

PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE



## SUPPORTING ADULT VICTIMS of Rape & Sexual Assault



“ DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK ”

This information is designed to support workers providing services to individuals who have experienced rape or sexual assault over the age of 16 years. For children you should refer to your agencies **child protection procedures** and you may also need to consider **adult protection guidance** – **see back page**

Through your work you will regularly encounter people who have experienced sexual violence, whether they disclose to you or not. This information should increase your understanding, and help you to recognise, support and respond to those who have experienced such abuse. You are not expected to be an expert, but you can play a crucial part in responding to the immediate and long term impact on those affected.

Sexual violence is one form of gender based violence where women are predominately the victim. Many women will experience more than one form of such abuse – more information is available from **Fife Domestic and Sexual Abuse Partnership**

Victims of rape and sexual assault often blame themselves, minimise what has happened and may be reluctant to disclose. Victims often feel ashamed or afraid they will not be believed. Unlike other crimes, victims are often held responsible for sexual violence by society and prosecution rates are low.

## WHAT ARE RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT?

Rape and sexual assault are non-consenting sexual acts. The key risk factor for experiencing sexual violence is being female, but anyone can be a victim, at any time in their life. In most cases, these assaults are carried out by someone known to the victim – a partner, ex-partner, friend, family member or work colleague. Mostly the sexual assaults are committed indoors, usually in the home.

## EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

- forced vaginal, oral or anal sex
- penetration by objects
- sexual harassment / intimidation
- being prostituted
- being forcibly touched in a sexual manner

It can happen only once - some people are raped or sexually assaulted by different people at different times in their lives - some women are raped and / or sexually assaulted over many years living with an abusive partner.



## PREVALENCE

In 2013/14 there were **964 sexual crimes** in Fife reported to the Police. Fife Rape and Sexual Assault Centre (**FRASAC**) supported **213 victims**. There will be many more who did not report / disclose their rape.

## MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- ✗ only young attractive women are raped
- ✗ it was her fault as she was dressed in sexy clothes
- ✗ rape is a product of an uncontrollable and overwhelming sex drive
- ✗ men cannot be raped
- ✗ if there was no struggle, it was not rape
- ✗ it was her fault she was drunk
- ✗ prostitutes can't be raped



No matter how much time has elapsed since an assault it is never too late to offer support. Unresolved sexual trauma is more likely where a victim:

- has had little support
- has not disclosed to anyone or has had a poor reaction to disclosure
- is unable to come to terms with their experience

**You do not need to be an expert; there are specialist agencies that can support you. You do not need to feel alone in offering support.**

If an individual is stressed or injured there must be reasons. If you have concerns - **ask** - it lets survivors know that you and your service are open to talking about this sensitive subject and makes it easier for them to talk to you.

Don't assume that the person will be hostile or offended by your questions.

They may be relieved to have someone to speak to. If they are angry and hostile that does not mean you shouldn't have asked. They may come back later, and want to discuss it when they are more able to do so.



## ■ SUPPORT DISCLOSURE

Your role will vary depending on the nature of your contact, whether it is one-off or ongoing and the nature of the assault (recent or historical), however you should ensure the following:

- Provide a safe, quiet and confidential space
- Ask non-threatening and open questions
- Treat the service user with respect and dignity
- Ensure there are no access barriers eg language, learning disability

## ■ CONCERNS ABOUT RAISING THE ISSUE

Raising the subject of sexual abuse might feel daunting. Reasons workers give for reluctance to do so have been stated as:

- I'm not an expert
- it's not in my job remit
- I'd probably do more harm than good
- I might say something wrong
- we don't have the time to give a woman long term support
- she probably wouldn't want to discuss it – it's private

## INDIRECT QUESTIONS:-

- Help me understand why you are upset.
- What else is going on for you that you might need help with?
- If it is difficult for you to talk about what has happened to you, that is ok, we can take it slowly.



## DIRECT QUESTIONS:-

- Tell me what has happened.
- What do you need help with?
- Would it be easier to talk to someone else (consider male/female option)

**Victims / survivors will often minimise their experiences and may or may not define them as abuse. A range of questions may be required to get a complete picture of the situation.**

## ■ HOW TO DEAL WITH A DISCLOSURE

The victim / survivor may never have disclosed before, acknowledge talking about it might be difficult for them.

