

What happens when you report a rape or sexual assault to the police

This information is provided to support you in gaining a general understanding of what happens when you report an offence to the police.

It is important to understand that these are guidelines and that each case will have its own particular circumstances and dynamics; it is therefore not possible to predict completely what action will follow in every individual case when a report is made.

Each case will be dealt with uniquely, dependent on many different factors.

What however should always remain the same is that anyone who reports an offence of rape or sexual assault should receive a professional and supportive service from the police throughout the investigation and any prosecution that follows.

Making the decision to report a sexual assault or rape to the police is often difficult for a variety of reasons. If you would like to speak to the police your Crisis Worker will be able to support you with this and put you into contact with them.

What happens when I report?

If you decide to report to the police there are two things that will happen first;

- A **crime report** is recorded by the police.
This crime report will record your details and those of the suspect (if you know them) along with details about where, when and how the assault took place the crime report will be given a crime number and this number will be provided to you.
- You will normally be contacted by a **Specially Trained Officer (STO)**. The STO's are specially trained officers who work only with victims of sexual assault. They are the police officers who will start the investigation into the crime you have reported.

The investigation

The purpose of an investigation will be to gather evidence from you, the suspect and any witnesses. The investigators may secure and review CCTV evidence if there is any that will help the case. They are also likely to review communications between you, the suspect and any witnesses because this may hold evidence or information relating to the circumstances of what happened. This review could involve looking at your phone records, text messages, WhatsApp chats and Social Media accounts such as Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.



If the assault happened recently a Forensic Medical Examination may be considered to secure any physical evidence from you, the suspect or a location. For this examination you may be asked to attend Treetops the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) in Cosham.

If the incident happened some time ago police may contact your doctor, school or social services to see if they hold information which may be helpful to the enquiry.

Once all the evidence for the investigation has been gathered it will be put together in an evidence file. This evidence file will be submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). The file will only be submitted to CPS if the police feel there is enough evidence for them to consider a prosecution. CPS ultimately decides if your case can be prosecuted in a criminal court. They must be satisfied a jury would be more likely than not to convict a defendant. The CPS bases this decision on the evidence in the evidence file for the case.

What happens if I support an investigation?

The STO will ask you whether or not you wish to support an investigation. If you wish to support an investigation you will be asked to have a video recorded interview (this is called "provide an evidential account") about what happened to you. In some cases this can be in the form of a written statement.

If the assault happened within the last 7-10 days you may be asked to consider having a Forensic Medical Examination at the SARC to recover forensic evidence.

If there are messages or conversations on phones or social media which is important to the investigation you will be asked to consider allowing police access to this material.

It is up to you to decide whether you want to support an investigation. If you decide not to support the Police it will normally mean the investigation will be closed and no prosecution will take place.

What will happen to the suspect?

If you wish to support an investigation, the police will interview the suspect. This will normally happen after you have had your interview but in some circumstances this can happen beforehand.

Depending on the circumstances of the report the suspect may be arrested.



If the assault has happened recently, there are concerns for your safety, the safety of others from the suspect or the suspect is likely to try and evade police they are likely to be arrested.

If the suspect is not arrested, the interview with them will take place on a voluntary basis with the suspect attending a police station by appointment to give their side of what happened.

If you choose not to have your interview (which is called “provide an evidential account”) the suspect is normally not interviewed by police. However in some cases, particularly if there are concerns about your safety or the safety of others, police may still interview them.

If police decide the suspect will not be interviewed, they will then need to decide whether a **suspect notification** needs to be done. A suspect notification means the suspect will be informed that an allegation of rape or sexual assault has been made against them. However, if it is believed that doing a suspect notification is likely to cause a risk of further harm to your wellbeing, this will not normally be done and the suspect will be unaware of the report made against them. If you have concerns about a suspect notification being undertaken it is important you tell your STO about these concerns.

What happens if the suspect is prosecuted?

If the suspect is charged with a rape or sexual assault this will normally be prosecuted in a Crown Court.

If the suspect pleads “guilty” you will not be required to give your evidence to the court. If the suspect pleads “not guilty” there will be a trial.

If you have provided your evidence in a video interview to police the court will normally play this as your main evidence instead of you telling the court again in person what happened. You may however, need to answer questions from the prosecution or defence. Special measures can be applied for (for example a screen between yourself and the suspect) so that you don’t have to see the suspect when attending court.