



We Are Survivors!

Support for female survivors of childhood sexual abuse from culturally & linguistically diverse, refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds



CONTENTS

Foreword: Arriving in Australia

Content Warning and a Note on Terminology

Other Guides in the We Are Survivors! series

A Message of Hope from a Fellow Survivor

INTRODUCTION

What is sexual abuse?

Is it still sexual abuse if the child didn't say 'No'?

How common is child sexual abuse?

Who are the victims of child sexual abuse?

QUESTIONS SURVIVORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE OFTEN ASK

"Why did it happen to me?"

Questions often asked by male survivors of child sexual abuse

"Why did it happen to me?"

"Why do I feel so alone?"

"What if the perpetrator gave me money or other things?"

"What if I was sexually assaulted by someone I know?"

"What if I was sexually abused by a stranger?"

Female offenders

THE EFFECTS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

What impact will the sexual abuse have on me and my life?

Sexuality and sexual identity

Fear of becoming an offender

Self-blame

Shame

WHY DON'T CHILDREN TELL?

Fear of being labelled homosexual/gay

"This is our secret"

Threats from the perpetrator

Fear of being blamed for the abuse

Fear of how people will react

Fear of possible negative effects on visa status/immigration status

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHILDREN DO TELL?

Negative responses

Positive responses

WHAT IF I AM STILL BEING AFFECTED BY THE ABUSE?

Getting help

What can help survivors of childhood sexual abuse

Who can help me?

First steps

Building a healthy sexual relationship

Can counselling help?

Can I make a report if the abuse happened in another country?

How do I make a report and whom do I report to if the abuse happened in Australia?

Barriers to making a report faced by survivors from Refugee and Asylum Seeking Backgrounds and other temporary visa holders

What are the legal processes?

You have rights

Hope, healing and recovery are possible!

WHAT SUPPORT SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE IN NSW / AUSTRALIA?

Some resources that can help

Some useful websites

FOREWORD:

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 and speaking 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 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.

In addition to all of this, you may be dealing with the trauma of having experienced child sexual abuse 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 abuse. Overcoming the trauma of childhood sexual abuse, 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 Male Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse 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 Young People Who Have Experienced Sexual Violence from CALD, Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Backgrounds

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

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

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.

A NOTE TO SURVIVORS FROM A FELLOW SURVIVOR

Dear Fellow Survivor,

I'm so glad you've found a copy of this excellent Guide. In it you will find a comprehensive discussion of the issues around childhood sexual assault and so many of the difficulties faced by people like you and I who are victims of this terrible crime through no fault of our own.

I was sexually abused by several older men as a child from birth until I was a teenager. I understand the terrible effects childhood sexual assault has, including into adulthood. For me this includes depression and posttraumatic stress disorder. Perhaps you also have ongoing mental illness or other effects. This is a completely normal response to the trauma you have experienced. It is not something wrong with you. Please don't be ashamed of your struggles. They are not and never will be your fault.

If you are like me you've probably questioned your worth. Am I worth fighting for? Or am I worthless because of what has happened to me? I want you to know that you have immeasurable worth. You are worth as much as any other human and you are definitely worth fighting for. Don't believe the lie that you're not.

I want to let you know that I'm so proud of you for surviving and for seeking help. I know that has taken so much courage. Please don't give up. There is hope and healing to be found if you get the right help. The resources and organisations listed at the end of this Guide are a great place to start.

I also want you to know that I have been where you are and I have come so far in my journey towards hope and healing so I know you can too. I have been particularly helped by kind friends who were not afraid to hear my story and by expert professionals such as psychologists and crisis line operators who helped me work through the crisis times and gave me the tools I needed to recover.

My experiences of childhood sexual assault are never forgotten but they are now much less powerful and damaging thanks to the help I've received. If you keep seeking the help outlined in this Guide, you too can grow stronger and find deep healing for old wounds.

I have taken my cases to police and through the justice system. This is not something you have to do. It is completely your choice. For me, it was a matter of ensuring there were consequences for the perpetrators and protections for other potential victims. The justice system is limited in what it can do but you may find at least reporting to police to be helpful for you. It is your decision and only you can decide what is best for you.

I want to thank you for reading this note from me and to wish you well in your journey to recovery. You are doing so well to be reaching out for help. Keep going! There are people who care and who can help you.

