



Victim information guide

What happens when a rape or sexual offence is reported to the police

This guide explains the police investigation process for sexual offences and what you can expect.

You do not need to read this guide all at once. Keep it and come back to it as the investigation progresses.

It takes courage to talk to the police, and taking part in a police investigation can be difficult and demanding.

This guide contains basic details of the police investigation process and signposts you to more detailed information that you may find useful. It also tells you about some of the support that you can get to help you go through the police investigation process.

Ask your police officer if you have any questions about the investigation. You can also get information from a support worker called an independent sexual violence adviser or advocate (ISVA).

Find out more about ISVAs on [page 10](#).

You may find some of the links in this guide are to websites that refer to 'women and girls', but the information is helpful for victims of all genders.

There are links to support and specialist services on [pages 16 to 19](#) and at the end of the guide ([see page 53](#)).

Useful things to write down

When you have confirmation of the police officer who is responsible for updating you, you can write their contact details below.

Your police officer:	
Email address:	
Phone number:	

The police will give your case a crime reference number (CRN). This unique number helps officers search for your case in their files, so it's useful to have if you call the police about your case.

Ask for your CRN and write it below.

CRN:	
------	--

You may not want an ISVA, or you may need to wait for one to become available to support you. If you do have an ISVA, you can write their contact details below.

Your ISVA:	
Email address:	
Phone number:	

Contents

Map of the investigation process	6
Get support and advice	10
Independent sexual violence advisers or advocates (ISVAs)	10
Help with talking to the police	13
Independent national support services	16
What happens after you make a report to the police	20
First contact with the police	20
Forensics and medical examination	22
Starting the police investigation	23
Your interview	24
What happens to the suspect?	28
How will the police keep you or other people safe?	28

The rest of the investigation (after your interview) 32

Evidence from your phone and other personal records 32

The ongoing police investigation 34

Police decisions and case outcomes 37

How the police decide what to do with your case 37

What happens if the CPS charges a suspect 39

Going to court 40

Other possible outcomes 47

Using a civil order to stop the suspect contacting you 47

Useful contacts and links 49

How to give feedback or raise concerns 49

Making a formal complaint 51

Support and local information 53

Map of the investigation process

Report made to the police

```
graph TD; A[Report made to the police] --> B[If police decide 'first response' is needed: First response (page 20)]; A --> C[Police investigation (page 23)]; B --> C;
```

If police decide 'first response' is needed:
First response ([page 20](#))

Response team officers check you're safe and collect any forensic evidence. They may take you for a forensic medical examination. This will only happen with your permission.

Police investigation ([page 23](#))

- An officer from the investigation team meets you to explain the process – [see page 23](#).
- Collecting all the evidence can take a long time. It will be important that you have support – [see page 12](#).
- An officer sends the case to a supervisor for review. The supervisor decides if your case can be sent to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for a charging decision – [see page 37](#).

Possible outcomes

Two main possible outcomes of a police investigation ([see page 37](#)):

- Police decide not to send your case to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for a charging decision and take 'no further action' (NFA) against the suspect.
- Police send your case to the CPS. The CPS reviews all the evidence in your case and decides if the suspect should be charged with an offence.

Three main possible outcomes if the CPS reviews a case ([see page 37](#)).

- The CPS decides not to charge the suspect and takes no further action against them.
- The CPS thinks there are gaps in the evidence and asks police to collect more information.
- The CPS decides to charge the suspect and the court process begins. After charging, the suspect is then called the 'defendant'.

Map of the investigation process

Three main possible outcomes if a suspect is charged (see page 41):

- The defendant pleads guilty and they are sentenced.
- The defendant pleads not guilty. The case goes to trial. The defendant is found guilty and they are sentenced.
- The defendant pleads not guilty. The case goes to trial and the defendant is found not guilty. They are released without any further action.



Scan the QR code or [follow this link for more information from the Crown Prosecution Service about what happens when someone pleads guilty or not guilty](#)

You have rights throughout the investigation process



You are entitled to certain support and standards of treatment during the police investigation. These are set out in the **Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales** (the Victims' Code, sometimes called VCOP). Scan the QR code or [follow this link to read the Victims' Code on the gov.uk website](#)



There is also a useful handbook from the charity [Rights of Women, which is called 'From Report to Court'](#). The booklet explains your rights in detail and gives examples that can help you to understand them.



If you need information about the justice process, scan the QR code or [follow this link to take a look at the CPS website](#) or talk to your police officer or independent sexual violence adviser or advocate (ISVA).

If you do not have access to the internet, ask your police officer for a printed copy.

Get support and advice

Independent sexual violence advisers or advocates (ISVAs)

An ISVA is a specialist adviser for people who have experienced sexual violence.

ISVAs can support you by:

- Helping you understand the impact of sexual violence on your health and wellbeing.
- Helping you understand the criminal justice process and your rights within it.
- Helping you access other services where relevant, such as housing or drug and alcohol services. For example, they can help book appointments or send referral forms.
- Contacting the police and other services for you, so that you do not have to speak to lots of different people. This is called being a 'single point of contact'.
- Helping you to process your feelings about the police investigation.
- Ensuring you can access support during the investigation and if the case goes to court, for example, 'special measures'.



