



We Are Survivors!

Support for LGBTIQ+ survivors of sexual violence from culturally & linguistically diverse, refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds



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ARRIVING IN AUSTRALIA

Welcome to Australia! First of all, congratulations on making it to Australia as that is an amazing achievement. While everybody's journey is different, there are some challenges that you may have faced, and may still be facing, when coming here.

If you are an asylum seeker and arrived here by boat, you may have been subject to mandatory detention while your refugee claim was processed. The experience of detention may have been a stressful, difficult, even traumatising one for you. The prolonged processing times may have added to the stress and uncertainty. Navigating the complex legal processes for seeking asylum or refugee status can be extremely daunting. Understanding and completing the required paperwork, showing up to the necessary hearings and ensuring you don't miss essential deadlines can be overwhelming for those new to this country and unfamiliar with the Australian legal system (navigating the court and legal system can be difficult even for some Australians).

Other challenges you may have faced include trying to gain access to essential services, particularly healthcare, education and gaining employment. If you don't speak English or find understanding English challenging, it is easy to become frustrated and despondent. Difficulties understanding the culture and being unfamiliar with the local systems can exacerbate what is already a challenging time. It can be difficult for anybody to establish connections and find new friends let alone finding yourself in a new country and trying to establish a community and social network. If you are struggling with any trauma you experienced in your home country, settling into Australia can almost seem impossible. This may be especially true if you have been separated from your family, either through the journey to get here or by all of the government processes. Sadly, you may have also had to face discrimination, racism, and xenophobia from some segments of the population. However, please be aware that this is not representative of the true spirit of this nation.

If you are a member of the LGBTIQ+ ("Rainbow") community you may have had to flee your country of origin due to persecution based on your gender identity and/or sexual preference, and/or you may have arrived in Australia only to face persecution and discrimination from certain members of the community here.

In addition to all of this, you may be dealing with the trauma of having experienced sexual assault or other sexual violence. There are certainly a lot of issues you are contending with, but this resource has been produced to help in your first steps towards healing from sexual assault. Overcoming the trauma of sexual violence, as well as recovery and healing, *are* possible. It is hoped that this resource will help you take the first steps in this, another, life-changing journey of hope.

We commend you for your bravery, strength and resilience!

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

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 Adult 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

We Are Survivors: A Guide for Professionals Supporting Survivors of Sexual Violence from CALD, Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Backgrounds

Go to www.wearesurvivors.online for more information and resources.

FOREWORD:

A Welcome Note from Elvis Caus, Awake Counselling

Welcome to this Guide from someone that arrived as a Bosnian refugee in 1993 and welcome from someone that is part of the rainbow family. None of us wanted to leave our homes and what we were familiar with, now you are here and this is your time to make your own path.

Coming out and getting married to a man has certainly come along easier in Australia than my country of origin. When the time is right for you, there is a chance to really be yourself and to keep building your identity. Coming out is just one part of you, however it's a big part, as big as the trauma that you have survived, keeping things secret is what drags us down.

Here in Australia you can get help for your trauma, you can tell your story, there are people that care and you can also finally be you. I always feel like I've been given another chance at life. Sure I've made mistakes along the way and I'll make more, but I've always learned and grown from those. This is your time to learn how to heal, learn much more about yourself and inspire others.

Warm regards,

Elvis Caus (he/him)

Counsellor (BSW, EMDR)

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<https://awakecounselling.com/>

AASW Member: 508051

NSW Victim Services: A2881VV

MESSAGES OF HOPE TO SURVIVORS FROM BRADLEY AND CRYSTAL, FELLOW SURVIVORS

Surviving sexual abuse isn't always graceful. Sometimes, it's messy and complicated, filled with emotions that are hard to make sense of.

For years I tried to push the memories away, to pretend like it never happened. I guess it was easier that way, or so I thought. But deep down the scars, both physical and emotional, were a constant reminder of the past.

Talking about it was the first step. But even talking about it wasn't easy. There were times when I doubted myself, wondered if maybe I was to blame. Was I groomed? Did I somehow bring this upon myself? It's a question that I've thought of for years, one that I struggled to answer. And then there were the questions about my own sexuality. Did this experience define me?

Despite the doubts I refused to let this experience define me. I refused to be a victim. Instead, I chose to be a survivor. And through it all, I've learned that healing is possible, that the darkness can be overcome.

It's not easy, and it's certainly not quick, but it's worth it. That's why it's important to seek out organisations that help people. Organisations like SAMSN. They provide a safe space to share your story, to connect with others who have been through similar experiences, and to access resources and support. They remind you that you're not alone, that there are people out there who understand and who want to help you heal.

So here I am, sharing my story with you. It's not easy, and it's certainly not pretty. But it's real, and it's mine. And if by sharing my story, I can help even one person feel less alone, then it's worth it because no one should ever have to suffer in silence.

Bradley

"Your strength and resilience are incredible, and it's okay to take it one day at a time. Believe in your power to overcome and you will find peace".

Crystal

INTRODUCTION

ISSUES FACING MEMBERS OF THE LGBTIQA+ COMMUNITY IN GENERAL

As an individual who identifies as LGBTIQA+ and/or a member of the Rainbow community, you may have, and may continue to, encounter a range of obstacles and problems within society, both within your country of origin and even now in Australia. Many of these challenges may be caused by cultural perceptions, prejudice, and social barriers. Even though LGBTIQA+ rights have advanced in some parts of the world, difficulties still exist. People who identify as LGBTIQA+ may experience stigma and prejudice because of their gender identity or expression and/or sexual orientation. This may occur in many different environments, such as schools, hospitals, and workplaces. Different countries have different laws protecting and recognizing LGBTIQA+ rights. In some parts of the world, people might encounter laws that discriminate against them, do not legally recognise their relationship, or encounter obstacles when trying to adopt children or receive healthcare. In addition, people who identify as LGBTIQA+ (or from the Rainbow community) are disproportionately the victims of violence and hate crimes, with the violence involving targeted attacks as well as verbal and physical abuse. Sadly, LGBTIQA+ people may face bullying and harassment in schools and online, especially if they are young.

