



We Are Survivors!

Support for survivors of commercial sexual exploitation from culturally & linguistically diverse, refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds



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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 sexual exploitation and 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 exploitation and abuse. Overcoming the trauma of child 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 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 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 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 MESSAGE OF HOPE FROM A FELLOW SURVIVOR

Dear Fellow Survivor,

My mother and father sexually exploited me as a child for commercial gain. They forced me to bring money into the household via child prostitution and child pornography (the latter was filmed by my father and uncle). Whilst many people might like to believe that this kind of thing happens only in 'third world countries' or financially struggling communities, my background is that I lived in an affluent, middle-class neighbourhood in Melbourne, Australia. Some adult men and women use children in order to enhance their family economy and they pay no regard for the basic human right of a child to be safe, loved and protected. That was certainly my experience growing up. I was unloved, unsafe, unprotected. Exploited.

The repercussions as an adult of my negative childhood experience include feelings of rejection, fear of physical intimacy, loneliness, isolation, drug use, negative self-image, fear of authorities (as my father had contacts within the Police) amongst many others. I suffer long-term from chronic post-traumatic stress disorder, severe depression and anxiety.

I never married and I never had children. At one point I investigated the option of fostering a child as a single parent but because of my long history of depression this was not viable.

I have written this one-page survivor story anonymously because the Police are finally investigating my case after I was given National Whistleblower Protection in 2022. Laws for whistleblowers - or for victims and survivors of sexual assault or rape, can be confusing and hard to understand. After having had my fundamental basic human rights violated, reading and understanding legislation and law was not a priority for me. My focus was on my healing journey, taking each day step by step, because at times, it felt overwhelming.

When I was a child, there were men (and some women) who accessed me for child sex through my parents and paternal family. Some other victims include my brother who experienced similar crimes. My father used to say that selling children for child sex (sexual exploitation for commercial gain) is a much more lucrative 'business' than selling drugs as drug supplies run out and need to be replenished whilst a single human child can be used, re-used and used again, multiple times.

Child prostitution was a staple part of my childhood, I had to hide the fact from schoolteachers at school (some schoolteachers even accessed my father's business), doctors (some doctors even accessed my father's business), police (some police even accessed my father's business). It is a very sad thing that in order for a person to gain commercially from child sex, the enterprise needs to be planned, organised, hidden and well thought-out. Instead of blaming my father and the child rapists accessing my father's child prostitution business, I internalised blame and thought it must all be my fault; I must be a very, very bad child/ person.

As a mature woman in my forties, after a couple of decades of professional counselling, I am still on my healing journey and whilst life has gotten a lot better, I still have some 'bad days' when I don't want to get up out of bed and do life. I've started to accept those bad days as a part of my life and I re-emerge with fresh hope and energy to keep going.

After having been part of a police investigation for many years now, with no arrests made to date, finding resolution through the justice system seems to fade further from my reach. That might not be the case for all victims or

survivors of sexual exploitation for commercial gain however I personally am now needing to creatively think about other ways (outside of the justice system) that I might be able to finally close the book on the childhood chapter of my life that saw so many crimes committed.

I felt suicidal a few times in my life and at the time I would have been relieved for the emotional pain to be over but fortunately I'm still here on this planet and I can honestly say that I'm glad to be alive and am glad that I wasn't successful in ending my life. Regularly seeing a professional counsellor, faith in Jesus, and having a small, tight circle of trusted girlfriends have been three major lifesavers in my personal life and story.

If you have ever been a victim of commercial sexual exploitation, I just want to say to you: 'It was not your fault. You were not to blame. You are not 'used goods'. You did not deserve to be treated that way'. Perhaps nobody has ever said the above words to you, or maybe they have but you haven't felt able to receive the message. It is my hope that all survivors of commercial sexual exploitation find peace and freedom from the immense pain and suffering committed against them.

Jilly

WHAT IS COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION?

The act of exploiting another person by making them perform sexual services for financial or other gain is known as commercial sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation usually involves using force, manipulation, coercion or deception to engage people—usually vulnerable adults or children — to participate in sexual activity in exchange for money, commodities, or services. This kind of exploitation can take many different forms, including pornography, prostitution, trafficking, and any other activity in which sexual behaviours are commercialised.