Scan the QR code or [follow this link to read Victim Support's information about special measures](#)

- 
- Helping you to raise any concerns you have about the police investigation.
 - Providing specialist support. For example, some ISVAs provide specialist support to victims:
 - with a disability
 - from ethnic minority backgrounds
 - with insecure immigration status who might be concerned about the police case affecting this
 - who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)
 - who are male

There are some limits on what ISVAs can do:

- ISVA services are not the same as counselling or therapy, though ISVAs can refer you to these services and often have counsellors in their organisations.
- ISVAs are not legal advisers. They can give you information about the criminal justice system but they should not give you legal advice.
- There are rules about what the ISVA who is supporting you can talk to you about. If they find out details about the evidence in your case, they will not be able to continue to be your ISVA from that point. For example, if they sit with you when you tell the police what happened, and they find out details about the case evidence. In these circumstances, another ISVA would be assigned to

Get support and advice

support you through the criminal justice process.

- You can talk to your ISVA if you have any questions about what they can and cannot know. You can talk to an ISVA and/or your police officer about your options if you want someone else with you when you talk to the police. For example, if you want a friend or other support worker to be with you.

How to get support

Your police officer should tell you about ISVAs and ask if you want to be referred for ISVA support. If they have not done this, ask to discuss ISVAs. You can change your mind about getting ISVA support at any time. If you say no to ISVA support at first, you can still ask the police to refer you later.

You do not need to report what has happened to the police or help them with their investigation to get ISVA support. You can ask for ISVA support without police assistance. Not all ISVA services offer the same support. You can talk to your local ISVA service providers about what support they can offer you.



You may also be interested in support from an **independent domestic violence adviser or advocate (IDVA)**. Find out more by scanning the QR code or [following this link to the Safe Lives website](#)



Organisations that provide specialised ISVA support are also available – [see page 16](#). The availability of an ISVA or IDVA depends on where you live and the details of your case. However, you can tell the police if you have a preference about which type of support worker you would prefer.

Help with talking to the police

It can be difficult to talk about sexual violence. This could be something that happened to you when you were an adult or a child. It can be especially difficult to talk to the police about sexual violence. You may want someone that you trust to stay with you while you tell the police about what happened.

You have the right to be supported by a person of your choice when reporting what happened to the police and during the interview. Exceptions are where the police do not think it is in your best interests, or the person is a witness in the investigation.

Your supporter cannot speak for you or get involved in the questioning. However, they can be a friendly face, and ask for breaks or provide other practical help, like getting you a drink.

Get support and advice

Intermediaries

An intermediary is a communication specialist who can help you understand the questions you are being asked.

The intermediary can assist the police and the court with the best way to communicate with you. They can let the police know any communication needs you might have, like using particular wording in the questions they ask you, or communication aids.

They can also sit with you in the police interview and in court, to help you understand any questions and help you communicate your response.

You can request that an application is made to the court for an intermediary if:

- You are under the age of 18.
- You require communication support. This may apply if you need support to understand and answer questions, including if:
 - you have a mental disorder as defined by the Mental Health Act 1983 (as amended by the Mental Health Act 2007)
 - you have a learning disability
 - you have a physical disability

Speak to your police officer about this.

Interpreters and translators

An interpreter can help you if you do not feel comfortable speaking English. You should not have to rely on family or friends to interpret for you – a specialist interpreter should be provided. The interpreter will translate between English and your chosen spoken or sign language when speaking to the police.

You have the right to get important documents about the interview or court translated into your chosen language. Examples include:

- written acknowledgement of the reported crime
- relevant parts of any documents you need to see for the purposes of your interview or the court hearing
- letters about the time, date and location of the trial
- letters about the outcome of your case, and the reasons for the decision
- responses to any complaints or requests for your case to be reviewed

Ask your police officer for an interpreter and translated documents if you find it difficult to understand, speak, read or write in English.

Get support and advice

Independent national support services

Rape Crisis England & Wales



Website: [rapecrisis.org.uk](https://www.rapecrisis.org.uk)

Helpline: 0808 500 2222

Open 24 hours a day,
every day of the year.



Webchat: 247sexualabusesupport.org.uk

Open 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Services available:

National helpline for anybody aged 16 or over who has been affected by any type of sexual violence.

Helplines can provide emotional support. Website provides information about other services, for example ISVAs.

The Survivors Trust Helpline



Website: thesurvivorstrust.org

Helpline: 0808 801 0818, open
daily – check website for times.



Services available:

National helpline for anybody aged 16 or over who has been affected by any type of sexual violence.

Inclusive of transgender and non-binary survivors.
Helplines can provide emotional support and practical advice. Website provides information about other services, for example ISVAs.

