



## RESPONDING SENSITIVELY AND EFFECTIVELY TO VICTIM-SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE FROM THE CALD, REFUGEE, ASYLUM-SEEKING AND TEMPORARY VISA HOLDING COMMUNITIES

Sexual assault is a traumatic and potentially devastating life experience. Survivors of sexual violence from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD), migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds as well as those holding temporary visas face many significant and unique challenges when seeking help. Talking about sexual violence can be extremely difficult in some cultural communities where attitudes of shame, victim-blaming and social stigma can all prevent survivors from disclosing their experience and receiving the help and support they deserve. As a professional who works with people from CALD communities, there is a lot you can do to promote a culturally-safe environment and provide trauma-informed support to someone who may have been subjected to sexual violence.

### COMMON OBSTACLES AND BARRIERS

Survivors from CALD, refugee, and asylum-seeking backgrounds and other temporary visa holders face unique challenges, obstacles and barriers when facing the trauma of sexual violence. It is important to be mindful of these issues when supporting a survivor.

Survivors may be afraid of reprisals or revenge from the offender, particularly if they come from the same or similar communities or cultural backgrounds.

There may be a stigma associated with sexual assault, mental health disorders, and talking about sexual matters in

some cultures or religious groups.

**Language barriers** can make it extremely difficult for some survivors to communicate about what has happened to them.

Survivors may be concerned that they might know the **Interpreter**, that the Interpreter might know the alleged perpetrator and/or that what they say might not be translated accurately or kept confidential.

Some survivors may not know about their **legal rights** within the Australian legal system and may be **unaware of the resources** available to help them.

Some survivors could be extremely reluctant to disclose sexual assault to Australian police due to a general **distrust of authorities**.

Refugee and asylum-seeking survivors of sexual assault and those who are holding temporary visas may be **afraid of being arrested, deported, or having any immigration case negatively impacted**.

The survivor also may be fearful if the offender is a member of their family and/or if they are dependent on the offender (for example, if they are on a spousal visa).

It is important that the survivor discusses their concerns with a specialist legal service as options are available under these circumstances.

Psychological issues from **previous and/or current trauma** may make it extremely challenging for the survivor to disclose, talk about and seek professional support.

Some survivors may **want to forget any trauma** they experienced before arriving in Australia and wish to have a "fresh start" completely. However, obtaining help and support may actually be the most effective way to achieve a fresh start.

### BE CULTURALLY SAFE AND TRAUMA-INFORMED

**Culturally-aware and trauma-informed attitudes and practices will help create an environment where the survivor will feel more comfortable to talk with you.**

Culturally safe practices are actions and attitudes which recognise and respect the cultural identities of others, and safely meets their rights, expectations and their needs. Being trauma-informed is promoting trauma recovery and resilience, being client-centred and strengths-focused, restoring safety, dignity and value and enhancing the survivor's agency and control.

### RESPONDING EFFECTIVELY AND SENSITIVELY

**The way you respond to a disclosure of sexual assault is an essential first step in stopping the abuse and/or preventing further harm to the person. It is also an important first step in the survivor's healing and recovery from the trauma.**

**You can respond sensitively and helpfully to the survivor by**

**Providing a quiet, private space for them to talk with you.**

Being aware of any unconscious bias you may have towards cultural groups and practices and ensuring that this does not interfere with your ability to provide support.

- Listening carefully to what they are saying and not interrupting.
- Letting them know that you believe them. Making it clear that whatever has happened is not their fault.
- Reassuring them that they did the right thing in telling you and that you are glad they told you. Being mindful that the survivor may be very frightened.
- Doing everything possible to comfort and reassure them.
- Not making promises that you are not sure you can keep.
- Thanking them for their courage and trust.

#### It is important not to

- Ask for details of the abuse and conduct your own investigation.
- Discuss what they have told you with others who are not involved with helping them.
- Make value judgements about the client, culture, or cultural practices you may not agree with.

### HOW OTHER PEOPLE MIGHT REACT

**It is important to remind the survivor that no matter how another person reacts, they have been the victim of a serious crime; they deserve to be treated with respect and consideration, and above all, that they are not to blame, the offender is.**



## REPORTING SEXUAL ASSAULT OF ADULT SURVIVORS FROM CALD, REFUGEE OR ASYLUM-SEEKING BACKGROUNDS

Reporting sexual violence involving a person from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background requires sensitivity and care.

**Reporting the abuse is the survivor's decision and only they can decide what is best for them.**

You can best support the survivor by respecting them, providing them with information and options and supporting their choices.

### PRACTICAL STEPS

If the survivor decides that they want to report the crime, by following these steps you can help the survivor receive the support and justice they deserve while respecting their cultural background.