Commercial sexual exploitation is a form of sexual assault and violence and is a serious breach of human rights.

Sexual exploitation involves the abuse of power, strength and/or authority, where one person takes advantage of their position of power, authority or influence over another person to engage the other person in sexual activity in order to benefit in some commercial way. Sexual exploitation can and usually does, have serious, long-lasting negative effects on the survivor’s physical, emotional, and mental health.

In situations of commercial sexual exploitation, the victim is not free to truly give consent to the sexual activity due to the power difference between the sexual exploiter and the victim. Giving consent (permission or agreement) is an essential part of sexual relationships and when one person has sexual relations with another person without that person’s free and informed consent, it is 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 person has stopped giving their consent it is sexual assault.

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

Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual assault and sexual violence.

In this Guide, the terms “sexual assault” and “sexual violence” and “sexual exploitation” will be used interchangeably unless specifically indicated.

FORMS OF COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Commercial sexual exploitation can include the production of pornography, prostitution and trafficking. Commercial sexual exploitation involves the exploitation of people, usually women and children, for the sake of pornography, prostitution, and other similar industries. In contrast to voluntary types of prostitution or pornography, in which people freely participate in the sex industry, victims of commercial sexual exploitation are tricked, manipulated, or forced into the activity against their will.

Exploiters employ a variety of methods to keep their victims under their control, such as threats, psychological manipulation, physical abuse, and “debt bondage”. Debt bondage is sometimes referred to as bonded labour or debt slavery and is a contemporary kind of slavery in which victims are forced to work in order to pay off a debt, which may be legitimate or it may be fraudulent. However, the conditions of the debt are manipulated or controlled by the creditor or employer (exploiter) in a way that keeps the victim in a perpetual state of servitude.

Commercial sexual exploitation in all its forms is illegal. Commercial sexual exploitation is a form of contemporary slavery and is a grave violation of human rights.

HOW COMMON IS COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION?

Commercial sexual exploitation is a major global problem with millions of people being subjected to sexual exploitation in all its forms every year. However, it is difficult to estimate the exact prevalence of commercial sexual exploitation due to the hidden nature of the crime and the underreporting of sexual crimes in general. In addition, differing definitions, cultural differences, as well as differences in data collection methods make determining the true incidence of the crime difficult to establish. Sexual exploitation is a greatly underreported crime, and many victims/survivors do not report what has happened to them due to fear, societal stigma, shame, 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.

WHO ARE THE ‘VICTIMS’?

Victims/survivors of commercial sexual exploitation come from a wide variety of backgrounds. The majority of victims of commercial sexual exploitation are women and teenaged girls who can be especially vulnerable to coercion and manipulation. Children, including both boys and girls, are also especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation because of their young age and reliance on caregivers. Children may be forced, tricked or trafficked into commercial sexual exploitation by strangers, acquaintances or even family members. Child trafficking and sexual exploitation are major issues on a global scale. As a result of a lack of access to social support, economic opportunities, and legal protections, members of marginalised or disadvantaged communities such as migrants, refugees, homeless people, LGBTIQ+ and young people, and those living in poverty are also more vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation.

Asylum seekers, illegal immigrants, and migrants can be at increased risk of commercial sexual exploitation because of their unstable legal status, their inability to access social assistance, and scarcity of work opportunities.

Other people more vulnerable to sexual exploitation can include people who have experienced past trauma, such as physical or sexual abuse, people with physical or intellectual disabilities, homeless young people, and people with substance abuse issues as offenders can exploit their dependence on illicit substances in order to control and manipulate them.

WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS?

Both the nature of offender characteristics and the dynamics of commercial sexual exploitation can vary greatly depending on the context, region, and cultural factors related to each unique situation. However, in general, perpetrators of commercial sexual exploitation can include traffickers or “pimps” who enlist, house, transport, or otherwise acquire people with the intention of using them for commercial sexual exploitation. Traffickers and pimps exert influence over their victims using persuasion, coercion, manipulation, violence, threats and/or deception.

