened recently or in the past.

Everything that happens at the GUM clinic will be confidential, and you do not have to tell them that you have been assaulted. You or your doctor can make an appointment and you don't have to give your own name. You can take a friend with you for support.

useful contact numbers

Amethyst Team (formerly the Family Protection Unit)

0131 316 6600

Caledonia Youth Clinic

0131 229 3596

Family Planning Association

0131 343 6243

GUM Clinic

0131 536 2104

Lothian and Borders Police

0131 311 31 31

Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline

Freephone helpline open daily: 6pm-12 midnight
08088 01 03 02

Samaritans

0131 221 9999

further information

We have a range of free information leaflets and packs for survivors, their supporters and agencies. Please call us on **0131 556 9437** to request copies and we will send them out to you in an unmarked envelope.

Information leaflets and packs available:

- Information and support pack for women
- Information for family, friends and partners
- Information about rape and sexual assault
- Information for survivors of childhood sexual abuse
- Information about group support
- Information about flashbacks
- Information about self-harm
- Information about panic attacks
- Legal information booklet

All our leaflets are available in larger print. If you would like copies please contact us on 0131 556 9437.

If you report a sexual assault to the police, they will take a brief statement and notify CID. A CID Detective Sergeant will take charge of the investigation. All interviews with you should be by a police officer from the Amethyst Team, who is specially trained to deal with sexual assault cases. They will take a detailed statement, which will be passed on to CID, and CID will interview the accused. They may also arrange for a forensic examination in a specialist unit which is based at the Gyle. If you report an assault and the police think that there is unlikely to be any forensic evidence, you may not need to go for a forensic examination.

If you would like to talk this through with someone please contact EWRASAC on 0131 556 9437.

If you would like further information we have a legal information booklet on reporting to the police and going to court. Please contact us on 0131 556 9437 to request a copy.