



# We Are Survivors!

## **A guide for professionals**

working with survivors of sexual assault from culturally & linguistically diverse backgrounds, refugees and asylum-seekers and people holding temporary visas



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# FOREWORD

Welcome to the *We Are Survivors!* series of resources for survivors of sexual assault, childhood sexual abuse, commercial sexual exploitation and other forms of sexual violence. This series of resources has been developed for survivors of sexual violence, their loved ones, and the professionals with whom they may come into contact. These resources have been developed specifically for survivors of sexual violence from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD), migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds and members of the community holding temporary visas.

Sexual assault is a traumatic and potentially devastating life experience for those who have been subjected to it. Survivors of sexual violence from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD), migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds face many significant and unique challenges in order to overcome the trauma and find peace and healing. Just talking about sexual violence can be extremely difficult in some cultural communities where attitudes of shame around sexuality, victim-blaming and fear of social stigma can all serve to prevent victims of sexual crime to disclose their experience and receive the help and support they deserve. These obstacles can be compounded by language limitations if the survivor does not speak English or is not confident in expressing themselves in English which can make reaching out for help or reporting the crime seem all but impossible.

The aim of this Guide is to provide you with important information on the issue of sexual violence, including the issues faced by survivors of sexual violence and how you may be better able to help and support them. As a professional who works with people from CALD communities, there is a lot you can do to promote a safe environment for the people in your care. You are in a unique position to identify and intervene in situations where someone may have been subjected to sexual violence and also to lessen the impact when a survivor has been subjected to sexual abuse.

The information contained in this Guide includes an overview of the different forms of sexual violence, some of the indicators and effects of sexual assault and other forms of sexual violence, how to respond in a helpful way if someone discloses sexual assault to you and how you can assist survivors in taking their first steps towards recovery and healing. The Guide also provides useful information regarding reporting sexual assault and other related legal matters, including resources, services and organisations that can provide you and the survivor with additional support.

Importantly, this Guide provides an overview of some of the barriers that can make it especially difficult for survivors from migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds and their loved ones from seeking and obtaining help and support and how you can work with the survivor to overcome those barriers.

Supporting victims and survivors of trauma can be especially challenging, so this Guide also provides you with important information on how you can look after yourself when looking after others.

This Guide can be used in conjunction with one or more of the other Guides in the *We Are Survivors!* resources.

## CONTENT WARNING

The content addressed in this Guide and other *We Are Survivors!* Guides addresses the topic of sexual violence and may be emotionally distressing and/or triggering to readers. It is recommended that all readers prepare emotionally beforehand.

If you are a survivor of sexual violence you may choose to read this Guide with the support of a trusted support person and/or professional.

If you have been a victim of sexual assault or rape, please allow this Guide to speak directly to you. If you need to take a break from reading this Guide, please feel free to put it down and pick it up at a later time when you are ready again to start reading.

If you would like additional support, a list of support services is provided at the end of this Guide.

## A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

The terms “sexual assault”, “sexual abuse”, “sexual violence”, “sexual exploitation” and “sexual crime” all refer to criminal behaviour that is sexual in nature and the terms are used interchangeably through this series of Guides. Similarly, the terms “victim” and “survivor” are used interchangeably in this Guide (and all Guides in this series) in recognition that sexual assault including sexual exploitation is a victimising crime (i.e., there is a “victim” of the crime) and that those who survive the crime are indeed “survivors” just to have survived. The term victim is also used to honour those who unfortunately did not survive the crime and are no longer with us as a result.

The *We Are Survivors!* Guides have been developed to help and support everyone from all backgrounds and circumstances in their survivor journey.

## OTHER GUIDES IN THE “WE ARE SURVIVORS!” SERIES INCLUDE

*We Are Survivors: Support for Young People Who Have Experienced Sexual Violence from CALD, Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Backgrounds*

*We Are Survivors: Support for LGBTIQ+ Survivors of Sexual Violence from CALD, Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Backgrounds*

*We Are Survivors: Support for Female Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse from CALD, Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Backgrounds*

*We Are Survivors: Support for Male Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse from CALD, Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Backgrounds*

*We Are Survivors: Support for Parents and Carers of Children from CALD, Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Backgrounds Who Have Been Sexually Abused*

*We Are Survivors: Support for Survivors of Commercial Sexual Exploitation from CALD, Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Backgrounds*

*We Are Survivors: Support for Survivors of Sexual Violence in Conflict*

Other resources in the *We Are Survivors!* program include Professional Development training, webinars, panel discussions and Tip Sheets.

For more information and to access these resources, go to [wearesurvivors.online](https://wearesurvivors.online)

# A MESSAGE OF HOPE FROM A FELLOW PROFESSIONAL

Dear Fellow Workers,

The reasons that led us to work in this industry might vary a lot, but we all have one thing in common: this immense empathy and desire to make the world a better place.

Each of us will have different ways of coping with the stories we come across, where hurt and inhumanity is shown in its raw state. It is ok to feel overwhelmed and sad, as these feelings are the ignition to our courage to fight for those who need the most.

At times, we might feel powerless, frustrated and angry... all of this because we deeply care. We wish it had been different. We wish we could have protected that person. And we also wish we could remove that pain from them. It can be a very difficult space to sit in, and remain strong, not feeling ashamed, guilty or responsible for the suffering that exists in the world.

Hearing these stories and providing support also make you resilient, strong and already makes this world a much better place.

My strongest advice is to always look after yourself, watch your feelings, behaviours and especially note when it is time to slow down. Take deep breaths, cry if needed, hug your loved ones and nurture your souls.

It is comforting to know that you, who are reading this guide, share a journey in making this world a more humane place to live.

Take care,

Marina, Asylum Seekers Centre



# INTRODUCTION

*“I was born and raised during a time when child sexual abuse was a taboo subject, especially for young children. It was not spoken openly in public. This is just because the implications of what the family has to go through especially the Mum and child, for example, family breakdown, the child may be (more) traumatised and (might even be) blamed or not believed, plus many more factors. However, things (have) become better nowadays.”*  
(Family Support Specialist, West Africa)

## WHAT IS SEXUAL ASSAULT?

The words “sexual assault” cover a wide range of non-consensual sexual acts or behaviours. Sexual assault describes any unwelcome sexual action or contact that takes place without the express agreement of all the persons involved. It is an infringement on the victim’s personal boundaries and can have serious, long-lasting negative effects on their physical, emotional, and mental health.

Sexual assault typically involves the abuse of power, strength and/or authority, where one person takes advantage of their position of authority or influence over another person to engage another person in sexual activity. Sexual assault may happen in a variety of settings, such as close relationships, families, and social systems.

Sexual assault is a crime, a serious human rights violation and is never – *under any circumstance* – permitted.

**The perpetrator of sexual assault commits a serious crime and violates a person’s basic human rights.**

## CONSENT

Giving consent (permission or agreement) is an essential part of sexual relationships. When one person has sexual relations with another person, without that person’s *free and informed* consent, it is called sexual assault. Consent must be continuous and ongoing, which means that people are free to change their minds at any time during a sexual interaction. If a person persists in the sexual activity after the other has stopped giving their consent it is also sexual assault.

There are a number of different types of sexual assault. Some of these include *rape*, which refers to forced sexual penetration, frequently through oral, anal, or vaginal sex. Coercing (or pressuring or manipulating) someone into engaging in sexual activity against their will is known as *sexual coercion* and is also a form of sexual assault. Unwanted touching or fondling refers to situations when someone touches a private area of the victim’s body without their consent / permission. This may also be referred to as *indecent assault*. *Sexual harassment* refers to unwanted sexual advances, remarks, or actions. In addition to the above, sexual assault also refers to situations when someone is incapable of providing informed consent because they are a child (see below), intoxicated, unconscious, or otherwise incapacitated.

In most countries, sexual assault is illegal. However, different countries and jurisdictions have different legal definitions of sexual assault as well as different cultural attitudes in relation to sexual assault. In this Guide, definitions and key concepts will be based on Australian legislation.

## **CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

Child sexual abuse is defined as any sexual behaviour that takes place between an adult or older person and a child under the legal age of consent. The age of consent means the age at which a person is deemed legally to be mature enough to agree to sexual activity. The age of consent varies from country to country but in Australia it is 16 years for both males and females. Children under this age cannot properly offer informed consent because of their limited life experience and knowledge, which prevents them from fully understanding the sexual activity and its ramifications. Child sexual abuse occurs on a continuum and can involve a range of activities including:

- Grooming for the purposes of sexual abuse.
- Forcing a child to look at pictures of sexual acts.
- Touching a child's body or genitals or getting the child to touch theirs.
- Making threats or blackmailing a child to force them to take part in sexual abuse.
- Coercing a child to pose, undress or perform sexual acts in photos, videos or in person.
- Voyeurism.
- Exhibitionism.
- Oral sex.
- Penetration of the vagina or anal cavity with a penis, finger, or other object.

## **ONLINE SEXUAL ABUSE**

Online sexual abuse is the use of digital communication platforms or the internet for the exploitation, coercion, harassment, or grooming of children and/or young people for sexual purposes. It can be perpetrated by adults or other young people who have the intention of abusing or sexually abusing the other person. Some common examples of online sexual abuse include:

### **Grooming**

Grooming refers to situations where the perpetrator gradually establishes an emotional and trusting relationship with the child or young person with the goal of sexually abusing them.

Social media, messaging apps, online gaming sites, and other digital platforms can be used by offenders to build rapport with potential victims, trick or pressure them into having sex, or convince them to post graphic photos or videos.

### **Sextortion**

Sextortion occurs when the perpetrator forces or manipulates the victim—by threats of exposure, humiliation, or physical harm—to provide sexually explicit photos or videos of themselves. They might say to the victim “If you don't do what I tell you to do, I am going to share the nude photos you gave me with your parents and your school”.

## **Online Sexual Bullying and Harassment**

Perpetrators can use social media, online forums, or messaging applications, to send sexually explicit comments or photos, unwelcome advances, or threats of sexual violence to the victim. Online sexual bullying and harassment can result in significant psychological and emotional suffering for the victims.

## **Distribution of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)**

Sharing photographs or videos showing the sexual exploitation or abuse of children and young people are also examples of online sexual abuse.

## **Sexual Solicitation**

Sometimes adults pose as children or young people to trick victims into believing they are communicating with someone their own age or in their own age group. When perpetrators do this, they gain the victim's trust and eventually ask them to engage in sexual activities. Offenders can use chat rooms, dating apps, or social media sites to do this.

## **Online Enticement**

Sometimes perpetrators will attempt to lure children or young people into meeting them in person for sex. They might gain the trust of the child or young person by pretending to be a "good friend", or they may use other tricks and forms of manipulation, such as offering them money to meet with them

in person.

## **Production of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)**

The production of child pornography is another form of online sexual abuse and occurs when offenders threaten, manipulate, pressure, or force a child or young person into creating sexually explicit photos or videos of themselves.

## **SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

The act of exploiting another person by making them perform sexual services for money or other gain is known as *commercial sexual exploitation*. It usually involves the offender using force, manipulation, coercion or deception to engage the young person into sexual activity in exchange for money or other benefits. Sexual exploitation can occur in person or online and it can include prostitution, pornography and trafficking. "Trafficking" refers to the recruiting, transporting, harbouring, or receiving individuals through force, fraud, coercion, or deception for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS

Sexual violence in conflict situations, or “rape as a weapon of war”, describes the intentional and organised use of sexual violence, including rape, as a tactic in armed confrontations or war. In certain circumstances, sexual violence is used as a tactical instrument to further military, political, or social goals rather than being only a regrettable result of the conflict. State actors, rebel organisations, or other armed entities may be the perpetrators.

### HOW COMMON IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

It is difficult to estimate the prevalence of sexual assault and sexual violence due to the underreporting of sexual crimes, differing definitions, cultural differences, as well as differences in data collection methods. Sexual assault is a greatly underreported crime, and many victims do not report what has happened to them due to societal stigma, fear of reprisals, and distrust of the authorities and/or legal system. As a result, it is most likely that reported figures reflect only a small proportion of the true incidence of the crime and so all reported figures should be interpreted with this factor in mind.

Nonetheless, a number of research-based and international organisations have sought to estimate the prevalence of sexual assault and sexual violence globally. For example, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that approximately one in three women worldwide have, at some point in their lives, suffered intimate relationship abuse (either physical or sexual) or non-partner sexual violence. Similarly, according to a United Nations (UN) Women report, over 35% of women globally have been victims of intimate relationship violence, which includes both physical and sexual abuse, as well as non-partner sexual violence. It is generally recognised that sexual violence rates are higher in conflict/war zones and places with significant levels of gender inequality and that ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ persons, those with disabilities and other marginalised populations are more vulnerable to sexual assault.

### HOW COMMON IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE?

***“Child sexual abuse is a widespread problem, I believe it’s difficult to determine and not many cases are reported even in western society...let alone in third world societies” (Family Support Specialist, West Africa).***

Research on the incidence of sexual violence committed against teenagers and children has revealed that it is a serious issue everywhere around the world. The 2017 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse estimated that in Australia one in three girls and one in seven boys will experience some form of child sexual abuse in their lifetime. A number of meta-analyses of studies of adults from countries and cultures all over the world have revealed that 10 – 20% of female children and 5-10% of male children have experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18 years, with their experiences ranging from unwanted sexual touching to rape (for example, Barth et al, 2013; Pereda, et al, 2009; and Stoltenborgh et al, 2011).