“Customers”, who may also be referred to as “johns”, make the payment for the sexual service. It is the customers who establish the market that fuels commercial sexual exploitation with their demand for paid sex. Organised

crime networks and street gangs that make money from trafficking and exploiting people for sex labour are also responsible for some forms of commercial sexual exploitation.

Online exploiters make up a significant proportion of offenders. As the internet has grown, so too have the online platforms that enable commercial sexual exploitation, a practice in which victims are forced or trafficked to engage in sexual acts via the internet. Unfortunately, dishonest law enforcement personnel and other officials may also be complicit in the facilitation of commercial sexual exploitation or may choose to ignore it allowing the crime to continue.

Tragically, sometimes family members may be the perpetrators of commercial sexual exploitation, exploiting their own relatives, including children.

ISSUES COMMONLY FACED BY SURVIVORS OF COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Survivors of commercial sexual exploitation may face a wide range of significant issues as a result of the trauma they have been subjected to. These may include physical health issues such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs), physical violence injuries, hunger and starvation, and exhaustion from long hours and traumatic working conditions. Survivors may also face a wide range of mental health issues, including suicidal thoughts, depression, anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) symptoms, and substance abuse.

As a result of the violence, coercion, manipulation and degradation that are inherent in sexual exploitation, survivors may suffer from severe emotional and psychological trauma and their sense of identity, trust, and self-esteem may all be negatively impacted by the abuse. Even after escaping the abusive environment, survivors of commercial sexual exploitation can experience re-traumatisation as a result of social stigmatisation from society which can include social isolation, rejection from family and friends, and difficulties reintegrating into mainstream society.

Survivors of commercial sexual exploitation may also face significant financial concerns as they may have been financially exploited as well as sexually exploited by the perpetrator/s, who may have deducted money from their income, demanded outrageous prices for basic needs, or enslaved them in legitimate or fraudulent debt (“debt bondage”).

Survivors of trafficking who were trafficked across borders may also have to deal with the stress of immigration-related matters or criminal charges stemming from their exploitation.

In addition to all of the above, survivors of commercial sexual exploitation experience ongoing trauma and disadvantage arising from stigma and discrimination, lack employment skills, poor social support networks, and

limited education, making it extremely challenging to reintegrate into society. However, with compassion, help and support, it is possible for survivors to recover and heal from the trauma of commercial sexual exploitation.

If you have been sexually exploited, 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 exploitation, and there are people you can talk to (for example other victims in a support group, a sexual assault counsellor, confidential 24/7 crisis counselling line if you need to immediately speak to a professional) and who will understand what you are going through.

DEBT BONDAGE

Debt bondage is often an integral component of commercial sexual exploitation, particularly in trafficking-related exploitation.

Debt bondage is forbidden by international law and constitutes a grave violation of human rights.

It usually occurs where a person (the victim) may borrow money or accrue debt to pay for essentials like food, housing, or medical costs. This debt could be fake or coerced, or it could be legitimate—like a loan from a lender. In cases of debt bondage, the terms of the loan are unjust and exploitative. To pay back the loan, the victim might have to labour for the creditor and pay excessive interest rates. Often the debt is increased by extra levies, fees, or expenditures, which makes it extremely difficult or even impossible for the victim to ever pay it off in full.

One of the main characteristics of debt bondage is the extreme control and isolation that the employer or creditor imposes on the victim. The victim may face limitations on their freedom of travel, seizure of their identity documents, and restrictions on their ability to communicate with others. This imposed isolation makes it extremely difficult to get assistance or to escape. Because the victim is unable to pay off the debt and are forced to remain in servitude indefinitely, the debt bondage system leads to a vicious cycle of exploitation. Even if they are able to pay back a portion of the debt, they might still be trapped because additional loans might be placed on them or the conditions of their current debt might be altered in order to make escape impossible.

If you have been subjected to debt bondage you are not alone and there are people and organisations who can help you. See the end of this Guide for a list of organisations that can help.

QUESTIONS SURVIVORS OF COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OFTEN ASK

There are many questions that survivors of sexual exploitation may ask themselves in the immediate aftermath of the crime or in the time afterwards. It is very normal to ask these questions.