As a member of the LGBTIQA+ / Rainbow community, you may face additional challenges related to mental health. The combined effects of discrimination, social stigma, and violence can have serious impacts on mental health and higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide attempts are all observed within the LGBTIQA+/Rainbow community. Contributing to, and often compounding these issues, can be the rejection by family members with separation from family members often exacerbating feelings of loneliness and isolation. In addition to all of this, you may also have had trouble finding healthcare providers that understand the challenges you are facing and who are sensitive to your needs. This can include matters relating to sexual health, including if you have been subjected to sexual assault.

CRIMINALISATION AND DISCRIMINATION FACED BY LGBTIQA+ INDIVIDUALS

The NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Survivors of Torture and Trauma (STARTTS, 2022) highlights that same-sex activity is criminalised in over 70 countries with 12 carrying the death penalty. Anti-gay laws are sometimes applied against trans people. Transgenderism is criminalised in 13 countries with punishment including corporal punishment and prison. Migrants, refugees and Asylum Seekers may have experienced extreme discrimination in their countries of origin and may in fact be seeking asylum as a result of the persecution they experienced based on their sexual preference and/or gender identity.

ISSUES FACED BY PEOPLE WITH LGBTIQA+ and MIGRANT, REFUGEE OR ASYLUM-SEEKING BACKGROUNDS

If you have arrived in Australia as a migrant or refugee, and you identify as LGBTIQA+, you may be experiencing some very unique challenges. As noted above, in some cultures, being LGBTIQA+ is a criminal offence. In other cultures, while it may not be criminalised, it may be seen as bad, evil, disgusting and otherwise be considered a “taboo” topic. Being open about your gender identity and/or sexuality can risk bringing punishment or even banishment to yourself and the whole family. These experiences can have a wide range of impacts, including isolation/loneliness, fear, uncertainty, sadness, grief and loss of identity or sense of self. Some of the other impacts might include depression, self-harming behaviours, drug and alcohol misuse/abuse, thoughts and feelings related to suicide, anger, depression, anxiety, symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) and other mental health issues (Elvis Caus, STARTTS, 2022). It is important to know that you are not alone if you are experiencing any of these things and

there are people who can help you. The aim of this Guide is to provide you with information and support so that you can find help and support.

ISSUES FACED BY PEOPLE WITH LGBTIQ+ CALD, MIGRANT, REFUGEE OR ASYLUM-SEEKING BACKGROUNDS WHO HAVE BEEN SUBJECTED TO SEXUAL ASSAULT

If you have arrived in Australia as a migrant, refugee or asylum seeker, if you also identify as LGBTIQ+ and if you have also been subjected to sexual assault, you might be feeling overwhelmed and fear that no-one will understand what you are going through or will be able to help you. It is possible that you are facing a wide range of seemingly insurmountable challenges. For example, you might be struggling with languages difficulties and worry that you can't or won't be able to talk about or express what you are going through adequately. You may also be concerned that you don't understand Australian systems, including the legal system or helping services. You might be fearful that you will face even more discrimination and trauma if you do attempt to access these services and systems. In addition to all this, you might be estranged from your family and other social and support networks as a result of your LGBTIQ+ identity and feel like you have no-one who can support you through this extremely difficult time. However, there are people who have experienced the same or similar difficulties you are facing and there are people who can help and support you. It is hoped that this Guide will assist you in finding the support you need and guide you in your healing journey.

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. Please be aware that 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.

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 *We Are Survivors: Support for Female Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse from CALD, Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Backgrounds* and *We Are Survivors: Support for Male Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse from CALD, Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Backgrounds*), intoxicated, unconscious, or otherwise incapacitated).

In most countries, sexual assault is illegal. 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.

WHAT IS “SEXUAL VIOLENCE”?

A variety of non-consensual sexual behaviours and activities that include the use of force, coercion, or manipulation to obtain power and control over another person are included in the broader phrase known as “sexual violence.” It encompasses a range of behaviours that infringe upon a person’s right to autonomy, physical integrity, and

sexuality control. In this Guide, the terms “sexual assault” and “sexual violence” will be used interchangeably unless specifically specified.

HOW COMMON IS SEXUAL ASSAULT?

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/survivors 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. As a result, all reported figures should be interpreted with these factors 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 Organisation (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 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 against LGBTIQ+ persons as well as against those living in conflict/war zones and places with significant levels of gender inequality and ethnic minorities, those with disabilities/special needs and other marginalised populations (see *We Are Survivors: Support for Survivors of Sexual Violence in Conflict*).

WHO ARE THE ‘VICTIMS’?

People of any gender, age, social background or racial origin may be victims of sexual assault, including people identifying as LGBTIQ+. While females are more likely to be victims of sexual assault, it is important to be aware that people of all genders can be victims of sexual assault. It is important to recognise and respond to all survivors of sexual violence regardless of their gender or sexual identity. Adolescents and children are also vulnerable to sexual assault, which may occur in institutions, homes, and schools. 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 assault. Sexual violence may also be used as a weapon of war and people’s vulnerability to sexual assault may be exacerbated in conflict/war environments as a result of displacement and the disintegration of social systems.

WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS?

Sexual offenders and rapists 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. Sexual offenders may also include members of gangs or other organisations, human traffickers and personnel in military and paramilitary forces.

