

**A guide for  
gay and  
bisexual  
men who  
have been  
affected by  
sexual  
violence**

# Introduction

This guide is for **gay and bisexual men** who have been affected by sexual violence. Our aim is to provide an overview of the basics and to help you find the support you need.

If you've been raped or sexually assaulted and are looking for support then by picking up this booklet you've already made the first step in the journey towards moving on. Sexual violation is an issue that is commonly misunderstood, downplayed or even denied; our **Myths and realities** section looks at some of the common assumptions that are made about rape and sexual assault.

Sexual violation impacts on the lives of survivors in very different ways but there are some common reactions which we'll help you to get to grips with. Whatever point you're at in your healing journey towards moving on, we want you to know that you're not alone. There is support out there if you'd like it and things can get better, you can heal from these experiences.

This booklet is for anyone who identifies as a gay or bisexual man, but some of the information may be more relevant for cis-gender men. We also have booklets for trans people and for lesbian and bisexual women.

If by reading this guide you decide that you would like our support, then please call us on **0345 3 30 30 30** or visit **[www.lgbt.foundation](http://www.lgbt.foundation)** to find out how we can support you and put you in touch with other services who can also help.

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# Understanding Sexual Violation

**Experiencing any form of sexual violation can be horrific and devastating.** For some men, understanding the practical meaning of certain terms can help them take steps towards talking about what happened. Having said this, some men find that following a trauma they are unable to remember clearly what happened, so don't be alarmed if this is the case, it's a perfectly normal psychological response to trauma.

**Sexual violation:** Sexual violation is a general term that includes many acts such as sexual assault, sexual harassment, rape, child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, sexual slavery/enforced prostitution and forced marriage.

**Sexual assault:** Sexual assault is any kind of sexual contact that is against a person's will or is without consent. This may be because of force, violence, or intimidation or where the man is unable to give consent (e.g. through being drunk or on drugs, being too young to consent, being asleep or having a mental disability).

**Assault by penetration:** The law says that someone commits a serious offence if they put something into the anus of a man without that man's consent. They might use part of their body (such as fingers), or an object.

**Rape:** The law states rape occurs if a man puts his penis into someone's vagina, anus or mouth without their consent. It is also classed as rape if a man continues after the person they are having sex with, withdraws consent. For example, if you were having sex with someone and you told them to stop. A woman cannot rape someone under English law, but she can commit assault by penetration.

# Understanding Consent

**One of the most common misconceptions** about sexual assault or rape is that you have to verbally tell the perpetrator to stop for it to count as a crime. This is not true. Here are some common myths to help you understand the importance of consent:

**Myth: “If you don’t say stop it isn’t rape.”**

**Reality:** There are many reasons why men find it difficult to say “No”. He might be afraid; he could be drunk or asleep, or unable to speak for another reason. The law says that the person doing the assault has to show why they thought they had consent.

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**Myth: “Your partner or ex- can’t rape you”**

**Reality:** You always have the right to say “no” whenever. If you do not agree to sex then it does not matter that you have had sex with that person before. They do not have the right to continue.

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**Myth: “I’ve had sex with them before so it can’t be rape or sexual assault”**

**Reality:** Even if you have had consensual sex with a person in the past, no matter how recently this does not mean that you have given consent for sex indefinitely.

# Myths and realities

**Myth:** “I must have done something to ask for it.”

**Reality:** Absolutely no-one deserves to be victimised, assaulted or violated. It doesn't matter where you were how you behaved or what happened in the run-up to the assault, if you haven't consented then it's wrong.

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**Myth:** “It can't be rape/assault because I know them.”

**Reality:** Whilst the media image of rape may be of a stranger attacking someone they don't know, in reality the majority of cases of rape and sexual assault against men involve perpetrators who are known to him. Whatever your relationship with the perpetrator, it doesn't give them the right to engage in sexual relations that you haven't consented to.

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**Myth:** “women can't rape/assault men.”

**Reality:** Whilst legally a woman cannot be accused of rape (because rape is defined as penetration with a penis) women can sexually assault men or other women. If you were subjected to sexual relations that you didn't consent to that is assault.