Nevertheless, it remains difficult to obtain exact information regarding the prevalence of sexual violence committed against children and young people due to the fact that many victims of sexual crime don’t report it due to shame, fear, distrust of the police or other authorities and/or the legal system. There can be differences in definitions, cultural beliefs and practices, as well as differences in data collection methods, all of which can make it difficult to know the exact numbers of people who experience sexual violence. It is therefore most likely that reported figures reflect only a small proportion of the true prevalence of sexual violence against children and young people.

## **WHO ARE THE 'VICTIMS' OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE?**

People of any gender, age, social background or racial origin may be victims of sexual violence. While females are more likely than males to be victims of sexual assault, it is important to be aware that males may be victims of sexual assault as well. It is critical to recognise and respond to all survivors of sexual violence regardless of their gender. Adolescents and children are also vulnerable to sexual assault, which may occur in institutions, homes, and schools amongst other places. Child trafficking and sexual exploitation are major issues on a global scale.

As previously noted, LGBTIQ+ persons, people with disabilities, refugees, and ethnic minorities may be particularly vulnerable to sexual violence. Sexual assault may also be used as a weapon of war and people's vulnerability to sexual assault may be exacerbated in conflict/war environments due to displacement and the disintegration of social systems.

## **WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE?**

Sexual offenders can come from a variety of backgrounds and may include spouses, romantic partners, members of the victim's immediate or extended family, friends or acquaintances, or a person/s previously unknown to the victim (i.e., "stranger").

Perpetrators may include people in positions of authority and/or power such as teachers, bosses, religious leaders, and community leaders amongst others. Sexual offenders may also include members of gangs or other organisations, human traffickers and personnel in military and paramilitary forces.

## **ISSUES COMMONLY FACED BY SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE FROM CALD, MIGRANT AND REFUGEE AND ASYLUM-SEEKING BACKGROUNDS AND OTHERS HOLDING TEMPORARY VISAS**

Victims of sexual assault from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD), migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds and others holding temporary visas in Australia face many unique challenges and obstacles when dealing with the trauma of sexual assault. For example, victims of sexual violence may be reluctant to talk about what has happened to them or to ask for assistance due to cultural sensitivities and taboos around issues concerning sexuality. It may be especially difficult for victims to disclose or report their experience due to a fear of being socially stigmatised, feelings of shame and embarrassment, and the potential of negative consequences for them and/or their family. Some survivors of sexual violence from CALD and migrant backgrounds may also be afraid of reprisals from the offender or other community members, especially if the perpetrator is well-known to them or within their cultural community.

In addition, survivors of sexual violence from CALD backgrounds may face immense difficulties reporting their experience or obtaining support from helpful services due to language limitations. Language difficulties can also make communication with police and medical practitioners extremely challenging. Survivors from CALD backgrounds may also find it difficult to obtain medical attention, counselling, legal assistance, and other support services due to their lack of knowledge about the resources that are available in Australia. All of these obstacles may be further

compounded by financial constraints and geographical and/or transportation issues making access to services even more challenging.

Survivors of sexual violence who are holding temporary visas may be extremely reluctant to report the abuse or to access medical attention due to a mistrust of the authorities, fear of deportation or fear that “rocking the boat” by bringing the crime to the attention of the authorities will have a negative impact on their application for residency. Similarly, survivors of sexual violence from intimate partners or family member who are dependent on a partner (or similar) visa may fear the withdrawal of that person’s support for their visa application if they disclose the sexual abuse. Sadly, these survivors may be totally unaware of their legal rights in Australia. *It is important to be aware that the Australian government makes special provision for people in these circumstances.*

***All victims of crime have legal protections regardless of their immigration status.***

## **QUESTIONS PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE MAY HAVE**

As a professional working with people from CALD, migrant, refugee and/or asylum-seeking backgrounds, you may have some questions regarding sexual violence within culturally diverse communities.

Some questions commonly asked by professionals include the following:

### **Does sexual violence only occur in Western countries and cultures?**

Sexual violence in all its forms occurs in countries and cultures across the world.

### **Is sexual violence only committed against people from poor or lower socio-economic backgrounds?**

Sexual violence is committed against people from all backgrounds, regardless of age, occupation, education, religion or geographic location.

### **Is sexual violence only committed against females?**

Sexual assault and abuse happens to both males and females.

### **Is sexual violence only committed by males?**

Sexual assault and other forms of violence can be committed by females as well as males. Both males and females can be the victims of sexual abuse by females.

### **Is engaging children in sexual activity morally or legally accepted in some cultures?**

Engaging children in sexual activity is illegal and considered morally wrong in cultures all around the world. Children lack the necessary information and maturity to make an informed decision about sexual activities with an older person. They do not have adult knowledge of sex and sexual relationships, or the social meaning of sexuality and its potential consequences.

Regardless of culture, adults intuitively know that engaging children in sexual activity is wrong – that is why offenders go to great lengths to ensure their behaviour is undetected and why they use a variety of coercive means to stop the child from telling anyone about the abuse.

### **Do victims make up stories about sexual assault or lie about it to get someone they don't like into trouble?**

Victims rarely lie about sexual assault. In most cases, victims of sexual violence choose not to tell anyone about the crime due to fear and/or feeling ashamed or humiliated by the abuse. Survivors of sexual violence do not voluntarily take on the burden of shame and humiliation or the consequences (such as social isolation and stigmatisation) if they have not actually been abused.

### **Is it mostly teenagers who are sexually abused?**

People of all ages – from babies to adolescents to the elderly, may be victims of sexual assault.

### **Are people most often sexually assaulted by strangers?**

People may be sexually abused by strangers, that is, by someone they don't know. However, victims are most likely to be sexually abused by someone known to them, such as a father, stepfather, relative, family friend, intimate partner, a person in a position of trust or authority or by a casual acquaintance.

### **Are offenders most likely to grow out of it and not do it again?**

Sexual offenders may continue their sexually offending behaviours without assessment and proper treatment.

## **QUESTIONS SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE OFTEN ASK**

There are many questions that survivors of sexual violence may ask themselves in the immediate aftermath of the assault or in the time afterwards. It is crucial to the survivor's healing journey and recovery to be reassured that it is very normal to ask these questions.

Some of the questions survivors of sexual violence often ask include the following:

### **“Why did it happen to me?”**

Many sexual assault survivors think that they must have done something wrong for the offender to target them. Becoming the victim of any crime, particularly an assault, can be an extremely confusing experience. The fact that sexual assault is not openly talked about in most societies can make matters even more confusing for those who have been subjected to it. Survivors of sexual assault frequently question if the perpetrator chose them because of something they did. For example, a survivor might ask “Was I too friendly?”, “Was it the clothes I was wearing?”, “Was I in the wrong place?”.

While these questions are normal for the survivor to ask themselves, it is essential to remember that, regardless of the circumstances, regardless of gender of the perpetrator or the victim, regardless of the age of the victim, sexual violence involves the misuse of power and authority by the perpetrator.

*Sexual assault is never OK and it is never the victim’s fault.*

### **“Why do I feel so alone?”**

Society’s taboo around discussing sexual violence can lead to victims feeling alone and isolated, believing they are the only ones who have experienced this kind of abuse. Sadly, emotions of guilt and embarrassment can keep survivors from talking about their experiences and therefore prevent them from being reassured that they are not alone and that there are people who can help them.

*If you are working with someone who has experienced sexual violence, it is important to reassure them that even though they might feel alone, they are not. There are many other people who have been subjected to sexual assault, and there are people they can talk to and who will understand what they are going through.*

### **“What if I was sexually assaulted by someone I know?”**

Research from around the world shows that most sexual assault is committed by someone the victim knows and should be able to trust. Offenders can include members of the victim’s extended family, such a grandfather, uncle, brother-in-law, or cousin, or members of their immediate family, like a spouse, father, stepfather, or brother. The victim may also know the offender through other ways, such as being a family friend, neighbour, teacher, or youth worker, for example.

A survivor might have experienced a wide range of emotions if they were the victim of sexual violence by a person they know. The betrayal of the perpetrator may have left the survivor feeling extremely confused. It is possible that they felt “dirty,” humiliated, or embarrassed about having sexual behaviour forced on them. It can be considerably more difficult if the abuser was a member of their own family because the survivor may have loved them but wanted the sexual abuse to stop.

It’s possible that the survivor was afraid that no one would believe them if they told anyone about the sexual assault, that they would somehow be held responsible for the abuse, or that people would assume they were to blame for the sexual abuse if they didn’t say “no”.

*These emotions and concerns are all very normal. It is important to remind the survivor that they are not alone, they have done nothing wrong, and that they have no reason to feel guilty or ashamed if they were sexually assaulted by someone they know.*



### **“What if I was sexually assaulted by someone I don’t know?”**

It can be just as confusing and traumatising for someone to be sexually abused by a stranger. If the victim experienced sexual assault by a person they don’t know (i.e., a “stranger”), they may have been reluctant to disclose the incident for fear that they wouldn’t be taken seriously or that they would somehow be blamed for what happened. If it is also possible that they were blamed for the abuse when they did tell someone, if they were unable to tell the abuser “No”, or if they were unable to resist the attack physically.

*No matter who does it, sexual assault is against the law and is a serious crime. It is important to remember that what happened was not the victim’s fault. They have nothing to feel ashamed or embarrassed about and there are people who can help them.*

### **“Is it sexual assault if my husband / spouse forced me to have sex?”**

Yes, it is regarded as sexual assault or marital rape if a husband or wife forces their spouse to have sex against her or his will. An essential component of any sexual activity is consent, and consent before having sex is always necessary, even in married relationships. Any non-consensual sexual behaviour that occurs in a marriage—that is, when one partner forces or coerces the other into performing sexual actions against their will—is considered marital rape.

People have the right to say “No” to any sexual activity at any moment, even while they are married, and consent must be continuous and ongoing. That means, just because a person consented to sexual activity on one occasion it does not mean they consent to it on every other following occasion. Any use of force, manipulation, or intimidation to obtain sex is wrong, and consent can never be assumed

or coerced even in marriage.

### **“Is it sexual assault if I wasn’t forced but I felt pressured to?”**

During a sexual interaction, consent can be withdrawn at any time and should always be given voluntarily. If one partner feels forced or persuaded into performing a sexual act and is not free to refuse, it is sexual assault. Consent should always be informed and given freely. Just because a person doesn’t say “no” doesn’t mean that they don’t consent. In other words, a person cannot assume another person has consented just because they didn’t say “no”. It is essential to recognise that power dynamics, social pressure, or emotional coercion can all prevent someone from expressing their actual feelings or objections. A person must say or do something to communicate consent.

For more information on NSW Consent laws, please see <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/sexual-violence/sexual-consent.html>

### **“What if the offender was a female?”**

Sexual assault is a crime that can be committed by a person of any gender, including women. Sexual assault refers to any act of non-consensual sexual action or contact and is not gender specific. Sexual assault is essentially about the breach of personal boundaries and consent. It is not influenced by the gender of either the victim or the perpetrator.

While evidence suggests that males make up the majority of sex offenders, it is crucial to know that sexual assault committed by female perpetrators causes just as much suffering as sexual abuse perpetrated by male perpetrators.

Whether the victim is male or female, and regardless of the gender of the perpetrator, sexual assault is about the abuse of the victim's trust and the misuse of power by the offender. Recognising and addressing sexual crimes committed by female offenders is necessary to ensure that all victims of sexual violence get the support and acknowledgment they deserve.

### **“Was it my fault?”**

The tendency for victims to blame themselves is one of the most common effects of sexual violence. If the person you are working with experienced sexual violence, they might have blamed themselves for the abuse, particularly if the abuser told them it was their fault, if they were unable to say “No” to the offender, if they were unable to flee the abuser, or if the perpetrator used coercion or other tricks to gain their compliance or trust. It is important to remember that the victim was not to blame for the sexual assault. The perpetrator must bear full responsibility for the abuse.

*Recognising that the victim was not to blame for the abuse is a significant step towards recovery even though the survivor might need to hear this many times from many different sources before they begin to believe it and can start truly healing.*

### **“Why do I feel ashamed about what has happened to me?”**

Shame is another very common effect of sexual assault. This is due, in part, to the taboo and secrecy surrounding sexual violence in many cultures. Many victims of sexual violence find it awkward to discuss because it involves both sexual activity and the intimate areas of the body. Because of this, people who experience sexual assault often believe that something “dirty” has happened to them and that they are somehow “dirty” as a result.

This is a very common response, especially if a culture places great value on sexual purity or virginity before marriage, as victims may feel that they are “damaged goods”, and no-one will want to date or marry them in the future.

However, victims of sexual violence haven't done anything wrong and have nothing to feel guilty, embarrassed or ashamed about. In fact, they can feel strong and courageous that they survived the experience.

# INDICATORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Disclosing sexual violence can be extremely difficult for many survivors especially if English is not their first language or if they don't speak English at all. It is therefore important to be aware of the non-verbal physical, emotional, psychological, and behavioural indicators that an adult or child may have experienced sexual assault.

It is also important to be mindful that not every survivor will have the same symptoms, and others might not even show any obvious indicators. Some survivors of sexual assault may have delayed reactions to the trauma with some symptoms appearing weeks, months, or even years after the attack.

## SOME POTENTIAL INDICATORS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT IN ADULTS

The following is a list of some potential indicators of sexual assault in adults:

- Unexplained bruises or injuries that don't seem to be related, especially near the breasts or genital area.
- Pain, discomfort and/or bleeding in the vaginal or anal area.
- STIs (sexually transmitted infections) or other problems related to reproductive health.
- Tattered or discoloured clothing, especially undergarments.
- Walking or sitting difficulties, particularly if they are accompanied by pain or discomfort.
- Panic attacks, terror, or anxiety.
- Depression, emotional numbing or mood swings.
- Social isolation.
- Erratic behaviours including risk taking.
- Nightmares, intrusive thoughts, or flashbacks associated with the assault.
- Feelings of guilt, shame, or self-blame.
- Inability to build close relationships or trust others.
- Hypervigilance, a persistent sense of unease or fear.
- Memory gaps especially in relation to the abuse/assault.
- Disturbed sleep cycles, nightmares, or insomnia.
- Misuse of substances or dependence on drugs or alcohol as a coping method.
- Changes in appetite, sudden weight gain or loss, and other issues related to eating.
- Avoiding situations, people, or things that could be a reminder of the abuse/assault.
- Self-harm such as cutting or thoughts of suicide.
- Increased anger, rage, or irritation.
- Disturbed relationships with friends, family, or intimate partners.
- Difficulty being assertive or setting limits in interpersonal relationships.
- Fear of intimacy or sexual intimacy.

## SOME COMMON INDICATORS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT AND ABUSE IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Some of the behaviours listed below may be possible indicators of sexual abuse of children and young people.

Any one of the following signs could indicate that there has been sexual abuse. However, it is important to keep in mind that the behaviour could be indicative of another problem. Usually more than one indicator of sexual violence is evident and often accompanied by a sudden change in behaviour. Whatever has caused the sudden change in behaviour should be explored.

#### **General Behavioural Indicators:**

- sudden reluctance to go someplace or be with someone.
- inappropriate displays of affection.
- sexual acting out.
- discomfort or rejection of typical family affection.
- sleep problems, including: insomnia, nightmares, refusal to sleep alone or suddenly insisting on a night light.
- extreme clinginess or other signs of fearfulness.
- a sudden change in personality.
- bizarre or unusual sophistication pertaining to sexual behaviour or knowledge, including sexual acting out.
- disclosure of sexual assault.

#### **Other Behavioural Indicators:**

- fatigue due to sleep disturbances.
- sudden weight change.
- cuts or sores made on the arm (self-mutilation).
- recurring physical ailments.
- difficulty in walking or sitting.
- unusual or excessive itching in the genital or anal area due to infection(s).
- torn, stained or bloody underwear.
- sexually transmitted disease(s) especially in pre-teens.
- Pregnancy.
- injuries to the mouth, genital or anal areas (e.g. bruising, swelling, sores, infection).

#### **Behavioural Indicators in a Young Child may include:**

- sad, cries often, unduly anxious.
- short attention span.
- inserts objects into the vagina or rectum.
- change or loss of appetite.
- sleep disturbances, nightmares.
- excessively dependent.
- fear of home or a specific place, excessive fear of men or women, lacks trust in others.
- regressive behaviours, including: thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, infantile behaviours or other signs of dependency.
- age-inappropriate sexual play with toys, self, others (e.g. replication of explicit sexual acts).
- age-inappropriate, sexually explicit drawings and/or descriptions.
- sudden use of sexual terms or new names for body parts.
- bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual knowledge.

- reverts to bedwetting/soiling.
- disclosure of sexual assault by parent or guardian.

**Behavioural Indicators in an Older Child or Young Person may include:**

- problems in school.
- unwilling to participate in or change clothing for gym class at school.
- sudden lack of interest in friends or activities.
- fearful or startled response to touching.
- overwhelming interest in sexual activities.
- hostility toward authority figures.
- fire-setting.
- need for constant companionship.
- regressive communication patterns (e.g., speaking childishly).
- academic difficulties or performance suddenly deteriorates.
- truancy and/or running away from home.
- wears provocative clothing or wears layers of clothing to hide bruises (e.g., keeps jacket on in class).
- recurrent physical complaints that are without physiological basis (e.g. abdominal pains, headache, nausea).
- lack of trust in others.
- unable to “have fun” with others.
- suicide attempts.
- drug/alcohol misuse.
- dramatic behavioural changes, sudden non-participation in activities.
- poor peer relationships, self-image.
- overall poor self-care.
- dramatic behavioural changes, sudden non-participation in activities.
- poor peer relationships, self-image.
- overall poor self-care.
- poor personal hygiene.
- Promiscuity.
- sexual acting out in a variety of ways.
- disclosure of sexual assault by parent or guardian.

# THE EFFECTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

*“An example of an enormous impact on the client’s family ... is that (my) client’s Mum mentioned, ‘I could not make a safe space for my child. I am completely not a good mum.’ So, (the) family and community were also victims. It had a huge emotional impact on (the) family and community.” (Family Support Worker, Bangladeshi Community)*

Sexual violence teaches the victim a number of falsehoods that have a direct relationship with many effects of the crime. Sexual abuse teaches the victim that

- they have no right to control access to their own body and that they have no right to privacy.
- they must have deserved the abuse and they should therefore put up with the abuse.
- they must service the needs of others, even when it is harmful to themselves.
- they are responsible for the abuse because they did not prevent or stop the abuse and they are therefore a ‘bad’ person.
- attention / affection equates with sexual exploitation.
- they are a dirty, bad, hopeless, useless and a bad person.

In summary, the effects of sexual assault may include depression and withdrawal, feelings of shame and guilt, anger and hostility, running away, suicide attempts and self-mutilation, promiscuity, drug and/or alcohol abuse, and extremely sexualised behaviour. Other effects of sexual abuse may include low self-esteem, ‘blocking out’ of feelings, dissociation (feelings of separation of the mind from the body), problems with intimacy and trust, body hatred, flashbacks, eating disorders, phobias, panic attacks and anxiety, nightmares and sleep disturbances, and sexual problems.

*While the effects of sexual violence have the potential to be extraordinarily damaging, appropriate and sensitive early intervention can markedly reduce the negative impact of the crime.*

## COMMON REACTIONS TO TRAUMA AND THE EFFECTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Responses to the trauma of sexual violence will be unique to every survivor. It is possible that the survivor will have some intense physical, psychological and/or emotional reactions. Their reactions might be immediate or they might take a while to happen. They might also suddenly emerge at unexpected times. Every person is different and there is no right or wrong way for a person to react, or not react, to the trauma of sexual violence.

*Always remember, even if it takes some time, hope, healing and recovery are possible for all survivors.*

Some of the physical reactions to trauma are listed below, as well as some of the common thoughts, feelings and behaviours that might occur in response to the trauma of sexual assault (*from SARC – Care Package for Survivors*).

## **Physical**

Constipation

Diarrhoea

Dry mouth

Exhaustion

Dizziness

Headaches

Loss of appetite

Muscle tension

Other pains

Rapid heartbeat

Sweating

Tight chest

## **Thoughts**

Confusion

Difficulty concentrating

Flashbacks

Intrusive memories

Nightmares

Poor memory

“It was my fault”

“I should have done more”

“I’m going crazy”

“I’ll never be the same”

“Nobody will ever love me now”

## **Feelings**

Hopelessness

Fear

Aloneness

Anger

Anxiety

Alienation

Shame

Detachment

Depression

Emptiness

Guilt

Hurt

Inadequacy

Insecurity

Irritability

No confidence

Numbness

Self-blame

## **Behaviours**

Avoiding people/places

Being impulsive

Changes to eating

Drinking/smoking/using drugs

Easily startled

Lack of interest in things

Nail-biting

Neglecting care of yourself



Self-harming

Socially withdrawing

Hyper-alertness

A person's behaviours may change as a result of the sexual trauma. Changes in behaviour are a common response to trauma. While those are very normal, it can be quite helpful for the survivor to understand the feelings and ideas that may be leading to their behaviours.

## **HELPFUL QUESTIONS FOR SURVIVORS TO CONSIDER**

It can be helpful to encourage the survivor to ask themselves the following questions to help them understand their behaviours and also to decide if they might benefit from additional help and support.

*What are the behaviours (both positive and negative) that I find myself engaging in?*

*What emotions and thoughts are underlying these actions?*

*What positive or negative consequences are or will result from these actions?*

*Do I find these behaviours beneficial or detrimental?*

*Do I want to change these behaviours?*

## **POST TRAUMATIC STRESS (PTS)**

The range of emotions and behaviours that people may experience following a traumatic event is sometimes referred to as post-traumatic stress. Sometimes this is referred to as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), however, more recently it has been recognised that the issues experienced by victims/survivors of trauma are a normal response to trauma and therefore the term "disorder" is counterproductive and not helpful.

Post Traumatic Stress responses may include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Distressing flashbacks, nightmares, and persistent and/or intrusive memories of the incident  
Refraining from talking about the painful incident and avoiding people, places, and activities that might bring the trauma back to mind.
- Being so "on edge" that it interferes with the ability to focus and fall asleep.
- Being constantly on edge, aware and/or "hyper-vigilant".
- Taking more and/or greater risks than normal.
- Being hyper-critical of oneself.
- Feeling "cut off" from others.
- Having intense emotions and ruminating thoughts.
- Losing interest in routine activities.

## **COMPLEX POST TRAUMATIC STRESS (C-PTS)**

Complex Post-Traumatic Stress (C-PTS) is a condition that can arise from prolonged or repeated exposure to traumatic events, especially those from which escape is difficult or impossible. It is distinguished from PTS because of the chronic nature and severity of the trauma experienced including long-term abuse, domestic violence, torture, captivity, or trafficking.

### **Symptoms of C-PTS:**

The symptoms of C-PTS can be extensive and multifaceted and often affect many areas of a survivor's life.

### **Re-experiencing the Trauma:**

**Flashbacks:** Reliving the traumatic event as if it's happening again.

**Nightmares:** Disturbing dreams related to the trauma.

**Intrusive Memories:** Unwanted and distressing memories of the traumatic events.

### **Avoidance and Numbing:**

**Avoidance:** Avoiding thoughts, feelings, places, and people associated with the trauma.

**Emotional Numbing:** Feeling detached from others, experiencing a lack of interest in activities, and having difficulty experiencing positive emotions.

### **Hyperarousal and Reactivity:**

**Hypervigilance:** Being excessively alert and on guard for potential danger.

**Startle Response:** Being easily startled or jumpy.

**Irritability:** Frequent irritability or outbursts of anger.

**Sleep Disturbances:** Trouble falling or staying asleep.

### **Negative Self-Perception:**

**Shame and Guilt:** Intense feelings of shame or guilt, often related to the trauma.

**Self-Blame:** Blaming oneself for the trauma or its consequences.

**Low Self-Esteem:** Chronic feelings of worthlessness or inadequacy.

### **Difficulty with Emotional Regulation:**

**Emotional Dysregulation:** Difficulty managing emotions, leading to intense and unpredictable emotional responses.

**Difficulty Controlling Anger:** Frequent and intense anger that may be difficult to control.

**Self-Destructive Behaviours:** Engaging in risky or harmful behaviours as a way to cope with emotional pain.

### **Interpersonal Problems:**

**Difficulty Trusting Others:** Finding it hard to trust people, leading to isolation or strained relationships.

**Attachment Issues:** Problems with forming and maintaining healthy relationships, either by becoming overly dependent or by avoiding closeness.

**Altered Perceptions:**

**Dis dissociation:** Feeling detached from reality, having out-of-body experiences, or feeling disconnected from oneself.

**Altered Beliefs:** Developing negative beliefs about oneself, others, or the world, often feeling that the world is a dangerous place.

## **SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE FROM REFUGEE AND ASYLUM-SEEKING BACKGROUNDS**

For survivors of sexual violence from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds, it is important to be aware that symptoms of PTSD and C-PTSD alone usually don't account fully for a survivor's expression of trauma. It is likely that the effects of the sexual violence have been, or are being, compounded by the stresses of factors such as the demands of resettlement and/or the protection-seeking process.

### **TRAUMA TRIGGERS**

Survivors of sexual assault may experience "trauma triggers" in relation to the crime. A trauma trigger can be anything that elicits a reaction to the survivor's traumatic experience. It can cause extreme anxiety as well as other emotions previously discussed. Trauma triggers are very personal. For survivors of sexual violence, the trauma trigger may be specifically in relation to the sexual violence, (such as seeing the perpetrator) or something that reminds them of the perpetrator. For people from refugee or asylum-seeking backgrounds it may be, for example, something that reminds them of previous experiences of organised violence and persecution.