- be calm
- validate their feelings and acknowledge the impact of the abuse
- indicate that you believe them and reassure them that they are not to blame
- ask if they want to talk about it (in their own time and at their own pace)
- let them know you are concerned about them, and any children, and you are willing to help
- tell them there are people who can help - give information about services and resources  
(see back page)

Be aware of your own reactions, which should be empathic. You want to avoid the following:

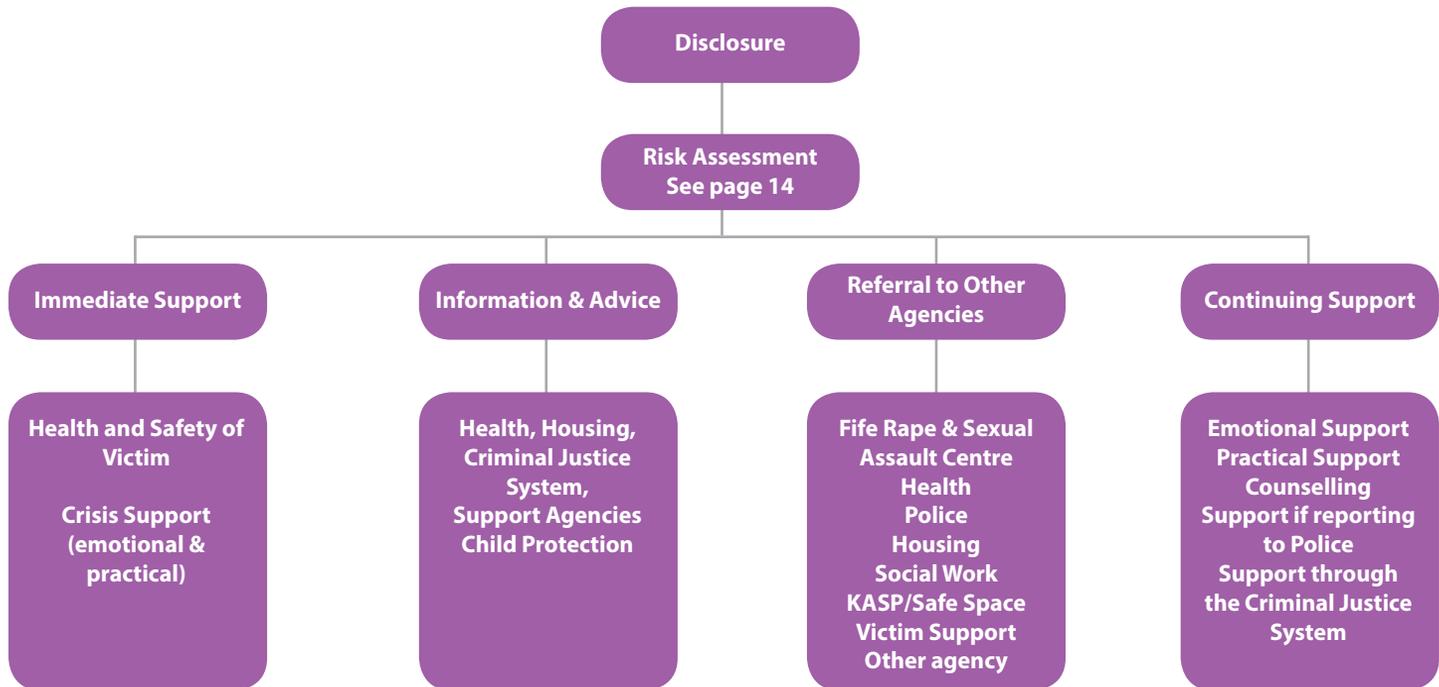
- excessive grief, sadness or distress
- reaction of anger, disgust, shock or horror
- feeling of voyeurism, sexual arousal
- the need to rescue or to be over-protective

## ■ COPING STRATEGIES FOR YOU

You shouldn't feel alone with this, the following will help:

- immediate support at work, talk to a trusted colleague (be aware of confidentiality)
- supervision
- training
- focus on positives rather than negatives
- find activities that help you relax and unwind at home
- workload balance

# POSSIBLE ROUTES FROM DISCLOSURE



All agencies have their own specific remit however you should be aware of the particular services provided by Fife Rape & Sexual Assault Centre, Health Services and the Police.

## ■ FIFE RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTRE (FRASAC)

FRASAC is an independent voluntary organisation which offers a range of free, confidential counselling and support services to anyone, male or female, who has been raped or sexually assaulted at some point in their lives.

Fully qualified and fully trained staff offer:

- counselling
- face to face emotional support
- practical support
- support through police and court procedures
- support and information on health
- crisis appointments

A counselling support worker can meet clients anywhere across Fife and will try to find a venue, which takes into account clients' needs for comfort, privacy and confidentiality.



Victims of rape or sexual assault often require support and advice about the physical and psychological impacts on their health.

NHS Fife Sexual Health Services provide specialist assessment and treatment in a sensitive, confidential and understanding manner at a number of locations across Fife.

A full sexual health assessment cannot be completed until 10 days post assault in order to ensure that testing for sexually transmitted infections, blood-borne viruses, and pregnancy can be undertaken and appropriate treatment started. Where disclosure has been delayed there may still be a need for a full health assessment.

Emotional trauma following rape or sexual assault can also have a detrimental affect on mental health and a range of support is available, with referral usually via the GP or one of the other specialist support services. Victims may experience anxiety, depression, loss of concentration, insomnia and a range of distressing symptoms, some will develop post-traumatic stress disorder. With appropriate support, the long lasting impacts on mental health can be minimised.

