



edinburgh rape crisis centre
supporting survivors of sexual violence

Supporting survivors of sexual violence & preventing sexual violence

Guidance for Edinburgh and Lothian
high schools

This guidance was originally developed by Rape and Sexual Assault Service Highland (RASASH) and has been adapted by Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre (ERCC) in 2020 for use in the Edinburgh and Lothian areas. ERCC would like to thank RASASH and the Highlands Violence Against Women and Girls Partnership for sharing their material.

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Introduction

This guidance is to support staff working with young people who have been affected by sexual violence. We understand that this can be an emotive area of work and it can sometimes be difficult to know what to do to support young people who have experienced this or who have been identified as potential perpetrators. Young people tell us that we can improve our response to them, and this guidance has been written to reflect their comments and experience.

About this guidance

This guidance is aimed primarily at staff working in education, but many of the issues apply to staff and volunteers in other settings, for example within youth work or third sector specialist services for young people.

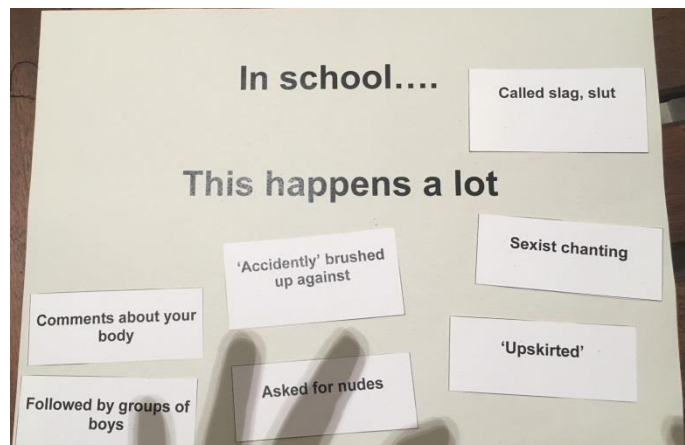
This Guidance does not replace Child Protection Procedures, Edinburgh, Lothian and Borders Under-age Sexual Activity Inter-agency Guidance or Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) processes, but is intended to be used by staff to safely support students within school and other environments. It is designed to support staff with the particular challenges where both the reported perpetrator(s) of sexual violence and the survivor are in the same school, youth group or organisation. It applies whether or not the incident has taken place in school/within school hours, at a youth group or in the wider community.

94% of young people in Edinburgh and Lothian think that they should learn about sexual abuse and violence in schools.

ERCC, 2019

What is sexual violence?

Sexual violence is what happens when someone does not consent to a sexual act.¹ It can involve a range of behaviours, including rape, groping and flashing, focused and unwanted sexual attention, harassment in the form of comments or jokes, displaying pictures or videos of a sexual nature, online sexual harassment such as comments on social media, threats, coercion, and can include child sexual exploitation.



Sexual violence is part of a continuum of gendered violence. Condoning or ignoring sexual harassment creates conditions for serious sexual violence to occur, makes it more difficult to challenge sexual violence, and increases barriers to those affected to come forward and seek support.

Young people in high schools experience a range of sexual violence in the school environment. The images on this page reflect some of these, as identified by young women themselves.

Extent of the issue

Staff and volunteers working with young people **will** come into contact with survivors of sexual abuse and sexual violence whether they know it or not.

- 64% of girls (13-21) experienced sexual violence or sexual harassment at school or college in the last year²
- 33% of young women (13-17) experience sexual violence from a partner³
- Only 8% of recorded rapes in Scotland are perpetrated by strangers⁴
- In 2018/19, 2,083 sexual crimes were recorded in Edinburgh and Lothian.⁵



¹ <https://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/help-about-sexual-violence/>

² Girlguiding Girls' Attitudes Survey 2017 – a number of large scale surveys report similar findings

³ "Asking about Abuse", 2011, Health Scotland

⁴ ibid

⁵ Scottish Government Recorded Crime in Scotland: 2018-19. Note: Scottish Crime & Justice Survey estimates 15% of rapes are reported to the police

Sexual violence is widespread and significantly under reported. It can have a devastating impact on someone's life. Whilst anyone can be affected, and this guidance applies to all young people, not everyone is equally at risk. Sexual violence is disproportionately experienced by women and girls and overwhelmingly perpetrated by men. Women and girls are at increased risk of rape and other forms of sexual violence from family members, boyfriends, peers and acquaintances. Most often, people experience sexual assault from someone known to them. Being young is not a protective factor: in fact, for women, it is a significant risk factor. Young people with learning and physical disabilities are also at increased risk of sexual violence. Another risk factor can include being (or suspected of being) part of the LGBT community.