Sexual offenders who commit sexual violence against people of the same sex are not necessarily homosexual.

QUESTIONS SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE OFTEN ASK

There are many questions that victims/survivors of sexual assault 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 that they understand it is very normal to ask these questions and that they are reassured that what happened to them was not their fault, that they have nothing to feel ashamed or embarrassed about, and that while it takes time, healing and recovery are possible.

“Why did it happen to me?”

Many sexual assault victims/survivors, like victims/survivors of other crimes, may think that they must have done something wrong for the abuser to target them. Becoming the victim of a 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?”, “Did the offender choose me because I am gay?”, “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, and regardless of the sexual preference of the victim/survivor, 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 abuse can lead to victims of sexual assault feeling alone and isolated, believing they are the only ones who have experienced this kind of abuse. This can be especially true for LGBTIQ+ victims/survivors who may already be feeling isolated from society and close networks such as family due to their sexual/gender identity. Sadly, emotions of guilt and embarrassment can keep victims/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 were abused sexually, even though you might feel alone, it is important to know you are not. There are many other people who have been subjected to sexual assault, including LGBTIQ+ people and there are people you can talk to (such as other survivors in a support group, a sexual assault counsellor, or a confidential 24/7 crisis counselling line if you need to speak to a professional immediately) and who will understand what you 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/survivor’s extended family, such a grandfather, uncle, brother-in-law, or cousin, or members of their immediate family, like a husband/spouse, father, stepfather, or brother. The victim/survivor may also know the offender through other ways, such as being a family friend, neighbour, teacher, or youth worker.

It is important to recognise that some women commit sexual abuse and rape. Offenders can include grandmothers, aunts, mothers, female teachers, etc. This is especially important to highlight for survivors of sexual violence perpetrated by female offenders and who may feel especially marginalised and isolated.

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

It’s also possible that you were terrified that no one would believe you if you told them about the sexual assault, that you would somehow be held responsible for the abuse, or that people would assume you were to blame for the sexual abuse if you didn’t say “no”. These emotions and concerns are all very natural and normal. It is important to remember that you are not alone, you have done nothing wrong, and you have no reason to feel guilty or ashamed if you have been subjected to sexual assault by someone you know.

In all cases of sexual assault, the offender is responsible for what happened.

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

It can be just as confusing and traumatizing to be sexually abused by a stranger. If you experienced sexual assault by a person you don’t know (i.e., a “stranger”), you may have been reluctant to disclose the incident for fear that you wouldn’t be taken seriously or that you would somehow be blamed for what happened. You may not even know or remember the offender’s details or appearance well enough to feel that you can report the crime to police. If you were unable to tell the abuser “no,” if you were unable to get away or resist the attack physically, it is possible that you were blamed for the abuse when you did tell someone.

No matter who does it - any gender, family, friend or stranger - sexual assault is against the law and is a serious crime.

It is important to remember that what happened to you was not your fault.

You have nothing to feel ashamed or embarrassed about and there are people who can help you.

“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 their 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. It is an infringement of the other person’s right to physical autonomy, privacy, and self-determination.

People have the right to say “no” to any sexual activity at any time, even while they are married. And consent must be continuous and ongoing, which means that just because you consented to sexual activity on one occasion it does not mean you consent to it on every other occasion following. Any use of force, manipulation, or intimidation to obtain sex is wrong, and consent can never be assumed or coerced, even in marriage.

In Australia, marital rape laws apply to all marriages regardless of the sexual orientation or gender identity of the individuals involved and LGBTIQ+ couples have the same legal rights and protections in marriage, including protections against sexual violence within the 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 females. Sexual assault refers to any act of non-consensual sexual action or contact and is therefore 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 bulk 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. Regardless of the gender of the victim or perpetrator, sexual assault is about the abuse of a 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.

If you have been sexually abused or raped by a female, please be aware that the perpetrator committed a serious crime against you.

“Was it my fault?”

Survivor’s tendency to blame themselves is one of the most common effects of sexual assault. If you have experienced sexual violence, you might have blamed yourself for the abuse, particularly if the abuser told you that it was your fault, if you were unable to say “no” to the offender, if you were unable to flee the abuser, or if the perpetrator used coercion or other tricks to gain your compliance or trust.

It is important to remember that you were not to blame for the sexual assault. The perpetrator bears full responsibility for the abuse.

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

If you have been a victim of sexual assault or rape, please allow this Guide to speak directly to you. Many survivors have reported saying mantras to themselves to be very helpful. One survivor found the following mantra to be very helpful and suggested that repeating it out loud to yourself might be helpful for you too:

The sexual assault was not my fault.

The sexual assault was not my fault.

The sexual assault was not my fault.

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.

“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 assault. 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 your culture places great value on sexual purity or virginity before marriage, as you may feel that you are “damaged goods” and no-one will want to date or marry you in the future.

Feelings of shame may be exacerbated if the sexual assault occurred within a LGBTIQ+ context. Any feelings of shame surrounding the victim/survivor’s sexual preference / identity may be compounded by feelings of shame regarding the sexual assault. This may make it even more difficult for LGBTIQ+ survivors of sexual violence to disclose the abuse. However, it is crucial to remember, if you are an LGBTIQ+ survivor of sexual violence, you haven’t done anything wrong and you have nothing to feel guilty, embarrassed or ashamed about, in fact, you can feel strong and courageous that you survived the experience.

COMMON REACTIONS TO TRAUMA AND THE EFFECTS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

LGBTIQA+ INDIVIDUALS FROM MULTI-CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS MAY BE ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE

People who identify as LGBTIQA+ are vulnerable to a range of physical and mental health issues independent of the effects of sexual violence. Elvis Caus (2022, STARTTS) notes that people from LGBTIQA+ people from multicultural backgrounds experience higher rates of suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts than the general population and that people who identify as LGBTIQA+ are more likely to engage in self-harm than the general population.

