REPORTING GUIDE

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Your guide on reporting non-recent child sexual abuse to the police in the UK.

This guide is for anyone who has been a victim of child sexual abuse or knows someone that has and may not yet have reported what happened to the police.

There may be a number of reasons for this, and to take this step may be painful for you and require courage. You may, or may not, be ready to take this step now. The purpose of this guide is to be sure you know what to expect when reporting to the police, and to help you to make an informed decision.

Operation Hydrant

This guide is produced by Operation Hydrant - a coordination hub established in June 2014 to deliver the national policing response, oversight, and coordination of non-recent child sexual abuse investigations concerning persons of public prominence, or in relation to those offences which took place within institutional settings.

Operation Hydrant is informed by individual forces of investigations meeting the criteria, and then coordinates the information among forces to prevent duplication. This is called 'deconfliction'.

It does not carry out individual investigations – this is done by individual Forces.

Operation Hydrant acts as the interface between the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and police forces in England and Wales.

CONTENTS

PAGE	SECTION	SUBJECT
2	1	Introduction
4	2	Why should I report what happened to me to the police?
4	3	How to report to the police
4	4	First account – What will I be asked?
5	5	What happens after I provide my first account to the police?
7	6	Operation Hydrant
7	7	The investigation
8	8	After the investigation is complete
9	9	The trial
10	10	Frequently asked questions
13	11	Your important information

Reporting Guide: Section 2, 3 and 4

2. Why should I report what happened to me to the police?

When you report what happened to you to the police, you will be listened to and taken seriously.

An impartial investigation will then be launched based on what you have told officers. Many victims and survivors of child sexual abuse have said that simply telling someone about what happened to them, being listened to and believed, was a relief – even though the act of doing that can be painful and upsetting.

If the person you name in your account is alive, the police will consider whether there are safeguarding issues that need to be addressed.

Many child sexual abusers continue to abuse, often into older age. Reporting what happened to you may help to protect other potential victims. This will also happen if the person you name is no longer alive, to determine whether the suspect may have associated with others who may still be alive, and be suspected of committing child sexual abuse.

News of an investigation or arrest will often result in other victims and survivors coming forward. As a survivor of child sexual abuse it may be a huge relief to know that you are not alone.

Not every report to the police will result in a criminal trial. If a case does not proceed to court, it can be for a variety of reasons, which will be explained in detail by your Officer in Case. However, every week across the country it is a fact that people who have abused children are convicted by the courts. Many victims and survivors attend court to see the person who abused them sentenced and held publicly to account for what they did.

3. How to report to the police

You can report to the police at any time. It can be done in a number of ways – going to a police station, dialling 101, reporting online via a police website, or even through a third party, such as a friend or relative.

4. First account

When you first make contact with the police, they will take an initial report, a 'first account'. The force will then make contact with you to take more detailed information.

This could be in a matter of days or weeks, depending on the force. Forces currently have a large number of people to speak to and they understand that this is a difficult time. However, they must ensure that this process is not rushed, is carried out sensitively and that all due care and attention is taken.

You can request how you would prefer to be contacted by the force, and this will be passed on. However, there may be occasions when they may contact you in a different way. This might be because they are unable to contact you through

your preferred method, or they may need to speak to you more urgently due to a safeguarding issue. You can request to speak to a male or a female police officer.

The police force you have contacted will ask you to provide a 'first account' – they will ask you questions so that they can understand what happened to you. This might be over the phone, or an officer may come to speak to you at a time and place convenient for you. It does not have to be at a front desk of a police station, or in the station at all. After this, you are required to provide a more detailed account to the police – this can be done through a range of ways, from a written statement to a video interview, your OIC can discuss the options with you.

What will I be asked?

It may be difficult for you to remember or to talk about what happened in detail – police officers will understand this. However, it may be useful to know the sort of questions you may be asked:

- Who committed the offence(s)? Is the person who committed the offence(s) known to you?
- What offence(s) were committed? You will be asked to describe what happened.
- Where were the offence(s) committed? You will be asked about where the offence(s) happened.
- When were the offence(s) committed? You will be asked to be as specific as possible about when the offence(s) happened.
- Have you reported these offences before? You will be asked if you have reported these offences to the police, or another agency, before.
- Have you told someone before? Due to the nature of child sexual offences there are often no direct witnesses. For this reason, a key witness in the investigation which follows could be the person you first told about what happened to you. It might be a friend, a stranger, or partner. You might have told them minutes, days, or even years after the offence, but they will be the first person you have told.