Relevant duties in applying this guidance

Schools and other youth settings should create the conditions to prevent sexual violence occurring, adequately support those affected when it does happen, hold perpetrators to account for their behaviours and put appropriate measures in place to manage risks. In doing this, we are complying with:

- Human Rights legislation
- Equality Act – Public Sector Duties
- Edinburgh and Lothian Child Protection Guidance
- GIRFEC
- Implementation of "How Good is our School?" (4th ed.)

Impact on education, health and wellbeing

Experience of sexual violence and harassment can lead to a range of issues. In the short term, young people may be recovering from physical injuries, dealing with feelings of anger and shock at what has happened to them and want to spend time alone, missing school and social opportunities. Longer term, the impact on mental and sexual health can be significant, including use of alcohol/drugs, self-harm, development of phobias, nightmares, flashbacks, pregnancy, STIs, promiscuity, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), inability to have or enjoy sex. Young people's behaviour can also deteriorate over time, and this can result in them being suspended or excluded from school thus resulting in them losing their education. Staff and volunteers can reduce the potential long term impacts by believing young people when they disclose, ensuring they adopt a **trauma-informed** and non-judgemental approach and by providing appropriate support.

Peer groups can respond in unexpected ways to survivors of sexual violence. Young people may feel that they are not understood or believed by their friends which can increase feelings of isolation. A good way to support a young person might be to support their friends to understand the causes and consequences of sexual violence and enable them to also support the survivor.

Summary: best practice responses to sexual violence

- Believe survivors and ensure a non-judgemental approach
- Provide opportunities for disclosure
- Explain processes and procedures, particularly around confidentiality and sharing information
- Go at the young person's pace
- Put measures in place to support the survivor that do not penalise them for disclosing
- Challenge gender stereotypes and attitudes endorsing sexual violence at all times
- Ensure that risks from potential perpetrators are identified and a risk management plan is in place
- Signpost/refer survivors to local agencies
- Explicitly discuss consent, sexual violence and healthy relationships in PSE but also in other parts of the curriculum

Supporting young people with experience of sexual violence

Staff should already be confident in dealing with sensitive and potential child protection issues. Staff should follow existing child protection procedures, bearing in mind the advice given in this guidance. Advice can be sought from Police Scotland, Social Work, and Education, Children & Families.

Disclosure

Young people should never be pressurised to disclose what has happened to them. An individual should not have to tell you the detail of what has happened: any conversation should be focused around the impact of the experience and what support the person needs now. Consideration should be given to where this conversation takes place, who is present, and what advice might be needed from a specialist service, such as Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre, in advance.

Try saying, *“That must have been very difficult for you. How do you think it is affecting you now?”*

It is not your role to investigate what has happened and determine whether or not the person is telling the ‘truth’. Your role is to deal with the impact and provide support to the young person, regardless of any conclusion of child protection or criminal proceedings. Be mindful that these processes can take some time and consider how the young person is supported by statutory and third sector agencies whilst any investigative processes are ongoing. How you discuss the outcomes of these (criminal or otherwise) is very important: ensure that you still believe the young person and communicate this to them.

Try saying, *“We are here to support you, regardless of the outcome of any investigation.”*

Recognise that some things can be difficult to talk about. A strategy to support young people and enable disclosure might be to ask “What has happened to you?” Remain curious and understand that for some young people it might be easier to write it down for you to read, rather than having to say it out loud. Writing can give a little distance which is helpful for disclosure.