The added vulnerability of LGBTIQA+ individuals can exacerbate the effects of sexual violence which means that it is of crucial importance that help and support are available to all survivors of sexual assault.

SOME COMMON REACTIONS TO TRAUMA

Your response to the trauma of sexual violence will be unique to you. It is possible that you will have some intense physical, psychological and/or emotional reactions. Your reactions might be immediate or they might take a while to happen. They might also suddenly emerge at unexpected (and inconvenient) times. Every person is different and there is no right or wrong way 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.

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. Many of these reactions have been taken from the *"SARC – Care Package for Survivors"* and the details about this invaluable resource for survivors can be found at the end of this Guide).

Physical

Constipation Diarrhoea Dry mouth Exhaustion Feeling dizzy 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 Isolation/ Wanting to be Alone Angry Anxious

Alienated Ashamed Detached Depressed Emptiness Guilty Hurt

Inadequate Insecure Irritable No confidence Numb Self-blame Shame

Even though they might be strong, they might even feel overwhelming at times, emotions cannot kill you. They are inside you and they are smaller than you. It is possible to recover control over your life and prevent the bad emotions from taking over.

To do that, you will need to deal with your emotions and worries. A trusted person be they an informed and supportive friend or a trauma-informed professional can help you to do this.

Behaviours

Avoiding people/places Being impulsive Changes to eating Drinking/smoking Easily startled

Lack of interest in things Nail-biting Neglecting care of yourself Self-harming Socially withdrawing Being very alert / hyper-vigilant

A person's behaviours may change as a result of the sexual violence you were subjected to. Changes in behaviour are a common response to trauma. While it is very normal, it can be very helpful to understand the feelings and ideas that may be leading to your actions.

HELPFUL QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Asking yourself the following questions might help you in understanding your behaviours and also to decide if you need 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?

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 actually 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 your 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 yourself
- Feeling "cut off" from others around you
- Having intense emotions and ideas that keep repeating
- Losing interest in routine activities

LONG TERM PHYSICAL / 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. Not every healthcare professional is well-versed in the various effects of trauma. Nonetheless, general practitioners and other medical professionals are growing more knowledgeable in this area and many are more attuned to the needs of trauma survivors. If you are feeling that your needs are not being responded to in a helpful and supportive manner by your current health care professional you can seek the assistance from another one who is “trauma-informed”.

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 imperative that you receive help and support from someone who is “trauma-informed”.

SEXUALITY AND INTIMACY

If you have been subjected to sexual assault or abuse you may find yourself struggling with letting yourself become close to another person (emotionally and/ or physically), including issues 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. Be patient and kind with yourself, 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.

- Being overly sexual and consensually placing yourself in unsafe sexual situations perhaps because you feel you deserve to be treated badly
- 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, overactive or improper sexual behaviour
- *Difficulties establishing or sustaining an intimate connection
- *Erectile or ejaculatory dysfunction for male survivors.

Your beliefs and attitudes around sex may have changed as a result of the sexual violence. It is important to critically examine the beliefs you have developed and to remind yourself 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

See the *“SARC – Care Package for Survivors”* for more information on this important issue.

WHY DON'T SURVIVORS TELL?

Survivors of sexual assault from LGBTIQ+ backgrounds 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

You 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/survivor. It makes sense that you would have kept the abuse to yourself if the perpetrator threatened to harm you or a loved one if you told anybody.

Remember, the abuse you endured was the fault of the perpetrator only; you were not to blame in any way.

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 survivor's disclosure of sexual assault it can serve to prevent them from taking the risk of telling anybody again.

If you told someone about the sexual abuse you and they didn't believe you, it might have destroyed your confidence and your trust in people. Maybe you made the decision to never tell anyone again. However, there are trusted, kind people who will support and believe you, including professional counsellors and other trauma-informed specialists.

It is never too late to begin to tell someone you trust and start the process of healing.

FEAR OF BEING BLAMED FOR THE ABUSE

Self-blame is a common response to sexual assault experienced by survivors of all genders. 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.

Remember, if you have experienced sexual abuse, you are not to blame. You haven’t done anything wrong, and there is nothing to be embarrassed or ashamed about. The perpetrator alone is responsible for the abuse.

The way society responds to victims of sexual violence 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 the survivor’s recovery.

Victim Blaming: Unfortunately, victim-blaming is a common but extremely negative social response to sexual violence in many cultures. 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, many victims of sexual violence may feel isolated and believe that the sexual assault was their fault.

For LGBTIQ+ survivors of sexual assault from multi-cultural backgrounds, feelings of guilt and shame may be intensified by societal stigmas associated with LGBTIQ+ identities and sexual assault.

Doubt and Disbelief: Some survivors are met with doubt or disbelief when they disclose 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.

Minimising the Assault: Similarly, some survivors’ disclosures of sexual violence are minimised or even silenced. For example, a survivor might be met with the response “Well, that is what happens if you choose to go out to those kinds of places”. Minimising or discounting survivors’ experiences of sexual assault can also serve to discourage them and other survivors from speaking out in the future.

FEAR OF BEING DISCRIMINATED AGAINST

If you identify as LGBTIQ+ you might feel reluctant to disclose the sexual assault for fear that the person you disclose to might discriminate against you on the basis of your sexual preference or gender identity. This worry may be in relation to talking about the sexual assault with people in your personal life, such as family members or friends, or to reporting the assault to the authorities or other services. You might be concerned that as a result of lack of understanding and sensitivity to LGBTIQ+ issues you may not receive a sensitive and trauma-informed response.

