

Guidance on supporting staff and students that have experienced sexual assault or sexual violence

1. If you are approached by an individual for advice and support in relation to any behaviour which was unwanted and which might have amounted to sexual assault or sexual violence, including rape, you should support them in contacting a staff or student advisor as appropriate with particular welfare responsibilities. These include:

Staff / Student	Specially trained Harassment Advisors ¹	harassment.line@admin.ox.ac.uk	270760
Student	The Director of Student Welfare and Support Services' office ²	director.swss@admin.ox.ac.uk	280444
Student	OUSU Student Advice Service ³	advice@ousu.ox.ac.uk	288466

The website [Sexual violence: response and prevention](#)⁴ is also a useful resource with information on the support available for students.

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¹ www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/harassmentadvice/advisornetwork

² www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/harassment?wssl=1

³ ousu.org/advice

⁴ www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/sexual-violence?wssl=1

A: Handling the disclosure

Your response

2. You should:

- Listen, and show that you are listening, even if it's difficult for you to hear.
- Acknowledge their strength in disclosing to you, it takes a great deal of courage to talk about experiences of sexual violence.
- Be empathetic and show your concern for them.

Confidentiality

3. All information concerning sexual assault and sexual violence should be treated in confidence as far as possible and unnecessary disclosure may give rise to disciplinary action. Information should only be shared on a need-to-know basis. You will need to explain to the individual that certain information will be shared with a limited number of University and/or college staff in order for support to be put in place. This support may include making arrangements to limit contact between the parties concerned.
4. If individuals are unwilling to allow information to be shared as set out in paragraph 3, you should support the individual to contact alternative support agencies:

Confidential support agencies		
Thames Valley Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) men and women 16+ ⁵	Highly-trained specialist staff will work with individuals to create a tailor-made support plan to suit their needs.	0800 221 8186 isvathamesvalley@refuge.org.uk
Independent Sexual Violence Advocate (ISVA) women and girls 18+ ⁶	Emotional and practical advice and support for women who have experienced rape, sexual abuse or any other type of sexual violence.	01865 725311 isva@osarcc.org.uk
Oxford Sexual Abuse & Rape Crisis Centre women and girls ⁷	A free confidential helpline, email support and support groups for women and girls who are dealing with the effects of sexual violence, and supporters of all genders.	01865 726 295 (answerphone) 0800 783 6294 support@osarcc.org.uk
Rape Crisis England and Wales women and men ⁸	A free telephone helpline which can provide advice to women and men.	0808 802 9999
SurvivorsUK men and boys ⁹	A free and confidential helpline for men and boys who are dealing with the effects of sexual violence.	02035983898 info@survivorsuk.org

⁵ www.refuge.org.uk/what-we-do/our-services/thames-valley

⁶ osarcc2.d7.ox4.org/content/advocacy-advice

⁷ www.oxfordrapecrisis.net

⁸ www.rapecrisis.org.uk

⁹ www.survivorsuk.org

5. There may be circumstances in which confidentiality cannot be maintained, for example where in your opinion the complainant or other members of the community may be in serious or immediate danger. The individual's consent would normally be sought before information is disclosed; however this may not be practicable, or appropriate in all circumstances. All decisions on disclosure will be made at a senior level. A member of staff might also be obliged to provide evidence to the court in proceedings arising from an allegation of sexual assault or sexual violence.

Let the individual stay in control

6. The pace and direction of your support should always be led by the individual. Sexual assault or sexual violence can make an individual feel powerless and not in control. Individuals need to feel they can be in charge of their lives again and it is important to resist the temptation to take over by arranging and doing things that you think are best. Instead, ask the individual what they would like to do next, and what support they would like from you.
7. Individuals will have differing priorities: some will want to report to the police, others will be concerned about pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections. They might come to you in the immediate aftermath or want to discuss a historic case.
8. An important aspect of control is control over the experience of disclosure. For this reason it is important to allow the individual to tell you as little or as much as they would like to.

Be aware of heightened sensitivity to possible judgment or blame

9. Individuals are often afraid of how others will react to their disclosure. In particular, they fear that they will be disbelieved, that their experiences will be minimised or trivialised, or that they will be blamed for what has happened to them. If they feel you are responding in any of these ways, this could discourage them from seeking further support. You should therefore refrain from saying anything that could be heard as minimising (e.g. 'At least you weren't hurt'; 'At least the perpetrator was not violent'; 'This is a common student experience'), or asking any question which could be heard as accusatory (e.g. 'Did you scream/fight back?' or 'Why didn't you say something sooner?'). For the same reason, you should refrain from asking about alcohol or drug consumption prior to the reported event, or about their relationship (if any) to the alleged perpetrator. Bear in mind that almost any factual question risks giving the impression that you are trying to ascertain whether they are to blame.