**Myth:** “Being raped or abused has made me gay or bi”

**Reality:** “There is no evidence to suggest that being raped changes your sexual orientation. You have the right to choose your own sexual partners.”

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**Myth:** Getting an erection/ejaculating must mean that I consented to it/enjoyed it”

**Reality:** The body is wired to react in certain ways whether we want it to or not, and getting an erection or ejaculating certainly does not mean that you enjoyed it or gave consent. Many perpetrators use these physiological responses to cause confusion for the survivor, and to make them feel even more powerless.

# Common reactions

## **The hours, days, months and years following a sexual assault or rape will be different for every survivor.**

Sometimes how we react and how we feel in the aftermath of an assault will differ to how we feel further down the line. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to deal with trauma.

For many men, knowing that they're not alone can be what leads them to seek support. Knowing that your reactions and thoughts are common amongst other survivors of sexual violation can bring some comfort and help you to start to making sense of how you're feeling. Here are some examples of feelings and thoughts that some male survivors have said they experienced afterwards. You probably won't experience all of these, and you might be having feelings that aren't on this list – everyone is different - but even recognising one or two that sound familiar could help you to feel a little less isolated in what you're going through.

### **SHAME**

*"No one can ever know how disgusting I am"*

### **DENIAL**

*"I must have consented otherwise it wouldn't have happened", "Maybe it wasn't as bad as I thought it was", "She/he loves/cares about me so they couldn't have done this"*

### **ANGER**

*"How could they do this to me?", "If I was straight this wouldn't have happened"*

### **SHOCK & NUMBNESS**

*"Why don't I feel anything?", "Why can't I cry?"*



## **DESPAIR**

*"My life will never be the same again"*

## **GUILT**

*"Why didn't I fight back?", "Did I do something to make this happen?", "What did I do that would make them want to do that to me?"*

## **FEELING POWERLESS**

*"I couldn't move"*

## **FEAR**

*"What if they've given me HIV or another STI?", "What if it happens again?", "What if I report it and they find out?", "I don't feel I can trust anyone now", "I can't bear to be alone"*

## **CONFUSION**

## **FEELING DISORIENTATED**

## **ANXIETY/PANIC ATTACKS**

## **FLASHBACKS**

## **PHYSICAL REACTIONS**

Change in appetite, problems with sleeping, nausea, physical pain such as headaches and stomach ache, itching, feeling constantly on edge.

# Seeking Support

## **Being the survivor of sexual violence can leave you feeling isolated and alone.**

When you are ready to talk, there are lots of people out there who can help you to find where to start, including some services which offer specialist support for gay and bisexual men.

You can find contact details of some useful organisations on the following pages but here are three things to think about when seeking support:

- If you decide to seek support through counselling or another support service, then you should never be pushed into disclosing what happened in detail. Therapy should be at a slow and safe pace that you feel comfortable with, where you talk at your own pace.
- It's never too late to ask for support, even if the rape or assault is historical. For some men, it can take decades to talk about sexual violation, but this doesn't mean the need for support is less.
- Shop around for the support that suits you. Deciding which services you want to access can help you to feel empowered and more in control of your own healing journey.

# Reporting sexual assault/rape

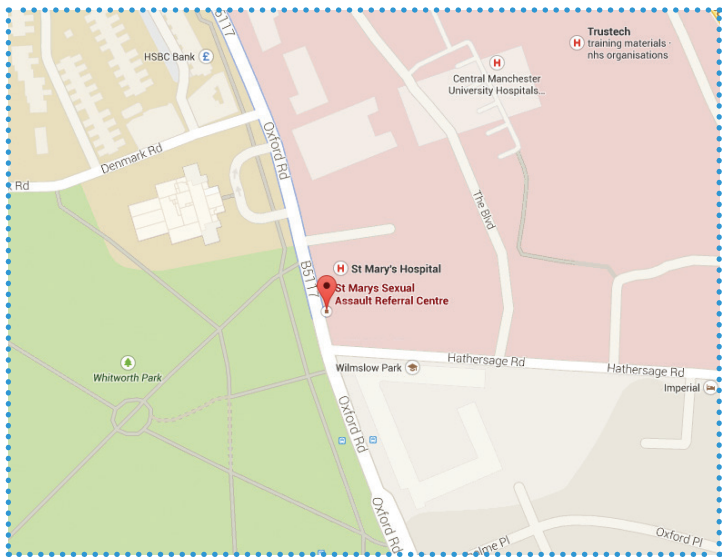
**Whether or not you report what's happened to you is your decision, and not one that anyone should ever put pressure on you about. If you want to report an assault to the police there is no time limit on when you can do this, although reporting soon after an attack may allow important evidence to be collected.**