With love,

Sandy

INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse is a significant social problem that has potentially devastating effects for everyone impacted by it, from the child victims, to families, and to whole communities. The sexual abuse of children occurs in countries all over the world, in all cultures, religions and in all types of families. People of all genders are vulnerable to sexual abuse.

While the sexual abuse of children is a problem all over the world, it is not often talked about openly. The effects of sexual abuse on children can last a lifetime if victims do not receive the help and support they deserve. The silence around the sexual abuse of children can contribute to feelings of guilt and isolation of victims and can exacerbate the potentially devastating effects of this crime. The effects can be compounded even further when the victim/survivor has also experienced other forms of trauma in their country of origin, as well as facing the significant issues of migration or the seeking of asylum in Australia.

It is imperative that the sexual abuse of children is discussed openly in order for victims of this crime to feel comfortable to disclose if they have been sexually abused in childhood and so that they can receive life-changing help and support.

If you are a survivor of childhood sexual assault and come from a migrant or asylum-seeking background, it is hoped that the material in this Guide will assist you to begin healing and to find support. Female and male survivors of childhood sexual abuse confront different challenges, but they also share many common ones. Therefore, a separate brochure is available for males who have experienced sexual abuse in childhood (*We Are Survivors: Support for Male Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse from CALD, Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Backgrounds*). It is hoped that by obtaining information and reading about the experiences of others, you will know that you are not alone. After experiencing child sexual assault, recovery is possible and support is available.

WHAT IS SEXUAL ABUSE?

The subject of child sexual abuse is typically cloaked in secrecy. More recently, however, there has been a willingness to learn more about the issue, to have open discussions about it, and to look for solutions to better protect children. Community knowledge of the issue has grown as a result of recent media attention, but from survivors to worried parents, many people's first question is still, "What is child sexual abuse?" Definitions of child sexual abuse have been provided by researchers and authors worldwide and it is generally agreed that the phrase "child sexual abuse" describes situations in which a person uses his or her authority or position to engage a child in sexual activity.

In Australia, child sexual abuse is typically understood to refer to situations that occur when an adult, adolescent or child uses their position, trust or power to take advantage of a child for their own sexual gratification. Child sexual abuse occurs on a continuum and can involve a range of activities including:

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

Child sexual abuse may also involve commercial exploitation (that is, using a child sexually for financial or other gain). It can occur in person, but it can also occur online. In fact, for many child-victims the grooming process may initially start through online platforms and escalate into in-person sexual abuse. The power and control strategies of the perpetrator can also occur online through the exposure of children to sexualised content, as well as threats to share compromising images of the victim, such as nudes. (*Please see the We Are Survivors: Support for Survivors of Commercial Sexual Exploitation from CALD, Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Backgrounds and the We Are Survivors: Support for Young People who have Experienced Sexual Assault from CALD, Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Backgrounds*).

IS IT STILL SEXUAL ABUSE IF THE CHILD DIDN'T SAY 'NO'?

Child sexual abuse is defined as any sexual behaviour that takes place between an adult or older person and a child *under the legal age of consent*. The age of consent means the age at which a person is deemed legally to be mature enough to agree to sexual activity. The age of consent varies from country to country but in Australia it is 16 years for both males and females. Children under this age cannot properly give informed consent because of their limited life experience and knowledge, which prevents them from fully understanding the sexual activity and its ramifications. Under normal conditions, children find it extremely difficult to say "no" to adults and this difficulty increases when the child is confused, afraid, or is being tricked, bribed, or coerced.

The sexual abuse of children is never ok.

HOW COMMON IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

Global research on the incidence of child sexual abuse has revealed that it is a serious issue all over the world including in Australia. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017) estimated that in Australia one in three girls and one in seven boys will experience some form of child sexual abuse in their lifetime. Other Australian studies have reported similar figures.

Research that has investigated studies of adults from countries and cultures all over the world has similarly revealed that 10 – 20% of female children and 5 - 10% of male children have experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18 years, with their experiences ranging from unwanted touching to rape.

WHO ARE THE VICTIMS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

Both boys and girls alike can experience sexual abuse, as can children of all ages, from young babies to teenagers. Sexual abuse can affect children from all types of families, including wealthy and impoverished ones, working-class and affluent ones, as well as those living in large cities and those living in the most remote communities.

All children are vulnerable to sexual abuse and all children deserve to be protected.

QUESTIONS SURVIVORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE OFTEN ASK

“WHY DID IT HAPPEN TO ME?”