Live Fear Free Helpline (Welsh)

Website: welshwomensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/live-fear-free-helpline/



Helpline: 0808 801 0800

Text: 07860 077 333

Email: info@livefearfreehelpline.wales



Webchat: gov.wales/live-fear-free

Services available:

24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Croesawir galwadau yn Gymraeg (calls are welcomed in Welsh). Provides Welsh and English language help and advice to:

- anyone experiencing domestic abuse or sexual violence
- anyone who knows someone who needs help, like a friend, family member or colleague
- practitioners seeking professional advice

Get support and advice

Find specialist support



Galop

LGBT+ people experiencing any type of abuse

galop.org.uk/



imkaan

Survivors from Black and Asian backgrounds
and migrant survivors

imkaan.org.uk/get-help



Male Survivors Partnership

Male survivors and their supporters

malesurvivor.co.uk/



Refuge

Domestic abuse survivors

refuge.org.uk



Respond

Disabled and neurodiverse survivors

respond.org.uk



Survivors UK

Male and non-binary survivors aged 13 and over

survivorsuk.org



Women's Aid

Women and child survivors of domestic abuse

womensaid.org.uk

Independent local support services

There may also be local support services in your area. Ask your police officer or independent sexual violence adviser or advocate (ISVA) if you would like help to find the best service for you. Tell them if you would prefer a service that specialises in supporting certain groups, for example:

- people with a disability
- people from ethnic minority backgrounds
- people with insecure immigration status who might be concerned about the police case affecting this
- people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)
- male victims

There is additional information in the support and local information section from [page 53](#).

What happens after you make a report to the police

First contact with the police

The first point of contact for cases reported to the police by phone will be the call handler team. You will speak with a police call handler working within the Police Control Room.

The role of the call handler team is to check if you or other members of the public are in immediate danger, or if the police need to collect some evidence quickly. The call handler team will not investigate the crime.

After reporting a case by phone, you may be contacted by either a specialist investigation officer or a uniformed officer, depending on:

- how long it is since the sexual violence happened
- the structure of your local police force

If the call handler team think you need an urgent visit from the police, they'll send a uniformed officer from a response team. The role of a response team is to make sure you are safe and to collect any evidence.

The response officer may record what you say in a booklet and/or ask for your permission to use a camera on their chest called a body-worn video (BWV). They may also use this camera to video the place where the offence took place

or their initial actions at the scene. Any BWV recording that is taken can be used as evidence in court, if required.

You do not need to talk about the sexual violence in detail to the response team. However, an officer will ask some broad questions about what happened to help guide the investigation. The questions might feel very direct, embarrassing or silly. This is to help them decide what offences may have been committed.

It's important that you feel comfortable with the police

Tell the police if there's something that would make you feel more comfortable. For example, some people prefer speaking to non-uniformed officers, or officers of a particular sex. The police cannot guarantee that they can meet your preference because it depends on who is available, but they'll follow your request if they can.

You can ask to be interviewed by an officer of a particular sex if this will help you to provide your evidence. [See page 27](#) for more information.

What happens after you make a report to the police

Forensics and medical examination

If the sexual violence happened less than a week ago, the police may collect items from you to help prove what happened.



Scan the QR code or [follow this link for more information from the British Transport Police about forensic evidence](#)

The officers should explain what items they need and why. For personal items, such as clothing, you have a right to get the items back, but it can take a long time. This is due to the length of the investigation process.

The police may also take you to a sexual assault referral centre (SARC), where a medical examiner can do a forensic medical examination (FME). This will only happen with your permission. You can visit a SARC and have an FME before reporting what happened to the police. You can do this even if you are unsure whether you want to report what happened.



Scan the QR code or [follow this link to find your nearest SARC by using the NHS search tool](#)

Starting the police investigation

Talking to the investigation team officer

A police officer from the investigation team will contact you soon after you make a report, usually by phone. This should be within one to two days of you reporting what happened. However, it can take a bit longer if the police force is very busy, and depending on the details of your case. The police officer should ask if you want to meet them in person at your home, or in a safe, private place, to talk more.

This may be your first contact with the police about the case. However, you may have had a visit from the response team, which is described on [page 20](#).

Your police officer will introduce themselves and talk you through the next steps. They might ask some risk assessment questions to check you are safe. You can tell them about things you are worried about, or if you feel that you or other people might be unsafe in any way.

The officer should tell you how to access support services and ask if you want them to refer you for independent sexual violence adviser or advocate (ISVA) support. If this does not happen, [see page 10](#).

Communication plan

Your police officer will agree a communication plan with

What happens after you make a report to the police

you. This plan tells the police how and when you'd like to be contacted. If you already have an ISVA at this point, the communication plan should be made with their input as well. The police should regularly check that you're still happy with the plan. You can update your preferences at any time.

The communication plan also gives you an opportunity to discuss and write down your safety concerns. Safety concerns can be mentioned to your police officer or ISVA at any point and be discussed every time the communication plan is updated.

If you do not have a plan, ask about it next time you speak with any police officer or your ISVA. You can quote this guide to state that police should make a plan with you.

During this first contact with the investigation team officer, they may ask you a little about what happened in the sexual violence. In particular, they may ask about this if you did not have a visit from the response team. They may ask some questions that seem direct, embarrassing or silly as they establish what has happened. They will need to be clear about some details that might not feel important to you.

Your interview

The police will invite you to an interview. It can be a difficult process because they will ask you to talk about the sexual violence in detail. Beforehand, the police should

explain the interview process and ask if they can do anything to make it easier for you.

This interview can be filmed if you agree to it. It is sometimes referred to as a video-recorded interview (VRI). With the permission of the court, the recording can be used as part of your evidence. This is one of the ‘special measures’ available to you. Special measures are designed to support victims, enabling you to give your best evidence.

Often, the interview takes place in a specially designed room called a VRI suite. It might be in a sexual assault referral centre (SARC) ([see page 22](#)), a police station or another building.