However, all victims and survivors of sexual violence deserve to be believed and supported. If the first person you tell doesn't provide you with this, keep telling until someone believes you and provides you with the help and support you deserve.

A range of LGBTIQ+ specific and LGBTIQ+ inclusive services, both in the general community and in the context of specialist sexual assault support programs, including specifically for migrant survivors of sexual violence, are listed at the end of this Guide.

FEAR OF BEING BLAMED DUE TO SEXUAL PREFERENCE OR GENDER IDENTITY

LGBTIQ+ survivors of sexual assault may be particularly reluctant to disclose to others, particularly if the crime was committed by a person of the same gender, because of fear that others will believe the assault was a consequence of their sexual preference or gender identity. 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 you experienced sexual abuse, the assault did not occur because you are gay, nor will it lead to your becoming gay.

If you are 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 or held accountable for their crimes; offenders may specifically instruct the victim to keep the abuse a secret. If you experienced sexual assault and were told to keep it a secret, it's critical to recognise that you did nothing wrong. It is not too late to tell someone about what happened to you to a trustworthy person if the abuse is still influencing your life and to get the help and support you deserve.

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 and status.

If you are reluctant to report sexual assault for this reason, it is important to discuss your situation with a specialist legal service if you are concerned that you or your family, may be at risk if you report the crime. All victims of crime, including survivors of sexual violence, have rights and protections. There are a number of organisations and agencies that can help you and help to protect you and your loved ones. See the end of this Guide for a list of organisations that can help you if you are in this situation.

Being an asylum seeker or somebody who is new to Australia who was sexually abused or raped in your native country by a person in a position of power (including a police member/s) can sometimes make it even harder to report the crime in your new country, based on lack of trust towards law enforcement. Please see to the end of this Guide for helpful organisations and agencies that can provide you with information and support if you are in this situation.

LANGUAGE

For people from Non-English-Speaking Backgrounds, challenges with communication may make it especially difficult to disclose sexual assault. Sexual assault is a difficult subject to talk about in general, but especially so if it is a personal disclosure. Finding the right words can be extremely difficult, and finding the right words to effectively communicate what has happened and express your feelings in another language might seem impossible. If you have experienced sexual assault and English isn't your first language, translators and multicultural liaison officers are available in many government agencies and services.

You have the right to access a translator and to have a translator who will maintain your confidentiality.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SURVIVORS TELL?

A number of factors have been shown to play a role in the impact sexual assault can have on the victims and survivors of sexual violence. This includes the response they received when she or he told someone about what has happened to them.

NEGATIVE RESPONSES

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

POSITIVE RESPONSES

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

It is possible that experiencing sexual assault was made even more painful if you informed someone about it and received a negative response. You might have decided never to talk to anyone about what happened to you again or you find it difficult to trust people as a result of your negative experience.

You should have been believed and you deserved to be protected.

While it is understandable that your sense of trust has been damaged, it is important to know that, if you decide to talk to someone about what happened to you, there are people who will believe you and who will support you.

GETTING HELP

In order to get the support and assistance you are entitled to, it can be helpful to discuss your experiences with someone you can trust. It could be your best friend, your spouse, your boyfriend or girlfriend, a close and trustworthy relative, or a counsellor. You have the freedom to choose who you would like to speak with.

One of the main reasons to tell a trustworthy friend or family member about your experience is to relieve yourself of the burden of carrying the secret, to regain your personal power and to be reassured *that you are not to blame for what happened to you.*

Some survivors may be very nervous reticent about seeing a counsellor because they feel that if the counsellor ends up not being the 'right match' for them and speaking to that person will have been a waste of time. However, some survivors meet up with a few different counsellors at the beginning until they find the right person for them.

When you read the list of agencies and organisations at the end of this Guide, and if you call one of the numbers provided, you can request what kind of counsellor you would prefer to meet with, including if they are male or female.

Your voice and opinion are important and you can let people know who you feel you will most comfortable talking with.

Open communication about the issue of sexual violence is crucial if we want to enable all victims of abuse to come forward and receive the assistance and support they are entitled to. This is another crucial strategy for stopping sexual violence.

WHAT CAN HELP SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

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 their feelings
5. To have their value as a person reinforced
6. To overcome the shame and humiliation of a sexual attack
7. To build or re-build their self-esteem
8. To get back in contact with their feelings
9. To speak out the truth of their lives

WHO CAN HELP ME?

If you decide to tell someone about what has happened to you, it is important to find a safe person to talk to. A safe person is someone who ...

- is likely to believe you
- cares about you
- will want to help you, and
- will respect your privacy.

Speaking with a spouse, close family member, or trusted best friend can be comforting for some survivors of sexual assault. Speaking with a counsellor or therapist can help some people. Some people discover that they can safely confide in a member of their own family. Sadly, this isn't always possible for other people for many reasons, including the information not being kept confidential and possibly reaching the ears of the perpetrator which can be an unsafe situation for the survivor. In this case, talking to a professional counsellor can be another option. Sometimes finding the 'right' person can take time and a few different attempts.

If the first person you speak with doesn't react in a helpful or positive way, remember that you have not done anything wrong. Find someone else to talk with and above all – don't give up!

WHAT CAN HELP?

Create Safety

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

In order to find out if you are *feeling* safe, you might want to ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I safe from further contact with the offender including physically, on social media, etc?
- Do I feel safe at home?
- Is there anything I need to change in order to feel and be safe?

