

**A guide for  
trans  
people  
who  
have been  
affected by  
sexual  
violence**

# Introduction

This guide is for **trans\* people** 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 violence is an issue that is commonly misunderstood, downplayed or even denied; our **Myths & realities** section looks at some of the common assumptions that are made about rape and sexual assault.

This booklet is for anyone who identifies as trans. Trans people can experience sexual violence regardless of their background. Sexual violence 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 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.

In this guide, we're using the term trans as an umbrella term for people whose own gender identity and/or gender expression differs in some way from the gender assumptions made about them at birth and from the consequent biological sex assigned to them (as opposed to cisgender – someone who identifies with the sex they were assigned at birth). We have used medical and anatomical terms to make it clear which body parts we are

# Contents

referring to. However, we do understand that some trans people may find these terms uncomfortable.

We also have booklets available for gay and bisexual men, 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 email [helpline@lgbt.foundation](mailto:helpline@lgbt.foundation) to find out how we can support you and put you in touch with other services who can also help.**

*\* includes but is not limited to: transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, non-binary, gender-fluid, gender nonconforming, intersex, third gender, twin spirited, transvestite, cross-dresser, bi-gender, trans man, trans women, hijra, agender, gender independent, and non-gender, as well as other non-binary identities.*

- 2 Introduction**
- 4 Understanding sexual violence**
- 6 Myths & realities**
- 11 Common reactions**
- 14 Reporting sexual violence**
- 17 Seeking support**
- 19 Useful contacts for support & information**

# Understanding sexual violence

Being the survivor of any form of sexual violence can be horrific and devastating. Understanding the practical meaning of certain terms may help you take steps towards talking about what happened. Having said this, some people find that following a trauma they are unable to remember clearly what happened, so don't be alarmed if this is the case.

**Transphobia:** Negative attitudes towards trans people are widespread and can manifest as harassment, discrimination, hate crime, violence and sexual assault. Trans people can experience transphobia from people of all types of sexual orientation and gender identities.

**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. There are some common myths explained in the Myths and Realities section to help you understand the importance of consent.

**Perpetrator(s):** A person or people who commit sexual violence, eg the abuser.

**Sexual coercion:** Sexual coercion covers a wide variety of behaviours. One common theme particularly experienced by trans people is the perpetrator pressurising someone into engaging in unwanted sexual activities by preventing access to medication or hormones as a means of gaining power and control. This is a form of

psychological bullying. Survivors do not cause their assaults and are not to blame. Perpetrators are fully responsible for their actions.

**Sexual violence:** Sexual violence 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 someone is unable to give consent (e.g. through being drunk or on drugs, being too young to consent, being asleep or having a particular disability). Uninvited touching or groping can happen anywhere and may seem like a minor incident, but it is still classed as sexual assault.

**Assault by penetration:** The law says that someone commits assault by penetration if they put something other than a penis, into someone's vagina or anus without consent. This applies whether the item is an object (including a prosthetic penis) or a part of their body (such as fingers). Assault by penetration carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment (the same maximum sentence as rape).

**Rape:** The law says that it is rape if a person intentionally puts their penis into someone's vagina, anus or mouth without their consent. It is also classed as rape if the perpetrator continues to penetrate you after you withdrew consent, for example, if you were having sex with someone and you told them to stop. Rape carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. A person without a penis cannot rape someone under English law, but they can commit assault by penetration.

# Myths and realities

**Myth:** “I deserve to be sexually assaulted or abused because I’m trans.”

**Reality:** Absolutely no-one deserves to be treated or controlled in this way because of their gender identity. Whether you’re transitioning, ‘coming out’ or entering a relationship where either or both partners are trans, it doesn’t make any difference. Regardless of the relationship, an abuser can manipulate their victim so that they feel blame for their abuse. They may also use someone’s gender identity against them. Being trans may make you feel more vulnerable, but no-one ever deserves to be abused.

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**Myth:** “Nobody wants to sexually assault a trans person.”

**Reality:** This is not true. Some trans people suffer from low self-esteem and a lack of confidence, but regardless of how someone sees themselves, anyone can be a victim of sexual violence. Common misconceptions are that sexual assault is primarily about sexual attraction. Rape and sexual assault are about power and control. Trans people can experience sexual violence regardless of the gender identity of either person.