Scan the QR code or [**follow this link to the Crown Prosecution Service \(CPS\) website to find out more about how you may be able to give some or all of your evidence before the trial**](#)

You do not have to have a video-recorded interview (VRI). The police could take a written statement instead. However, you would then need to give this part of your evidence in court, rather than your VRI being played to the jury as your evidence. If you choose this option, you would still be entitled to apply for other special measures at court ([see page 43](#)). Discuss the options with your police officer or ISVA.

What happens after you make a report to the police

Speaking about the sexual violence can bring up some new memories. If you remember more things after the interview, write them down and contact your police officer.

Your wellbeing during the interview

During the interview, you can ask for breaks if you want them. It might be helpful to have someone available to support you afterwards, and for you to not do much for the rest of the day.

Some people find relaxation exercises useful. These can help with dealing with intense feelings or being overwhelmed.



For more information about grounding exercises, scan the QR code or [follow this link to visit the Rape Crisis website](#)

Can you take someone with you to the interview?

You have the right to ask for a friend or family member to sit in the interview with you, as long as they are not a witness in the case. This supporter cannot get involved with the interview questions. However, they can ask for breaks on your behalf and provide emotional support.

If you have an independent sexual violence adviser or advocate (ISVA), they can:

- sit outside the interview room to support you before and after the interview
- support you during any breaks

You can also request that your ISVA sits inside the interview room with you as a supporter. However, if your ISVA sits in the interview, they will not be able to continue to be your ISVA after this point. This is because ISVAs are not allowed to know the evidence in your case. In these circumstances, another ISVA would be assigned to support you through the criminal justice process. You can talk to your ISVA if you have any questions about this.

Requesting rights under the Victims' Code

To help you feel comfortable in the interview, you have the right to ask that the police officer is of the sex of your choice. Under the Victims' Code, the police must meet your request unless they think it would make the investigation unfair.



You can read more about the Victims' Code by scanning the QR code or [following this link to the gov.uk website](#)

What happens to the suspect?

How will the police keep you or other people safe?

Throughout the investigation the police will work to make sure you and others are safe.

This involves police assessing risk. Police use this assessment to consider the case circumstances to decide what safeguarding measures are needed to prevent the suspect from harming anyone. The police might ask you questions as part of their risk assessment.

We know circumstances can change. Tell your police officer and ISVA if at any point you are worried about your safety, or the safety of anyone else.

Call 999 if you are concerned that you or others are in immediate danger.

Safeguarding measures

The police may consider safeguarding measures such as:

- Arresting the suspect or seeking certain bail conditions. [See page 30.](#)
- Applying for civil orders, for example, to stop the suspect from contacting you. [See page 47.](#)
- Applying for a sexual risk order (SRO) if there is a wider threat to the public.



Scan the QR code or [follow this link to more information on the CPS website about SROs](#)

You can discuss safeguarding measures with your police officer and ISVA.

Will the suspect be arrested?

This will often depend on what has happened, and when.

If the police have ‘reasonable grounds’ for believing that the person’s arrest is necessary, the suspect is likely to be arrested. This could occur, for example, if they are worried about your safety or the safety of others.

Your officer will keep you updated if the suspect is arrested.

Sometimes the suspect may not be arrested but will be contacted, usually by telephone. They may be asked to come into the police station for an interview on a voluntary basis.

What happens to the suspect?

Will the suspect be in prison during the police investigation?

The suspect may be held on remand

If a suspect is charged ([see page 39](#)) they may be held in custody before the trial. This is called being held on remand.

The suspect may be released on bail or under investigation

If a suspect is charged, the police can release them on bail. This means the suspect is legally required to report to the police at a specified date and time. A suspect can also be released under investigation, where they do not have a requirement to report at a specific date and time.

Bail conditions

If a suspect is released on bail, this can be with or without conditions. These conditions can limit, for example, where a suspect can go or who they can contact. Your police officer should talk to you about your concerns before releasing the suspect on bail. The police should record and consider these concerns.



It is possible that the suspect will be subject to bail conditions. Ask your police officer or independent sexual violence adviser or advocate (ISVA) if you are not sure what this means for you.

Police communication

You have a right under the Victims' Code to be told about important decisions in the investigation. For example, if the suspect is to be released on bail, and any bail conditions they have been given.

If the suspect contacts you or other witnesses in the case, it's important that you tell the police. The suspect may be breaching their bail or committing a further offence by contacting you. The police may consider other measures such as obtaining a civil order to help keep you safe – [see page 47](#). Talk to your police officer and ISVA if you are worried about your safety at any point.

The rest of the investigation (after your interview)

Evidence from your phone and other personal records

Sometimes the police will ask for your phone or other digital evidence, such as access to data from your social media accounts. The police can ask different agencies for records they have about you, for example, your doctor or social services. This is called third-party material.

Asking for this type of evidence can feel intrusive. You have rights if the police ask you about digital evidence or third-party material.

Before a police officer asks for your phone or seeks access to third-party material, they should be sure this is important for the case.

The rules about how and when police can get private information about you are complex and can vary. If digital or third-party material is requested, you should receive forms explaining what material the police want and why.

Your rights

You might want to talk to your police officer, ISVA, an independent specialist support organisation ([see page 16](#)) or a legal adviser about your rights. As a victim of crime, you are not provided with a legal adviser. This is because you are not suspected of committing a crime and

if the suspect is charged the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is responsible for prosecuting the case. However, you can consult a legal adviser about the investigation process to ensure your rights are respected.

