

Sexual Assault

Help and support available



Information for patients

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals



PROUD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST



Sexual assault and rape can be frightening experiences. It is common for the sexual assault to change the way you feel afterwards.

The leaflet provides details on common emotional reactions to a sexual assault, what may happen if you decide to tell someone about what has happened, and ways in which you can access support.

It is important to know that you are not alone, and there are many services available to provide support and practical help.

What is sexual assault?

Sexual assault is a term often used to describe any kind of sexual violence or activity (including online) that was unwanted or involved one or more of the following: pressure, manipulation, bullying, intimidation, threats, deception and/or force.

Sexual assault is any sexual contact or behaviour that happens without clear, voluntary, and informed consent. It can happen to anyone - and it often involves someone the victim-survivor knows.

Sexual assault can include:

- Attempted rape
- Unwanted sexual touching or fondling
- Forcing a person to perform sexual acts (such as oral sex or penetration)
- Penetration of the person's body without consent (this is legally defined as rape)
- Coercing or manipulating someone into sex using threats, lies, guilt, or intimidation
- Engaging in sexual activity with someone who is unable to give consent due to age, intoxication, disability, or unconsciousness
- Sexual harassment
- Indecent exposure
- Cyber flashing
- Spiking (like food and drinks)

Definitions updated 2026 from

- <https://rainn.org/get-the-facts-about-sexual-assault-rape/>
- <https://hackenthorpelodge.org/what-is-sexual-assault/>

Common emotional reactions to sexual assault

Shock and disbelief

- I can't believe this has happened to me, I feel so numb / cold.
- Determined to carry on as normal.

Shame and loss of self-esteem

- I feel used / worthless / dirty.
- I can never let anyone know about what has happened.
- Wanting to wash constantly.

Confusion and disorganisation

- I don't know what to do / where to turn.
- Uncontrolled crying, giggling, rage.

Guilt

- It's all my fault, I must have done something to cause it.
- Maybe it was because of what I was wearing / saying / doing.

Fear

- I'm afraid. What if I see them again?
- Sense of feeling powerless.

Anger

- I hate him / her / myself.
- Difficulties with close relationships.

Depression

- How can I continue with my life? I'll never get over this.
- Tendency to isolate self.

Post-traumatic stress symptoms

- Vivid flashbacks.
- Intense distress at real or symbolic reminders.
- Nightmares or disturbed sleep.
- Feeling detached, cut-off, avoiding situations.

Anxiety

- I feel like I have to be aware of everything around me.
- Increased need to control the environment.

Common behavioural reactions to sexual assault

It is important to know that there is no right way to act following a sexual assault.

The shocking experience may affect your behaviour in different ways, here are some examples:

- You may want to forget that the assault happened and not mention it to anyone, or you may wish to talk about it and try to figure out what happened.
- Some individuals may experience symptoms of pain or poor health even though there is no obvious reason for this.
- There may be changes to your sleep patterns, appetite or interest in sex.
- You may experience flashbacks, nightmares, and panic attacks about the assault.
- You may experience difficulties maintaining close relationships with friends or family.

So what happens next?

Recent sexual assault

It can be frightening not knowing what may happen after telling someone about a sexual assault. If the assault has happened in the past 7 days then you will be asked if you wish to attend the local sexual assault referral centre to receive medical care and to collect forensic evidence.

You will also be asked if you wish to report the crime to the police. It is your decision about whether or not you want to do this; nobody else can make that decision for you. If you decide to report this crime, it would be a good idea to take someone you trust along to the police station with you for support.

If you do not wish to report the incident to the police an examination can still be carried out and samples given if you want to. These samples can be sent off for DNA analysis to see if your attacker(s) can be found without you being identified.

Non-recent (also known as historic) sexual assault

It is never too late to report an assault. Deciding on when or whether to report can be very difficult. You should never feel forced to take any action that you do not feel comfortable with. If you decide to report a non-recent assault you can contact 101 and briefly explain what you are calling about. You will be put through to a specially trained officer who will take an initial statement.

Whether you are speaking about the assault for the first time or have received help in the past but need further support, there are people who can help you. It is up to you whether to confide in a friend or family member, talk to your GP, or seek support from confidential helplines or counselling.

How can I help myself?

First and foremost, it is important to remember that you are not to blame, and the responsibility and blame lies solely with the abuser(s). You will have many decisions to make, but try to stay in control and make those decisions as and when you feel ready.

There are many services that offer support and advice about what to do next after you have shared information about a sexual assault. On the following page there is a list of local services designed to support women, men, and children who have experienced abuse in the South Yorkshire area.

If you feel you would prefer to talk to someone anonymously, here are some national helplines dedicated to supporting sexual abuse survivors:

The Survivors Trust 0808 801 0818	Rape Crisis England & Wales 0808 500 2222	Victim Support 0808 168 9111
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Additional local support and resources

Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC)

Where?	Sheffield
Services offered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rape and sexual assault referral centre for all of South Yorkshire region• Medical and forensic care• Emergency contraception• Immediate crisis support• Aftercare and signposting
Who for?	Free, confidential healthcare and support for anyone aged over 16yrs in South Yorkshire. Children aged under 16 access services through Child Sexual Assault Assessment Services (CSAAS), which is provided by, and run from, Sheffield Children's Hospital. Sheffield Social Services 0114 273 4855
Contact:	Tel: 0330 223 0099 Website: www.hackenthorpelodge.org

Sheffield Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre (SRASAC)

Where?	Sheffield
Services offered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Helpline• Counselling• Advice on giving support to others who have been raped or sexually abused.• An Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) can offer practical help and emotional support.
Who for?	Men, women, young people aged over 12 years, families
Contact:	Tel: 0114 241 2766 Helpline: 07517 100 757 Website: www.srasac.org.uk

Doncaster Rape and Sexual Abuse Counselling Service (DRASACS)

Where?	Doncaster
Services offered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Counselling• Independent Sexual Violence Advocacy (ISVA)• Helpline
Who for?	Men, women, children, parents
Contact:	Tel: 01302 360 421 Website: https://www.drasacs.org.uk/

Barnsley Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Services (BSARCS)

Where?	Barnsley
Services offered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support• Counselling sessions• Women's group therapy service
Who for?	Men, women and children
Contact:	Tel: 01226 320140 Website: www.bsarcs.org.uk

Saffron: Sheffield Women's Counselling and Therapy Service

Where?	Sheffield
Services offered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individual or group counselling and psychotherapy services• Wellbeing courses
Who for?	Women aged 16+ who have experienced crisis or trauma
Contact:	Tel: 0114 275 2157 or 07742 533603 Website: www.saffronsheffield.org.uk

EVA Therapy

Where?	Sheffield
Services offered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Specialist counselling and psychotherapy• Fortnightly support group
Who for?	Women and girls who have experienced domestic and sexual abuse or trauma
Contact:	Tel: 0114 275 0101 Website: www.vidasheffield.org.uk

Young Women's Housing Project (YWHP)

Where?	Sheffield
Services offered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Housing and therapeutic support service
Who for?	Young women aged 16 - 25 who have been affected by sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or sexual / domestic violence
Contact:	Tel: 0114 268 0580 Website: www.ywhp.org.uk

Rotherham Abuse Counselling Service (Rothacs)

Where?	Rotherham
Services offered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Counselling for survivors of domestic and/or sexual abuse at any time in their life• Independent Sexual Violence Advocacy (ISVA)• Individual and group counselling
Who for?	Women, men and young people aged 13 years and older
Contact:	Tel: 01709 835482 Website: www.rothacs.org.uk



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