Trauma triggers that have commonly been identified by people from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds can include things such as:

Bright lights

Shutting blinds

Certain sounds or smells

Loud noises

Confined spaces

Closed doors

Unfamiliar places

Misgendering

Assumptions about being heteronormative

Authority figures

Uniforms

People writing things down

Questioning

(STARTTS, 2024)

## **LONG TERM PHYSICAL AND HEALTH CONSEQUENCES**

Numerous common medical conditions such as headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, and neck discomfort, might be brought on by the trauma of sexual assault. Other symptoms might include aches and pains that have no other explanation. In addition, some chronic illnesses have also been linked to unresolved trauma, such as chronic lung and heart disorders, liver disease, viral hepatitis, liver cancer, autoimmune diseases, and sexually transmitted infections.

The symptoms associated with unresolved trauma can vary widely and are frequently difficult for medical professionals to explain. When trauma survivors see “trauma-informed” healthcare providers, who are knowledgeable about trauma-related issues and treat their patients with respect, cooperation, and support, they tend to have more positive experiences and outcomes.

It is therefore imperative that survivors of sexual violence receive help and support from someone who is “trauma-informed”.

## **ISSUES SURVIVORS MAY FACE REGARDING SEXUALITY AND INTIMACY**

If someone has been subjected to sexual assault or abuse they may find themselves struggling with intimacy and sex. This is a perfectly normal and understandable reaction to a sexual trauma. While some people may experience problems immediately following the abuse or assault, for others it might occur weeks, months, or even years after the trauma. It is important that the survivor is patient and kind with themselves, all aspects of healing from sexual assault can take time.

The following is a list of some of the most typical issues faced by victims of sexual assault or abuse in relation to sex and intimacy:

- Avoiding or feeling afraid of having sex.
- Viewing having sex as a duty.
- Feeling angry, disgusted, or guilty when touched.
- Finding it difficult to become aroused or to feel sensation.
- Feeling emotionally detached or absent during sex.
- Experiencing intrusive or upsetting sexual thoughts and images.

The following symptoms may also be present:

- \*vaginal pain or orgasmic difficulties.
- \*obsessive or improper sexual behaviour..
- \*difficulties establishing or sustaining an intimate connection
- \*erectile or ejaculatory dysfunction (for males).

The survivor's beliefs and attitudes around sex may have changed as a result of the sexual assault. If the survivor expresses struggles in this area, it may be helpful to remind them that healthy sex is not involved in sexual trauma. Abusive sex is, and sex is *not*, always abusive.

**Unhealthy sexual attitudes and beliefs that can come about as a result of abuse:**

- Sex is unsafe
- Sex is about satisfying one person
- Sex is addictive
- Sex is uncontrollable
- Sex is essential to be loved

**Healthy sex attitudes and beliefs:**

- Sex is a choice
- Sex is respectful
- Sex is about sharing
- Sex is private
- Sex is safe and intimate

*(SARC – Care Package for Survivors)*

# WHY DON'T SURVIVORS TELL?

*“... in my experiences, it is sad that most victims are unable to disclose their distressing event due to fear, lack of trust or stigma.” (Family Support Worker, Bangladeshi Community)*

Survivors of sexual assault may decide not to tell anyone about what has happened to them for a variety of reasons. Some of these are discussed below.

## THREATS FROM THE PERPETRATOR

The survivor might have been threatened to keep the sexual assault a secret. Sexual assault is a terrorising and sometimes life-threatening crime and any threats made by the perpetrator may be taken very seriously by the victim. It makes sense that they would have kept the abuse to themselves if the perpetrator threatened to harm them or a loved one if they told anybody.

Remember, the abuse they endured was the fault of the perpetrator only; the victim is not to blame in any way, even if they didn't tell anyone about it.

## FEAR OF NOT BEING BELIEVED

Many survivors are afraid that no one will believe them if they disclose that they have experienced sexual assault. In reality, very few people make up stories about being sexually abused. In fact, many victims of sexual assault choose not to report it at all because of the stigma, shame, and embarrassment that frequently accompany sexual crimes. The pain of the abuse itself is compounded when others, particularly those within the survivor's own family, don't believe them. Additionally, when people don't believe a victim's disclosure of sexual assault it can serve to prevent them from taking the risk of telling anybody again.

When survivors report experiencing sexual violence, it is crucial to believe them. If the survivor told someone about the sexual abuse and that person didn't believe them, it might have destroyed their confidence and their trust in people. They may even have made the decision to never tell anyone again. These responses make sense.

*However, it is important to remind the survivor that there are people who will support and believe them if they choose to talk about what has happened to them. It is never too late to talk to someone trustworthy and begin the process of healing.*

## FEAR OF BEING BLAMED FOR THE ABUSE

Self-blame is a common response to sexual assault experienced by both female and male survivors. Survivors may ask themselves what it was about them that attracted the criminal to target them. If they were unable to say “No”, run away, or physically resist the perpetrator, they might blame themselves for the abuse. The self-blame can be exacerbated as a result of being made to feel that way by others. The negative impact on the survivor's self-esteem and self-worth can last a lifetime.

*Remind the survivor that they are not to blame. They haven't done anything wrong, and there is nothing to be embarrassed or ashamed about. The perpetrator alone is responsible for the abuse.*

## **FEAR OF HOW OTHER PEOPLE WILL REACT**

***"In our culture, victims and their families are often hesitant to disclose such incidents, fearing that it may badly impact marriage prospects." (Family Support Worker, Bangladeshi Community)***

The way society responds to victims of sexual assault can vary greatly and is impacted by social, cultural, and personal factors. Some people provide victims of sexual assault with sympathy, compassion, and support. Professionals, advocates, friends, and family can all be incredibly helpful in providing much-needed support to survivors of sexual violence. Sadly, some attitudes that are held towards victims of sexual violence can be extremely damaging and can lead to behaviours that have an adverse effect on their healing process.

Unfortunately, victim-blaming is a common but extremely negative social response to sexual violence. It is not uncommon for victims to be unjustly interrogated about their actions, decisions or clothing (for example), with the implication that they are somehow to blame for the assault. As a result of the shame and stigma, victims of sexual violence may feel isolated and believe that the sexual assault was their fault.

Some survivors have been met with doubt or disbelief when they disclosed sexual assault. Casting doubt on the victim's disclosure can be devastating and can serve to prevent them from talking about what has happened to them with anyone else in the future. Similarly, some survivors' disclosures of sexual assault are minimised or even silenced. For example, a survivor might have been met with the response "Well, that is what happens in marriage and everyone just has to put up with it" or "That is what happens if you dress like that".

*Minimising or discounting survivors' experiences of sexual assault can be extremely harmful and can also serve to discourage them and other survivors from speaking out.*

## **FEAR OF BEING LABELLED HOMOSEXUAL / GAY**

Survivors of sexual assault may be particularly reluctant to disclose to others that they have experienced the abuse, if the crime was committed by a person of the same gender, because of fear that their experience will make them homosexual/gay. This can be made worse by the stigmatisation of homosexuality in many societies.

However, a person's sexual orientation is unrelated to sexual abuse. Sexual assault is about the perpetrator's decision to use sex as a means of exerting dominance and control over another person. If the survivor experienced sexual abuse by someone of the same gender, the assault did not occur because the survivor is gay, nor will it lead to them becoming gay.

If the survivor is worried about these issues, it may be helpful to speak with a qualified and experienced counsellor to get support and reassurance on this issue.

### **"THIS IS OUR SECRET"**

In order to make sure they are not discovered, abusers may specifically instruct the victim to keep the abuse a secret. If the survivor experienced sexual abuse and was told to keep it a secret, it is critical to recognise that the survivor did nothing wrong. It is not too late for the survivor to talk to someone trustworthy about what happened to them and to get the help and support they deserve.

## **FEAR OF NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON VISA STATUS / APPLICATION FOR RESIDENCY**

Many refugees, asylum seekers and temporary visa holders are afraid to talk to the police or other authorities if they have been subjected to sexual violence because they are concerned that it might have a negative impact on their visa application or immigration status. If the survivor is reluctant to report sexual assault for this reason it is important that they discuss the situation with a specialist legal service if they are concerned they, or their family, may be at risk if they report the crime.

*All victims of crime, including victims of sexual violence, have rights and protections under Australian law. There are a number of specialist organisations and agencies that can help and protect them and their loved ones. See the end of this Guide for a list of legal and other specialist organisations that can help.*

If the survivor was sexually abused in their native country by a person in a position of power (such as a police member/s) it can sometimes make it even harder for them to report the crime, based on lack of trust towards law enforcement and the legal system. Please refer to the end of this Guide for helpful suggestions for organisations and agencies that can provide support in relation to this issue.



## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SURVIVORS DO TELL?

Several factors have been shown to play a role in the impact sexual violence will have on the survivor. This includes the response they received when they disclosed the sexual assault.

### NEGATIVE RESPONSES

When the survivor receives a negative response to his or her disclosure the effects of the assault are likely to be exacerbated. A negative response, particularly from a significant person, can cause the survivor to blame him or herself for the abuse, which can lead to many of the negative effects described earlier.

### POSITIVE RESPONSES

On the other hand, when the response the survivor receives is a positive one, the damaging effects of the assault may be mitigated.

*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 in the future. It is also an important first step in the survivor's healing and recovery from the trauma.*

# BEING CULTURALLY SAFE AND TRAUMA-INFORMED

In order for a survivor to feel safe to disclose that they have been subjected to sexual assault or any form of sexual violence, they will need to feel safe to do so. Ensuring that you engage in a way that is both culturally safe and trauma-informed is essential. **Culturally safe practice** refers to actions and attitudes which recognise and respect the cultural identities of others, and safely meets their rights, expectations and their needs. **Trauma-informed practice** refers to an approach to care that actively recognises and responds to the impact of trauma on individuals. Trauma-informed care involves understanding the signs of trauma, creating a safe and supportive environment, and avoiding practices that could re-traumatise the survivor. The aim of trauma-informed care is to provide support that is respectful, compassionate, and individually tailored to the survivor's unique needs to promote their empowerment and healing.

## TIPS FOR PROVIDING A CULTURALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT

To ensure the survivor you are working with is, and feels, culturally safe, it is important to try to have an awareness of the survivor's culture and the socio-political background of their country of origin, if possible.

*Be open, curious, non-judgemental and ready to learn.*

It is important that you

- are aware of your own culture and its impact on your interactions with people and the service you provide.
- acknowledge, challenge and address any of your own attitudes, assumptions, stereotypes, biases and prejudices that may impact on your interactions with the survivor.
- acknowledge and address any unequal power relationship dynamics that might exist.
- engage in an ongoing process of self-reflection and remain accountable for ensuring you always endeavour to be culturally sensitive and undertake culturally safe practices.

## TIPS FOR PROVIDING A TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSE

To be **trauma-informed** is to:

- Promote trauma recovery and resilience.
- Be client-centred and strengths-focused.
- Restore safety, enhance agency and control.
- Empower the survivor to be the driver.
- Restore secure, safe attachments, promote positive connections to others, and enhance a sense of belonging.
- Restore meaning and purpose to life, help to rebuild identity, and promote justice.
- Restore dignity and value.
- Seek to be self-aware, always actively engaging in ongoing self-reflection and learning.

You can create an overall sense of safety for the person you are working with by:

- Greeting the person well by using a calm voice and having open, relaxed body language.
- Taking the time to ease into the conversation and letting the person go at their own pace.
- Showing you are genuinely interested and care by actively listening and by being sincere and respectful.
- Always avoiding misgendering by checking the person's preferred pronouns and always using language that doesn't assume the gender or sexuality of the person or their partner.

**All of these attitudes and practices will increase the sense of safety for the survivor and help create an environment where they will be comfortable to talk with you.** (STARTTS, 2024)

## **RECOGNISING AND MINIMISING POTENTIAL TRAUMA TRIGGERS**

When working with survivors of sexual violence, it is essential to be mindful of the possibility of trauma triggers and to do your best to recognise and minimise any potential trauma triggers. This is true for all survivors of sexual violence but particularly important when supporting survivors from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds who may have additional triggers associated with trauma experienced in their country of origin or while in transit to Australia.

While you may not be able to predict everything that may trigger someone who has been subjected to sexual assault, it is important that you recognise the common triggers in your workplace environment and practices and, as much as possible, take steps to minimise their impact.

Strategies for minimising the risk of potential trauma triggers:

- If possible, meet the survivor at a place where they will feel comfortable and give them as much choice as you can.
- Be as transparent as possible with the survivor. Inform them of what you will be doing in your time together and let them know in advance if you need to alter any plans.
- Use the survivor's preferred pronouns and avoid any misgendering.
- Be as consistent and reliable as possible and try to establish regularity.
- If possible, give the survivor the option of having a trusted person being present.
- Try to make the room less formal and more informal / relaxed.
- Avoid closed-in spaces, barred windows and bright lights.
- Offer the survivor a choice about whether they would prefer the door to the room being open or closed.
- If you need to ask questions, explain why you are asking questions and be sure to ask any questions sensitively in a way that doesn't appear like an interrogation.