Returning your devices

If you give your police officer electronic devices for extracting digital data, such as your phone or computer, the police should return them as soon as possible. You should be kept informed about how long your devices are needed for. You can also ask about borrowing a phone while you wait for yours to be returned. Police should always offer this. The police should tell you how long they will need your devices for, although they might not be able to give you an exact timeframe.



You can find more information about this part of the investigation by scanning the QR code or [following this link to the CPS website](#)

To give you confidence when the police ask for sensitive evidence, there should be local safeguards to your rights. Ask your police officer to tell you about their transparency and accountability policies on digital evidence and third-party material.

The rest of the investigation (after your interview)

The ongoing police investigation

After a lot of initial activity, it might feel like the police investigation goes quiet suddenly. The police officer investigating your case will be gathering the evidence, for example, interviewing the suspect and other witnesses. Gathering the evidence can take a long time – a year or more in some cases.

Your police officer will update you in line with your communication plan. You can decide if you'd like to hear from the police regularly, or only when something changes in your case. You can change your communication plan at any time by asking your police officer.

This part of the investigation can feel frustrating and slow. It can be helpful to have support from an ISVA or other specialist support worker to help you cope. [See pages 10 to 19](#) for more information about support services and talk to your police officer if you want help to access support. You are entitled to support, even if you want to stop the police investigation.

Stalking and harassment

It is important to tell your police officer if the suspect's behaviour is worrying or frightening you. This includes if you think they are stalking or harassing you, for example, if they are contacting you or following you. They could also be in breach of any bail conditions so it is important you inform the police.

If you are threatened or harassed in any way by the suspect, their family or friends, you should tell your police officer. It is good to make notes about what happened. This will help you to clearly remember later what was said and done.

If you feel that you or others are in immediate danger, call 999.



Scan the QR code or [follow this link for useful information about harassment in the Rights of Women 'From Report to Court' handbook](#)

The rest of the investigation (after your interview)

Victim personal statement

If you want to, you can write a victim personal statement (VPS). A VPS is a letter to the court. It will be taken into account by all criminal justice agencies involved in the case to help them understand how the crime has affected you, build the strongest possible case and make sure you get the support you need. It is considered by the judge when the suspect is being sentenced.

Although the information you provide in your VPS may appear in the media, you are entitled to lifelong anonymity. It is illegal for the media, or anyone else, to publish your name or any information that could identify you. This includes on social media.



Scan the QR code or [follow this link to more information from the Crown Prosecution Service about victim personal statements](#)

Police decisions and case outcomes

How the police decide what to do with your case

Once the police have finished collecting the evidence, they will decide if your case can be sent to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). The CPS is responsible for prosecuting most criminal cases in England and Wales. They decide when a suspect can be charged with a criminal offence and present the case against them in court. The police should only ask the CPS to charge a suspect if it's more likely that a jury will find them guilty than not guilty.

Possible outcomes in your case

1. Police take 'no further action' (NFA)

You'll receive a letter explaining the decision and your options

2. Police send your case to the CPS

2a)
CPS sends case back to police for more investigation

2b)
CPS takes 'no further action' (NFA)

2c)
CPS charges the suspect

Police decisions and case outcomes



There are strict rules about when the police can send a case to the CPS. Scan the QR code or [follow this link to read about these](#)

Victim liaison officer

The CPS has a dedicated victim liaison officer (VLO) in every Rape and Serious Sexual Offence Unit. They are there to coordinate communication between you, the police and the CPS.

Some information cannot be used in court

Some of the information collected during an investigation cannot be used in court and so will not count as ‘evidence’ in legal terms. For example, the police cannot usually use information that you have been told by other people.

Victims’ right to review

If the police or CPS decide to take no further action against the suspect, this means they will not be taken to court or charged. You may have a right to challenge the decision under the victims’ right to review (VRR).



Scan the QR code or [follow the link for more information on the CPS website about the victims' right to review](#)

An ISVA or other supporter can help you challenge decisions through a VRR. [Read page 10](#) if you do not currently have ISVA support but would like to know more.

What happens if the CPS charges a suspect

If a suspect is charged and formally told they are being prosecuted for the offence, they will now be called the 'defendant'.

The defendant may be remanded into custody

The court will sometimes make a decision not to grant bail to a defendant. This is called remand. Some of the reasons they do this include if they believe there is a risk:

- that the defendant may commit another offence
- that the defendant will fail to attend court
- that the defendant may interfere with witnesses and/or victims
- to the defendant's own safety

Police decisions and case outcomes

The defendant may be released on bail

The defendant may be granted bail. The court can give them conditions which limit, for example, where they can go and who they can talk to. For example, a defendant is usually told not to contact you or your friends.

Tell the police if there is anything else they should ask the defendant not to do.

If the defendant contacts you or other witnesses in the case, it is important that you tell the police. They will look at whether any additional offences have been committed.