**Myth:** “My gender identity/presentation caused the rape/assault.”

**Reality:** It is your personal choice to appear how you want to, and when and how you disclose your gender identity to a sexual partner. Just because you don't 'out' yourself to a sexual partner, doesn't mean you deserve to be sexually assaulted. You have done nothing wrong.

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**Myth:** “As someone who doesn't fit into the gender binary, there are no services for me.”

**Reality:** Although currently there are no specific services for non-binary or intersex people who are survivors of sexual violence, you can still access support. You can find these organisations in the **Useful contacts for support & information** section.

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**Myth:** “If you're a trans sex worker then no one will believe it's rape.”

**Reality:** If you're a sex worker and you say no, then this means no. You haven't given your consent. A common perception is that you won't be taken seriously or be able to access support, but this is not true.

# Myths & realities

**Myth:** “You provoke rape by the way you dress or act.”

**Reality:** Dressing in a way that you are comfortable with is an important way of expressing your identity. It is never an invitation for rape, nor does clothing determine who is a victim of sexual violence.

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**Myth:** “Women can't rape/assault other people.”

**Reality:** While legally a woman or a trans person without a penis cannot be accused of rape (rape is defined as penetration with a penis), they can be the perpetrators of assault by penetration as well as perpetrators of sexual assault. If you were subjected to sexual relations that you didn't consent to, that is assault.

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**Myth:** “Being raped or abused has defined my sexual orientation.”

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

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

**Reality:** There are many reasons why people find it difficult to say “no.” You might be afraid, 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.

**Myth:** “Feeling aroused must mean that I enjoyed it/ consented to it.”

**Reality:** The body is wired to react in certain ways whether we want it to or not e.g. getting goosebumps in cold weather. Getting an erection, ejaculating, feeling aroused or having an orgasm 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 more powerless. You have done nothing wrong.

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**Myth:** “My partner or ex can’t rape me.”

**Reality:** Even if you have had consensual sex with a person in the past, no matter how recently, you always have the right to say “no.” They do not have the right to continue.

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

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

# Myths & realities

**Myth:** “If you drink alcohol or take drugs, then you’re asking to be assaulted.”

**Reality:** Being vulnerable does not imply consent. If a person is unable to give consent because they’re drunk, drugged or unconscious, it is rape/assault.

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**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:** “No one will believe me.”

**Reality:** No matter what your attacker or someone else may have told you, there are people who will listen to you and believe what you say. Check out the **Useful contacts for support & information** at the back of this booklet for organisations that can help you.

# 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' way to deal with trauma.

For many trans people, knowing that they're not alone can be what leads them to seek support. Knowing that your reactions and thoughts are common among other survivors of sexual violence can bring some comfort and help you to start to make sense of how you're feeling. Here are some examples of feelings and thoughts that some trans survivors of sexual violence have said they experienced afterwards. You probably won't experience all of these, and you might even have 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.

### **DENIAL**

*"I must have consented otherwise it wouldn't have happened", "Maybe it wasn't as bad as I thought it was", "They love/care about me so they couldn't have done this"*

### **ANGER**

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

### **SHAME**

*"I feel disgusting/filthy", "I can't get clean", "What will people think of me?"*

### **ISOLATION**

*"Who can I talk to?", "Who will understand me and who I am?"*

# Common reactions

## SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

*"I can't live with myself", "Ending my life is my only escape and will make everything go away"*

## SHOCK AND NUMBNESS

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

## DESPAIR

*"I can't live with myself knowing this has happened", "My life will never be the same again"*

## DISGUST AND REVULSION

*"I can't bear to think about anyone touching me", "I hate myself", "I'm worthless", "I deserved it"*

## 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

*"They still have control over me", "I can't tell anyone", "There's nothing I can do to stop this happening again", "No-one will believe me if I tell them"*

## 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**

*"I felt aroused, does that mean I was secretly turned on by it?"; "Is this why I'm questioning my identity?"*

## **DISORIENTATION**

*"I keep forgetting things"; "I can't make my mind up about anything"; "I don't even know what day it is"*

You may also have physical reactions such as anxiety or panic attacks, flashbacks, uncontrollable crying, low mood, inability to eat or compulsive eating, problems with sleeping, nausea, physical pain (such as head or stomach ache), itching, self-neglect (e.g. you don't want to shower or eat), self-harm (either by deliberately hurting yourself or by drinking too much/ taking drugs) and feeling continuously on edge or restless. Some people have suicidal thoughts or feelings, but there is support out there for you and there is life after assault.