Retraction

It is possible that a young person discloses sexual violence or abuse and then later says that they cannot remember what happened or that they made it up. This can be a normal response to a traumatic experience. Also, the pressure that comes with disclosing, such as having to repeat their story a number of times, feeling disbelieved, reactions from family and friends, and lack of support can lead to a young person retracting what they have said. Young people can often also feel out of control of the situation once any investigation starts. Whilst

“non-invasive responses (from staff) are going to put everyone involved in the conversation at ease”

any retraction should be acknowledged, the chances of it happening are minimised if individuals are supported appropriately and sensitively. If someone changes their mind about what happened, unless there is clear evidence to the contrary, staff should still take actions to reduce risk and take measures to increase the safety of the individual: always provide as many opportunities for individuals to come back and speak to you.

Confidentiality and information sharing

If a young person trusts you enough to share this very personal information it is your responsibility to believe them, respect their confidentiality and, if you must share information, to do this appropriately, safely and with their knowledge, unless likely to increase risk of further harm. Child Protection Guidelines should always be followed and the wishes of the young person must be respected.

Try saying, "Sometimes we do have to share information, for example, if you or someone else was at risk of harm, but I will tell you what I have to share, why I need to share it and, with whom I will share it."

Consider who in the school needs to know the information and if you must inform any other professional: for example, the Named Person should be informed, but it is unlikely that every class teacher or the school nurse would need to know the circumstances of what happened. Also, informing parents should only happen in cases where the young person expressly wishes this to happen or in cases where Child Protection measures are to be taken – education staff should seek advice from the Education Child Protection Advisor.

If information has been received by staff, for example, from another young person or from another agency, that a young person has been affected by sexual violence, the Named Person should be notified. It may be appropriate for the Named Person to sensitively question someone about their experiences in order to put supports in place.

Appendix 1 could also be given to a young person to explain why information is being passed on and for them to refer to later.

Practical actions and support

There are a number of adjustments that schools and other organisations can make to support a young person who has experienced sexual violence. The following list is not exhaustive and it is best to discuss what might be the best approach with the young person themselves. The young person should not feel punished or disadvantaged, so the presumption should always be to change the perpetrator's mode of transport, registration class, etc., unless the survivor requests this for themselves. When the perpetrator(s) is(are) also part of the same school or group, specific consideration may need to be given to:

- How individuals get to school/group: is there the potential for further harassment, repeat victimisation, etc.? Changes to transport and timings may be required
- Altering times in and times from school so that there does not have to be contact between the parties
- Bear in mind where the young people live. If they get the same bus to and from school, consider alternative arrangements for one of them to get to school
- Supporting a young person to move registration class (if requested)
- Make arrangements to ensure separation in shared classes to avoid contact
- Be mindful of contact during physical education activities: for example, during Scottish country dancing progressive dances can mean contact with the perpetrator, so allow the student to not participate or to only participate in certain dances, team sports and swimming
- Consider the use of single toilets if available for either young person

"It should be the survivor's decision on how he/she would like to deal with the situation and how to make his/her school days comfortable"

Other supports can be put in place, for example:

- Ask the person what they need to feel safe and what support they want
- Go at the young person's pace when talking about the issues and avoid pressurising for further information
- Assist the young person to put their own plans in place to manage contact with the perpetrator
- Be flexible to ensure that someone can get access to specialist support, for example: leaving classes early, allowing support services to come to school/group
- Identify someone within the school environment to talk to about what's happened: a Guidance Teacher, School Nurse or a Children's Services Worker
- Alternative measures of schooling may need to be sought for a period of time, or a reduction in physical time at school, this should be done with a view to reinstating normal arrangements as soon as is possible.
- Be aware and supportive if there is a decline in educational attainment, recognise that lack of concentration on schoolwork is a common result and may last for some time
- Provide advanced warning of coverage of issues of sexual violence in class (e.g. in PSE), and give the option of not attending, whilst ensuring that alternatives are made so that young people do not lose out on learning more about the issues
- Consider single sex groups when delivering inputs on relationships, consent and sexual violence, particularly if there are survivors who have disclosed in the group
- Consider how and when the young people will be changing for sport and put provisions in place

"school is such a major factor in life, making this as easy as possible would help someone being bullied"

When delivering to group settings where sexual violence is to be discussed or any other health and wellbeing issue where there is a cross over to sexual violence (see **Impact on education, health and wellbeing** section), it is important that staff have clear ground rules. For example, staff should give a time and a place when they are free for listening to any issues that the session has raised for young people. Staff should also acknowledge that there might be individuals in the room affected by sexual violence and that those in the group should try to keep themselves safe. This means: reassuring that no one is expected to disclose, if someone needs time out, they should have clear directions of where they can go, and information on support agencies should also be given. Reassure the group that sexual violence is never the fault of the survivor, and if possible, have another person available in the room who can offer immediate support if anyone becomes distressed.