“Why did it happen to me?”

Many victims of commercial sexual exploitation, like victims of other crimes, may think that they must have done something wrong for the abuser to target them. Becoming the victim of a crime can be an extremely confusing experience. The fact that sexual crimes are not openly talked about in most societies can make matters even more confusing for those who have been the victims of such crimes. Survivors of sexual exploitation might question if the perpetrator chose them because of something they did. For example, a survivor might ask “Was I too friendly?”, “Was it the clothes I was wearing?”, “Was I in the wrong place?”.

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

Sexual exploitation is never ok and it is never the victim’s fault.

“Why do I feel so alone?”

Society’s taboo around discussing sexual violence can lead to victims of sexual exploitation feeling alone, isolated and stigmatised, believing they will never be accepted by society. Sadly, emotions of guilt, shame and embarrassment can keep victims 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 exploited 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 exploitation, and there are people you can talk to and who will understand what you are going through and who can help you (for example other victims in a support group, a sexual assault counsellor, confidential 24/7 crisis counselling line if you need to speak to a professional immediately).

“What if I was sexually exploited or trafficked by someone I know?”

Research from around the world shows that most sexual exploitation and trafficking is committed by someone the victim knows and should be able to trust. Offenders can include members of the victim’s extended family or members of their immediate family. The victim may also know the offender through other ways, such as being a “boyfriend”, family friend or neighbour, for example.

You might have experienced a wide range of emotions if you were the victim of sexual exploitation 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.

These emotions and concerns are all very 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.

In all cases of sexual exploitation, the offender/s is always to blame.

“What if I was sexually exploited or trafficked by someone I don’t know?”

It can be just as confusing and traumatising to be sexually exploited by a stranger or strangers. If you experienced sexual exploitation by a person or people you don’t know, you may have been reluctant to disclose the incident for

fear that you would somehow be blamed for what happened. If you were unable to tell the abuser “no,” if you were unable to get away or physically resist, it is possible that you were blamed for the abuse when you did tell someone. No matter who does it, sexual exploitation 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.

“What if the offender was a female?”

Sexual exploitation can be committed by a person of any gender, including women. Sexual exploitation can refer to any act of non-consensual sexual action or contact and is not gender specific. Sexual violence 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 sexual exploiters and perpetrators, it is crucial to know that sexual violence committed by female exploiters and perpetrators causes just as much suffering as that perpetrated by males.

Whether the victim is male or female, and regardless of the gender of the perpetrator, sexual exploitation is about the abuse of the victim’s trust and vulnerability. 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 are a male or female who has been sexually exploited by a female, please be aware that the perpetrator committed a serious crime against you, it is no less serious than if the perpetrator was male.

“Was it my fault?”

Victim’s tendency to blame themselves is one of the most common effects of sexual violence and exploitation. If you have experienced sexual exploitation, you might blame yourself for what happened, particularly if the abuser told you it was your fault, if you were unable to resist physically or say “no”, if you were unable to escape, or if the perpetrator used coercion or other tricks to gain your compliance or trust.

It is important to remember that you are not to blame. 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 exploitation. This is due, in part, to the taboo and secrecy surrounding sexual violence. Many adult 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 exploitation 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. However, you haven’t done anything wrong and have nothing to feel guilty, embarrassed or ashamed about, in fact, you can feel strong and courageous that you survived such a traumatic life experience.

“I arrived in Australia illegally as I was trafficked here for sex work. Will I be in trouble with the law?”

As a victim of trafficking for sexual purposes, you should not be in trouble with the law. Legal systems in many countries, including in Australia, recognise that victims of trafficking are coerced, manipulated, or forced into illegal activities, and they focus on protecting and supporting victims rather than punishing them. Victim-protection laws are designed to protect trafficking victims/survivors from prosecution for crimes they were forced to commit as a result of their trafficking situation. These laws have been especially designed to recognise the coercion and lack of consent involved in trafficking. There are organisations that specialise in helping trafficking victims/survivors. These organisations can provide you with specialist legal advice, support, and advocacy. They can help you understand your rights and navigate the Australian legal system.