As with emotional reactions, it's important to remember that your body's physical and mental response to trauma may be extreme but can change over time. If you have gone through gender reassignment surgery, it will have been a long and difficult personal journey to get to that point and beyond. Being subjected to sexual violence can be extremely traumatic and may even result in permanent damage. Some trans survivors may experience painful physical damage to newly constructed genitalia or medically altered body parts.

Try to give yourself the time to heal as dealing with both the physical and psychological impact of what you've been through will take time - give yourself a break and take one step at a time. You have survived a traumatic event and it's normal for you to have certain reactions to that, but with the right support, you can and will move on with your life.

# Reporting sexual violence

**Whether or not you report sexual violence 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 then 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. Procedures vary from area to area but if you are in Greater Manchester the police will usually take an initial short statement from you and then escort you to St Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC). However, it is your choice as to whether or not you would like to attend. St Mary's will support anyone, including trans men or women as long as they either live in the catchment area or the assault happened in their area. While some people may find it uncomfortable accessing services predominantly used by women, 10% of clients seen at St Mary's are men.

At St Mary's, the majority of staff are women, who are highly skilled and trained workers. When you arrive, you will be introduced to a female Crisis Support Worker, whose role is to outline the services available at St Mary's and provide practical and emotional support. If you decide to have a medical examination then the crisis worker will support you through this. Forensic medical examinations are conducted by one of the centre's female Forensic Physicians. This doctor will assess and attend to medical needs (such as emergency contraception, treating injuries, HIV PEP and STI treatment) and also collect forensic evidence. You will be involved in the decisions about this process.

Many people believe that the only option for reporting an assault 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 SARC as a self-referral, without you having to report the assault to the police to do so. You will be offered the same services as you would as a police case. Any forensic samples taken will be stored securely for up to 7 years, giving you the time to decide what is right for you. No one will try to convince you to report the assault if you don't want to. Your attendance at SARC will remain confidential (unless there are safeguarding concerns, such as children or vulnerable adults being at risk that would necessitate information sharing).

The SARC will also be able to offer you further support, for example counselling (waiting lists can be up to 7 months) or your local Rape Crisis service. 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. There is no waiting time for ISVA or crisis worker support.

If you feel uncomfortable about attending a SARC, you can also seek healthcare from A&E or your GP. When deciding what help you may need and when you need it, bear in mind that emergency contraception is most effective if taken as soon as possible, and depending on individual circumstances, needs to be taken at the most 5 days afterwards. Equally, some victims may be at risk of HIV. Medication can be offered for this (HIV PEP) and this again, is most effective if taken as soon as possible, and is ineffective after 72 hours. Screening for sexually transmitted infections is usually advised at 2 weeks and 3 months after the sexual activity.



If you're in Greater Manchester, St Mary's SARC on Oxford Road in Manchester have a 24 hour helpline on 0161 276 6515. For more information about the reporting process and about visiting a Sexual Assault Referral Centre go to [www.stmaryscentre.org](http://www.stmaryscentre.org)

# Seeking support

**Trans people often do not reach out for help and support because they believe there is no help available out there for them.**

Being the survivor of sexual violence can leave you feeling isolated and alone, but 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 trans people. It can be difficult for trans people to talk about sexual violence for a number of reasons including the lack of specialist support services, fear of exposure (being outed as trans), feeling ashamed and isolated and fear of a transphobic response from services.

People who are in the process of gender transition may feel uncomfortable with particular body parts and therefore reluctant to access services where they have to physically expose themselves for forensic reasons, such as at the SARC. This can feel like a very invasive process for any survivor but it can feel even more so for a trans person. Trans people may feel increased levels of vulnerability or shame during medical examinations and trans women, in particular, may find it difficult to access female crisis support centres and being recognised as a woman.

If you have a close friend or loved one that you can trust then it can help to take them along with you for support when you visit for the first time. This can help you to feel empowered to receive the service that you rightly deserve, no matter what gender you identify with.

Some of the organisations listed in the **Useful contacts for support & information** section may also be able to provide advocacy services and help facilitate the reporting process.

# Seeking support

Ultimately, when you're seeking support you should be treated as the gender you self-identify with and while not every service or person you deal with is going to necessarily ask you what your preferred personal pronoun is (e.g. he, she, they) and may get this wrong - don't feel like you're not entitled to say who you are, what you're comfortable with and your expectations are of the service you receive.

