

Information for Adult Survivors of Childhood Abuse

The content of this leaflet is aimed at providing supportive information for adult survivors of childhood abuse. However, the advice provided can also be considered relevant in circumstances of current child abuse.

What is Child Abuse?

Child abuse is any action by another person – adult or child – that causes harm to a child and is a criminal offence.

A child is anyone under the age of 16 years and in some circumstances under the age of 18 years. Abusers can be any person of any gender and can come from all walks of life. Children may be abused within

a family or institutional setting by those known to them or by a stranger. Abusers very often instil a belief in the child that the child is at fault for the abuse and frequently use threats of harm to force or encourage a child's silence.

It is important to highlight that survivors are not to blame for the abuse they experienced during childhood.

Abuse can be sexual, physical, emotional and/or neglect.

Sexual abuse:

sexual contact with a child or young person is a crime and can also involve forcing or persuading a child or young person to take part in sexual activities. This doesn't have to involve physical contact and can happen online.

Emotional abuse:

occurs when a child or young person experiences emotional maltreatment or neglect. This can include name calling and deliberately making a child feel sad or afraid. It's sometimes called psychological abuse and can cause serious harm.

Physical abuse:

causing physical harm to a child or young person. Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning or suffocating.

Neglect:

ongoing failure to meet a child or young person's basic needs. It's dangerous and can cause serious and long-term harm.

Why should I make a report to Police?

Police Scotland understands that not every person may feel ready or able to speak about the abuse they have experienced in childhood, however we are here to listen to you and let you know about relevant support services when you feel ready.

Whether the abuse you experienced was physical, emotional, sexual or if you were neglected, Police Scotland will explain the investigative process, making sure you understand your options and keeping you updated during the investigation.

Police Scotland is fully committed to thoroughly investigating child abuse no matter where or when this happened or who was involved. Our priorities during such investigations are to ensure your welfare and wellbeing, identify persons who may pose a risk to children and to protect any person who may be at risk of harm.

Your report will enable Police to assess the current risk posed by the abuser and ensure that no further persons are at risk. Your report may also lead to your abuser being brought to justice.

How can I report my abuse to the Police?

Should an urgent response from the Police or other Emergency Services be required, please dial 999.

Otherwise, you can report abuse to Police Scotland in the following ways:

On 101 / Attendance at a Police Station

You will be asked for certain information but will not be asked to disclose specific details of your abuse. You can request that Police attend at a time, date and location suitable to you. Alternatively you can go to a Police Station to make a report of the abuse you experienced. You can also discuss your options with a police officer before making a decision about whether you would like to make a formal report or not.

Crimestoppers

If you do not feel ready or able to speak to Police but want to pass on information or you feel that someone is at risk of harm you can phone Crimestoppers anonymously on **0800 555111** and pass on your concerns.

Support Services

Some support services can help you to decide which option is best for you and accompany you to a police station. Information on support services is provided at the back of this booklet. British Sign Language users can contact Police Scotland directly with the assistance of an online sign language interpreter from contactSCOTLAND BSL via <https://contactscotland-bsl.org/device-direct/>

What happens after I make a report to Police?

A trained police officer will speak with you and note a statement. If you are a survivor of sexual abuse you will be given the choice of speaking with a male or female police officer and every effort will be made to meet your request. Your statement will be obtained by an officer specially trained in taking sexual offence statements. You may be given the name of another officer who is responsible for making enquiries into the information you have given. We aim to keep you updated and reassured at every stage of the enquiry.

Other people named and/or identified during the course of the investigation may also have to be spoken to by the Police as part of their enquiry.

To assess your vulnerability as a witness, we will consider, with our partners, your particular needs and thereafter try to ensure those needs are met. If you have a mental illness or learning disability we will seek the services of an Appropriate Adult who is independent of the Police and specifically trained to help you. The Appropriate Adult will help you understand what is happening and help you communicate with the Police.

Once the Police have gathered together all information, they will decide if there is enough evidence to report any person to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), which is responsible for the prosecution of crime in Scotland. If the decision is made not to report to COPFS you will be provided with an explanation for this.