To begin the healing process, you will need to establish your safety and sense of safety as a *first priority*. If you are currently at risk of violence of any kind, get help to find safety including staying at a trusted friend or family's members house or accessing a domestic violence refuge shelter. If you are not safe and/or are not feeling safe, it is important to work out what you need to do to be safe. Talking to someone and getting help and support to put safety measures in place for yourself is essential as you may not be able to do this by yourself.

A list of support services is provided at the end of this Guide including 24/7 confidential crisis counselling numbers that can help if you ever find yourself needing immediate help.

Show Self-Compassion

In order to begin to heal from the trauma of sexual violence, you need to be able to be compassionate and kind towards yourself. This can be difficult if there is any part of yourself that blames yourself for what happened.

One way to overcome this and be able to be kind to yourself is to think about someone who has been kind to you in the past and imagine having this compassion and care for yourself. What would a caring friend say to you? What kind messages would a kind and caring friend give? Give these same messages to yourself. If you are still struggling to be compassionate towards yourself, imagine hearing from another innocent person who has gone through what you have gone through and is now struggling with the feelings and effects that you are experiencing. In what ways would you show them kindness? What words would you say to help them? Do these things and say these things to yourself. Give this compassion and kindness to yourself in some way every day.

One survivor recommends putting two chairs side by side together in a room that you feel safe in, sit in one chair and talk to the empty chair as if you are talking to a sexual assault or rape victim, helping them through their healing journey.

Talk to Someone You Trust

Speaking with someone who is sympathetic, understanding, and helpful is one of the best ways to begin healing from the trauma of sexual violence. This might be a trusted friend or relative, or it could be a trauma-specialist expert. For many survivors, speaking with a professional counsellor in addition to friends and family can be extremely beneficial.

When choosing who to talk with, consider whether they will:

- Respect your privacy
- Listen to you without blaming you
- Be supportive
- Let you make the final decision

Some people find it challenging to discuss their experiences with people they know. Speaking with a qualified counsellor can be a crucial step in the recovery process. Counsellors with expertise in sexual assault trauma are trained to recognise and assist with the many effects of trauma.

Find and Strengthen Positive Connections

Developing relationships of trust and compassion with safe, loving people who do not harm others is a crucial aspect of healing from sexual violence. It can take some time to regain trust after suffering sexual abuse. You may feel like you want to withdraw and isolate yourself from people. However, positive and healthy connections and relationships with people can have a profoundly therapeutic and positive effect on you and your life. A safe circle of friends, community and/or family members can take some time to develop for anyone, let alone victims of sexual abuse or rape, whose trust has been severely violated. Be gentle with yourself and allow yourself to slowly build trust.

Do Something You Enjoy Every Day

Every day, try to engage in an activity you enjoy. Taking care of yourself is essential, so schedule time each day for something you enjoy. Make time every day to unwind and prepare larger treats in advance so you always have something to look forward to.

Here are some ideas from the “SARC – Care Package for Survivors”:

- Book tickets to a movie, show or sporting event
- Light candles, diffuse essential oils or burn incense
- Read a good book
- Listen to your favourite music
- Plan a camping, snorkelling or hiking trip
- Soak in a warm bath filled with bubbles, bath salts or essential oils
- Go for a picnic
- Swim in the sea or walk on the sand or do both!
- Watch the sunset
- Go for a bike ride
- See a live band
- Have a massage
- Cook your favourite meal
- Meet a friend for coffee and maybe cake!
- Spend time in the garden and buy or pick fresh flowers

Here are some of the methods other survivors have found helpful:

Painting and other forms of art therapy

Music

Dance

Drama

Physical activity or sports, 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 LGBTIQ+ survivors

Talking to a trusted friend or relative

Talking to a counsellor

Reporting the abuse to the Police

Seeking justice

Helping others who have been abused

Spending time with animals

Here are some personal strategies and ideas for members of the LGBTIQ+ Rainbow Community from Elvis Claus (Awake Counselling):

- Work with a variety of organisations: safe individual work such as counselling then progress to group work if you feel that would be helpful for you.
- Find an LGBTIQ+ friend who can support you.
- Find supportive peers and support/allies from the Rainbow community.
- Limit your exposure to negative online social media and apps. (STARTTS, 2022)

Become Active for Positive Change

Some survivors find that getting active for change honours the fact that they are survivors and inspires them to advocate for human rights. Making a public statement about sexual assault or child sexual abuse is one way to take a stand. Taking part in protest marches, signing petitions, participating in survivor forums, and lobbying lawmakers for reform are all ways that survivors can become empowered and can empower others to make positive change in the world.

Seek Cultural Healing

Many people believe that cultural customs and rituals have great healing power. They can strengthen a sense of identity and purpose, nurture a sense of belonging, and facilitate meaningful relationships. They can also provide a safe avenue for self-expression and exploration. Understanding your culture with language, customs, artwork, dancing, storytelling, traditional foods, and medicines can all play an important role in social, emotional, and spiritual recovery and healing from sexual violence.

Establish a Balanced, Healthy Lifestyle

Developing and maintaining a healthy, balanced lifestyle can be another crucial component of healing and recovery. Important aspects of a balanced and healthy lifestyle can include:

- Making sure you are safe.
- Seeking professional help if needed.
- Limiting your exposure to trauma stories and bad news.
- Informing and educating yourself about trauma and what you are experiencing.
- Managing your stress and anxiety.
- Connecting with others.

- Getting health checks.
- Exercising regularly.
- Challenging your brain.
- Practicing meditation and mindfulness.
- Helping others.
- Expressing gratitude for the good things.
- Having safe physical contact.
- Sleeping well.
- Using positive self-talk.
- Eating a healthy diet.
- Getting sunshine.
- Being creative.
- Laughing often.
- Stimulating your senses daily, such as tasting delicious foods or smelling the aroma of flowers or essential oils.
- Breaking routines, trying new things, and learning new skills.
- Having a sense of purpose in life.