Schools should also consider the make-up of their Guidance Team and ensure that there are women available for people to talk to. Research is clear that survivors of sexual violence prefer to seek support from women.

Wider organisational culture and prevention

Sexual violence exists today because of continuing gender inequality between women and men and society's acceptance of this. Prevention starts with adopting an approach to improve equality and tackling gender stereotypes. Schools and youth organisations have access to a range of materials to support this (see **Resources** section). It is best to tackle these issues directly and in advance of an issue being reported by a young person. Young people should be recognised and valued as experts: professionals have much to learn about the extent of sexual violence and how it impacts young people. Young people themselves will have creative suggestions for how we can improve our responses and we should value them as contributors and partners in continuing to address issues that affect their lives.

All organisations have a responsibility to tackle what might be perceived as low level sexual harassment. Clear messages should be given about the unacceptability of behaviours such as wolf-whistling, using sexualised or sexist language, calling people 'gay', bra-pinging, etc. This would include staff, without fail, calling out young people every time these behaviours are identified. Comments such as "*boys will be boys*" and "*it's just banter*" normalises behaviours which are very damaging and does young people a disservice. Actions to address behaviours at the lower end of the spectrum will make a solid foundation for not tolerating gender based violence in any of its forms. Staff remaining silent or turning a blind eye to certain 'lesser' seeming behaviours directly enables gender based violence to thrive and flourish.

The vast majority (75.9%) of young people think they should learn about where to get help and advice on sexual health and relationships.

Wave 2017

Organisations such as Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre are involved in delivering prevention education directly to young people in schools. It is widely recognised that whilst key messages around the unacceptability of sexual violence and discussions around the issues can (and should) be led by staff, including teachers, young people also value the additional input of specialist organisations on this topic. This is because they feel more able to discuss the issues openly and they recognise the organisations as highly skilled and knowledgeable. Staff working with young people in Edinburgh and Lothian schools have reported being concerned about young people involved in unhealthy/violent relationships and the proportion of students who believe that there are high incidences of false allegations made about rape. Factual information about the level of sexual violence in society and the reasons why someone may wish to retract a report should be explored with young people.

Guidance staff in schools, and others with a responsibility for young people's health and wellbeing, should be knowledgeable about sex, relationships and sexual violence. This includes being appropriately trained in issues such as gender equality, sexual orientation, gender based violence, rape culture and how these issues specifically impact on children and young people. More generic skills in being confident and having the skills to respond positively to young people, dependent on their needs, will also help in implementing this guidance and supporting young people with a range of issues.

Best practice would be to work with young people to enable them to lead on developing guidance and policies on issues around their safety and wellbeing, including relating to sexual harassment, sexual violence and bullying. The **Voices Unheard Educational Resource**⁶, developed by Voices Unheard, a youth-led domestic abuse and gender based violence project is an example of such work.

“equal male to female staff and more training in certain departments such as sexual harassment support, as at times they can be, without meaning to, quite blunt or they ask the wrong questions which makes people who were about to tell them their issue, recoil back into themselves”

⁶ <https://lgbtdomesticabuse.org.uk/media/1164/voices-unheard-educational-resource.pdf>

Perpetrators of sexual violence

This part of the guidance outlines good practice in responding to young people who have been identified as potential perpetrators of sexual violence.

Only the police and social work have the power to investigate reports of sexual assault, although other staff may have information that is relevant. Staff have a role to play in reducing potential risks posed by the individual(s).