Sexual abuse victims, like many other victims of crime, often think that they must have done something wrong for the abuser to target them. Becoming the victim of a crime, particularly an assault, is an extremely confusing experience. The fact that sexual assault is not openly talked about in most societies and cultures can make matters even more confusing for the children who have experienced it. Survivors of sexual assault frequently question if the perpetrator chose them because of something they did. For example, a survivor might ask “Was I too friendly?”, “Was it the clothes I was wearing?”, “Was I in the wrong place?”

Regardless of the circumstances, regardless of gender of the perpetrator or the victim—a male or a female, a girl or a boy, regardless of the age of the victim—child sexual abuse involves the misuse of power and authority by an adult.

All children are vulnerable to sexual abuse, and it is our responsibility as a society to protect them.

“WHY DO I FEEL SO ALONE?”

People who have been subjected to childhood sexual abuse often believe they are the only ones who have experienced this kind of abuse. This is primarily due to the taboo around discussing sexual abuse in many societies. Furthermore, feelings of guilt and embarrassment can prevent victims/survivors from discussing their experiences with other people. 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, and there are people you can talk to (for example other victims in a support group, a sexual assault counsellor, 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 THE PERPETRATOR GAVE ME MONEY OR OTHER THINGS?”

Sexual offenders employ a variety of techniques known as “grooming” techniques to win over their victims’ confidence, cooperation, and silence. Perpetrators might employ a variety of strategies to “groom” children and young people, such as giving them money, alcohol, or drugs, or exposing the child to pornography before engaging in sexual activity. Through deceit and bribery, these grooming strategies not only serve to gain the child’s trust but also serve to make the child feel like they cannot tell anyone what has happened to them. For example, the child may feel responsible for the abuse if he/she received money, alcohol, or drugs from the criminal or was curious to view the pornography.

However, you are not responsible for the abuse if the perpetrator used any of these strategies. The offender is the only one to blame for the abuse. This is true even in cases where you accepted presents or money from the offender, if you took drugs or alcohol from them, or if they showed you pornography.

Child sexual abuse is NEVER the child’s fault.

“WHAT IF I WAS SEXUALLY ASSAULTED BY SOMEONE I KNOW?”

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

You might have experienced a wide range of emotions if you were the victim of sexual abuse by a person you know. The betrayal of the perpetrator may have left you feeling extremely upset and confused. It’s possible that you felt “dirty,” humiliated, or embarrassed about engaging in the sexual behaviour. You might also feel unsure about your sexual orientation. It is possible that you still feel that way now. It can be considerably more difficult if the abuser was a member of your own family because you may have loved them yet still wanted the sexual abuse to stop.

It’s possible that you were terrified that no one would believe you if you told them about the sexual assault, that you would 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 anxieties are all very natural.

If you have experienced child sexual assault by someone you know it is important to know that you are not alone, you have done nothing wrong, and you have no reason to feel guilty or ashamed.

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

“WHAT IF I WAS SEXUALLY ABUSED BY A STRANGER?”

It can be just as confusing and traumatising 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 their 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 - male or female, family, friend or stranger – child 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.

FEMALE OFFENDERS

Approximately ten percent of child sex offenders are thought to be female. While evidence suggests that males make up the bulk of sex offenders the sexual abuse of boys by female perpetrators causes just as much suffering as sexual abuse of boys by male perpetrators. Whether a victim is a boy or a girl, and regardless of the gender of the perpetrator, sexual abuse is about the abuse of the victim’s trust and the misuse of power by the offender. Recognising and addressing female offenders’ sexual assault is necessary to ensure that all victims of child sexual abuse get the support and acknowledgment they are entitled to.

No matter who does it - male or female – child sexual assault is against the law and is a serious crime.

THE EFFECTS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

WHAT IMPACT WILL THE SEXUAL ABUSE HAVE ON ME AND MY LIFE?

Sexual abuse can have potentially devastating consequences for the child-victim and their family, regardless of gender. Without help and support to overcome the abuse, sometimes the effects can last a lifetime. Some of the possible effects of child sexual abuse are listed below.