If you do report to the Police, the likelihood is that you will be asked to talk to a specially trained Police Officer. They will take your statement and advise you on the support available. It is likely that they will also take you to a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC).

Many people believe that the only option for reporting an assault or rape is directly to the Police, but you may not feel able to do that, especially in the immediate aftermath of an attack. Another option is to visit your local Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC). You do not have to have reported the assault to the Police to do this.

The nearest one in Manchester is St Mary's SARC on Oxford Road – they have a 24 hour helpline on **0161 276 6515**.

The staff at a SARC will be able to examine you and look after your health needs, including offering sexual health screening and emergency contraception if required.



Even if you don't want to report the assault to the Police immediately, the SARC can retain evidence which could be used in the future if you requested. No-one will try to convince you to report the assault if you don't want to.

The SARC will also be able to refer you for further support, for example counselling. Many SARCs have Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVA), who can support you if you want to report an assault and through any subsequent investigation and prosecution. Survivors Manchester has male ISVA's.

For more information about the reporting process and about visiting a Sexual Assault Referral Centre go to

**[www.stmaryscentre.org](http://www.stmaryscentre.org)**

# Useful contacts and support

**If you or someone else is in immediate danger, you should always contact the police by dialling 999.**

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## LGBT Foundation

At the LGBT Foundation, we have been offering support to victims of sexual violence for over ten years.

We can offer:

- Immediate support through our daily pop-in service (Monday-Friday 10am-7pm)
- A listening and non-judgmental ear through our helpline service
- A safe and accepting space to explore your feelings through our free face-to-face counselling service
- The opportunity to talk to a police officer in our fortnightly police surgery
- Fortnightly free legal advice surgery

**Web:** [www.lgbt.foundation](http://www.lgbt.foundation)

**Helpline:** 0345 3 30 30 30

**Email:** [helpline@lgbt.foundation](mailto:helpline@lgbt.foundation)

**LGBT**  
foundation

# Useful contacts and support



## **Survivors Manchester**

A survivor-led/survivor-run voluntary organisation supporting male survivors of sexual abuse and rape.

**Web:** [www.survivorsmanchester.org.uk](http://www.survivorsmanchester.org.uk)

**Email:** [support@survivorsmanchester.org.uk](mailto:support@survivorsmanchester.org.uk)

**Tel:** 0161 236 2182

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## **St Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre (Manchester)**

Offer forensic, medical and counselling services to victims of rape or sexual assault.

**Web:** [www.stmaryscentre.org](http://www.stmaryscentre.org)

**Helpline:** 0161 276 6515

**Email:** [stmarys.sarc@cmft.nhs.uk](mailto:stmarys.sarc@cmft.nhs.uk)

## **Survivors UK**

The national website for support for male survivors of sexual abuse, rape and sexual exploitation, providing information and online support activities.

**Web:** *www.survivorsuk.org*



## **Broken Rainbow**

National charity offering support to LGBT people affected by domestic violence or abuse.

**Web:** *www.brokenrainbow.org.uk*

**Helpline:** 0300 999 5428 (from mobiles) or 0800 999 5428 (from a landline)

**Email:** *help@brokenrainbow.org.uk*

We believe in a  
fair and equal  
society where all  
lesbian, gay,  
bisexual and trans  
people can achieve  
their full potential.

This guide is available in large print  
by calling **0345 3 30 30 30**  
or email [info@lgbt.foundation](mailto:info@lgbt.foundation)

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