(STARTTS, 2024)

## RESPONDING SENSITIVELY TO DISCLOSURES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

***“You have done the right thing to tell what had happened to you, I believe you, it was not your fault.” (Family Support Specialist, West Africa)***

When a person discloses any form of sexual violence it is most likely that they will be feeling scared, guilty, ashamed, angry and/or powerless. Hearing about what the person has been subjected to may result in you feeling some strong emotions. You may feel anger, disgust, distress and sometimes, you may even feel disbelief. No matter what you are feeling, it is important to remember that the way you respond will be extremely important to the recovery of the person disclosing to you. It has taken a lot of trust and courage for the survivor to disclose to you what has happened to them. There are a variety of ways you can respond that will be both sensitive and helpful.

You can respond by:

1. Listening carefully to what the survivor is saying and not interrupting them.
2. Letting the survivor know that you believe them.
3. Making it clear that the sexual violence was not their fault.
4. Reassuring the survivor that they did the right thing in telling you and that you are glad they told you.
5. Being mindful that many abusers threaten their victims to prevent disclosure and that the survivor may be feeling very frightened.
6. Doing everything possible to comfort and reassure the survivor.
7. Not making promises that you are not sure you can keep (for example, “That man will never come near you again”).
8. Thanking the survivor for trusting you and for their courage and in sharing with you what has happened to them.

### IF THE SURVIVOR IS A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON

1. Don't promise confidentiality as you may need to report the abuse to the authorities and/or enlist the support of other professionals to protect the child/young person.
2. Be clear about your role. For example, saying “I am your (teacher/doctor/counsellor) and I will do whatever I can to help make you safe again, but I might need the help of some other people whose job it is to protect children”.
3. Report your concerns to the appropriate authorities.

It is important **not** to:

- Ask for details of the abuse and conduct your own investigation. This is the job of the authorities.
- Discuss what the survivor has told you with others who are not involved with helping them.

## HOW OTHER PEOPLE MIGHT REACT

Sometimes people do not understand how distressing sexual violence is, and it is important to remember no matter how another person reacts, the survivor has been the victim of a serious crime. For instance, some people may not react with the understanding and support that the survivor may expect and deserves. Others may not believe them, they may pretend that it hasn't happened, or they may try to make the survivor do something they don't want to do. They may also feel angry, upset, confused or embarrassed.

*If this happens, remind the survivor that they deserve to be treated with respect and consideration, and above all, that they are not to blame, the offender is.*

# IS THE SURVIVOR SAFE?

*Always call 000 In an Emergency or if the survivor is in Immediate Danger*

## SAFETY FIRST

Being and feeling safe is essential for recovery from sexual assault.

In order to find out if the survivor is feeling safe, it is helpful to ask the following questions:

- 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?

To begin the healing process the survivor will need to establish their safety and sense of safety as the first priority. If the survivor is currently at risk of violence of any kind, get help to establish their safety. If they are not safe or are not feeling safe, it is important to work out what needs happen for them to be safe. A list of specialist support services is provided at the end of this Guide.

## MANDATORY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS IN CASES OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

If you suspect a child is being or has been subjected to sexual violence or if it is a child who has disclosed sexual abuse to you, you may legally be required to notify the authorities of your concerns. Reporting your concerns to the authorities can be the first step in stopping the abuse and protecting the child from further harm in the future. Further information regarding mandatory reporting requirements in NSW can be found at

<https://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/article/What-is-Mandatory-Reporting>

Everybody has a moral and ethical responsibility to take action if they believe a child is being harmed. If you have a suspicion that a child has been, or is being, sexually abused and no-one notifies the authorities the child may be subjected to further sexual abuse. The child is likely to carry the trauma of the abuse into adulthood. In some cases, the child might even die as child abuse can have fatal consequences. Reporting your concerns to the appropriate authorities can also be the first step in enabling the child to access important assistance and support.

## HOW CAN I SUPPORT THE CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON ONCE A REPORT HAS BEEN MADE?

It is likely that the child will feel a range of emotions once their situation has become known to somebody. They may feel relieved that something is going to be done to help them be safe and get the help and support they need. However, they may also feel confused, frightened, guilty and/or ashamed. Your support will be very important during this period.

Here are some things that you may be able to do to support the child or young person during this difficult time:

- Provide a stable, nurturing environment (e.g., in child-care or at school).
- Create predictability by maintaining routines.
- Develop strategies to enhance the child's adjustment.
- Be available if the child wants to talk with you.

- Allow the child to express him or herself naturally through other means such as art and play.
  - Provide support to the child's parents (e.g., positive behaviour management strategies) and information about community resources if requested.
- Preserve the child's positive contacts with safe, significant others (e.g., grandparents).
- Support the child's continued participation in positive activities outside the home.
  - Suggest the child and/or their family consider counselling if they are not already linked in with a supportive service, if requested.

#### **WHAT CAN HELP SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT?**

1. To be believed
2. To be understood
3. To be told "This was not your fault"
4. To have a safe and confidential environment where the survivor can speak openly about his or her feelings
5. To have his or her value as a person reinforced
6. To be reassured that they do not carry the shame of the sexual abuse
7. To build or re-build their self-esteem
8. To get back in contact with his or her feelings
9. To speak out the truth of their lives

#### **Some of the activities other survivors have found helpful are listed below:**

Painting and other forms of art therapy

Music

Dance

Drama

Physical activity or sport such as self-defence, martial arts

Writing and / or reading poetry

Writing a diary

Other forms of creative writing and expression

Spiritual healing

Reading about other people's experiences

Joining a group of other survivors

Talking to a trusted friend or relative

Talking to a counsellor

Reporting the abuse to police

Seeking justice

Assisting others who have been abused

Spending time with animals

## **WHAT IF THE SURVIVOR IS STILL BEING AFFECTED BY THE SEXUAL ABUSE?**

The effects of sexual assault might surface or re-surface at any moment and sometimes unexpectedly. Flashbacks, nightmares, panic attacks, depression, mistrust of men (or women), and other symptoms might arise when the survivor least expects it. The effects of the abuse could arise, for instance, if they have to see the perpetrator, if they start a close, sexual relationship, etc. Seeking therapy and support to help the survivor recover from the trauma they have experienced may be beneficial if the effects of the trauma are having a detrimental impact on their present life.

## **CAN COUNSELLING HELP?**

Some people are hesitant to seek counselling for personal issues. Although there are a number of causes for this, dread of the unknown is probably the most common. For people who generally don't verbally communicate their feelings, it might be particularly intimidating. There may be some stigma attached to counselling in certain cultures and communities, and there may be misconceptions about what counselling entails.

Above all, the purpose of counselling is to help the survivor, and the counsellor's job is to listen to the survivor's worries and emotions. Some people are afraid to attend counselling sessions because they believe they will have to go into great detail about the sexual assault. However, the survivor does not have to discuss anything they don't want to in counselling. Some people worry that their conversations won't be kept private, but counsellors must abide by a stringent code of conduct and keep whatever they are told private (unless there is a risk to the survivor's safety or the safety of others).

*Survivors of sexual assault from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds and survivors holding temporary visas may also be afraid that seeking counselling or attending counselling might have a detrimental impact of their application for residency in Australia. It is important to reassure them that seeking or attending counselling services will not affect a person's application for permanent residency or their visa status. Counselling is a tremendously helpful tool for many people as they work towards healing from abuse. These fears and concerns can be discussed with specialist services such as the Immigration Advice and Rights Centre (IARC).*

If the sexual assault the survivor experienced is having a detrimental effect on their daily life it is a sign that they might need or benefit from professional support. A good starting point might be for the survivor to speak to their doctor about a referral to a specialist support service, psychologist, mental health social worker or counsellor. There are also many organisations that can provide counselling and support. A list of helpful organisations is provided at the end of this Guide.



It is important that the survivor finds a worker who they feel comfortable with. Sometimes it can take several sessions talking with the counsellor before the survivor starts to trust them or begins to feel comfortable. If the survivor does not feel comfortable with their worker, they can try someone different. People working in the trauma area hear trauma stories every day. They are familiar with the many feelings and challenges faced by people who have survived sexual trauma and they won't judge or blame the survivor.

# REPORTING SEXUAL ASSAULT

*Please be aware that the following information is general in nature and is not legal advice.*

Some survivors find a lot of relief in reporting the sexual assault to police and seeking justice through the legal system. For some survivors it is a matter of ensuring there are consequences for the perpetrator and to prevent other potential victims from being subjected to the same abuse. Reporting the crime can be important for the survivor's own safety. Reporting could make sure that mechanisms are put in place to mitigate the risks of them being unsafe again (for example, police can issue an Apprehended Violence Order (AVO) on the victim's behalf), if the perpetrator is known to them.

It is possible for female or male survivors to request women police officers to speak to if this makes them feel more comfortable with reporting. It is also possible for male survivors to request male police officers if this makes them more comfortable with reporting.

However, it is important to know that making an official report to the police is not something a survivor *has* to do. It is completely his or her choice. The justice system is limited in what it can do and it can be an extremely daunting, and at times, insensitive process. Justice may not be delivered in the end, which can be a re-traumatising experience itself. Nevertheless, some survivors find at least reporting to police to be helpful.

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

Another option of reporting in NSW is called **Sexual Assault Reporting Option**. Although it doesn't initiate an investigation and is not a formal report, it creates a record of what occurred and allows the NSW Police Force to gather information on sexual offences and offending. It could 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.

Seeking legal advice from specialist legal services and support from specialist domestic and family violence services for survivors of sexual abuse is critical (see the end of this Guide for a list of some of these specialist services). Many of these organisations can help with developing and implementing a safety plan, providing holistic and trauma-informed care and supporting the survivor to make an informed decision about reporting to police. In an emergency always dial 000.

*You can find a list of counselling, sexual assault, specialist legal services and other related support services in NSW and Australia at the end of this Guide.*

## **CAN A REPORT BE MADE IF THE CRIME HAPPENED IN ANOTHER COUNTRY?**

Investigating and prosecuting sexual assault that happened in another country can be difficult and is dependent on a number of factors, such as the laws of the country where the abuse took place, the laws of the nation the victim is currently residing in (Australia in this case), and any relevant international agreements or conventions.

If a crime has an extraterritorial component—that is, it happened outside of Australia—law enforcement authorities may be able to investigate it. But the specific legal tools available and the prosecutorial power to pursue the perpetrator can differ. Some of the factors that may be taken into account include the following:

**Jurisdiction:** If the offender is an Australian citizen or resident, Australian law permits the prosecution of certain offenses committed overseas. Nevertheless, different laws may have different prerequisites and specifics, and not all crimes may be prosecuted.

**Extradition:** If an applicable extradition treaty or agreement is in effect and the accused offender is found in another nation, Australia may request extradition. Through the legal procedure of extradition, one nation might ask another for the extradition of an individual so they can face charges or serve out their sentence.

**International Agreements:** Australia and other nations may have bilateral or multilateral agreements that promote collaboration in criminal matters, such as the investigation and prosecution of sexual assault cases.

**Time Limits:** Statutes of limitations may impose time limits on if or when a prosecution can begin.

**Victim Support:** Victims of crime, especially those who have been sexually assaulted, can receive help from organisations and support services available in Australia. These services can assist survivors in navigating the judicial system, getting support, and understanding their rights.

If the survivor experienced sexual assault in another country and is now living in Australia, if he or she is considering reporting the crime to the police or other authorities, it is recommended that they contact the police or a specialist legal service about their particular circumstances.

The survivor may wish to have a friend or support person with them, and they may request the assistance of a translator if one is available. Seeking support from organisations that specialise in helping survivors of sexual assault can provide invaluable assistance and guidance.

*You can find a list of some specialist support services at the end of this Guide.*

## **HOW TO MAKE A REPORT TO AUTHORITIES IF THE ABUSE HAPPENED IN AUSTRALIA**

*Please be aware that the following information is general in nature and is not legal advice.*

Reporting sexual assault requires navigating specific processes and procedures and the survivor will most likely need the assistance of organisations that have been created to handle such cases. It is important to know that procedures may differ across states and territories but generally speaking, the process of reporting sexual assault involves the following steps:

### **Seeking Support**

Survivors can obtain support from specialised services or organisations that assist survivors of sexual violence. These organisations can provide counselling, information, and assistance throughout the reporting process. This can happen before or after the report has been made to the police. This may be especially helpful if the survivor chooses to pursue legal action as the legal process can be extremely difficult emotionally. See the end of this Guide for a list of specialist support services.

### **Contacting the Police**

Survivors of sexual assault can report the incidents to the local police. In some cases, specialised units may handle these cases such as the NSW Sex Crimes Squad. Many police offices have access to translators, interpreters and Multicultural Liaison Officers.

**A report can be made in person or in some cases online.**

## **Legal Advice**

It may be helpful to seek legal advice for the survivor to understand all of their rights and options. Legal professionals experienced in handling cases of sexual assault can provide invaluable guidance and advice. See the end of this Guide for a list of specialist legal services.

## **Medical Investigation**

Survivors may decide to go through a medical examination, depending on the situation, in order to record any physical evidence or injuries connected to the crime.

## **Preserving Evidence**

As in cases of recent crimes, it may be crucial for an investigation to save any pertinent evidence, including documents, letters, and personal belongings.

