

## Reporting Abuse – What can I expect when I report to Police?

The decision to report abuse can often be a difficult one to make, this guide will hopefully help to support you in the process. It is not a definitive guide of what 'WILL' happen but should be seen as a guide to explain what processes are, and possibly what to expect along the journey.

### What do we mean by Abuse?

For this purpose, abuse refers to Physical (Assault and Domestic Violence), Sexual, and Neglect. All of these apply to both children and adults, emotional abuse can also be part of any of the above.

Often, certainly in the case of many sexual offences, a survivor of abuse makes the decision to report many years after the abuse has taken place, this is often referred to as a 'non recent' or 'historical' disclosure. Most abuse offences are not affected by time constraints.

### When I report?

Most initial reports are made by telephone to the Police, if that is difficult in the first instance, a friend or supporter could make this initial step on your behalf with your consent.

The Police call taker will establish who you are, how to contact you further and very basic details of what you might need to discuss. There is no requirement to give 'full' details over the phone at this stage. They may also ask questions to ascertain if you are at any current level of risk.

The matter would then be passed to an officer to meet with you and to discuss your report further. This could be a uniformed officer, or an officer from a specialist team, CID, Child Protection etc.

If your report is of a very recent sexual offence, arrangements may be made for you to meet with Police at a specialist centre called a SARC or similar. This would be to facilitate the carrying out of any specialist medical attention that would be necessary.

None of this would or could take place without your knowledge or consent.

You would be required to make a statement, this is your account of what happened, officers will endeavour to include as much relevant detail as possible, it's very important to build a full picture. Your statement could be written, or sometimes by means of a video interview (normal practice for child victims and witnesses).

You may be offered the services of an independent specialist support worker called an ISVA.

This stands for Independent Sexual Violence Advocate, there are also ISVA's for children and IDVA's for supporting Domestic Violence victims. They are independent from the Police and the investigation but have the role of supporting you and being the 'go between' for you and the Police.

## What happens next?

The Police will then commence their investigation into what you told them, they may ask for information from your phone or computer if relevant, they may ask you for consent to access official records, Medical, Social Care etc. They may make enquiries with schools and any other relevant lines of enquiry to build a picture.

The Police will also contact any other person who may have witnessed events or examine records and make enquiries that could give important information and assist the investigation. This can often take some time. They will also consider that others could be victims of similar abuse.

## What happens to my abuser?

Normally, at some point the suspect will be asked to give a formal account under legally prescribed conditions. The person can be arrested for such or invited to the Police station to give an account whilst legally represented. This is part of the investigation.

As a victim/complainant, in such cases you are protected in law. The Police will consider if any specific or additional steps are needed to ensure that you are kept safe. They should discuss this with you.

When the Police are at a certain point in the investigation, they will refer the matter to the CPS (Crown Prosecution Service) who will then decide as to whether the evidential threshold is met to take the matter to court. Generally, the CPS may make one of the following decisions:

A direction to gather further evidence to aid the decision,

To charge the suspect with an offence or number of offences, this places the matter into the court system,

To deal with the matter another way, such as a caution (you can only receive a caution if you have admitted the offence for which you are being cautioned)

To take no further action, due to insufficient evidence or other reason

## What if my case goes to court?

Such matters will be dealt with by either a Magistrates Court or the Crown Court (for more serious offences), there are usually several preliminary hearings.

If a suspect pleads 'guilty', it is unlikely that you would be called to court to give evidence, they are admitting the offence.

If a suspect pleads 'not guilty', it will be the job of the Crown to prove the case in court during a trial, and you may be required to give evidence. If called, you are legally compelled to attend as directed. Before the trial you would be contacted by the witness care team who would assist you in these matters. Children and some vulnerable adults normally give their evidence via a live video link from a separate room (not in the court room). Police can also apply for 'special measures' which could include

giving evidence from behind a screen etc and other measures to assist you to give evidence. Children are automatically entitled to special measures.

You may also be asked to provide a 'victim personal statement', this is something that the Police will help you with, it's something you are entitled to do, and it gives you the opportunity to tell the court (through the statement), how you feel about the case and what effect it and the abuse has had upon you. No one will force you to make the statement.

You may also receive support to make criminal injuries claim – CICA.

Support is there for anyone who requires it to give evidence. You can of course have a supporter with you at court.

Below is a list of websites that contain information they you may find useful.

The Diocesan Safeguarding Team will always listen and assist you to make your referral if needed.

<https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/> 0300 303 3706

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/> Online only

<https://www.suelamberttrust.org/> 01603 622406

<https://www.firstlight.org.uk/our-services/safe-spaces/> 0300 303 1056

<https://nidasnorfolk.co.uk/> 0300 561 0555

<https://napac.org.uk/about/> 0808 801 0331

<https://rapecrisis.org.uk/> 0808 500 2222