Try saying, *“We have a responsibility to make sure that young people are safe. We take reports of sexual violence very seriously and we will have to conduct a risk assessment.”*

When considering what risks may be posed by an individual, the following factors should be taken into account:

- Is this a pattern of behaviour: are there previous reports or suspicions of sexual violence?
- Is this an escalation of behaviour: was there previous concerning conduct?
- What does the person think about sex, women and girls: what attitudes have been expressed and behaviours observed?
- What was the nature of the incident: was the victim incapacitated, was violence used, was it filmed, was the victim vulnerable for other reasons, etc.?
- What contact does the individual have with other vulnerable people, e.g. young children, peers with learning disabilities?
- What is the young person’s status within the school? This may have an impact on how others respond and may require clear management
- Where did it happen: in school, on school transport, after youth group, at a party, etc.? This may have an impact on active measures that the school may have to take to reduce risk

This should help inform a risk management plan where any current or future risks are reduced and should be developed even if any investigation concludes there is no evidence that the incident took place or if the individual maintains their innocence. Young people are entitled to an education, but exclusion, diversionary activities, on-going support, are all options that can be considered for the individual.

It is the duty of staff to ensure the wellbeing of other young people they work with whilst providing positive support to any potential perpetrators of sexual violence.

Problematic sexual behaviour can be an indicator that someone has experienced sexual abuse themselves. However, the majority of sexual violence perpetrators have not been victims: any previous experience of victimisation does not cause perpetration of sexual violence. Options for support for perpetrators can be explored through Youth Action services.

Resources

Prevention Education

- [Edinburgh's Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women Knowledge Hub](#)
- [GLOW resources for schools](#)
- [Zero Tolerance resources](#)
 - [Under Pressure – Preventing Teen Abuse & Exploitation](#)
 - [Just like a child – Early Years approaches to promote gender equality](#)
 - [Under Pressure Training](#): This can be provided by the prevention team at Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre
 - [Youth Worker Responses to Gendered Abuse and Exploitation](#)
- [Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre \(ERCC\)](#): Sexual Violence Prevention Programme for High Schools in Edinburgh and Lothian
- [Healthy Respect](#): Sexual health and relationships information, advice and support for young people in Edinburgh and Lothian
- [Mentors in Violence Prevention](#): A peer education approach to reducing violence, including gender based violence

Sources of Support

- [Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre STAR project](#): Support for young people of any gender, up to the age of 18, who have been affected by sexual violence, including sexual harassment, sexting or sharing of an intimate image
- [Rape Crisis Scotland](#): National Helpline and on line resources for survivors of sexual violence
- [West Lothian's Domestic and Sexual Assault Team \(DASAT\)](#): Support for survivors of domestic abuse and sexual assault across West Lothian
- [Edinburgh Women's Aid](#): Women's Aid groups in Edinburgh provide support to children and young people affected by domestic abuse
- [Women's Aid East and Midlothian](#)
- [West Lothian Women's Aid](#)
- [Fearfree](#): Support for men and LGBT survivors of domestic abuse over 16 years old
- [LGBT Helpline Scotland](#) and [LGBT Youth Scotland](#): Information and emotional support to LGBT people, their families, friends and supporters
- [Scottish Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline](#): A national helpline providing support to anyone experiencing domestic abuse or forced marriage

Further Information & Guidance

- [Edinburgh Child Protection Committee](#)
- [East & Mid Lothian Public Protection Committee](#)
- [West Lothian Public Protection Committee](#)
- [Edinburgh, Lothian and Borders Under-age Sexual Activity Inter-agency Guidance](#)
- [MARAC Risk Assessment for Young People](#): for identifying risk in abusive relationships

Appendix 1 – Sharing Information

Question: Why might we share what you tell us?

Answer: Because making sure you are safe is our top priority.

We provide a confidential service to you so you can talk openly about your personal business. But we also have a responsibility to be sure you are safe. This means that we might have to share some information if we are worried that you or someone else isn't safe.

Today you told us something that has caused us to be concerned and we have written it down on a 'concern form'. We've also talked with you about what we need to do with the information now.

Sometimes staff can't do their best to help young people without getting help and advice from other people. So they will share just enough information with people like guidance teachers, social workers, school nurses or other helpful organisations e.g. ERCC or Police, to get you the best help possible.

Remember: we only start asking others for advice and sharing your information, so that we can help you or anyone else that we think is not safe.

We will always try to talk with you first about what's happening with your information and make decisions with you to plan the next steps. If you tell us not to share your information or in other words 'don't give your consent' we still might have to tell other people.

If you have any questions or worries about what we have talked about today or any information on this leaflet, please contact _____

Our follow up appointment is on:

Date: _____

Time: _____

With: _____

Where: _____

Adapted from information developed by Waverley Care