Possible Effects of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Feelings

- confusion
- depression
- isolation
- low self-esteem
- feelings of shame and guilt
- problems with intimacy and trust
- 'blocking out' of feelings
- anger and hostility
- anxiety and/or panic attacks
- fear of being abused again
- fear for the safety of siblings / own children
- confusion about sexuality
- fear of becoming an offender

Behaviours

- difficulty trusting others
- difficulty with intimate relationships
- flashbacks
- nightmares and sleep disorders
- mental health problems
- eating disorders
- running away
- drug / alcohol abuse
- sexualised behaviours and/or sexual problems

- confusion about sexual identity
- self-harming behaviours
- suicide attempts or suicide

SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL IDENTITY

If you were sexually abused as a child, the abuse might have led to feelings of confusion regarding your sexual orientation or the potential effects of the abuse on your sexual orientation. If you experienced sexual arousal as a physiological response to the sexual activity, what the perpetrator did is still illegal. The fact that your body may have responded to the physical stimulation can exacerbate uncertainty and feelings of body betrayal for many survivors of sexual assault. It is crucial to understand that what was done to you was still abuse even if your body reacted physiologically.

FEAR OF BECOMING AN OFFENDER

Another common effect of sexual abuse on males is the fear of becoming an offender. This fear is partially due to the false belief that most sex offenders were abused as children (and therefore grew up to repeat the abuse on others). This is a false belief and further serves to discourage victims from disclosing the abuse for fear that people will think he or she will become a sex offender. It is important to realise that there are many survivors of sexual abuse who are not sex offenders, and there are many sex offenders who were not sexually abused as children.

If you have been sexually abused as a child it is important to know that not only is it possible to overcome the abuse, it is possible to turn the traumatic experience around and to become stronger and wiser as a result.

While the effects of child sexual abuse can be potentially devastating it is possible to turn this negative life experience around into something positive.

There are many people who have overcome the traumatic experience of childhood sexual abuse and while the ways are different for everybody, for most people, an important first step is talking to a trusted person in your life. Talking to someone you trust about what has happened to you can be the first step in getting the help and support you deserve.

SELF-BLAME

Victim/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 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 childhood sexual abuse, please allow this Guide to speak directly to you. Many survivors report that saying a positive, healing mantra can be helpful. For example, repeating the following statement out loud to yourself might be helpful in challenging self-blame beliefs:

The sexual abuse was not my fault.

The sexual abuse was not my fault.

The sexual abuse was not my fault.

SHAME

Another common effect of child sexual abuse for both male and female survivors is to feel ashamed. One reason for this is because of the secrecy and silence that surrounds sexual abuse. Sexual abuse involves private parts of the body and sexual activity, and many adults feel uncomfortable talking about it. As a result, when a child is sexually abused they often feel that something secretive or “dirty” has happened to them. This is a normal reaction to sexual abuse.

However, if you have been sexually abused as a child, it is important to remember that you haven’t done anything wrong and you don’t have anything to feel ashamed or embarrassed about. You can feel strong and courageous that you survived the experience.

WHY DON'T CHILDREN TELL?

Children may decide not to come forward if they have experienced sexual abuse for a variety of reasons. Because it disturbs most people to think of an adult purposely harming a child, many adults are reluctant to discuss sexual abuse. Children become reluctant to discuss sexual abuse when adults are reluctant to do so. Children may not tell anyone for other reasons too, including the following:

“THIS IS OUR SECRET”

As a child, it is possible that the abuser told you to keep the abuse a secret. Children are innocent and naive by nature. Most children assume they must follow an adult’s instructions when they are told to keep something secret. In order to make sure they are not discovered, abusers may specifically instruct the victim to keep the abuse a secret.

If you experienced sexual abuse and were told to keep it a secret, it is important to recognise that you did nothing wrong. It is not too late to talk with someone you trust about what happened to you, especially if the abuse is still having an effect on your life. It is important to get the help and support you deserve.

THREATS FROM THE PERPETRATOR

“Do not tell anyone”

“No-one will believe you”

“You will be in trouble”

“Your parents will punish you”

“No-one will play with you”

(Family Support Specialist in CALD communities)

You might have been threatened as a child to keep the sexual assault a secret. Since they are naturally very trusting, children take these kinds of threats very seriously. It makes sense that you would have kept the abuse to yourself if you had been sexually abused and 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 DISBELIEF

Many victims/survivors are afraid that no one will believe them if they disclose that they have experienced sexual abuse. 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 victim/survivor's own family, don't believe them. Additionally, when people don't believe a victim/survivor's disclosure of sexual abuse it can serve to prevent them from taking the risk of telling anybody again.

If you told someone about the sexual abuse 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. These responses make sense. However, it is important to remember that there are trusted, kind people including professional counsellors who will support and believe you if you choose to talk about what has happened to you.