It is important to reach out to trusted organisations and professionals who can guide you through this process and provide the support you need. You are not alone, and there are resources available to help you. A list of specialist organisations is presented at the end of this Guide.

“I was trafficked into Australia to work as a sex worker. Will I be deported if I try to get help?”

If you were trafficked to Australia for sexual exploitation, it is important to know that there are laws and support systems in place to protect you, rather than deport you. Australia has systems in place to assist and protect victims of human trafficking and modern slavery. For example, the Australian Government offers support programs for victims of trafficking, such as the **Support for Trafficked People Program (STPP)**. This program can provide you with access to accommodation, financial assistance, legal advice, medical treatment, and counselling. As a victim of trafficking, you may be eligible for a specific visa that allows you to stay in Australia. The Human Trafficking Visa Framework includes visas such as the Bridging F visa (BVF) and the Referred Stay (Permanent) visa. These visas can provide you with temporary or permanent residency if you are able to cooperate with the police.

In addition, Australian law protects trafficking victims from being prosecuted for crimes they were forced to commit as a result of their trafficking situation. This legal protection was designed to encourage victims/survivors to come forward without fear of punishment or deportation.

*If you feel safe doing so, consider contacting the **Australian Federal Police (AFP)**. They have specialised units trained to handle trafficking cases with sensitivity and can help ensure your protection.*

There are a number of organisations that specialise in helping the survivors of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, such as the **Australian Red Cross** as well as **Anti-Slavery Australia**, amongst others. They can provide you with invaluable support, legal advice, and assistance in navigating the system. These organisations often operate with a high level of confidentiality to protect your identity and ensure your safety.

A list of organisations that can help is provided at the end of this Guide.

“I am a victim of trafficking and I have a massive debt from debt bondage. Can I get help?”

As a victim/survivor of trafficking with debt from debt bondage, you can receive help. Many organisations and programs in Australia are designed to provide victims/survivors of trafficking in overcoming debt bondage and other financial and emotional burdens. *There are a number of organisations that provide free legal aid to trafficking victims.* They can help you understand your rights and navigate the legal system to address your debt and other issues. Legal professionals can also assist in negotiating with creditors or even finding ways to have your debt forgiven, especially if it was incurred under coercive circumstances.

There are also numerous support organisations that can help you. For example,

Anti-Slavery Australia offer support, legal advice, and resources for trafficking victims. They can guide you through the process of seeking relief from debt bondage.

The Australian Red Cross have programs specifically designed to support victims of human trafficking, providing practical and emotional support.

The Salvation Army - The Salvation Army's Trafficking and Slavery Safe House can provide you with shelter, legal assistance, and other support services.

The contact details of these organisations are provided at the end of this Guide.

The Australian Government also has a number of programs specifically to help victims/survivors of trafficking. For example,

The Support for Trafficked People Program (STPP) offers various forms of assistance, including financial aid, legal support, and counselling.

The Human Trafficking Visa Framework includes visa options that allow you to stay in Australia and access support services.

These and other support organisations can also assist you with financial counselling and support. They can provide free financial counselling to help you manage and understand your debt, and to create a plan for your financial recovery. Many support organisations also offer *Emergency Relief Programs* which can provide immediate financial

support for essentials like housing, food and medical care. Many support organisations also provide free or low-cost counselling services to help you cope with the trauma and stress associated with trafficking and debt bondage.

You can take these steps:

1. Contact a Support Organisation

Reach out to one of the organisations mentioned above or another that specialises in assisting trafficking victims.

2. Obtain Legal Advice

Obtain legal advice to understand your rights and options regarding your debt.

3. Get Financial Counselling

Work with a financial counsellor to assess your situation and create a plan.

4. Find Emotional Support

Talk with a counsellor or another mental health professional to support your emotional well-being.

By taking these steps, you can start the process of overcoming your debt and rebuilding your life.

“How will I survive financially?”

If you are a victim/survivor of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking, it is understandable that you will have fears about how you will be able to survive financially. However, organisations like Anti-Slavery Australia and the Australian Red Cross can help connect you with job training programs and employment services. Vocational training programs that provide skills and certifications in various trades and professions are also available to survivors of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. In addition to employment services and vocational training, many organisations also offer scholarships and grants for survivors of trafficking to pursue education and training. Local educational institutions often offer programs for adult learners, including language courses, and job training. Some organisations also provide microloans, financial literacy training and small business support to help survivors start small businesses or pursue entrepreneurial opportunities.