5. What happens after I provide my first account to the police?

When you have provided your account to the police, they will launch an investigation. The investigation will seek to uncover any evidence relating to the allegations you have made.

At the appropriate time, police will approach the person you have accused of abuse.

The police will refer to the person you are accusing as "the suspect".

Depending on the length of time since the offence(s) took place, the current status of the suspect, and your safety, the police will decide whether to arrest the suspect, or interview them "under invite". The police need to meet strict criteria before they can arrest someone, therefore they may decide that "under

Reporting Guide: Section 5

invite" is more appropriate. However, this does not mean that they are treating the offence less seriously.

The police will ask for your view on this, as it is recognised that this may not be the action you want taken, depending on the circumstances. However, they will also need to weigh up your views against other considerations, such as whether there is a continued threat to others.

Will I have to go to a police station?

If you have made your report to the police at home, and you are happier in that environment, the police will come and speak to you there to take more details.

However, if you do not want to speak to the police at your home due to your circumstances, then you will be taken to an interview suite. These are dedicated rooms within police stations, where you can speak to the police in privacy and comfort. You will then have a dedicated officer assigned to your case.

Depending on the local force, this might be an officer from a dedicated sexual offences investigation team, a criminal investigation department (CID), or a child protection team.

The officer who is assigned to your case will make contact with you as soon as possible. They are known as the "officer in the case" or OIC.

Your OIC will meet with you and take a more detailed account of what happened. They will do this at a time and place that is convenient for you. If you decide to make contact with the police, it is important for you to remember that everything you are asked to do is done with your agreement. The officer in the case will work with you to ensure that you understand what will be asked of you and why.

Support

The officer in the case will give you help, support and address any specific needs or wishes you have. They can also make referrals on your behalf to other agencies who are independent of the police who may be able to support you and meet your needs.

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (Victims' Code) looks at the minimum levels of service victims can expect from agencies – you can find more here: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/476900/code-of-practice-for-victims-of-crime.PDF

There are many groups who provide support – your OIC will be able to provide you with information regarding what is available in your area.

This might include your local Independent Sexual Violence Advisor Services (ISVA). ISVAs can provide support to victims and survivors of rape, sexual abuse, and sexual assault.

Reporting Guide: Section 6 and 7

6. Operation Hydrant

If you have reported non-recent child sexual abuse to police, involving someone of public prominence or within an institution, details of your report will be shared with Operation Hydrant. This is a national policing team set up to coordinate the investigation of non-recent child sexual abuse.

Operation Hydrant does not have an investigative function. Investigations are undertaken by the force in the geographical area the allegations relate to. Forces are responsible for investigating the allegation and providing any safeguarding needed.

7. The investigation

The pathway of investigations will vary, depending on the practice of the local force and the specific details of your case. However, this section details what you can expect to happen following your first account to police.

Your evidence

Your initial account of what happened will help police to make decisions on what action needs to be taken immediately.

However, you will be asked to provide a more in depth account. You will be contacted to arrange a time and a place that is convenient for you.

Your account is likely to be taken as a written statement or recorded on a DVD.

The person doing the interview will explain this process to you.

You will be asked to explain what happened in as much detail as you can. You will be asked to describe in your own words the offence(s), and the events leading up to them. You will then be asked questions about anything which is unclear.

You may find that you need to give your account in more than one session, over a period of days, weeks, or even months. Just let the interviewer know how you are feeling, and a further interview or interviews can be arranged.

The officer in the case is responsible for the investigation, and securing all the evidence. This may involve taking statements from witnesses, as well as other relevant enquiries. This can take a period of months, but the officer in the case has a duty to keep you updated on how the investigation is progressing.

National guidance advises that your officer in the case will stay with you throughout the case, but this may depend on the way each force works.

If the investigation results in a court case, then your DVD interview, or written statement to the police, will be used as your evidence, and will form part of the prosecution case against the suspect. You may hear this referred to as Achieving Best Evidence or ABE.

