

SELF-CARE AND SUPPORT AFTER SEXUAL ASSAULT

This leaflet provides
information on all the
support available



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This leaflet is for survivors of sexual assault and abuse.

You may have experienced sexual assault recently or in the past.

This leaflet gives information on common reactions to sexual assault and advice on self-care.

This leaflet will provide information on the support available at 56 Dean Street.

This leaflet also gives information on how to access further information on sexual assault and how to access specialist services in London.



WHAT IS SEXUAL ASSAULT?

“SEXUAL ASSAULT IS ANY ACT OF A SEXUAL NATURE WHERE ONE PERSON HAS NOT GIVEN THEIR CONSENT”

– THE HAVENS

- You cannot freely consent if you feel pressured or threatened.
- You cannot freely consent if you are asleep or too drunk or too high to understand the consequences.
- Consent can be verbal and implied. Your body language can just as clearly say ‘NO’ as saying the word ‘No’. If the person is unsure of your wishes, they should ask.¹
- Consent can be withdrawn, as soon as you say stop, all sex should stop.²
- You cannot give consent if you are under the age of 16 years (regardless of gender/sexuality/relationship to the perpetrator), and sexual activity under the age of 13 is illegal under any circumstances.³

1 <http://www.galop.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Consenting-to-Sex.pdf>

2 <http://www.galop.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Consent-and-chemsex-series-What-the-laws-says-upload.pdf>

3 <http://www.galop.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Consenting-to-Sex.pdf>

CONDITIONAL CONSENT

If a condition of your consent was not met e.g. you consented to sex with a condom, and the condom was removed/not used without your knowledge, this is also considered sexual assault. This is sometimes referred to as ‘stealthing’ and is a prosecutable offence.⁴

Consent and a cup of tea

You may find it helpful to watch this short video clip:

To find the video online, type “**Tea Consent**” into the search bar of www.youtube.com

Rape is a type of sexual assault that is defined as a person putting their penis in someone else’s mouth, anus or vagina without their consent. Sexual assault and rape are serious crimes. The maximum prison sentence for rape and sexual assault is life imprisonment.⁵

Sexual violence is a crime that can affect all sections of society including, women, girls, boys, men, including people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer or intersex (LGBT+) and minority ethnic (BAME) communities.

ON AVERAGE, ONE IN FOUR WOMEN AND ONE IN TEN MEN ARE SEXUALLY ASSAULTED IN THEIR LIFETIME.

Perpetrators of sexual assault can be family members, friends, partners, acquaintances, as well as strangers.

The responsibility of sexual assault is always with the perpetrator. It is never the fault of the survivor.

MALE SURVIVORS

There are some misconceptions about the sexual assault of men that can make it more emotionally difficult for the male survivor and become an obstacle in accessing support.

Any man can be abused or assaulted regardless of size, strength, appearance or sexual orientation. A perpetrator can be of any sexuality as it is about violence, anger, power and control over another person, NOT lust, desire or sexual attraction. Also having an erection and or ejaculation during a sexual assault is involuntary and does not equate to enjoyment or consent.

For more information see:

survivorsgateway.london/resources/male-survivors/

⁴ <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/rape-and-sexual-offences-chapter-3-consent>

⁵ The Havens

LGBT+ SURVIVORS

Sexual assault affects all communities, including LGBT+. This stands for Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, and the + is used to indicate that people with a range of identities are also included, for example, people who identify as non-binary, gender fluid, intersex and those who are questioning their sexuality or gender identity.

Research suggests that rates of sexual assault may be higher in people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual. But homophobia can prevent people who are LGBTQ from speaking about a sexual assault. It is important to remember that sexual assault is an abuse of power, not a question of sexuality.⁶

Some gay and bisexual men may worry about having to explain the circumstances in which the sexual violence happened and whether that would lead to a judgemental or prejudiced response.