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

FEAR OF BEING LABELLED HOMOSEXUAL / GAY

Children, young people and even adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse may be particularly reluctant to disclose to others that they have experienced sexual abuse because they fear that their experience will make them homosexual / gay (sexually attracted to people of the same sex). These feelings can be exacerbated as a result of the stigma which surrounds homosexuality in many cultures and societies.

However, a person's sexual orientation is unrelated to sexual abuse. Sexual abuse concerns the perpetrator's choice to use sex as a means of exerting dominance and control over a defenceless child. If you experienced childhood sexual abuse, the assault did not occur because you are gay, nor will it lead to your becoming gay. If you're worried about any of these issues, it could be beneficial to speak with a qualified and experienced counsellor to get support and assurance.

FEAR OF BEING BLAMED FOR THE ABUSE

Self-blame is a common response to sexual assault experienced by both female and male survivors. Survivors may ask themselves what it was about them that attracted the criminal to target them. If they were unable to say “no”, run away, or physically resist the perpetrator, they might blame themselves for the abuse. This 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 childhood 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.

As a society we must recognise the vulnerability and relative powerlessness of children. No matter what happened, no child is ever to blame for sexual abuse. Children’s trust and innocence should never be abused, exploited or taken advantage of. In all cases of child sexual abuse the offender is the person responsible for the abuse.

FEAR OF HOW OTHER PEOPLE WILL REACT

The way society responds to victims of sexual assault can vary greatly and is impacted by social, cultural, and personal factors. Some people provide victims of sexual abuse with sympathy, compassion, and support. Professionals, advocates, friends and family can all be incredibly helpful in providing much-needed support to victims/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 victim/survivor’s healing process.

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, victims of sexual violence may feel isolated and believe that the sexual assault was their fault **format**.

Some victims/survivors are met with doubt or disbelief when they disclose childhood sexual abuse. Casting doubt on the victim’s disclosure can be devastating and can serve to prevent victims from talking about what has happened to them with anyone else in the future. Similarly, some victims/survivors’ disclosures of sexual assault are minimised or even silenced. For example, a survivor might be met with the response “Well, you must have misbehaved for that to have happened to you”. Minimising or discounting victims/survivors’ experiences of sexual abuse can also serve to discourage them and other survivors from speaking out.

FEAR OF POSSIBLE NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON VISA APPLICATION / IMMIGRATION STATUS

Many refugees, asylum seekers and other temporary visa holders are afraid to talk to the police or other authorities if they have been subjected to sexual abuse because they are concerned that it might have a negative impact on their visa application / immigration status.

If you are reluctant to report childhood sexual assault for this reason it is important to discuss your situation with a specialist legal service. If you are worried that you or your family may be at risk if you report the crime and are concerned that reporting the crime may negatively impact your application for asylum or your visa status, it is important to talk to someone from a specialist legal service. *A list of specialist legal services is provided at the end of this Guide.*

All victims of crime, including victims/survivors of child sexual abuse, have rights and safeguards. 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 many organisations that can help.

Being an asylum seeker or somebody who is new to Australia who was sexually abused 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 refer to the end of this Guide for helpful suggestions for organisations and agencies that can provide you with support.*

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHILDREN DO TELL?

The effects of the sexual abuse can be made worse or be lessened depending on the response children receive when they tell someone.

It is possible that being sexually abused as a child made the event even more painful if you told someone about it and received a negative response. You might have decided never to talk to anyone about what happened to you again or found it difficult to trust people in the future as a result of your negative experience. This makes sense.

You should have been looked after and protected as a child and you deserved to be protected.

While you have every reason to distrust others it is important to know that, if you decide to talk to someone about what happened to you, there are people who will accept you and believe you.

WHAT IF I AM STILL BEING AFFECTED BY THE ABUSE?

The effects of childhood sexual abuse 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, if your child reaches the age at which you were abused, etc.

Finding support to help you recover from the trauma you experienced as a child may be beneficial if the effects of the abuse are still having an impact on your life. Although the past events cannot be changed, you have the power to alter the present.

GETTING HELP

In order to get the support and assistance you deserve, 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, regain your personal power and be reassured that you are not to blame for what was done to you.

Some survivors are worried about seeing a counsellor because they feel that if the counsellor ends up not being the 'right match' for them then 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.

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'd prefer to meet up 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.