Starting a fresh life can seem extremely daunting but with help, guidance and support, it is possible to overcome the trauma of commercial sexual exploitation and begin to enjoy life and new opportunities.

“Will I be accepted back into society?”

It's important to know that you have every right to be accepted, supported, and treated with respect and dignity. Healing and reintegration into society can be challenging, but many people have successfully done it with the right support. Understanding that you are not defined by what happened to you and realising that you are strong and resilient are important first steps. Connecting with support groups, whether in person or online, can provide a sense of community and understanding and organisations that specialise in helping survivors can be incredibly beneficial. A list of organisations that can help is provided at the end of this Guide.

Remember, you deserve a life full of respect and opportunities.

COMMON REACTIONS TO TRAUMA AND THE EFFECTS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND/OR VIOLENCE

Everybody's experience of sexual exploitation is different. It may have an impact on your thoughts, feelings, actions, interpersonal relationships, as well as how you view and interact with the world.

SOME COMMON REACTIONS TO TRAUMA

Your response to the trauma of sexual exploitation 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 exploitation.

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 sexual trauma. 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 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 Very alert / hyper-vigilant

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?

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS (PTS)

The range of emotions and behaviours that people experience following trauma 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 survivors of trauma are a normal response to trauma and therefore the term “disorder” is counterproductive and not helpful. Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) 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 remain

Losing interest in routine activities

COMPLEX POST TRAUMATIC STRESS (C-PTS)

Complex Post-Traumatic Stress (C-PTS) is a condition that can arise from prolonged or repeated exposure to

traumatic events, especially those from which escape is difficult or impossible. It is distinguished from PTS because of the chronic nature and severity of the trauma experienced including long-term abuse, domestic violence, torture, captivity, or trafficking.

Symptoms of C-PTS

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

Re-experiencing the Trauma

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

Nightmares: Disturbing dreams related to the trauma.

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

Avoidance and Numbing

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

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

Hyperarousal and Reactivity

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

Startle Response: Being easily startled or jumpy.

Irritability: Frequent irritability or outbursts of anger.

Sleep Disturbances: Trouble falling or staying asleep.

Negative Self-Perception

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

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

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

Difficulty with Emotional Regulation

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

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

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

Interpersonal Problems

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

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

Altered Perceptions

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

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

If you are experiencing symptoms of C-PTS it is possible to get help to manage them and take the first steps towards healing and recovery. There are people and organisations who can provide expert and trauma-informed assistance and support. A list of support services is provided at the end of this Guide.

LONG TERM PHYSICAL/ HEALTH CONSEQUENCES

Numerous common medical conditions such as headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, and neck discomfort, might be brought on by sexual trauma. 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 are more attuned to the needs of trauma survivors. 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 violence or exploitation, you may find yourself struggling with intimacy and sex. This is a perfectly normal and understandable reaction to a sexual trauma. While some people may experience problems immediately following the abuse, 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 violence can take time.

The following is a list of some of the most typical issues faced by victims of sexual violence, including sexual exploitation, 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 males).

Your beliefs and attitudes around sex may have changed as a result of the sexual exploitation. 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

WHY DON'T SURVIVORS TELL?

Survivors of sexual exploitation 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/S

You might have been threatened to keep the sexual exploitation a secret. Sexual violence is a terrorising and sometimes life-threatening crime and any threats made by the perpetrator may be taken very seriously by the victim. This is especially frightening if the sexual exploitation took place within the context of organised crime or was gang-related. It makes sense that you would have kept the abuse to yourself if the perpetrator/s threatened to harm you or a loved one if you told anybody or tried to escape.

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 exploitation. In reality, very few people make up stories about being sexually abused or exploited. In fact, many victims of sexual crimes 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, including the authorities, don't believe them. When people don't believe a victim's disclosure of sexual exploitation it can serve to prevent them from taking the risk of telling anybody again.