You can access an information sheet that covers some of the issues and support felt by LGBT+ :

survivorsgateway.london/resources/lgbt-survivors/



⁶ The Havens

⁷ <https://www.priorygroup.com/blog/what-is-chemsex>

⁸ <http://www.galop.org.uk/consent-chemsex/>

⁹ <http://www.galop.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Transphobia.pdf>

CHEMSEX

Chemsex is a term used to describe the use of any combination of drugs that include crystal methamphetamine, mephedrone and/or GHB/ GBL by men who are associated with more sexually adventurous sex, which can involve a number of partners over an extended period of time. These situations can sometimes be problematic regarding issues like consent, and the ability to give consent whilst under the influence.⁷

It is important to remember, if someone is asleep, unconscious, or so 'out of it' that they cannot make a decision for themselves, then they cannot consent. If someone has sex with you while you're unable to consent, this is sexual assault.⁸

Those involved in Chemsex might fear a judgemental response if they talk about what happened or may be worried that they will be charged with a drugs offence, even if they were the victim. You won't be arrested for using or telling the Police you have used drugs; that isn't illegal.

For more information about this:

met.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/cs/chemsex

TRANSGENDER SURVIVORS

Transphobia and Transgender-sexual assault can sometimes occur in the same context, or the line between the two assaults can be confusing. Any physical or sexual assault against you is completely wrong. As well as acts of violence or sexual violence, assault can also include inappropriate touching or searching and the removal of your clothing or a wig without your consent.

When talking about Transgender sexual assault, the rules are the same. Any sexual activity without your consent is sexual assault. Gender identity is not an 'excuse' or justification for perpetrators of sexual assault.⁹

SEX WORKERS

Many sex workers don't report rape or other violence for fear of being arrested themselves. Evidence suggests that offenders may deliberately target those who sell sex because they believe they will not report the crime to the police. Perpetrators of such offences can include clients or pimps.

According to the Crime Prosecution Service, "those who sell sex should not be treated as offenders but as people who may be or become victims of crime". This means that the police are more interested in prosecuting crimes of rape and sexual violence than the sale of sex.

As a sex worker, you give consent to sex with a client, on your terms that are agreed prior. This is called conditional consent. Any deviation from those terms, including removal of a condom and refusal to pay, are considered by the law to be sexual assault.

Seriously consider reporting incidents to the police. Most police forces now have liaison officers for people involved in the sex industry. If you wish to report to the police, you can talk it through first with your local sex work support project and they can support you to report if you wish. You have the right to report violence and other crimes and have these investigated like every other person.¹⁰

¹⁰ <https://uglymugs.org/um/>

IF YOU HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ASSAULTED RECENTLY:

If this has happened to you recently, you might be experiencing lots of different feelings. There is no right or wrong way to feel.

Sexual assault is a traumatic experience and your mind and body go into shock.

When we experience a trauma, our brain cannot process information and store memories in the way we normally would. The parts of our brain that would normally store information and create manageable emotional responses to situations we encounter are overwhelmed.

This often means that trauma memories are left unprocessed. This means that these memories often lack coherence, or can be difficult to place within a wider context or time frame. Sometimes, trauma memories are fragmented or partial, or are not like a memory at all, in that they can feel as if they are happening to us again right now.

This is a normal response to an abnormal experience. Sometimes trauma memories can be processed over time and will naturally begin to feel more manageable. At other times we may need to seek support to help overcome the impact of unprocessed memories (see support services at the end of this leaflet.)

LONGER-TERM IMPACT OF TRAUMA

Aside from the brain struggling to process trauma memories, we can be left experiencing a range of emotional difficulties. This can include:

For example:

- Feeling numb or detached – everything feels unreal or like it has been a dream
- Feeling scared or anxious
- Hypervigilance – “Who do I trust? Will it happen again?”
- Nightmares and difficulty with sleeping
- Flashbacks
- Feeling sad or low mood.
- Feeling guilty or ashamed
- Feeling responsible and regretting things that you have done or not done
- Anger at what has happened
- Helplessness
- Feeling a loss of control over life

If you find you have been experiencing these symptoms for more than three months following an experience of trauma, this could be a sign of a condition called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This condition can be treated successfully, but it will be important that you seek support from your GP or a mental health professional that will be able to support you.