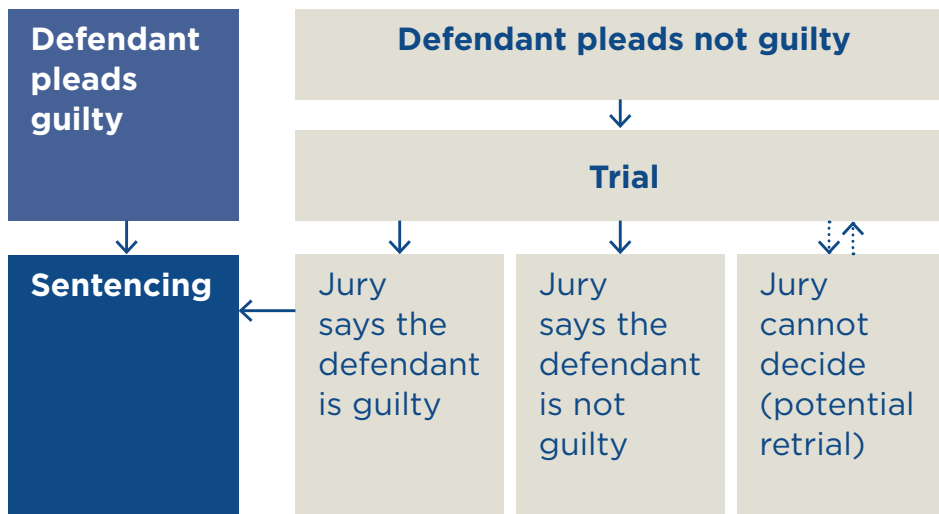
You are not required to attend court for any hearings to decide if the defendant is granted bail or remanded into custody. The police must tell you if this is going to happen.

Going to court

The first court hearing will take place in the magistrates' court and this will be soon after the police have charged the defendant. At this hearing, the defendant may plead guilty, not guilty or they may not enter a plea.

Depending on the case, a decision will be made about whether there will be a magistrates' or Crown Court trial.

What happens next?



The trial

There will only be a trial if the defendant pleads not guilty. While you wait for the trial, the witness care unit (WCU) will update you if there are any changes. This includes the defendant changing their plea to guilty.

The WCU will tell you what date to go to court. You can ask for the police to share your communication plan with the WCU so they know how you would like to receive updates. For example, this could be from your independent sexual violence adviser or advocate (ISVA).

Police decisions and case outcomes

Cases will either be tried in a magistrates' court, where there is no jury, or a Crown Court, where there is a jury made up of 12 members of the public. In a Crown Court trial, the jury is asked to look at evidence and decide if they are sure that the suspect is guilty.



Scan the QR code or [follow this link for more information on the CPS website about Crown Court trials](#)

There may be several hearings in court about the case. They will be about technical issues or deciding dates for next steps.

You can choose whether to attend court for any of these hearings. They usually only take a few minutes. If the defendant says they are not guilty, there is likely to be a delay between the defendant pleading not guilty and the jury trial. You will be offered support from a special police team, usually called the witness care unit (WCU).

Schedule changes

The trial schedule can change, sometimes at short notice. This can be difficult for victims. The trial might be postponed until a later date. Sometimes this happens on the day when everyone arrives at court expecting the trial to start.



The defendant might change their plea to guilty at any point, before or during the trial. If this happens before the trial, the trial will not go ahead. If it happens before you give evidence, you will no longer need to do so.

The WCU can talk you through these possibilities and provide support. They can also arrange for you to visit the court building before the trial so that you know what to expect.

Special measures

As a victim of rape or sexual violence you are eligible to apply for support to give your evidence. This is known as special measures.

There are two special measures that can help you give some or all of your evidence before the trial. These are video-recorded interviews and video recorded cross-examination.

There are additional special measures that can help you give evidence during the trial. These include barrier screens so you do not have to see the defendant and they cannot see you, and giving your evidence via a live video link.

The CPS will make the application on your behalf for the special measures that would help you. The court will make the final decision on which can be used.

Police decisions and case outcomes



Scan the QR code or [follow this link to find out more on the CPS website about special measures](#)



If you would prefer to watch a video, scan the QR code or [follow this link to watch a video from HM Courts & Tribunal Service](#)

The witness care unit (WCU), your ISVA (if you have one) and your police officer should all talk to you about special measures. Special measures must be put in place before the trial starts.

What happens if you need to give evidence

You can wait in a separate room away from the rest of the court. If your video-recorded interview (VRI) is being submitted as your evidence in chief, this will be played to the court first. There may be some follow-up questions from the CPS prosecutor. You will be able to look at your police statement or interview so that it is fresh in your memory before you answer questions.

If you are not using your VRI as your evidence in chief, the CPS prosecutor will ask you questions about what happened.

Next, the legal representative for the suspect, usually a barrister, may ask you further questions or challenge you

about what you've said. This is called cross-examination. If the court has agreed to pre-recorded cross examination, this will take place before the main trial and the video will be played to the court.

Being asked questions by the defendant's barrister or legal adviser can be a difficult experience. It is important to have someone to support you afterwards, and it can be helpful not to do much for the rest of the day.



Scan the QR code or [follow this link for more information on the CPS website about the trial](#)

If the defendant pleads guilty, or the jury say the defendant is guilty

The defendant will be sentenced. The sentencing hearing may happen straight away, or it might be done later if the court needs more information.



Scan the QR code or [follow this link for more information on the CPS website about the verdict and sentencing](#)

Police decisions and case outcomes

Media reports about the court case will not name you

Although the details of your case may appear in the media, you are entitled to lifelong anonymity. It is illegal for the media, or anyone else, to publish any information that could identify you. This includes on social media.