Who decides if the case will go to Court?

A solicitor in COPFS will decide if there should be a prosecution and a case taken to court.

COPFS has a Victim Information and Advice (VIA) service, which has offices around the country. VIA provide information and advice to child victims and victims of crime in cases of domestic abuse, hate crime, sexual crime, stalking, and cases with witnesses who are vulnerable

or where it is likely that a trial will involve a jury. It is likely that VIA will be in contact with survivors in cases involving non-recent childhood abuse. They will let you know what is happening at all stages of the case. If you do not hear from VIA and believe that your case falls within one of those categories, you should contact COPFS. Details on how to contact COPFS can be found here: www.copfs.gov.uk/contact-us

What happens if I have to go to Court?

If COPFS do take the case to court, you may have to give evidence in court. COPFS VIA staff will speak to you about the support you may need to help you give evidence. This can include a visit to court before trial.

They will also speak to you about special measures that you may be entitled to which aim to support you while you give evidence.

Special measures include having a supporter with you in court, or being able to give your evidence without having to see the accused in court.

If you think special measures would help you in court, and you have not heard from COPFS VIA, please contact COPFS:

www.copfs.gov.uk/contact-us

FAQ

Can I make a report to Police if my abuser is now dead?

Yes, Police Scotland will still investigate your report with the primary purpose of ensuring that no persons who are still alive were involved in any abuse. All information obtained will be recorded on police systems. Whilst Police will carry out these actions it is important to highlight that deceased persons cannot be reported to COPFS.

Can I have someone with me when I speak to the Police?

Yes, throughout all the above processes you can have a friend, family member or other support person with you to support you before, during any breaks and after your statement has been taken.

What happens if English is not my first language?

If you have difficulty understanding or speaking English, you can request an interpreter to help you understand questions you are being asked, information you are being given or to enable you to provide answers and information effectively.

What are my rights as a victim of crime?

For further information on your rights as a victim of crime in Scotland, please refer to the 'Victim's Code for Scotland' at www.mygov.scot/victim-witness-rights

What happens to the personal information I give to Police?

Police Scotland understands how important it is to protect people's privacy and has published an Information Charter, which sets out the standards that you can expect when we request or hold your information. Full details can be found at www.scotland.police.uk/access-to-information/information-charter

What support is available?

- **Breathing Space:** Offers a confidential phone line for anyone who feels low, anxious or depressed in Scotland. To access this service, call Freephone **0800 838587**. (6pm-2am Monday to Thursday & 6pm Friday- 6am Monday).
- **Samaritans:** Offers a safe place for you to talk any time you like, in your own way – about whatever is affecting you. Samaritans can be contacted on Freephone **116 123** 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- **Local GP:** General Practitioners are the gateway to all local health and social care services and consideration should be given to seeking a consultation in respect of any mental or physical health concerns.
- **Scottish Government:** This website contains links to survivor support services, via NHS Inform and ALISS, as well as links to more immediate support: **www.gov.scot/Topics/Health/Support-Social-Care/Support/Survivors-Sexual-Abuse**
- **Future Pathways:** Offers help and support to people who were abused or neglected as children while they were living in care in Scotland. Future Pathways work to help survivors access person-centred support and can be contacted via Freephone **0808 164 2005** or email **registration@future-pathways.co.uk** For further information, please go to **www.future-pathways.co.uk**
- **Rape Crisis Scotland:** If you have experienced any form of sexual violence then you can contact the Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline on **08088 010302** (open 6pm- midnight daily) or via **support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk**. Support can also be obtained via local Rape Crisis Scotland Services. If you report a crime of this nature to Police Scotland, you can ask to be referred to Rape Crisis Scotland. For further information, please go to **www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk**
- **Victim Support Scotland (VSS):** Provides support and information to anyone who has been affected by crime or who has to attend court. To receive support, call the helpline on **0345 603 9213**, which is available 8am to 8pm Mon - Fri. Alternatively, if you report being a victim of any crime to Police Scotland, you can ask to be referred to VSS. For further information please visit **www.victimsupportsco.org.uk**

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