Here are a few 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, it can take decades to talk about sexual violence, 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.
- There may also be trans groups, which can offer you information and support in your local area. The organisations listed in the **Useful contacts for support & information** section should be able to help you with finding them.

# Useful contacts and support

To help reduce any anxiety you may feel about accessing services, all of the organisations listed below have been contacted and checked as to whether they offer trans inclusive services and are welcome of trans people, locally and/or nationally. If you or someone else is in immediate danger, you should always contact the police by dialling 999. Call the police on 101 to report crimes that are not an emergency.

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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. Survivors Manchester recognises the difficulty trans men may experience in seeking support and being recognised as the gender they identify with. They welcome any men to their service regardless of the gender they were assigned at birth.

**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)**

Offers forensic, medical and counselling services to victims of rape or sexual assault, including trans people.

**Web:** [www.stmaryscentre.org](http://www.stmaryscentre.org) **Helpline:** 0161 2766515

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

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## **Broken Rainbow**

National charity offering helpline support to LGBT people affected by domestic violence or abuse. They offer a trans specific helpline service on Tuesdays, 1pm-5pm.

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

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

**Email:** [help@brokenrainbow.org.uk](mailto:help@brokenrainbow.org.uk)

## **Victim Support**

Their services are confidential, free and available to anyone who's been raped or sexually assaulted, now or in the past. They can help, regardless of whether you have told the police or anyone else about the attack. If you don't want to see anyone face-to-face, you can also talk to them on the phone, either at one of their local offices or at the national Victim Supportline. They offer a trans inclusive service.

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

**National Supportline:** 0845 30 30 900 (open 8am-8pm Monday-Friday; 9am-7pm weekends and 9am-5pm bank holidays)

**Greater Manchester Supportline:** 0161 200 1950

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## **The Sanctuary: Manchester**

An 'overnight, every night' service providing a place of safety and support to adults feeling at crisis point and living with difficulties such as panic attacks, depression and low mood. Support is provided in a face to face capacity and additional support will be made available to clients via telephone. The service is inclusive of trans people and can offer support.

**Web:** [www.selfhelpservices.org.uk/shs\\_service/the-sanctuary/](http://www.selfhelpservices.org.uk/shs_service/the-sanctuary/)

**Phone:** 0161 637 0808 (open 8pm-6am, throughout the year)

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## **The Survivors' Network**

A charity based in Brighton offering a range of services to survivors of any gender aged 14+, who have experienced any form of sexual violence. The helpline, email and text service is a national service which is inclusive of trans people. They offer local and confidential support to self-identifying female and male survivors who have experienced sexual violence and/or abuse.

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

**Helpline:** 01273 720110 (Wednesday and Friday, 7pm - 9pm)

**Email:** [help@survivorsnetwork.org.uk](mailto:help@survivorsnetwork.org.uk) **Text support:** 07717 999 989

# Useful contacts and support

## Galop

An LGBT anti-violence and abuse charity based in London that gives advice and support to people who have experienced biphobia, homophobia, transphobia, sexual violence or domestic abuse. They offer local support services to anyone including trans and non-binary people, who live or work in London and a national helpline for information and advice.

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

**Advice line:** 020 7704 2040 (an answerphone is available when the advice line is closed)

**Email:** [info@galop.org.uk](mailto:info@galop.org.uk)

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## The Survivors Trust

A national umbrella organisation for over 135 voluntary rape and sexual abuse specialist support services, with links to local support across England. They can offer information for trans survivors.

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

**Phone:** 01788 550554 (please note, this is not a helpline)

**Email:** [info@thesurvivorstrust.org](mailto:info@thesurvivorstrust.org)

## **cliniQ**

Based in London, CliniQ is a queer inclusive and non-judgemental sexual health and wellbeing service for all trans people, partners and friends. They are a trans-led team, who offer a safe, confidential space and are open every Wednesday from 5.30-7.30pm.

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

**Phone:** 020 3315 6699 (this is not a helpline service)

**Drop-in:** 56 Dean St, Soho, London, W1D 6AQ

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## **FORGE**

A USA-based organisation providing support to the trans community. Their website includes specific information for trans survivors of sexual violence.

**Web:** [www.forge-forward.org/anti-violence/for-survivors](http://www.forge-forward.org/anti-violence/for-survivors)

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**LGBT Foundation would like to thank Dr Catherine White from St Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre, Dr Louis Bailey from Hull York Medical School, Duncan Craig from Survivors Manchester and everyone who attended the trans focus group for their help in developing this booklet.**

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

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