### ASSESS FOR IMMEDIATE DANGER, ENSURE SAFETY AND PROVIDE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

To find out if the survivor is feeling safe ask

- Are you safe from further contact with the offender?
- Do you feel safe at home?
- Is there anything you need to change in order to feel and be safe?

If they are not safe and/or are not feeling safe, it is important to work out what needs happen for them to be safe.

**If the person is in immediate danger, call emergency services on 000 in Australia.**

Ensure they are now in a safe place. Offer the survivor emotional support and reassure them that they are not alone and help is available.

### TO MAKE A REPORT

**Contact An Appropriate Support Service and/or the Police**

It may be helpful to obtain the advice, guidance and support from a specialised sexual assault service, such as the **NSW Sexual Violence Helpline** (Phone 1800 424 017), prior to contacting the Police.

Contact the local police to report the assault.

**Use Interpreters and/or Translators if Needed**

It is imperative to ensure that any language barriers are addressed.

Contact a professional interpreting service to facilitate communication if needed. The **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National – phone 131 450)** can provide immediate interpreting services.

Avoid using family members or friends as interpreters to maintain confidentiality and accuracy.

### Consult Cultural Liaison Officers

With the survivor's consent, consult with cultural liaison officers or community leaders who can provide you with relevant cultural context and extra support for the survivor.

### Ensure Medical Assistance if Needed

Ensure the survivor receives medical care (with their consent). Sexual Assault Services can provide medical and psychological support.

Try to find counsellors and/or support services who have experience working with CALD and/or refugee and asylum-seeking communities and are sensitive to cultural issues. Some options are included here -

**The Asylum Seekers Centre**  
Phone (02) 9078 1900

**The NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors - STARTTS** - Phone (02) 9646 6700

**Settlement Services International - SSI**  
Phone (02) 8799 6700

### Legal Assistance

Assist the survivor to access free legal advice and support through specialist legal services, such as those listed next.

### Legal Aid Domestic Violence Unit

Phone 1800 979 529

**Victims Services NSW** - Phone 1800 633 063

**Immigration Advice and Rights Centre – IARC**  
Phone (02) 8234 0700

**Refugee Advice and Casework Service – RACS**  
Phone (02) 8355 7227.

### MAKING THE REPORT

Provide a detailed account of the assault, including any evidence or witness information. Be mindful to avoid any potential cultural biases.

### FOLLOW UP WITH THE SURVIVOR

Ensure the survivor understands their legal rights and try to maintain communication with the survivor to provide them with ongoing support and updates.

### SEXUAL ASSAULT REPORTING OPTION (NSW)

Another option of reporting in NSW called **Sexual Assault Reporting Option**. This option can be the first step if a survivor is unsure about pursuing a legal case against the perpetrator but would like the police to have the information.



## REPORTING TRAFFICKING

If the person you are assisting is a survivor of trafficking, you can make a report to **The Australian Federal Police via phone on 131 237 or you can use their online reporting tool.**



## IF THE SURVIVOR IS A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON

If the survivor is a child or young person, it is also essential to approach the situation with appropriate developmental awareness and cultural sensitivity.

Provide a safe and caring environment for the child to express their feelings and experiences.

Show empathy and understanding of the child's cultural background and any extra stress they may be facing due to their cultural identity.

Address any potential language barriers. Use clear and simple language to avoid misunderstandings and/or use interpreters if necessary. Ask if you can have an interpreter who is trained in child protection issues.

Be aware of the cultural background and practices of the child and their family to help you in interpreting behaviours and situations accurately and ensuring that your interpretations are

based on facts and not cultural biases.

Understand the child's family structure, including the roles of extended family members, which can be very different in CALD communities.

Build trust with the child and their family by showing respect and understanding of their culture.

Be mindful of the stigma that can be associated with child protection interventions in some cultures. Respect the family's concerns about confidentiality, particularly in tight-knit communities.

Be aware that the family's response to authorities, including child protection authorities, may be significantly affected if they have a history of trauma associated with authorities in their country of origin.

Engage with community leaders, cultural liaison officers and/or organisations that specialise in working with CALD communities who can provide you with insights and support in understanding the child's and family's cultural context.

*While cultural practices should be respected, it's also important to recognise when certain practices may be harmful or abusive.*

### Follow Your Organisation's Mandatory Reporting Policies and Procedures

In preparing to make a notification, be sure to follow your organisation's protocols for reporting and making appropriate documentation.

### Contact the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ)

Contact the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) **Child Protection Helpline** (Phone 132 111 - 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

**TTY Service (for hearing impaired):** 1800 212 936

### Online Reporting

For less urgent concerns, you can also make a report online through the NSW Department of Communities and Justice eReport system.

**Website:** <https://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s>