Look for Positives and Actively Practice Gratitude

It can be easy to forget to notice the positives in our lives and the beauty all around us. Regularly practising gratitude is a very simple way to bring more balance and positivity into your life.

Perhaps you can create a gratitude notebook or journal where you can actively acknowledge even the small things in life that you are grateful for. For example:

- First thing each morning write down three things that you are grateful for in your life
- Decorate your gratitude page if you would like to
- Each evening, write down at least three positive things from your day
- When you are having a low day, read back over what you have written
- Try to make this a habit – you will be amazed at the positive difference it makes!

Keep Going

Healing can sometimes be slow-going, gradual, with lots of ups and downs. It might take a lot of time, effort, and ongoing work to reach a place in your life where you feel okay or even happy, but the journey is worthwhile. Be encouraged that many survivors of sexual violence have been able to find happiness again in their life ... it is possible!

Like everyone else, you will have good days and bad days. On a 'bad day', give yourself permission to feel your feelings (both negative and positive). When you are having a particularly difficult day, sometimes it helps to just put everything on hold for the day, make an effort to get a decent night's sleep, and then face the world again the next day. But the important thing is to keep going. A good day is just around the corner so reach out for help if you need it and don't give up!

BUILDING A HEALTHY SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP

Trust and intimacy can be extremely difficult for people who have experienced sexual violence.

Physical touch can cause involuntary reactions for some survivors, such as panic attacks, freezing, flashbacks, zoning out (dissociation), or nausea. These reactions might occur within the context of a sexual relationship.

Healthy sex and sexual trauma are very different.

Healthy sex involves respect, equal control and safety for both parties. Healthy sex is pleasurable, enjoyable and satisfying. If you are having difficulties with intimacy and trust following sexual assault, take your time, be patient and be kind to yourself. Communicate with and involve your partner. Sometimes, couples therapy can be helpful for those in a committed relationship or else speaking one-on-one with a professional regarding barriers to physical, sexual and emotional closeness following sexual violence.

The "*SARC – Care Package for Survivors*" provides some useful practical strategies to assist in dealing with being "triggered" during sexual activity in the context of a sexual relationship. There are also other people, books and websites that can assist.

WHAT IF I AM STILL BEING AFFECTED BY THE 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 you least expect it. The effects of the abuse could arise, for instance, if you have to see the perpetrator, if you start a close, sexual relationship, etc. Seeking therapy and support to help you recover from the trauma you have experienced may be beneficial if the effects of the trauma are having a detrimental impact on your life.

Although the past events cannot be changed, you have the power to alter the present.

CAN COUNSELLING HELP?

Understandably, some individuals 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 countries and cultures, and there may be misconceptions about what counselling entails.

Above all, the purpose of counselling is to help you, and the counsellor's job is to listen to your 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, you don't have to discuss anything you don't want to in counselling. You can provide as little or as much detail as you feel comfortable with. If you feel the counsellor is asking too many questions that you don't feel safe answering at that point in time, let them know that and they will respect your boundaries and stop. Some people worry that their conversations won't be kept private, but counsellors must abide by a stringent code of conduct and keep whatever you say private (unless there is a risk to your safety or the safety of others).

Survivors of sexual assault from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds 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 be reassured 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 and all survivors of sexual crime have a right to receive help and support.

If the sexual assault you experienced is having a detrimental effect on your daily life it is a sign that you might need or benefit from professional support. It is important to seek help to cope with the effects of sexual assault so that they don't dominate your life and cause serious effects in the long term. Good mental health is just as important as good physical health. It takes an enormous amount of courage to talk to someone about your experiences. But not seeking help can often lead to the situation becoming worse.

A good starting point might be to speak to your doctor about a referral to a psychologist, mental health social worker or therapist. It is important that you find a worker who you feel comfortable with. Sometimes it can take several sessions talking with the counsellor before you start to trust them. If you really don't feel comfortable with your worker, try someone different. Remember, people working in the trauma area hear trauma stories every day. While everybody's experiences are different and unique, they are familiar with the many feelings and challenges faced by people who have survived sexual trauma and they won't judge or blame you. Even if therapy gets more difficult, have faith in your ability to heal.

Above all, never give up on yourself!

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

REPORTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE TO THE AUTHORITIES

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 the victim being unsafe again (for example, the police can issue an Apprehended Violence Order (AVO) on the victim's behalf), if the perpetrator is known to them.

It is possible for survivors to request women police officers to speak to if this makes them feel more comfortable with reporting. It is also possible for 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 you have to do. It is completely your choice. The justice system is sometimes limited in the justice it can achieve 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, making a statement and having their voice heard to be helpful.

Reporting the abuse is your decision and only you can decide what is best for you.

Another option of reporting in NSW 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 you are 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. Many of these organisations can help you with developing and implementing a safety plan, provide holistic and trauma-informed care and support you to make an informed decision about reporting to police. In an emergency always dial 000.

You can find a list of some of some specialist legal and other services at the end of this Guide.

CAN I MAKE A REPORT IF THE ABUSE HAPPENED IN ANOTHER COUNTRY?

If you experienced sexual assault in another country and you are now living in Australia, if you are considering reporting the crime to the police or other authorities, it is recommended that you contact local police or a legal expert about your particular circumstances. You may wish to have a friend or support person with you, and you may request the assistance of a translator if one is available. Seeking support from organisations that specialise in helping survivors of sexual crimes can provide in valuable assistance and guidance. See the end of this Guide for a list of specialist support services.

You may not be certain if you will have to go back to your previous country and have concerns that going back after reporting to Australian law enforcement will put you in danger. You can discuss these and any other concerns you have by contacting any of the relevant specialist organisations and agencies listed at the end of this Guide.