During the investigation you will be asked for your consent by police to look at what is called ‘third party material’. This is information which has to be taken into consideration by the Police and CPS when considering a decision to charge a person with an offence.

Reporting Guide: Section 8

Examples include education records, social service records and medical records. Your officer in the case will explain this process, what material may be in existence and answer any questions you have.

8. After the investigation is complete

Once the suspect has been interviewed, all of the witnesses or people with relevant information spoken to, and all the evidence collected, the investigation will be complete.

A decision will be made regarding whether there is sufficient evidence to charge. This is made by either the police or the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) dependent on the particulars of the case.

What if I disagree with a decision not to charge the suspect?

If the decision taken is not to proceed to charge the suspect, the reasons for this will be explained to you by the officer in the case. There are a number of reasons a case may not be continued and you will have the chance to ask questions and understand why.

The Child Sexual Abuse Review Panel, chaired by CC Simon Bailey, reviews cases of child sexual offences previously investigated and marked no further action before 5 June 2013. To refer a case to the Panel contact nationalpanel@acpo.pnn.police.uk

However, if the decision not to proceed was taken after 5 June 2013 then the case should be referred to the Victim Right to Review. https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/victims-right-review-scheme

If you would like to make a complaint, you can learn about the police complaints system through the Independent Office of Police Conduct here: https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/

Reporting Guide: Section 9

9. The trial

If the police investigation results in charges, the case will proceed to court. What you can expect from the court, or criminal justice process as it is known, is outlined below:

- **Magistrates Court**

  The first hearing will take place in a Magistrates Court, where the charges will be formally read out to the defendant.

  You will not normally be asked to go, but you can if you wish. The magistrates will normally refer the case to a Crown Court for trial.

- **Crown Court**

  If the defendant pleads not guilty then a judge and jury will hear the evidence at a Crown Court. You may be called as a witness.

  Anyone called as a witness to court will feel nervous and apprehensive. The court understands this, and support is in place to help you and answer any questions you may have.

- **Special Measures**

  As a witness in a sexual abuse case, you may feel particularly vulnerable and intimidated. To help you through this, "special measures" can be applied for. These will assist you in giving your best evidence to the court. These include giving evidence from behind a screen, or giving evidence via a live link, amongst others.

  If you want to be considered for special measures, speak to your OIC. The police then provide the Crown Prosecution Service with the information necessary for the legal team to apply to the court for special measures to support you in giving your evidence.

- **Support and information**

  You will also be able to access support from the court witness service. They, and the OIC, can arrange for you to visit the courtroom before the trial, which can help you feel more familiar and comfortable with the surroundings. Information about your case, including the dates of the trial and the result, will be passed by the CPS to the police, so that you can be kept informed.

- **How long will a trial take?**

  How long a trial will take can depend on a number of things, but may include the number of charges the accused faces, and the number of victims and witnesses giving evidence. Trials can range from a few days to several weeks.

  Your OIC will talk about when you will be required to attend court during the trial - as well as when you can attend during proceedings

  When the jury returns its verdict, this will be an emotional time for you. The police and the court can provide advice and support to you at this point if you want it.

Reporting Guide: Section 9 and 10

If you are receiving support from an Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA), they will maintain contact after the court case to ensure that there is a support plan in place for you, if this is what you want. The officer in the case will be able to advise you regarding this.

For information on Witness Care Units, visit the CPS page here: https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/care-and-treatment-victims-and-witnesses

- **Victim Impact Statement**

  If the jury returns a guilty verdict, the Judge may ask you to prepare a Victim Impact Statement.

  This is your chance to explain the impact that the abuse has had on you and your life.

  The Judge will consider your Victim Impact Statement when preparing sentence.

- **Will I be identified?**

  It is against the law for newspapers or television to use your name or any details that would identify you.

  All sexual offence victims have an absolute right to anonymity by law, regardless of whether a suspect is charged, and found guilty or not guilty.

  This means that while the news media may report on the criminal trial, and the evidence which is heard, they will not say or report anything which could lead to you being identified.

If you choose to waive your right to anonymity, your OIC can discuss what this might mean for you.

It is also important to recognise that anything that you, your family, or friends post about the investigation or trial on social media platforms such as twitter or Facebook – no matter how small the comment – is the equivalent of publishing it on the pages of a newspaper. This could prejudice the trial and may even stop it, and may identify you as a victim.