CONTACT

If you have been sexually assaulted recently and need urgent help, appointments and advice:

You may contact The Havens. The Havens are specialist centres in London for people who have been raped or sexually assaulted.

www.thehavens.org.uk
Tel: 020 3299 6900 (24/7)

If you live outside London you find your nearest Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) by searching for your location on the NHS website:

www.nhs.uk

IF YOU HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ASSAULTED IN THE PAST:

Whether you were an adult or a child when it happened, rape and sexual assault can have big impacts on your health, life and relationships. Some of these can be long lasting.

For example:

- Emotional difficulties: (e.g.: sadness, anxiety, panic attacks and phobias, low self-esteem)
- Mental health problems: (e.g: depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-harm, eating disorders or suicidal thoughts)
- Intrusive or disturbing thoughts or memories
- Unexplained physical symptoms including pain and illness
- Difficulty with relationships
- Sexual difficulties and/or change in sex drive
- Problematic drug or alcohol use

Again, experiencing on-going distress linked to trauma that has occurred in the past is often a sign that memories of the traumatic event have been left unprocessed, and seeking support to help manage this is often very important to help support longer-term recovery.

Whether you have been sexually assaulted recently or in the past, **you are not alone**, there is support available.

SUPPORT AVAILABLE AT THE CLINIC

The Health Adviser Team can offer a safe space to talk about how you are feeling when you are ready.

Health Advisers are unable to provide specialist counselling, however, they can assess whether counselling or therapy would be useful and help you access specialist services.

You can refer yourself to the Health Adviser team by completing a self-referral form. Please complete the form and hand it to reception. A member of the team will contact you within 14 days.

Alternatively, if you live in London, you can refer yourself directly to specialist services via the London Survivor's Gateway. The London Survivors Gateway offers survivors of rape and sexual abuse help to access specialist services in London.

They provide information on what help is available in London following any form of sexual violence and help to access these services. You may access their services regardless of how long ago the assault happened.

[www.survivorsgateway.london/get-help-now/](https://survivorsgateway.london/get-help-now/)

London Survivors Gateway: 0808 801 0860
Monday – Friday: 10am-4pm.

Medical help following sexual assault is available at the clinic including:

- HIV post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP): To help you prevent HIV transmission
- Emergency Contraception: To help prevent unwanted pregnancy
- Screening for sexually transmitted infections
- Prophylactic antibiotics: To protect you against chlamydia and gonorrhoea
- Hepatitis B immunisation: To protect you from getting Hepatitis B.

TOOLS TO HELP YOU COPE WITH SEXUAL ASSAULT

How you respond to sexual assault is going to be individual to you. There is no right or wrong way to feel. This leaflet is about normalising common reactions to help you understand and process your own individual reactions. **This guide is drawn from a body of resources on the following website:**

<https://survivorsgateway.london/resources/>

These tools are used by survivors and therapists within the Survivors Gateway network.

MANAGING TRIGGERS AND FLASHBACKS

What are they and why do they happen?

Having flashbacks or dealing with intrusive memories is a common experience for survivors of sexual assault. It can feel like the event is happening all over again. These memories are a way of the logical mind attempting to make sense of what has happened and are a natural part of the healing process. Accept and reassure yourself that you are having a flashback and use one of the following grounding exercises to help you come back to the present.



GROUNDING EXERCISES

- Concentrate on your surroundings. Pick an image within your surroundings and describe it to yourself in detail.

E.g. If you are on the tube it could be an advertisement or a picture on the wall.
- Remind yourself where you are and what you are doing and that you are going to be ok.
- Try grounding yourself in the present moment and speak to yourself about what you can see, smell, touch, hear and taste.
- Try to go somewhere where you feel safe and secure.
- Try to talk to someone.