Other possible outcomes

Using a civil order to stop the suspect contacting you

If the suspect or defendant tries to contact or harass you, you and the police may be able to apply for a civil order.

There are different types of civil order. Most try to stop the suspect or defendant from contacting you.



You can find out more about civil orders by scanning the QR code or [following this link to the CPS website](#)

Your police officer, whose [details are on page three](#) of this guide, can talk to you about the options. Your ISVA or support worker may also be able to help.

It is the police's job to put some civil orders in place, for example a domestic violence protection notice (DVPN). The police can use certain orders if they decide not to charge the suspect. The CPS can also request that a civil order, such as a restraining order, is established even if the defendant is found not guilty. You can also get a legal adviser to help you apply for some other civil orders without police involvement.



Scan the QR code or [follow this link for Citizens Advice's information about getting free or affordable legal help](#)

Other possible outcomes

Applying for compensation

When you report rape or sexual violence to the police, you may be able to get compensation from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme (CICS).

This money comes from the government and not the suspect or defendant. It does not cost anything to apply for this compensation.

The suspect or defendant does not need to be charged or convicted for you to get compensation, but eligibility rules and timeframes apply. In most cases you must apply within two years of the crime happening, but there are exceptions.



Scan the QR code or [follow this link to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority \(CICA\) website](#) for an explanation of these rules



Scan the QR code or [follow this link to view some useful videos on the Victim Support website about getting compensation](#)

You can choose a friend or family member to make an application for you. You may also be able to get advice and support from your independent sexual violence adviser or advocate (ISVA) or support worker.

Useful contacts and links

How to give feedback or raise concerns

Let your police officer know if you have any concerns about your case or how the police are conducting their investigation. You can email or phone them using the contact details given to you at the start of this guide. An ISVA or another supporter can help you do this. Read [page 10](#) if you do not currently have ISVA support but would like to know more.

If you want to raise concerns about your police officer, you can contact their supervisor. Ask your police officer for their supervisor's contact details and make a note of them here:

Supervisor's name:	
Email address:	
Phone number:	

Information about making a formal complaint can be found on [page 51](#).

Under the Victims' Code, you have the right to complain if you do not think the police are treating you correctly. The Code states that you are entitled to:

- be treated with respect, dignity, sensitivity and compassion

Useful contacts and links

- be protected from revictimisation, intimidation and retaliation
- have your privacy respected
- help to understand and engage with the criminal justice process without discrimination
- be updated about your case regularly



You can find a full list of your rights by scanning the QR code or [following this link to the gov.uk website](#)

An independent sexual violence adviser or advocate (ISVA) or another supporter can help you make a complaint. Read [page 10](#) if you do not currently have ISVA support but would like to know more.

There are also informal ways to share both good and bad experiences through victim surveys. Ask your ISVA or police officer about whether the police force currently has a victim feedback or victim experience survey. The results of these surveys are usually combined and discussed with support services each year. This helps the police to improve and to build on what they do well.

Making a formal complaint

You can make a formal complaint by scanning the QR code or following the link below.

An independent sexual violence adviser or advocate (ISVA) or other supporter may be able to help you to make a complaint.



Scan the QR code or [follow this link to complain online](#)

Your police and crime commissioner (PCC)

The PCC is elected by the public to decide police budgets and hold police to account in your local area.

PCC contact details	

Useful contacts and links

Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC)

If you are unhappy with the police response to your complaint, you may be able to request a review from an independent organisation.

The IOPC is an independent organisation that oversees complaints about the police.



Website: policeconduct.gov.uk

Post: PO Box 473, Sale, M33 0BW

Phone: 0300 020 0096



Email: enquiries@policeconduct.gov.uk

Text relay: If you require text relay services to communicate, please call 18001 020 8104 1220. You will need to install the Relay UK app on your phone or computer to use this service.

British Sign Language: Contact the enquiries team for further details
enquiries@policeconduct.gov.uk

Support and local information



[Victims' Code](#)



[Victim Support information portal](#)



[Crown Prosecution Service - a guide for victims of rape and serious sexual assault](#)



[From Report to Court - A handbook](#)



[National helplines - sexual violence](#)



[National support - domestic violence](#)



[The Survivor's Handbook \(Women's Aid\)](#)

Support and local information

Victims First

Provides free emotional and practical support to all victim survivors, witnesses and family members of victims. Victims First can ensure that anybody impacted by rape and sexual assault in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire (including Milton Keynes) and Oxfordshire can access specialist support, which can include Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs), group work, peer support and counselling/ trauma therapy. They support all adults and children aged 5+, living in the Thames Valley area and can help victims identify the best support for their needs.