When survivors report experiencing sexual violence, including sexual exploitation, it is crucial to believe them. If you told someone about the sexual exploitation you were subjected to 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 BLAMED

Self-blame is a common response to sexual violence and exploitation 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 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 exploitation, you are not to blame. You haven't done anything wrong, and there is nothing to be embarrassed or ashamed about. The person or people who exploited you are responsible for the abuse.

FEAR OF HOW OTHER PEOPLE WILL REACT

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 violence 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 and exploitation 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 and exploitation. 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 crime. As a result of the shame and stigma, victims of sexual violence may feel isolated and believe that the sexual violence was their fault. Similarly, some victims/survivors' disclosures of sexual exploitation are minimised or even silenced. For example, a survivor might be met with the response "Well, why didn't you just yell out for help or try to escape?". Minimising or discounting survivors' experiences of sexual exploitation can also serve to discourage them and other survivors from speaking out.

FEAR OF BEING LABELLED HOMOSEXUAL ("GAY")

Survivors of sexual exploitation may be particularly reluctant to disclose what they have gone through to others, particularly if the crime was committed by a person or people of the same gender. Survivors fear that their experience will make them homosexual or "gay". This fear is especially damaging in environments where homosexuality is stigmatised, even vilified. However, it is important to know that a person's sexual orientation is unrelated to sexual crime. 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 violence by somebody of the same gender, the assault did not occur because you are homosexual, nor will it lead to your becoming homosexual. If you are worried about these issues, it may be helpful to speak with a qualified and experienced counsellor to get support and assurance on this issue.

"THIS IS OUR SECRET"

In order to make sure they are not discovered, abusers may specifically instruct the victim to keep the abuse a secret. If you experienced sexual exploitation 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. Speak to a trustworthy person if the abuse is still having an effect on your life and get the help and support you deserve.

FEAR OF NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON VISA STATUS / APPLICATION FOR RESIDENCY

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

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

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.

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.

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 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 be most comfortable talking with.

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 his or her feelings
5. To have his or her value as a person reinforced
6. To be reassured that they do not carry the shame of the sexual exploitation
7. To build or re-build their self-esteem
8. To get back in contact with his or her feelings
9. To speak out the truth of their lives

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 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

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. Not everyone feels comfortable to take part in social or political activism and there is no need to feel guilty if you choose not to do this. It is important to find the healing activities that work for you.

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 CRIMES TO THE AUTHORITIES

Some survivors find a lot of relief in reporting what has happened to them to the police and seeking justice through the legal system. For some survivors it is a matter of ensuring there are consequences for the perpetrator/s 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 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 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 CRIME 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?

In an Emergency or if you are in Immediate Danger

To get help quickly in the event of an emergency or imminent danger, use the emergency number (000). Give as much information as you can about the occurrence, such as the location, the names and descriptions of the people involved, and any other pertinent details.

For Non-Emergency Situations

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 sexual exploitation 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. However, changes have recently been made in NSW to create safe spaces and modern facilities to help empower domestic and sexual violence survivors and vulnerable witnesses to give their best evidence in court. These new facilities have been installed or upgraded in 45 courthouses across NSW.

Court upgrades to help domestic and sexual violence survivors | Communities and Justice (nsw.gov.au)

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.

REPORTING TRAFFICKING

Contact the Australian Human Trafficking Hotline or the Australian Federal Police

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

Consider Making an Online Report

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

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

Find a Support Organisation

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

See the list of helpful organisations at the end of this Guide.

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.

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.

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

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: enslavery@salvationarmy.org.au

AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE (AFP)

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

Phone: 131 237

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Support for Trafficked People Program (STPP)

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

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://centacareswnsw.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

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

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>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- * Identify and validate their childhood experiences
- * Explore strategies of survival and healing

- * Work through issues such as trust, intimacy, and sexual confusion
- * Establish a support network for continued personal recovery
- * Make choices that aren't determined by abuse

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

SOME USEFUL WEBSITES

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

Hints For Healing

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

NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence

A wide range of resources for survivors and relevant professionals.

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

Women's Legal Resource Service NSW

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

<https://vimeo.com/asklois>

E-Safety Commissioner

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

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