## **Police Investigation**

In order to investigate the crime, the police may speak with the victim, possible witnesses, and the suspected perpetrator.

## **Legal Action**

Legal action may be taken if the police investigation produces enough evidence to warrant charges being laid against the alleged offender. The survivor may have to testify if the case is brought before a judge and/or jury. This can be extremely difficult for survivors— it can even be re-traumatising. For example, some survivors may be required to testify and be cross-examined in front of the perpetrator, whether in person or remotely.

## **Redress and Compensation**

Some survivors may be eligible to apply for victims of crimes financial compensation. You will need to check with a legal advisor or knowledgeable professional to find out which, if any, crimes compensation scheme the survivor may be eligible for, such as Victims Services in NSW.

## **Statutory Limitations**

Statutory constraints might apply to cases of historical sexual assault. In order to give survivors more time to come forward, some countries have eliminated or extended their statutes of limitations.

*It can be extremely beneficial to obtain help from specialist counselling services, support organisations, and other options available to survivors of sexual violence throughout the reporting and legal process. These services can help the survivor to access the many tools available to provide assistance and support, before, during and after the reporting process.*

## **REPORTING TRAFFICKING**

To make a report regarding trafficking, contact the Australian Human Trafficking Hotline or the Australian Federal Police.

## Reporting by Telephone

If the person you are assisting is a survivor of trafficking, the **Australian Human Trafficking Hotline** is a resource for reporting cases of human trafficking. The hotline is open around-the-clock and offers support and information on all matters pertaining to human trafficking. You can report something online via their website or give them a call on **1800 303 597**. Reports concerning trafficking can also be made by phone to the **Australian Federal Police** on **131 237**.

## Making an Online Report

To report cases of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, a number of law enforcement authorities and government organisations provide online reporting tools, such as the e-Safety Commissioner or the Australian Federal Police.

<https://www.afp.gov.au/crimes/human-trafficking-and-people-smuggling/human-trafficking-and-slavery>

## Support Organisations for Survivors of Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation

There are a number of organisations that have been established to assist victims of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. To obtain assistance with reporting issues and find helpful support services, the survivor will benefit from getting in contact with these organisations which can help them with legal issues, therapy, housing, and other types of support. Organisations and services with expertise in immigration support can also offer guidance, advocacy, and help with immigration procedures.

See the list of helpful organisations for survivors of trafficking at the end of this Guide.

## SOME OF THE BARRIERS TO MAKING A REPORT FACED BY SURVIVORS FROM REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKING BACKGROUNDS AND TEMPORARY VISA HOLDERS

*“I know a young woman who fled her country due to being part of the LGBTIQ+ community. She was forced to marry a man in her country of origin but she was homosexual. In Australia, she sought safety and felt that she could start to freely express herself; however, she was then sexually abused by a man. She feared that her visa would be impacted, as her claims were based on her homosexuality, and she was abused by a man. In this case, it was important for her to talk to legal services to seek advice, as being a victim of a crime would not impact her visa application. Being a victim of a crime and reporting it should not impact anyone’s visa application.” (Support Worker, CALD Community)*

Some of the main obstacles survivors from migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking backgrounds and other temporary visa holders may face include:

### FEAR OF RETALIATION

Survivors may be afraid of reprisals or revenge from the offender, particularly if they come from similar communities or cultural backgrounds. If the offender is a member of the same community as the survivor, this concern may be intensified.

## **CULTURAL OR RELIGIOUS STIGMA**

There may be a stigma associated with sexual assault, mental health disorders, and talking about sexual matters in some cultures or religious groups. Survivors may feel reluctant to report the sexual violence out of fear that members of their community will judge them harshly and / or deliberately isolate them or their loved ones.

## **DISTRUST OF AUTHORITIES**

Some survivors may come from countries where the government, legal and/or law enforcement agencies are viewed as corrupt or untrustworthy. Survivors could therefore be extremely reluctant to disclose instances of sexual assault to Australian authorities because of this general distrust of authorities.

## **LANGUAGE CHALLENGES**

If the survivor has limited English language skills it might make it difficult for them to communicate effectively with the police and other support agencies or they may be anxious that they will find it difficult. They might also be afraid of not being understood or the possibility of the details they provide being misinterpreted.

## **LACK OF EXPERIENCE WITH THE AUSTRALIAN LEGAL SYSTEM**

It can be quite difficult to understand court proceedings, legal jargon, and reporting requirements, all of which can make reaching out to make a report and/or get support extremely difficult for any survivor but especially so for survivors from CALD, refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds.

## **FEAR OF BEING DETAINED OR DEPORTED**

The survivor may be afraid to disclose sexual assault because of worries about their immigration status. One major obstacle may be a fear of being arrested, deported, or having their application or case negatively impacted. Some people who are new to Australia also be in fear of returning to a country where they have been sexually abused or raped by a member/s of law enforcement or other officials from that country.

## **LACK OF AWARENESS OF SUPPORT SYSTEMS AVAILABLE IN AUSTRALIA**

Some, perhaps many, survivors from CALD, refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds and those holding temporary visas may be unaware of the resources available to help victims of sexual assault in Australia. This lack of awareness may prevent victims/survivors from accessing the assistance they deserve. It is hoped that this Guide and the We Are Survivors! resources will be a helpful first step for you.

## **CONCERNS ABOUT THE INTERPRETER**

A major fear that some survivors of sexual assault from CALD and non-English-speaking backgrounds is that they might know the Interpreter (they may be from the same community) or that the Interpreter might know the alleged perpetrator. For example, the survivor might be worried that what they say might not be kept confidential. They might also be concerned that what they say might not be translated accurately.

## **CULTURAL INSENSITIVITY**

When interacting with survivors from different backgrounds, some police and support services may not be culturally sensitive or competent. This might make survivors from CALD backgrounds feel mistrustful and reluctant to engage with authorities.

## **PAST TRAUMA AND/OR DIFFICULTIES WITH MENTAL HEALTH**

If the survivor is a refugee or asylum seeker they may have also suffered from previous trauma and possibly mental health issues arising from the past trauma. The psychological obstacles arising from all the trauma they have experienced may make it especially challenging to talk about and disclose the sexual violence they have been subjected to.

## **DESIRE TO FORGET THE PAST AND HAVE A FRESH START**

Some survivors may wish to forget the traumas they experienced before arriving in Australia and have a “fresh start” completely. Unfortunately, the experience of sexual assault is not easily “forgotten” and attempts to bury the memories or experience may result in further and ongoing trauma for the survivor. Obtaining help and support may actually be the most effective way to obtain a fresh start.

***It is essential to let the survivor know that with connections to the right help and support, these barriers can be overcome and they can receive the assistance they need to recover and heal.***

## WHAT ARE THE LEGAL PROCESSES?

*Please be aware that the following information is general in nature and is not legal advice.*

Reporting sexual assault requires navigating specific processes and procedures and you will most likely need the assistance of organisations that have been created to handle such cases.

In Australia, a person is presumed innocent unless proven guilty under the law. When someone is accused of sexual assault, the police may file a charge (or charges) against them. This initiates a court case where the accused is tried for the offense or offenses, judged guilty or not, and punished if found guilty. This process involves the person who experienced the abuse. Even if the victim is the one who has suffered, sexual assault is legally regarded as a crime against the community, which is why the victims/survivors are referred to as “witnesses” in the proceedings. As a result, the victim/survivor does not need to hire their own lawyer because the community prosecutes through the Attorney General. There is no requirement for the victim/survivor to appear in court if the offender pleads guilty.

Since the investigation and judicial processes can be extremely emotionally taxing and even frightening for survivors, it is imperative that they receive complete support throughout the process.

Survivors can get legal advice on the process from Legal Aid (below).

**<https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/my-problem-is-about/my-family-or-relationship/domestic-and-family-violence>**

### AN IMPORTANT NOTE ON THE USE OF INTERPRETERS

In order to effectively communicate with those who do not understand English, using interpreters can be essential in a variety of contexts, such as social services, legal procedures, and healthcare. Using interpreters can, however, lead to a number of problems.

For example, the interpreter’s ability to accurately explain complicated and/or sensitive concepts particularly in relation to sexual violence, their grasp of cultural nuances, and their skill in both languages can all affect how accurate and reliable their interpretation is. Similarly, to effectively portray the cultural background of communication, interpreters must be culturally competent and aware. Interpreters who are not familiar with cultural norms, values, or taboos may cause cultural misunderstandings that result in poor communication and possible offense.

Although interpreters are required to maintain confidentiality and adhere to ethical norms, breaches of confidentiality can still happen, particularly if the interpreter has a personal relationship with the person being interpreted for, or their community. Ensuring confidentiality and privacy is crucial in order to guarantee that the person feels secure and at ease sharing sensitive information and also that they are in fact, kept safe.

Interpreters may occasionally exercise control over the discourse by serving as information gatekeepers. The person’s capacity for open communication may be impacted by this power dynamic, particularly if they are afraid of the interpreter or their community’s reaction. Unfortunately, although interpreters should be objective and unbiased at all times, their interpretations may be influenced by their own prejudices or cultural views. Bias can taint communication’s truth and fairness, especially in legal contexts relating to sexual crimes when objectivity and accuracy are crucial.



## TIPS FOR USING INTERPRETERS

When talking to a survivor about engaging the services of an interpreter it is important to try to exercise the following

- Explain the need for an interpreter in a way that reduces stigma.
- Always ask the person which language they feel most comfortable speaking.
- Be aware of gender issues and avoid any misgendering.
- Always introduce the interpreter and explain their role.
- Emphasise that interpreters are bound by confidentiality and impartiality.
- If possible, request the same interpreter each time you see the person.
- Create opportunities for briefing and debriefing of interpreters who may be affected by the session.

(STARTTS, 2024)

## SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT HAVE RIGHTS

Survivors of sexual violence have rights when seeing a professional support.

Survivors have the right

- To be treated with dignity, respect and understanding.
- To be provided with a safe, confidential place for counselling.
- To make decisions about their own life.
- To have a support person with them if they choose.
- To have access to an interpreter.
- To express themselves without being judged.

## HOPE, HEALING AND RECOVERY ARE POSSIBLE!

Even though recovery from sexual assault is a complex process, it is possible to recover with the right care and support. While survivors of sexual violence are not necessarily “scarred for life”, many survivors who have healed from the abuse say that they were forever changed by it.

*To the supporters of survivors ...*

Even though the journey is filled with many challenges, ups and downs, good days and bad ones, with the right care and support, it is possible to recover from the trauma of sexual violence.

We hope that this Guide has given you and the survivor you are supporting hope that healing and recovery are possible and that you are both feeling better equipped to take the next steps in the healing journey.

***We commend all survivors and their supporters on your strength, courage and resilience and we wish you well in the next stage of this most important journey!***

# TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

## VICARIOUS TRAUMA AND BURNOUT

Working with a person who has been subjected to sexual violence can be demanding and even vicariously traumatising and can leave you vulnerable to burnout.

### VICARIOUS TRAUMA

The term “**vicarious trauma**” refers to second-hand trauma experienced from being exposed to the distress and traumatic stories of others, including survivors of sexual assault. Hearing a survivor’s disclosure of sexual assault or any other form of sexual violence is distressing. It is likely that you will have an emotional reaction in response to the situation, even if you cope amazingly well during disclosure of the actual incident.

From those who are in the early days of their careers to highly experienced workers, *all professionals* who work with people who have experienced trauma are vulnerable to vicarious trauma. It is therefore very important to take care of yourself to minimise the risk of any vicarious trauma you may experience.

### SIGNS OF VICARIOUS TRAUMA

The following signs of vicarious trauma are important to look out for:

- Intense emotional distress.
- Unwanted thoughts related to a client’s story.
- Fear for your safety and/or the safety of your family.
- Feelings of powerlessness to help.
- Changes in beliefs about the world and your trust in humanity.
- Isolating yourself.

Ignoring the signs or “red flags” of vicarious trauma may place you at risk of burnout.

### BURNOUT

“**Burnout**” is the state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion resulting from the interaction of psychological responses to the stressors of daily life and the constant interaction with people in need. Burnout is extremely common and like vicarious trauma, it can be difficult to avoid if you are not mindful of the “red flags” or warning signs.

## **SIGNS OF BURNOUT**

Signs of burnout can include

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Pessimism
- Loss of compassion
- Cynicism
- Antisocial attitude
- Exhaustion
- Lack of motivation
- Boredom
- Feelings of impotence
- A reduction in efficiency

## **BOUNDARIES**

The challenges facing survivors of sexual violence can be even greater if the survivor is from a migrant, refugee or asylum-seeking background. The survivor may not be confident with the English language, they may not be familiar with Australian culture, customs and services and they may have numerous high and complex needs.

Similarly, the survivor may develop unrealistic expectations of what you can do or they might be confused about their relationship with you and what you are realistically able to do to help them. It is also possible that the survivor will have difficulties trusting that your role is to help them based on their (possibly very negative) pre-arrival experiences. In your desire to help the survivor it is important that you establish boundaries for your own wellbeing as well as for the wellbeing of the survivor you are supporting. For example, you might be tempted to give out your personal details or private contact information so that the survivor has someone they can contact in the event of an emergency or personal crisis. While done with the best of intentions, this might result in unforeseen and challenging consequences.