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—the police may be able to investigate it. 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 you experienced sexual assault in another country and you are now living in Australia, if you are considering reporting the crime to the police or other authorities, it is recommended that you contact the police or a specialist legal organisation about your particular circumstances.

You may wish to have a friend or support person with you, and you 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 DO I MAKE A REPORT AND WHO DO I REPORT TO IF THE CRIME HAPPENED IN AUSTRALIA?

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

Reporting sexual crime requires navigating specific processes and procedures and you 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 violence involves the following steps:

Seeking Support

You 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 you choose 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

You 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.

Legal Advice

It may be helpful to seek legal advice to understand all your rights and options. Legal professionals experienced in handling cases of child sexual assault can provide you with advice and guidance tailored to your specific situation. See the end of this Guide for a list of specialist legal services.

Medical Investigation

You may decide to go through a medical examination, depending on the situation, in order to record any physical proof or injuries connected to the abuse. You can consent to or decline the medical examination.

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 look into the reported history of abuse, the police may speak with you (the “victim”), possible witnesses, and the suspected perpetrator.

Legal Actions

Legal actions may be taken if the police investigation produces enough evidence to warrant charges being laid against the alleged offender. You 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 victims/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 you 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 victims/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 counselling services, support groups, and other options accessible to survivors of sexual violence throughout the reporting and legal process. These services can help you to access the many tools available to provide assistance and support, before, during and after the reporting process.

BARRIERS TO MAKING A REPORT FACED BY SURVIVORS FROM REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKER

BACKGROUNDS AND TEMPORARY VISA HOLDERS

Similar to other victims of sexual violence, if you are a refugee, if you are seeking asylum and/or if you are a temporary visa holder, you may have extra concerns when considering reporting sexual assault in Australia.

FEAR OF REPRISALS OR RETALIATION

It is possible that you 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 you your concerns may be intensified.

CULTURAL OR RELIGIOUS STIGMA

You may come from a culture or community where there is a stigma associated with sexual assault, mental health problems, and talking about sexual matters. You may feel reluctant to report the sexual violence out of fear that members of your community will judge you harshly and / or deliberately isolate you or your loved ones.

DISTRUST OF AUTHORITIES

If your country of origin is one where the legal and law enforcement agencies are viewed as corrupt or untrustworthy it might make you very hesitant to report the crime. You might be extremely reluctant to disclose instances of sexual assault to Australian authorities as a result of your general distrust of authorities. If you have been sexually abused or raped by a member/s of law enforcement or another “official” government authority from your country of origin you might be especially hesitant to report the crime to Australian authorities.

LANGUAGE CHALLENGES

If you have limited English language skills it might make it difficult for you to communicate effectively with the police and other support agencies or anxious that you will find it difficult. You might also be afraid of not being understood or the possibility of the details you 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

You may be afraid to disclose sexual assault because of worries about your immigration status. One major obstacle may be a fear of being arrested, deported, or having your 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, you might be worried that what you say might not be kept confidential. You might also be concerned that what you say might not be translated accurately.

FEARS ABOUT FURTHER DISCRIMINATION AND RE-VICTIMISATION

LGBTQIA+ individuals have historically faced discrimination, harassment, and violence from the police and other authorities in many parts of the world, including Australia. This history, especially if it is part of your own personal history, may make it difficult for you to immediately trust police and other legal institutions, as you may be afraid of being dismissed, not believed, or re-victimised.

CULTURAL INSENSITIVITY

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

PAST TRAUMA AND/OR DIFFICULTIES WITH MENTAL HEALTH

If you are a refugees or asylum seeker you 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 you have experienced may make it especially challenging to talk about and disclose the sexual violence you 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 you. Obtaining help and support may actually be the most effective way to obtain a fresh start.

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 HAVE RIGHTS

You have rights when seeing a professional support for sexual assault.

You have the right

- To be treated with dignity, respect and understanding.
- To be provided with a safe, confidential place for counselling and/or other support.
- To make decisions about your own life.
- To have a support person with you if you choose.
- To have access to an interpreter.
- To express yourself 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 all 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.

A FINAL WORD TO REFUGEE AND AYLUM-SEEKING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES FROM ELVIS CAUS (AWAKE COUNSELLING)

- We are lucky to have survived and have a chance to live a new life.
- Your child's sexual orientation is not the whole of them, it is a huge and big part in their life, but there is so much more to know.
- Support such as counselling is available to learn more about yourself, your emotions, feelings and what matters to you.
- The world is ever changing and a different place from when you grew up, we have to change in order to grow.
- Love is all you need!

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

We commend you on your strength, courage and resilience and we wish you well in the next stage of your journey!

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

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

NSW DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES AND JUSTICE (DCJ)

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

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

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

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

3rd 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

SEXUAL ASSAULT SERVICES VICTORIA (SASV)

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

Phone: 1800 806 292

Email: 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

Hours: Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm

Auburn 44A Macquarie Road
Auburn, NSW 2144

Hours: Wednesdays, 10am to 3pm

Phone: (02) 9078 1900

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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: endslavery@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

Sydney 414 Elizabeth Street Surry Hills, NSW 2010

Phone: 02 9206 2000

Email: acon@acon.org.au

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

Phone: 02 6622 1555

Email: 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

Southern, Far West & Blue Mountains

Phone: 1800 063 060 / 02 9206 2114

Email: 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)

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

PO BOX 306, Erskineville NSW 2043

Phone: 0481 565 958

https://www.rainbowfamilies.com.au/contact_us

ASYLUM- SEEKERS CENTRE LGBTIQ+ 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>

“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 people 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>