Further information on grounding can be found:

www.survivorsgateway.london/resources/grounding/



MANAGING HYPER-VIGILANCE AND ANXIETY

Being hyper-alert is a normal response to trauma. We can often find that we become more aware of the potential danger around us, and things that previously may not have worried us can feel anxiety-provoking or threatening.

It is your body trying to stay safe and guard against danger. However, it can get in the way of your normal routine. Try to engage in physical activity every day. Trying different things to relax such as watching TV, listening to music or reading can help. Survivors can experience extreme anxiety which may be experienced as physical symptoms, for example, difficulty in breathing, muscle tension, nausea or headaches.

Sometimes this can lead to us avoiding situations or trying to escape from situations that might trigger memories of trauma or cause anxiety. This is a very normal response but can mean that we begin to limit our lives or struggle to engage with the world around us in ways we might previously have done.

When you are feeling like this, it is important to try and remind yourself that you are safe and that you are not back at the time your trauma occurred. Our brains, in an attempt to protect us, will predict that the trauma will occur again or that we might be in danger if we re-enter situations that cause us anxiety.

This often is not true. Try to focus on what is different now. How is your current situation different? What would be different about entering a feared situation now? What could you put in place to make yourself feel safe? Who is around you that could make this experience easier?

It can be important to try and bring your attention to the present moment by focussing on what you can see, feel, taste, touch or smell right now. This is called grounding. Try bringing your attention to objects, sounds or smells that weren't connected to the trauma, and try to use this to remind yourself how your current situation is different and safe.

MANAGING GUILT AND SHAME

Many survivors feel guilty and ashamed following a sexual assault. You may blame yourself through self-talk such as “I should not have met up with him, I should not have taken drugs”.

Unfortunately, we still live in a society that is often quick to blame victims of sexual assault, and we can often feel a sense of responsibility for what has happened to us. These ideas are based on myth, and for the survivor may often lead to on-going feelings of shame that can mean we find it difficult to talk about what has happened and seek help.

IF YOU NOTICE THAT YOU ARE HAVING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS ABOUT YOURSELF, TRY TO WRITE THEM DOWN AND CHALLENGE THEM. IS THERE ANOTHER WAY TO SEE THIS SITUATION? HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND TO A FRIEND WHO WAS IN A SIMILAR SITUATION?

Be compassionate towards yourself.

Shame can grow when we feel bad about ourselves and we do not talk about it with anyone. Getting support and acceptance from others can prevent shame from taking hold.

Being compassionate means thinking about ways in which we might be kind to ourselves when we are in distress. How would you like to treat yourself when you feel scared? What could you do to produce feelings of safety and relaxation? How might you talk to yourself? What might you do?

Thinking about this can help you feel more prepared for times when you feel anxious, fearful or low and give you clues around how to manage feelings of shame and guilt that can emerge.

Try to find ways of recognising what you are doing well, how resilient you are and the strengths and skills you know you have. Reminding yourself that you are valuable and skilled can help us challenge the ideas of guilt and responsibility that often comes along with trauma.

MANAGING SUICIDAL THINKING

Having suicidal thoughts and feelings is a common response to trauma. Experiencing strong emotions and distress can be overwhelming and can make survivors feel unable to cope or to continue. There are many ways to manage suicidal thoughts and feelings. If you are thinking about suicide it is important for you to talk to someone and get help immediately.

- Talk to your GP, friend or family member
- In a crisis and you are alone you can call the Samaritans on 116 123 or another specialist sexual assault helpline (see resources section in this leaflet)
- Know when it is best to ring for an ambulance and to go to the hospital.
- Avoid drugs or alcohol. These can make you feel worse about yourself and increase the risk
- Develop a safety plan. Devise a plan that you can carry out at any time. Make an agreement with friends or family that you can call them anytime that you are feeling overwhelmed
- Book an appointment to see your GP as soon as possible.