Boundaries are important for both you and the survivor with whom you are working. For survivors, boundaries are essential to create predictability, manage expectations, and create safety and trust. For you as a professional trying to help and support the survivor, boundaries are critical to ensure that you minimise your risk of vicarious trauma and/or burnout. (STARTTS, 2024)

## **SOME HELPFUL TIPS FOR SETTING AND MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES**

The following tips for setting and maintaining boundaries are based on those outlined by the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Trauma and Torture Survivors (STARTTS). These tips may be helpful in your role supporting a survivor of sexual assault, particularly if the survivor is from a migrant, refugee and/or asylum-seeking background:

- Explain simply and clearly the service, your role and its limits, how information will be collected and used, as well as when the survivor can communicate with you.
- Find out the expectations of the survivor and provide any clarifications that may be necessary.

- Set clear limits on what you are able to do and possibly achieve.
- Don't make promises you can't keep.
- Explain what confidentiality is and the limits of confidentiality.
- Address any boundary issues or warning signs as they arise with sensitivity.
- Try not to take it personally if the survivor gets distressed or upset.
- Be sure to reflect and debrief with a supervisor or colleague to help reduce any stress you may be experiencing and get support when you need it.

(STARTTS, 2024)

## **MANAGING YOUR OWN TRIGGERS**

It is very possible that in assisting a survivor of sexual violence (or other trauma) that you experience a situation that triggers your own personal experience of trauma. It is possible that you have experienced sexual violence yourself or have a loved one who has. There is a lot of power in "lived experience", and if you are a survivor of sexual violence, you are certainly in a quite unique position to empathise and understand what the survivor is going through, including what may be helpful for them.

Be aware that with these strengths there also are greater risks, including the risk that the story of the survivor might expose you to your own triggers. Having an awareness of your own triggers will be very important in this situation and knowing when and how to access support for yourself if this does happen is essential.

If you find yourself experiencing the symptoms of trauma you may need to decide if you actually are the best person to work with the survivor. If you decide that it is in your and your client's best interest that the survivor work with another professional, it is important to de-brief appropriately so that you and the survivor can obtain appropriate, personal closure. Prioritising and practising self-care are also imperative.

# PRIORITISING TRAINING, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SUPERVISION

It is important to acknowledge that not all qualifications prepare workers to work with survivors of sexual violence and trauma. In order to provide the best possible care to all survivors of sexual violence and trauma, and in order to prevent re-traumatising the survivor, it is crucial to engage in relevant training and professional development. Ongoing training and education, particularly in the specialised areas of sexual violence, trauma, trauma-informed care and specialised care, are essential. Professional supervision and support are also essential in order to provide the best possible service to all survivors of sexual violence.

## PRIORITISING SELF-CARE

To prevent vicarious trauma and burnout, it is critical to prioritise self-care.

## PROFESSIONAL SELF-CARE

The NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Trauma and Torture Survivors (STARTTS) offers the following suggestions for practising professional self-care:

- Maintain firm professional boundaries.
- Focus on the positive aspects of your work.
- Be realistic about your workload and what is reasonable to expect to achieve.
- Avoid working long hours and working after-hours.
- Take proper lunch and breaks away from your desk.
- Debrief with supervisor or trusted colleagues.
- Engage in professional development and learning activities.

(STARTTS, 2024)

## PERSONAL SELF-CARE

Personal self-care means taking care of yourself in your personal life. You can practice personal self-care in the ways that work best for you, for example, cooking your favourite meal, having a soothing, relaxing bath, seeing a movie with a good friend, taking your dog for a walk, playing with your cat, listening to your favourite music, or playing sport or a fun game with a loved one. Whatever you choose to do, do something that will help you process and unwind from the stress and demands of the day in a positive and healthy way.

**“SEEDS”:** The acronym SEEDS was coined by Dr John Arden (2023) and refers to the five key components of everyday life practices that lay the foundation for a healthy life and a healthy brain. SEEDS can be a healthy and beneficial way to remind yourself to exercise self-care in your personal life.

Social Connection

Exercise

Education

Diet

Sleep

*Remember, if you find yourself feeling overwhelmed, reach out to your supervisor, boss, trusted colleagues, loved ones or support services to obtain the support you need in dealing with these very challenging issues.*

## CONCLUSION AND THANK YOU

Efforts to address the barriers faced by survivors of sexual assault from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities require a holistic approach involving cultural sensitivity, a commitment to building trust, an understanding of trauma-informed practice, as well as knowledge regarding how to access appropriate support services. It is hoped that the *We are Survivors! Guide for Professionals* will provide you with the information you need to help create and maintain a secure, safe and reassuring environment where all survivors of sexual violence can come forward and receive the help they deserve. Thank you for playing your part in the survivor's journey.

***While as professionals we may not be able to change the world, we can play an important role in helping to change the survivor's world. Thank you, go well and take care.***

# SERVICES THAT CAN HELP

In Australia, a number of organisations and services are available to help survivors of sexual violence from all cultural backgrounds. These services provide a range of support, including medical, psychological, legal, and advocacy assistance.

## INTERPRETING AND TRANSLATING SERVICES

### **TRANSLATING AND INTERPRETING SERVICE (TIS) NATIONAL**

**<https://www.tisnational.gov.au/en/Contact-us>**

TIS provides immediate phone interpreting services.

Call and request an interpreter 24 hours a day, every day of the year

**Phone: 131 450 (within Australia)**

**Phone: +613 9268 8332 (outside Australia)**

Automated Telephone Interpreting Service (ATIS)

Call and request an interpreter 24 hours, every day of the year

**Phone: 1800 131 450**

Free Interpreting Service (FIS)

Enquiries about free services

**Email: [tis.freeinterpreting@homeaffairs.gov.au](mailto:tis.freeinterpreting@homeaffairs.gov.au)**

**Phone: 1300 575 847**

**Postal address**

TIS National GPO Box 241 MELBOURNE VIC 3001

## **SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND THEIR SUPPORTERS**

### **SEXUAL VIOLENCE TELEPHONE HELPLINE SERVICES**

#### **NSW Sexual Violence Helpline**

For anyone in NSW impacted by sexual assault (including friends, families and supporters). Available 24/7.

**Phone: 1800 424 017**

### **Sexual Abuse and Redress Support Service**

For adult survivors of childhood institutional sexual abuse. Supporting anyone accessing the Redress Scheme and alternative compensation. Available 24/7.

**Phone: 1800 211 028**

### **Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence Helpline**

For anyone in Australia whose life has been impacted by domestic or family violence. Available 24/7.

**Phone: 1800 943 539**

### **Rainbow Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence Helpline**

For anyone from the LGBTIQ+ community whose life has been impacted by sexual domestic and/or family violence. Available 24/7.

**Phone: 1800 497 212**

### **SEXUAL ASSAULT, COMPLEX TRAUMA AND/OR RELATED SERVICES**

#### **NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR SERVICES AGAINST SEXUAL VIOLENCE (NASAV)**

NASAV provides an Australian directory for sexual assault services.

<https://www.nasasv.org.au>

<https://www.nasasv.org.au/support-directory>

PO Box 442

Mandurah WA 6210

**Phone: (08) 9535 8263**

#### **NSW HEALTH**

NSW Health has a network of specialist Sexual Assault Services (SAS) delivered by local health districts. Every local health district has a Sexual Assault Service that operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week (see below).

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/parvan/sexualassault/Pages/health-sas-services.aspx>

#### **NSW VICTIMS SERVICES**

Victims Services in New South Wales offers support and assistance to victims of crime, including information on financial support and access to counselling services.

<https://victimsservices.justice.nsw.gov.au>

Commissioner of Victims' Rights

Victims Services

Department of Communities and Justice

Locked Bag 5118

Parramatta NSW 2124

**Phone: Victims Access Line: 1800 633 063**



**Translating and Interpreting Service: 131450**

**Aboriginal Contact Line: 1800 019 123**

**Voice calls or teletypewriter: 133677**

**Voice Speak and listen service: 1300 555 727**

**Email: [vs@dcj.nsw.gov.au](mailto:vs@dcj.nsw.gov.au)**

## **NSW DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES AND JUSTICE (DCJ)**

**[www.dcj.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dcj.nsw.gov.au)**

Head office location: 6 Parramatta Square, 10 Darcy Street, Parramatta.

Mailing address: Locked Bag 5000 Parramatta NSW 2124.

**Phone (General): 02 29377 6000**

## **NSW POLICE**

**[https://www.police.nsw.gov.au/contact\\_us](https://www.police.nsw.gov.au/contact_us)**

**Phone:**

**All Emergencies: 000**

**Non-Emergencies: 131 444**

**Crime Stoppers: 1300 333 000**

## **BIRCHTREE CENTRE – TRAUMA INFORMED THERAPISTS**

The Birchtree Centre provides support and healing for those experiencing trauma and mental health challenges.

**<https://www.birchtreecentre.com.au>**

**Phone: (02) 9518 8719**

### **Forest Lodge**

58 Parramatta Road, Forest Lodge NSW 2037

**Phone: (02) 9571 5750**

### **Pymble**

14/33 Ryde Road, Pymble NSW 2073

**Phone: (02) 8002 1073**

## **BLUE KNOT FOUNDATION**

Blue Knot provides information and support for anyone who is affected by complex trauma. Complex trauma is repeated, ongoing, and often extreme interpersonal trauma (between people) – violence, abuse,

neglect or exploitation experienced as a child, young person and adult.

<https://blueknot.org.au>

**Phone: 1300 657 380**

**Email: [helpline@blueknot.org.au](mailto:helpline@blueknot.org.au)**

#### **FULL STOP AUSTRALIA – NATIONAL SEXUAL ABUSE AND REDRESS SUPPORT SERVICE**

Offers confidential, trauma specialist counselling for people of all genders who are impacted by violence and abuse, as well as their friends, colleagues and family members.

<https://fullstop.org.au>

**Phone: Family Advocacy and Support Services (FASS): 1800 11 FASS**

**Phone: 1800 385 578**

**Phone: (02) 8585 0333**

**Fax: (02) 9555 5911**

**Post: PO Box 555 Drummoyne NSW 2047**

**Email: [info@fullstop.org.au](mailto:info@fullstop.org.au)**

#### **AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF SEXUAL ASSAULT (ACSSA):**

ACSSA provides research, resources, and information on sexual assault, including the impacts and responses to sexual violence.

<https://apo.org.au>

#### **CENTRES AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT (CASA):**

CASA centres provide free, confidential counselling and support services for individuals who have experienced sexual assault. Services may include crisis intervention, counselling, and advocacy.

##### **CASA HOUSE**

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor

Queen Victoria Women's Centre

210 Lonsdale Street

Melbourne

**Phone: Counselling and Support Phone: (03) 9635 3610**

**Phone Admin Line: (03) 9635 3600**

**Facsimile: (03) 9663 9742**

**Email: [casa@thewomens.org.au](mailto:casa@thewomens.org.au)**

## **SEXUAL ASSAULT SERVICES VICTORIA (SASV)**

<https://www.sasvic.org.au>

**Phone: 1800 806 292**

**Email: [contactus@sasvic.org.au](mailto:contactus@sasvic.org.au)**

## **SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

### **CENTACARE SWNSW CHILD AND ADOLESCENT SEXUAL ASSAULT COUNSELLING SERVICE**

<https://centacareswnew.org.au/services/child-and-adolescent-sexual-assault-counselling-service>

Centacare SWNSW Child and Adolescent Sexual Assault Counselling Service is a free and confidential service that provides intervention tailored to children and adolescents who are victim/survivors of sexual assault and their non-perpetrating parents/carers.

Centacare SWNSW provides services to Albury, Coolamon, Corowa, Finley, Griffith, Jerilderie, Junee, Leeton, Narrandera, Mulwala, and Wagga Wagga.

Centacare can be contacted by phone or via the website Contact Form.

**Phone: 1300 619 379**

### **KIDS HELPLINE**

Provides free 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people.

<https://kidshelpline.com.au/>

**Phone: 1800 55 1800**

### **E-SAFETY COMMISSIONER**

The e-Safety Commissioner can help individuals experiencing online bullying or abuse to take action or make a complaint in Australia.

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/contact-us>

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/young-people>

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/report>

### **BRAVEHEARTS**

Bravehearts is an Australian child protection organisation, solely dedicated to the prevention and treatment of child sexual abuse.

<https://bravehearts.org.au/>

<https://bravehearts.org.au/get-help/>

**Phone: 1800 272 831**

## REACH OUT

Reach Out Australia's services provide self-help tools so that you have information and practical steps to help you understand what's going on and how to take action.

<https://au.reachout.com>

## SUPPORT SERVICES FOR PEOPLE FROM ASYLUM-SEEKING AND REFUGEE BACKGROUNDS

### ASYLUM SEEKERS CENTRE (ASC)

The Asylum Seekers Centre is a place of welcome and support. The ASC provides practical help for people seeking asylum in Greater Sydney and advocate for fair and humane policies for refugees and people seeking asylum.