WHAT CAN HELP SURVIVORS OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

1. To be believed
2. To be understood
3. To be told "This was not your fault"
4. To have a safe and confidential environment where the survivor can speak openly about his/her feelings
5. To have his/her value as a person reinforced
6. To overcome the shame and humiliation of a sexual attack
7. To build or re-build self esteem
8. To get back in contact with his/her 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.

Some people discover that they can 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. Speaking with a partner or spouse, close family member, or trusted best friend can be comforting for some survivors. Speaking with a counsellor or therapist can also help some people. 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 – 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 indeed 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. In order to heal from trauma and find a solution to any difficulties you are experiencing you need to be safe first.

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 heal from the trauma of sexual assault, 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!

For example, you could put 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 child or a sexual abuse survivor, 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 abuse. 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 is 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 childhood sexual abuse. It can take some time to regain your trust in people. It is possible to feel cut off from other people after experiencing significant trauma, and you may feel like you want to withdraw and isolate yourself. However, positive and healthy connections and relationships with people can have a profoundly therapeutic effect. A safe circle of friends, community and/or family members can take time to develop for anyone, let alone victims of sexual abuse or rape, whose trust has been severely violated.

Be kind and gentle with yourself and allow yourself time and space to slowly rebuild your trust in others.

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.

Some of the methods other survivors have found helpful are listed below.

Painting and other forms of art therapy

Music

Dance

Drama

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

Writing and / or reading poetry

Writing a diary

Other forms of creative writing and expression

Spiritual healing

Reading about other people's experiences

Joining a group of other survivors

Talking to a trusted friend or relative

Talking to a counsellor

Reporting the abuse to the Police

Seeking justice

Assisting others who have been abused

Spending time with animals

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 politicians for reform are all ways that survivors can become empowered and can empower others to make positive change.

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 a significant role in your social, emotional, and spiritual recovery and healing.

Establish a Balanced, Healthy Lifestyle

Developing and maintaining a healthy, balanced lifestyle is 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 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 of childhood sexual abuse, 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 it is important to 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 childhood sexual abuse.

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. *Some helpful books and resources for female and male survivors are listed at the end of this Guide.*

WHAT IF I AM STILL BEING AFFECTED BY THE ABUSE?

The effects of childhood sexual abuse 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. Obtaining professional support may be helpful 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 violence from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds may also be afraid that seeking counselling or attending counselling might have a detrimental impact on their visa status or 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 the sexual abuse 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 ABUSE TO THE AUTHORITIES

Some survivors find a lot of relief in reporting childhood sexual abuse 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 also 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 female or male survivors to request women police officers to speak to if this makes them feel more comfortable with reporting. It is also possible for male survivors to request male police officers if this makes them more comfortable with reporting.

However, it is important to know that making an official report to the police is not something 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 is called [Sexual Assault Reporting Option](#). Although it doesn't initiate an investigation and is not a formal report, it creates a record of what occurred and allows the NSW Police Force to gather information on sexual offences and offending. It could be the first step if 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 (see the end of this Guide for a list of some of these specialist services).

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.

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

If you experienced child sexual abuse 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 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 police will put you in danger. You can discuss these and other concerns you may have by contacting any of the relevant organisations or agencies listed at the end of this Guide.

Investigating and prosecuting child sexual assault that happened in another country can be difficult and is dependent

on a number of factors, such as the laws of the country where the abuse took place, the laws of the nation the victim is currently residing in (Australia in this case), and any relevant international agreements or conventions.

If a crime has an extraterritorial component—that is, it happened outside of Australia—law enforcement authorities may be able to investigate it. 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 victims in navigating the judicial system, getting support, and understanding their rights.

HOW DO I MAKE A REPORT AND WHO DO I REPORT TO IF THE ABUSE 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.

If you need an interpreter but are worried about confidentiality, you can request a telephone interpreter from another part of the country. If you would prefer an Interpreter of a specific gender, you can also request this.

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.

In Australia, a person is presumed innocent unless and 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 childhood sexual abuse.

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.

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

Auburn 44A Macquarie Road

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

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

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

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

152–168 The Horsley Drive

Carramar NSW 2163

Phone: (02) 9646 6700

Fax: (02) 9646 6710

Email: stts-startts@health.nsw.gov.au

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

SOME USEFUL WEBSITES

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

Hints For Healing

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

NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence

A wide range of resources for survivors and relevant professionals.

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

Women's Legal Resource Service NSW

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

<https://vimeo.com/asklois>

E-Safety Commissioner

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

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