Avoid labelling the experience

10. It is important to remember that the reaction to sexual assault will vary from person to person; the individual may be angry, numb or have feelings of guilt. It is helpful not to have any preconceived expectations of how they will look and act, as this could affect your ability to empathise fully.
11. It is possible that the individual will not have labelled their experience as 'sexual assault' or 'rape' (or as 'harassment' or 'stalking'). It is important that you do not ask or prompt them to do this, but rather allow them to use the language they are comfortable with at this time.
12. Same-sex sexual assault happens, and you need to be mindful of assuming the gender of the individual or the perpetrator. Remember to mirror their language and use the pronouns they use.

13. If the individual requests information on the legal definition of rape and sexual assault more information can be found under the [Sexual Offences Act 2003](#)¹⁰.

In the event of a recent incident of sexual violence

14. There is no formulaic pathway and individuals' priorities will differ. However there are practical considerations, which are time-sensitive, that they should be made aware of.
15. Let the individual know that there are external personnel who are trained to provide medical attention whilst also gathering early medical evidence which may be used in the event of a prosecution.

The individual's options:

➤ **Sexual Assault Referral Centre¹¹ - if the individual does not want to contact the police immediately**

SARCs have specially trained experienced professionals who can give medical help and advice. They can store forensic results until the individual makes up their mind whether or not to report to the police and can support them through the immediate trauma.

You should always contact the SARC before travelling; whilst they operate a 24 hour service they do need to ensure the relevant staff are available.

You will need to accompany the individual to a SARC or arrange for someone else to do so, and ensure that the individual does not need to pay for transport. Many of the Porters' lodges have a discretionary fund to pay taxi fares to and from the SARC.

The nearest SARCs are:

<u>Solace Centre</u> ¹²	Bletchley Sherwood Drive Bletchley Milton Keynes MK3 6TP	Tel: 0300 130 3036
<u>Solace Centre</u>	Slough NHS Upton Park Hospital Albert Street Slough SL1 2BJ	Tel: 0300 130 3036

➤ **Thames Valley Police¹³ - if the individual does want to make a report to the Police immediately**

Non-emergency telephone 101; emergency telephone 999.

Note that approaching the Police binds the Police to investigate if they believe a crime has been committed.

¹⁰ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/42/part/1

¹¹ www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Sexualhealth/Pages/Sexualassault.aspx

¹² www.solacesarc.org.uk

¹³ www.thamesvalley.police.uk/reptr.htm

Individuals will normally be assigned a Specially Trained Officer (STO) who will facilitate their care from initial report, through medical examination, interview and subsequent investigation. They will then identify and engage the most appropriate methods of support.

- **Medical attention** – an individual who does not want to go to a SARC or the police is advised to seek medical attention from their college doctor or nurse, local GP or Accident and Emergency (A&E). The local GUM (Genito-Urinary Medicine) Clinic can provide morning-after pills, tests for Sexually Transmitted Infections and anti-retroviral medication. **Note:** The following medical practitioners cannot collect forensic evidence.

<u>Accident and Emergency (A&E).</u> ¹⁴	John Radcliffe Hospital Headley Way Headington Oxford OX3 9DU	Tel: 999 for an ambulance
<u>GUM Clinic</u> ¹⁵	Churchill Hospital Old Road Oxford OX3 7LE	Tel: 01865 231231
<u>College doctor or nurse</u> ¹⁶		

Protect and preserve evidence

16. In the event of a recent assault, it is recommended that the individual should not:

- a) Use the lavatory or discard underwear or sanitary products
- b) Wash, shower, bathe or shave
- c) Wash their hands
- d) Remove, wash, discard or destroy clothing worn or bedding and towels used at the time of the incident or subsequent to it
- e) Drink or eat anything, including non-essential medication
- f) Clean their teeth
- g) Smoke
- h) Disturb the scene or allow other people or animals to enter areas where the incident took place, where possible.

Non-physical evidence, such as relevant texts, social media messages and emails may also be preserved.

17. If attending a SARC or police station, it is important for the individual to bring any underwear or clothing worn at the time of the incident in a plastic bag, if not being worn for the journey. The place of the incident should be made secure if possible.

¹⁴ www.ouh.nhs.uk/services/departments/acute-emergency/emergency-department/default.aspx

¹⁵ www.sexualhealthoxfordshire.nhs.uk

¹⁶ www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/health/doctors?wssl=1

In the event of an historic incident

18. The guidance in paragraph 15 applies; however it is advisable to telephone the SARC before making a journey to establish whether they are likely to be able to gather any forensic evidence.
19. Given the distressing nature of these experiences, delayed labelling and responses more generally are common. If it has taken the individual a long time to label their experience, or to realise that they wish to seek help, this does not mean that they are any less likely to be honest or in need of help.