<https://asylumseekerscentre.org.au>

**Newtown** 43 Bedford Street

Newtown, NSW 2042 **Phone: (02) 9078 1900** Hours: Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm

**Auburn** 44A Macquarie Road

Auburn, NSW 2144 Hours: Wednesdays, 10am to 3pm

### NSW SERVICE FOR THE TREATMENT AND REHABILITATION OF TORTURE AND TRAUMA SURVIVORS (STARTTS)

STARTTS is a specialist, not-for-profit organisation that provides culturally relevant psychological treatment and support, and community interventions, to help people and communities heal the scars of torture and refugee trauma and rebuild their lives in Australia.

<https://www.startts.org.au>

152–168 The Horsley Drive

Carramar NSW 2163

**Phone: (02) 9646 6700**

**Fax: (02) 9646 6710**

**Email: [stts-startts@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:stts-startts@health.nsw.gov.au)**

### SETTLEMENT SERVICES INTERNATIONAL (SSI)

<https://www.ssi.org.au>

SSI delivers a range of human services that connect individuals, families and children from diverse backgrounds with opportunities – from settlement support to disability programs, community engagement initiatives and training and employment pathways.

#### Head Office:

2/158 Liverpool Road,  
Ashfield NSW 2131

**Phone: (02) 8799 6700**

**Email: [info@ssi.org.au](mailto:info@ssi.org.au)**

## **NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT, DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES**

### **1800RESPECT**

<https://www.1800respect.org.au>

1800RESPECT is a national helpline providing confidential counselling, information, and support for individuals impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence.

**Phone: 1800 737 732**

**Text: 0458 737 732**

### **WHITE RIBBON AUSTRALIA**

White Ribbon is a global movement working to stop men's violence against women and children.

<https://www.whiteribbon.org.au>

### **OUR WATCH**

[www.ourwatch.org.au](http://www.ourwatch.org.au)

*Our Watch* is a national leader in the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia. It does not provide emergency assistance or support services.

GPO Box 24229

Melbourne VIC 3001

<https://www.ourwatch.org.au/contact>

## **MEN'S SPECIFIC SERVICES**

### **MEN'S REFERRAL SERVICE**

Men's Referral Service provides advice for men about family violence.

<https://ntv.org.au/mrs>

**Phone: 1300 766 491**

### **MEN'S LINE AUSTRALIA**

Men's Line Australia supports men and boys who are dealing with family and relationship difficulties. 24/7 telephone and online support and information service for Australian men.

<https://mensline.org.au>

**Phone: 1300 789 978**

## **LEGAL AID SERVICES**

Various legal aid services in each state and territory can provide information and assistance regarding legal processes, including seeking justice for survivors of sexual violence.

## **LEGAL AID NSW**

Legal Aid NSW provides assistance to people who are unable to afford legal representation and access to the court system.

**<https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/contact-us/our-offices>**

**Phone: 1300 888 529**

(from 9am–5pm, Monday to Friday excluding public holidays).

**Web chat: <https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/contact-us>**

Legal Aid Domestic Violence Unit

**<https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/my-problem-is-about/my-family-or-relationship/domestic-and-family-violence/domestic-violence-unit>**

**Phone: 1800 979 529**

## **WOMEN'S DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURT ADVOCACY SERVICES (WDVCAS)**

WDVCAS is funded by Legal Aid NSW to provide information, assistance and court advocacy services to women and children experiencing domestic violence.

**<https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/my-problem-is-about/my-family-or-relationship/domestic-and-family-violence/womens-domestic-violence-court-advocacy-services>**

**Phone: 1800 WDVCAS or 1800 938 227**

## **SPECIALIST LEGAL AID SERVICES**

### **REFUGEE ADVICE AND CASEWORK SERVICE (RACS)**

The Refugee Advice and Casework Service is a nonprofit providing essential legal support to people who have fled persecution to find certainty and safety in Australia.

**[www.racs.org.au](http://www.racs.org.au)**

Eora Country, 30 Botany St, Randwick NSW 2031

**Phone Legal Help / Client Line: (02) 8355 7227**

**Reception Line: (02) 8317 6500**

**Fax: (02) 7251 1532**

**Email: [reception@racs.org.au](mailto:reception@racs.org.au)**

### **IMMIGRATION ADVICE AND RIGHTS CENTRE (IARC)**

The Immigration Advice and Rights Centre (IARC) is a specialist, not-for-profit community legal centre (CLC) with over 35 years' experience in migration law and policy. IARC assists migrants experiencing vulnerability in NSW by providing free legal information, advice, and casework services.

**<https://iarc.org.au>**

Suite 3, Level 8  
377-383 Sussex Street  
Sydney, NSW, 2000

**Phone: Info line: (02) 8234 0700**

**Domestic Violence Priority Line: (02) 8234 0777**

**Email: [info@iarc.org.au](mailto:info@iarc.org.au)**

## **WOMEN'S LEGAL SERVICE NSW**

Women's Legal Service NSW does not provide legal advice by email. Confidential information about the substance of a matter should not be given by email as it is not possible for WLS NSW to protect any confidential information provided. For legal advice please call their legal advice lines.

Office hours: Monday–Friday: 9am–1pm and 2pm–4.30pm

**<https://www.wlsnsw.org.au>**

PO Box 206, Lidcombe NSW 1825

**Phone: (02) 8745 6900,**

**Fax: (02) 9749 4433**

For the Telephone Interpreter Service **131 450** and ask them to call Women's Legal NSW on **(02) 8745 6900**. They will connect you to a solicitor for legal advice.

**Email: [reception@wlsnsw.org.au](mailto:reception@wlsnsw.org.au)**

## **FORCED MARRIAGE**

### **MY BLUE SKY**

My Blue Sky is a national service run by Anti-Slavery Australia for people who are in a forced marriage or worried about being forced to marry.

**<https://www.mybluesky.org.au/>**

**Phone: 02 9514 8115**

**SMS: +61 481 070 844**

**Email: [help@mybluesky.org.au](mailto:help@mybluesky.org.au)**

## **TRAFFICKING AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

### **ANTI-SLAVERY AUSTRALIA**

Anti-Slavery Australia is the only specialist centre providing free legal and migration services to people who have experienced or are at risk of modern slavery in Australia.

**<https://antislavery.org.au>**

**Phone: +612 9514 9660**

**Email: [antislavery@uts.edu.au](mailto:antislavery@uts.edu.au)**

### **Anti-Slavery Legal Practice**

**Phone: +612 9514 8115**

**Email: ASALegal@uts.edu.au**

### **AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS**

**Australian Red Cross: Support for Trafficked People Program**

**<https://www.redcross.org.au/migration/support-for-trafficked-people/>**

**Phone: 1800 113 015**

**Email: national\_stpp@redcross.org.au**

### **THE SALVATION ARMY**

**The Salvation Army Trafficking and Slavery Safe House**

**<https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/>**

**Phone: 1300 473 560 or 1800 000 277**

**Email: enslavery@salvationarmy.org.au**

### **AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE (AFP)**

**<https://www.afp.gov.au/crimes/human-trafficking-and-people-smuggling/human-trafficking-and-slavery>**

**Phone: 131 237**

### **GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS**

**Support for Trafficked People Program (STPP)**

**<https://www.dss.gov.au/women/programs-services/reducing-violence/anti-people-trafficking-strategy/support-for-trafficked-people-program>**

### **LGBTIQA+ COUNSELLING AND/OR SUPPORT SERVICES**

#### **ACON**

ACON is NSW's leading HIV and LGBTQ+ health organisation.

**[www.acon.org.au](http://www.acon.org.au)**

**Sydney** 414 Elizabeth Street Surry Hills, NSW 2010

**Phone: 02 9206 2000**

**Email: [acon@acon.org.au](mailto:acon@acon.org.au)**



**Northern Rivers** Suite 4P Conway Court, Lismore, NSW 2480

**Phone: 02 6622 1555**

**Email: [northernrivers@acon.org.au](mailto:northernrivers@acon.org.au)**

**Hunter (Hunter, New England, Central Coast, Central West)**

129 Maitland Road  
Islington, NSW 2296

**Phone: 02 49627700**

**Email: [hunter@acon.org.au](mailto:hunter@acon.org.au)**

**Southern, Far West & Blue Mountains**

**Phone: 1800 063 060 / 02 9206 2114**

**Email: [regionaloutreach@acon.org.au](mailto:regionaloutreach@acon.org.au)**

**KIRKETON ROAD CENTRE**

The Kirketon Road Centre is a health care service that provides free and anonymous care to people who experience barriers to accessing health care. South-Eastern Sydney Local Health District ([nsw.gov.au](http://nsw.gov.au))

**Phone: (02) 9360 2766**

**Fax: (02) 9360 5154**

**QLIFE**

**[www.qlife.org.au](http://www qlife.org.au)**

**Phone: 1800 184 527**

Webchat available between 3pm and midnight

**<https://qlife.org.au/resources/chat>**

**RAINBOW FAMILIES**

‘Rainbow Families’ supports, connects, celebrates, empowers, and advocates for LGBTQ+ parents and their families at every stage of their lives. Rainbow Families serves as an important voice for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, diverse and queer (LGBTQ+) parents and their children.

**[www.rainbowfamilies.com.au](http://www.rainbowfamilies.com.au)**

PO BOX 306, Erskineville NSW 2043

**Phone: 0481 565 958**

**[https://www.rainbowfamilies.com.au/contact\\_us](https://www.rainbowfamilies.com.au/contact_us)**

**ASYLUM- SEEKERS CENTRE LGBTIQA+ peer-group (for people seeking asylum only)**

**<https://asylumseekerscentre.org.au>**

The Asylum Seekers Centre is a place of welcome and support. The ASC provides practical help for people seeking asylum in Greater Sydney and advocate for fair and humane policies for refugees and people seeking asylum.

**Phone: (02) 9078 1900**

**Hours: Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm**

Address

43 Bedford Street  
Newtown, NSW 2042

Address

44A Macquarie Road  
Auburn, NSW 2144

**Hours: Wednesdays, 10am to 3pm**

# SOME RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP

## Care Package for Survivors of Sexual Trauma

By Sexual Assault Resource Centre (Government of Western Australia)

<https://www.kemh.health.wa.gov.au/~media/HSPs/NMHS/Hospitals/WNHS/Documents/Patients-resources/SARC---Care-Package-for-Survivors-of-Sexual-Trauma.pdf>

## NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence

The ECAV provides useful resources to assist victims of sexual assault, their families and communities. These publications are available to download free of charge.

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/parvan/sexualassault/Pages/sexual-assault-resources.aspx>

<https://www.ecav.health.nsw.gov.au/Resources/Resource-Shop/booklets>

## “Torture Therapy: Giving Survivors Their Lives Back”

YouTube SBS The Feed

This documentary provides an inspirational view into the lives of survivors of sexual violence in conflict and the truly remarkable professionals who help them.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29dbH3TXIQs>

## “Re-Regulated: Set Your Life Free From Childhood PTSD and Trauma-Driven Behaviours that Keep You Stuck” by Anna Runkle (2024) Hay House LLC.

In Re-Regulated, author Anna Runkle provides practical techniques, worksheets and prompts to calm triggers, break out of isolation, and help change the self-defeating behaviours that are so common for people who have experienced trauma and complex trauma.

## “What Happened to You?: Conversations on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing” by Bruce. D Perry and Oprah Winfrey

Oprah Winfrey and trauma expert, Dr Bruce Perry, discuss the impact of trauma and adverse experiences – and how healing must begin with a shift to asking ‘What happened to you?’

## “The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse” by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis

The Courage to Heal is a comprehensive guide that offers hope and a map of the healing journey to women who were sexually abused as children and their loved ones.

## **“Victims No Longer: The Classic Guide for Men Recovering from Sexual Child Abuse” by Mike Lew and Ellen Bass**

The first book written specifically for men, *Victims No Longer* examines the changing cultural attitudes toward male survivors of incest and other sexual trauma. This book offers compassionate and practical advice, supported by personal anecdotes and statements of male survivors. *Victims No Longer* helps male survivors to:

- \* Identify and validate their childhood experiences
- \* Explore strategies of survival and healing
- \* Work through issues such as trust, intimacy, and sexual confusion
- \* Establish a support network for continued personal recovery
- \* Make choices that aren't determined by abuse

Psychotherapist Mike Lew has worked with thousands of men and women in their healing from the effects of childhood sexual abuse, rape, physical violence, emotional abuse, and neglect. His book contains invaluable strategies for, particularly for men, on recovering from incest and other abuse.

## SOME USEFUL WEBSITES

### **NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS)**

Hints For Healing

<https://www.hintsforhealing.startts.org.au>

### **NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence**

A wide range of resources for survivors and relevant professionals.

<https://www.ecav.health.nsw.gov.au>

### **Women's Legal Resource Service NSW**

Ask LOIS is a free legal online information service provided by Women's Legal Service NSW.

<https://vimeo.com/asklois>

### **E-Safety Commissioner**

*The e-Safety Commissioner can help individuals experiencing online bullying or abuse to take action or make a complaint in Australia.*

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/contact-us>