IMPROVING SLEEP AND MANAGING NIGHTMARES

Many survivors report that they struggle with sleep and can experience nightmares to do with the event. Once again, this is the mind's way of understanding traumatic memories. Sleep problems are common because your mind is on high alert. Below is a practical list of things that can support you when you are struggling to sleep.

- Make a routine to go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning.
- Try to exercise every day.
- Avoid using your electrical devices including your phone and TV at least an hour before bed. Reading something that is soothing or calming or another calming activity or relaxation routine can help.
- Avoid any caffeine from early afternoon.
- If you enjoy having baths, have a nice long bath before going to bed.
- If you like to meditate, do this before you go to bed to soothe yourself into relaxation.
- If you haven't fallen asleep within 30 minutes, get up and do something calming until you feel sleepy again.

IF YOU EXPERIENCE A NIGHTMARE

- Try to get out of the bed and go to another room/ space. This creates space for your brain to recognise you are in a different place and time, and helps you to recognise you are safe.
- Try to bring your attention back onto the present by focusing on grounding and what you can see, hear, taste, touch and smell right now.
- Try some deep breathing exercises to calm your body and shift your focus from your brain (and memories) and onto your body.

LIST OF ORGANISATIONS PROVIDING SPECIALIST SUPPORT

SEXUAL ASSAULT AND RAPE

LONDON SERVICES

Survivors Gateway: is the primary contact for non-urgent sexual violence support.

Tel: 0808 801 0860

Monday – Friday: 10am–4pm

www.survivorsgateway.london
www.survivorsgateway.london/service-map/

The Havens: We're here to help you if you've been raped or sexually assaulted in the past 12 months.

Tel: 020 3299 6900

<https://www.thehavens.org.uk/how-we-can-help/Self-Help-Guide-for-Survivors-of-Sexual-Assault-v.2-March-2019.pdf>
(thehavens.org.uk)

UK SERVICES

The Survivor's Trust: Member agencies throughout the UK provide a range of specialist services to all survivors including counselling, support helplines and advocacy service.

Free helpline: 08088 010818

<https://www.thesurvivorstrust.org/>

WOMEN AND GIRLS

Women and Girls network WGN:

WGN Freephone: 0808 801 0660

Monday–Friday: 10am–4pm

Late eve Wednesday: 6pm–9pm

Email support: advice@wgn.org.uk

<https://www.wgn.org.uk/>

MALE SURVIVORS

Survivors UK:

Tel: 020 359 83898

Monday to Friday: 9.30–17:00

Email support:

help@survivorsuk.org

www.survivorsuk.org

LGBT+ SURVIVORS

Galop:

Tel: 0800 999 5428

Monday to Friday: 10am – 5pm

Wednesday to Thursday:

10am–8pm

Email support:

advice@galop.org.uk

www.galop.org.uk/sexualviolence

HELP FOR CHEMSEX

56 Dean Street:

<https://dean.st/chems/>

London Friend:

<https://londonfriend.org.uk/sex-and-chemsex/>

HELP FOR SEX WORKERS

National Ugly Mugs: Sign up to NUM for free to report incidents and receive warnings about dangerous individuals. If you report to National Ugly Mugs we will use the information to warn other sex workers and potentially save their lives.

<https://uglymugs.org/um/>

GENERIC SUPPORT/ LISTENING

The Samaritans:

Telephone: 116 123

<https://www.samaritans.org/>

CHILDHOOD ABUSE

NAPAC: The national Association of people Abused in Childhood (NAPAC) runs a telephone support line that's free to call from UK landlines and UK mobiles

NAPAC:

Tel: 0800 801 0331

Lines are open 10am–4pm, Monday, Wednesday and Friday and 2pm–9pm on Tuesdays and Thursday. Calls to this number will not show on your phone bill.

https://napac.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Recovering_from_childhood_abuse.pdf

One in Four: For survivors of child sexual abuse of all ages and genders

<https://oneinfour.org.uk/>

You can also call the NSPCC: 0800 800 5000

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>



GET IN TOUCH

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VISIT US

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