If the individual decides not to report

20. A decision not to visit a SARC or report to the police is still a valid decision and the individual's wishes should be respected. However it is important that they retain relevant evidence, in so far as this is possible, in case they change their mind in the future.
21. However, in cases involving serious criminal conduct, due to the seriousness of the conduct and the possible criminal sanctions, the investigation of this conduct should be first and foremost a matter for the police and such conduct should usually be reported to the police in the first instance.
22. If a student, member of staff or member of the public wishes to make a formal complaint about a student's behaviour, that complaint should be brought to the Proctors' Office under:
 - the [University's Harassment Policy and Procedure](#)¹⁷ (for harassment complaints, including allegations of sexual assault); or
 - the [University's Disciplinary Regulations](#)¹⁸ (Council Regulation 2/2006).
23. If a student, member of staff or member of the public wishes to make a formal complaint about the behaviour of a University employee, that complaint should be brought to the attention of the Head of Department under:
 - the [University's Harassment Policy and Procedure](#) (for harassment complaints, including allegations of sexual assault); or
 - the [University's Disciplinary Regulations](#)¹⁹.
24. This in no way limits the rights of the complainant to report complaints of serious criminal conduct to the police.

Keeping records

25. An individual to whom an allegation of sexual assault is made is advised to make a note of what has been disclosed, either in the presence of the individual (with their permission) or as soon as possible thereafter. You may be asked to act as a witness in any criminal proceedings and a contemporaneous note will be valuable. The notes are likely to contain sensitive personal data and should be stored securely in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act²⁰. Such notes should not normally be disclosed without the individual's permission.

Sexual Assault and Sexual Violence abroad

26. If the incident happened in another country and the individual is still there, they can contact the [local British Consulate or Embassy](#)²¹ for assistance, including medical and legal help. The Foreign

¹⁷ www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/harassmentadvice/policyandprocedure

¹⁸ www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/243-062.shtml

¹⁹ www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personnel/during/disciplinary

²⁰ www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/compliance/dataprotection

²¹ www.gov.uk/government/world/embassies

& Commonwealth Office leaflet [Rape and sexual assault abroad](#)²² provides more information. Also see the [Rape Crisis Network Europe](#)²³ website for information about specialist support services in other European countries.

B: Supporting the individual

27. If the alleged perpetrator and the complainant are in the same college or department, contact between them will need to be managed, including contact through employment, teaching, examinations, accommodation and social activity. The Director of Student Welfare and Support Services can advise on cases involving students and the Director of Human Resources for staff cases. The relevant Director can make recommendations to the appropriate bodies on such situations, including cases where a complaint is not made to the police or, following a police investigation, the alleged perpetrator is not charged.
28. You can discuss with the individual how they can be helped to feel safer. This might include making sure that relevant staff and student members are asked not to disclose an individual's whereabouts or telephone number.
29. The individual can also discuss their ongoing safety with the [Crime Reduction Adviser](#)²⁴ in Security Services (belinda.hopkins@admin.ox.ac.uk). The adviser can help create a bespoke safety plan for the individual.
30. You can encourage the complainant to speak to:
 - ISVAs, specially trained professionals who will help and support them to explore all their options.
 - a specially trained harassment advisor
 - the Director of Student Welfare and Support Services' office
 - OUSU's Student Advice Service.

All contact details are given in paragraphs 1 and 4 of this document.

31. The Director of Student Welfare and Support Services' office is also available to advise staff on student cases, and can advise on issues including whether and how to inform relevant University and college staff of the case, and managing contact between the complainant and the alleged perpetrator.

C: Providing long-term support for the individual

32. You can encourage students to speak to the [Student Counselling Service](#)²⁵ where there are professionally trained female and male counsellors, psychotherapists, clinical psychologists and a psychiatrist. Counselling will not erase what has happened, but it may help equip the individual with some new ways to think about what has happened, while helping them mobilize their resources and feel more in control.

²² www.gov.uk/government/publications/rape-and-sexual-assault-abroad

²³ www.rcne.com

²⁴ www.admin.ox.ac.uk/ouss/cra/#d.en.122451

²⁵ www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/counselling

33. For staff, see the Occupational Health Service's [Manager's Guide to Supporting Teams after a Traumatic Incident](#)²⁶
34. In the case of students, the individual may wish to suspend their studies; every effort should be made to ensure that their academic standing is not adversely affected and that their return to study is as smooth as possible.
35. Staff may require a period of leave and every effort should be made by the department or college to handle this request and return to work sensitively.
36. It should be made clear to the individual that all the sources of support described above will be available to them on their return.

D: Sources of support for individuals who receive a disclosure

37. An individual to whom an allegation of sexual assault or sexual violence is made is encouraged to be mindful of their own welfare. Within the University, staff members are encouraged to view Occupational Health Services [Guide to Coping with a Traumatic Incident](#)²⁷. Students can contact the [Student Counselling Service](#). Outside the University, individuals can contact the Oxford Sexual Abuse & Rape Crisis Centre, which provides support for supporters as well as survivors.

If you have any comments or questions on this guidance, please contact harassment.line@admin.ox.ac.uk or the Director of Student Welfare and Support Services' office: director.swss@admin.ox.ac.uk.

²⁶www.admin.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminoxacuk/localsites/occupationalhealth/documents/Manager%27s_Guide_to_Supporting_Teams_after_a_Traumatic_Incident.doc

²⁷www.admin.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminoxacuk/localsites/occupationalhealth/documents/Employee%27s_Guide_to_Coping_with_a_Traumatic_Incident.docx