You should therefore avoid posting anything on social media about the investigation or the trial, until a verdict is reached by the court, and ask your friends and family to do the same. Your OIC can advise you further about this.

10. Frequently Asked Questions

Will the police have to come to my home?

When you speak initially with the police, they should discuss how you prefer to be communicated with, and what is best for you.

Officers can arrange to meet and talk with you at a location which suits you. If you do not want this to be at your home, your views will be taken into account, and officers will discuss options with you.

Reporting Guide: Section 10

What if the person who abused me is dead?

Although a deceased person cannot be subject to a criminal trial, you should still consider reporting what happened to the police. This allows the police to check whether the person you are accusing was linked to any other abusers who may still pose a risk to children.

You will also have the opportunity to receive the same support offered to victims and survivors where the accused is alive.

Will I be identified in the newspapers?

Most investigations and court cases into allegations of non-recent child sexual abuse actually take place outside the national media spotlight.

Many local newspapers report on the convictions of child sexual abusers every week, and this often encourages other victims and survivors of child sexual abuse to come forward. Only a very small minority of investigations around high profile people are reported in the national news media.

Victims of sexual offences have the right to anonymity by law – the news media cannot name or identify you unless you choose to waive your right to anonymity. Some victims and survivors do this to share their experiences and encourage and support others.

It is important to remember that you may identify yourself if you make reference to the case on social media, such as Twitter and Facebook. For this reason, it is advisable to avoid any comment on social media, and advise friends and family to do the same.

I reported the offences against me previously but nothing was done – why should I bother?

The police service, other agencies, and society have recognised that victims and survivors were not always listened to and believed in the past.

The police service has worked hard to change its approach, and to gain the trust of victims and survivors to come forward and report non-recent child sexual abuse. The fact that so many victims and survivors have come forward in recent years is partly as a result of that change in approach. Victims and survivors know that they will be listened to and believed, and an investigation will be launched.

What happened to me was so long ago – why come forward now?

The police service understands the many reasons why a victim or survivor of child sexual abuse may not report what happened to them until they are an adult – this will in no way detract from what you have to say.

If you choose to report the abuse to the police you will be listened to by an officer and it will be looked at thoroughly. It does not matter when the offence happened.

Reporting Guide: Section 10

How long will it take from the time I report what happened to me, to the end of the process?

There is no one answer to this question, as every case is different. However, your OIC will be able to provide you with an idea of timescales in respect of your particular case.

Investigations of non-recent child sexual abuse are some of the most complex carried out by the police, and can take some time. If your case progresses to court, the length of time taken for the trial to conclude will depend on a number of things, including how many witnesses there are.

The period of time between reporting what happened to you and the conclusion can be an emotional and challenging time.

You will be able to discuss this with your OIC who will be able to advise on access to support services.

What happens if I start the reporting process and then change my mind?

If you change your mind about proceeding with a police investigation, you should discuss this with your OIC. Every case is different, but your views as the victim will be important.

Will Operation Hydrant investigate my allegations?

Operation Hydrant is the national policing operation which coordinates all investigations of non-recent child sexual abuse for the whole country. However, it does not undertake the investigations which may follow from your allegation. This is done by the force local to where the reported abuse took place. Operation Hydrant will pass the details provided to the local force.

Can I receive the therapy or counselling I need while a criminal investigation or trial is ongoing?

The police and the CPS recognise the importance of you receiving the therapy that you need. An ongoing investigation or trial does not mean that you cannot receive therapy, and a link to further information about this is here.

https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/therapy-provision-therapy-vulnerable-or-intimidated-adult-witnesses

Reporting Guide: Section 11

Date of Reporting to the Police.	Name and collar number of my OIC
Contact number for the OIC.	My crime reference number

Date, time, and location of appointments:

Date	Time	Location	With	About

Updates from the Officer in case.

Date	Update

Reporting Guide: Section 11

Court Dates:

Date	Court	Notes

Important Contacts

Name	Role	Telephone	Email

The links below may provide some useful information:

The Victims Code of Practice.
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/476900/code-of-practice-for-victims-of-crime.PDF

The Victim's Journey.
https://mojdigital.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/58/2013/04/Victims-journey-through-CJS.pdf

My notes