Phone: **0300 1234 148**

Website with self-help resources and a Live Chat function:
www.victims-first.org.uk

Online Referral Form: <https://www.victims-first.org.uk/get-support-now/>

They can also arrange access to the “Thames Valley Sexual Violence Service” and the “Children and Young People Support After Crime Service”:



Support and local information

Thames Valley Sexual Violence Service

Provided by Hope After Harm (All of Thames Valley area, 18 years old +)

Our Sexual Violence Service offers a safe and confidential space for those affected by sexual violence and abuse. Experienced Independent Sexual Violence Advisors and Sexual Violence Caseworkers provide one-to-one support by assessing each service user's unique needs and providing personalised support. We also provide informal groups such as an online web café, drop in sessions, coffee and craft groups and walking groups. As well as structured group work including psychoeducation sessions accessible to everyone

Phone (via Victims First): **0300 1234 148**

Website: www.hopeafterharm.org.uk

Online Referral Form: <https://www.victims-first.org.uk/get-support-now/>



Support and local information

CYP Support After Crime Service

Provided by SAFE (children and young people)

Provides confidential, non-judgemental emotional and practical support to children and young people aged 5 to 18 who live or are educated within the Thames Valley area and have experienced sexual violence. Support is tailored to each individual and led by the child or young person's needs and preferences. Services include Children's Independent Sexual and Domestic Violence Advocates (CISDVA), one-to-one and group support delivered by trained practitioners and counselling to help process the impact of sexual harm.

Phone (via Victims First): **0300 1234 148**

Website: www.safeproject.org.uk

Online Referral Form: <https://www.safeproject.org.uk/routes-to-help.php>



Support and local information

Trust House (All of TVP)

Phone: **0118 958 4033**

Email: support@trusthouse.org.uk

Website: www.trusthouse.org.uk



Survivor Space (Oxfordshire)

Email: referrals@survivorspace.org.uk

Website: www.survivorspace.org.uk



SAASSBMK (Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes)

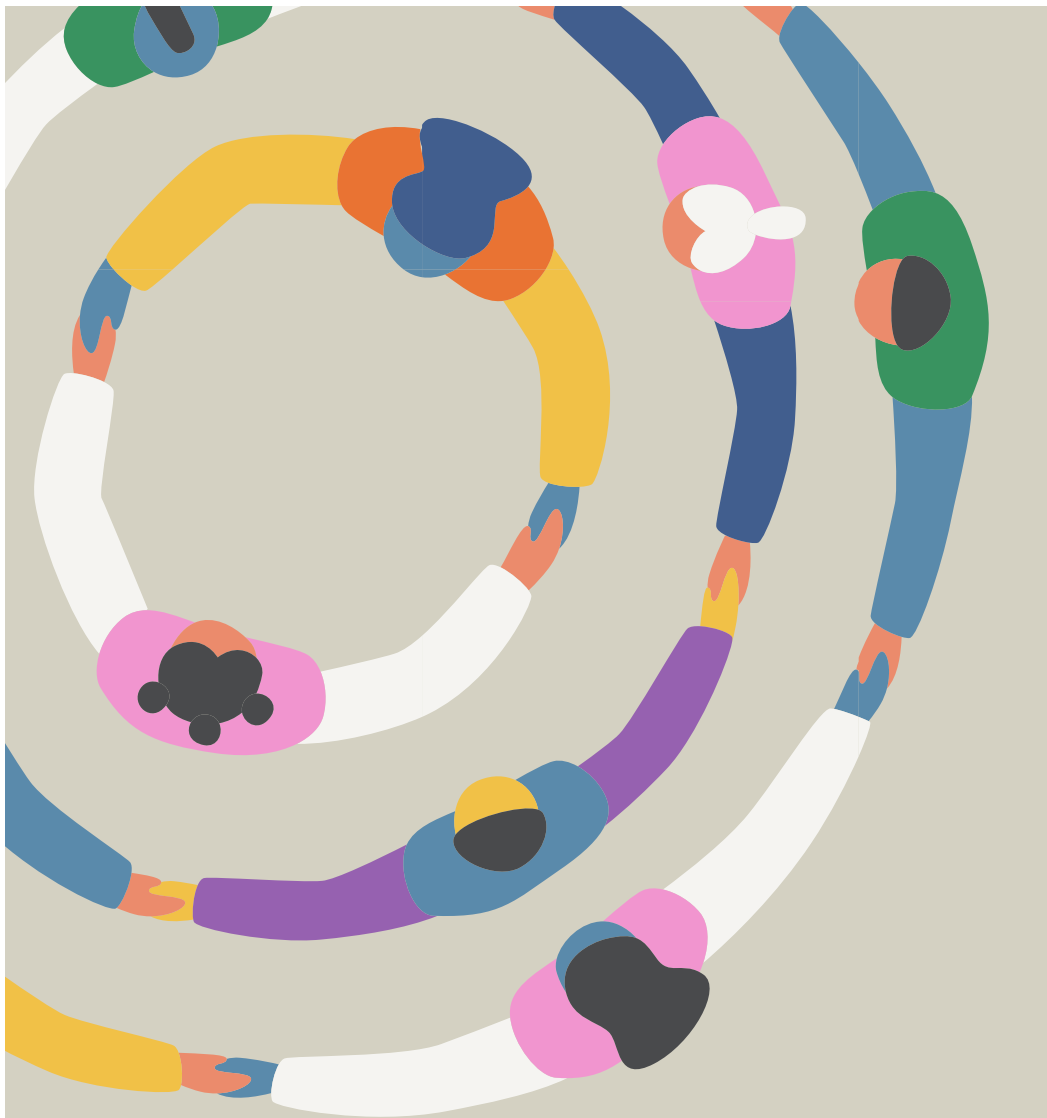
Phone: **01296 392468 (Bucks)**

01908 201971 (MK)

Email: support@saassbmk.org.uk

Website: www.saassbmk.org.uk





**This guide was produced as part
of the national operating model**

© College of Policing Limited (2025) C1284-0325