## ■ REPORTING AN ASSAULT TO THE POLICE

When a victim reports a sexual assault to the police, a police officer will attend in the first instance to note initial details, a Sexual Offences Liaison Officer (SOLO) (a specialist police officer) will then be appointed and make contact with the victim to take a statement and arrange for a forensic medical examination if required. This SOLO will be the contact throughout the police investigation to provide the victim with any updates and answer any questions.

The initial interview can take place somewhere suitable to both victim and police; there are interview suites available throughout Fife.

The medical examination takes place in a medical suite at Fife Police Headquarters in Glenrothes. The SOLO will arrange transport and be present during the examination.

Other police officers (generally not the SOLO) will interview other witnesses and the suspect.

If there is **insufficient** evidence, which can be for any number of reasons, there will be no further action and the victim will be informed.

If there is **sufficient** evidence then the suspect will be charged and a report sent to the Procurator Fiscal. It is the Procurator Fiscal who makes initial decisions on proceeding.

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## ■ SAFETY

Rape or sexual assault by a complete stranger is uncommon, it is far more likely that the assailant is known to the victim and could be a spouse, partner, relative, work colleague, neighbour or friend. There are a few simple questions to ask which can help to assess whether there are any immediate safety concerns to address:

- does the victim feel safe to return home? If not where can they go?
- are there any children in the household who might be at risk of harm?
- does the victim have contact numbers for support services and do they need support to access support.

## ■ ADULTS AT RISK OF HARM

Research evidence indicates that some adults are at increased risk of rape and sexual violence. This includes those with learning or other disabilities, mental health issues, alcohol and drug problems. Where you think this might be the case, an “adult cause for concern” referral should be considered.

A disclosure of sexual victimisation may come months or years after the abuse has occurred. Much of the preceding advice is equally relevant, although concerns about collecting forensic evidence and immediate health responses around pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections are different.

## ■ CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE AND ADULT SURVIVORS

Childhood sexual abuse is the use of children for the sexual pleasure and gratification of an adult. The victims can experience all forms of sexual violence and abuse that adults experience including rape and group rape; abusers getting children to abuse other children; masturbation of the child or forcing the child to masturbate an adult; shown pornography or forced into pornography; voyeurism.

Child sexual abuse involves -

- abuse of power
- betrayal of trust and responsibility
- inability of a child to consent
- a wide range of sexual activity
- use of force, physical and/or threats by the abuser
- a child's perception of a threat, even if the abuse is neither coercive nor violent

Safe Space and Kingdom Abuse Survivor's Project are specialist agencies in supporting adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse

## USEFUL CONTACTS

**FIFE RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTRE**  
(9am - 4pm Mon - Friday)  
[www.frasac.org.uk](http://www.frasac.org.uk)  
01592 642336

**FIFE SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES**  
(various times depending on which clinic attended)  
[www.nhsfife.org/sexualhealth](http://www.nhsfife.org/sexualhealth)  
01592 729271 or 01592 647979

**POLICE** (24 hrs)  
[www.fife.police.uk](http://www.fife.police.uk)  
101

**FIFE WOMEN'S AID** (domestic abuse) (24 hrs)  
[www.fifewomensaid.org.uk](http://www.fifewomensaid.org.uk)  
0808 802 5555

**FIFE COUNCIL HOUSING SERVICES**  
(homelessness) (24 hrs)  
[www.fifedirect.org.uk/homeless](http://www.fifedirect.org.uk/homeless)  
0800 286231

**SOCIAL WORK SERVICES** (office hours) (24 hrs)  
[www.fifedirect.org.uk/socialwork](http://www.fifedirect.org.uk/socialwork)  
01383 441177 or 08451 550099

**RAPE CRISIS HELPLINE** (6pm to midnight)  
[www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)  
0808 801 0302

**VICTIM SUPPORT FIFE** (office hours)  
[www.victimsupportsco.org.uk](http://www.victimsupportsco.org.uk)  
01592 807090

**KINGDOM ABUSE SURVIVORS PROJECT**  
(office hours)  
[www.kasp.org.uk](http://www.kasp.org.uk)  
01592 644217

**SAFE SPACE** (office hours)  
[www.safe-space.co.uk](http://www.safe-space.co.uk)  
01383 739084

## OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION

**FIFE DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL ABUSE PARTNERSHIP**  
Further Information can be found at:  
[www.fifedirect.org.uk](http://www.fifedirect.org.uk)  
01592 583690

**FIFE CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE**  
[www.fifechildprotection.org.uk](http://www.fifechildprotection.org.uk)  
01592 583251

**FIFE ADULT PROTECTION COMMITTEE**  
Adult protection guidance can be found at:  
[www.fifedirect.org.uk](http://www.fifedirect.org.uk)  
01383 602200

**WOMEN'S SUPPORT PROJECT**  
[www.womenssupportproject.co.uk](http://www.womenssupportproject.co.uk)  
0141 552 2221

## USEFUL RESOURCES

**FDASAP** service user's Information Leaflet  
TALK leaflet can be found at: [www.fifedirect.org.uk](http://www.fifedirect.org.uk)  
01592 583690

Information and help after rape and sexual assault  
[www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)  
0131 244 2213