

## Getting help after rape and sexual assault and the use of self-swab kits

This joint statement is supported by the following organisations:

Devon & Cornwall Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner; Devon & Cornwall Sexual Assault Referral Centres; Devon County Council; Plymouth City Council; Torbay Council; Cornwall Council; Safer Cornwall; Royal Devon University NHS Foundation Trust.

### Getting help after rape or sexual assault

If you, or someone that you know, has been raped or sexually assaulted, there is support available from organisations in Devon and Cornwall. To access this support, you can contact your local [Sexual Assault Referral Centre \(SARC\)](#).

They will never tell you what you should do, but they will help you think about your options.

They will listen and believe you. You will be cared for in a place where you are safe.

***“The staff were very kind, considerate, helpful. They let me take my time when I needed to and I felt at ease throughout the process”*** – Devon & Cornwall SARC client

### What is a SARC?

If you have been raped or sexually assaulted, you can contact [your nearest NHS sexual assault referral centre \(SARC\)](#) for free, specialist care and support in a safe space.

You can get help from a SARC without having to talk to the police or report what happened to you - your consent is everything, at every stage.

SARCs offer trusted, safe and recognised methods of support.

### Local support in Devon & Cornwall

Devon & Cornwall SARC has centres based in Exeter and Plymouth in Devon and Truro in Cornwall, offering support throughout the region.

Advice is available 365 days a year via its 24-hour information line: **0300 303 4626**  
Access to the SARC is appointment only.

## **Preserving evidence and forensic examinations**

If you have been raped or sexually assaulted within the last seven days, you will be offered a forensic medical examination. This is where a doctor or nurse collects evidence, including swabs, from your body and clothes.

It is your choice whether to have a forensic medical examination and having one doesn't mean you have to report to the police.

If you decide to have a forensic medical examination, the SARC will ensure that any evidence gathered follows the national guidance for collection, movement and storage of DNA evidence.

When you contact the SARC, they will give you advice on what you can do to help preserve evidence before a forensic medical examination.

## **Self-swabbing kits**

A SARC will **not** ask you to use a self-swab kit (where you collect your own DNA sample), as these kits may impact the ability of the SARC to capture approved DNA samples.

If you're not sure about reporting to the police, you can have the examination and the evidence can be safely stored, giving you time to decide what to do.

If you decide to report to the police in the future, this evidence can be shared with them.

**It is recommended that you do not take a swab yourself**, as this could impact the ability of the SARC to capture a DNA sample and provide the required evidence to the police.

You can read about the risks of doing this in a [Joint Statement](#) on self-swabbing kits, which has been published by the Faculty of Forensic and Legal Medicine.

## **Further information on local support in Devon & Cornwall**

- SARC services are available to anyone within Devon & Cornwall regardless of age, sexual orientation or gender identity
- Services include practical, emotional and medical support including crisis care. You will be offered a choice as to what to do next following your assault and you will have a crisis worker to support you at all times
- There is an opportunity to gather forensic evidence, including DNA, for up to seven days after being raped or sexually assaulted. Devon & Cornwall SARCs can provide forensic medical examinations at its centres and support you with any health needs or concerns
- The centres can also provide information and support on emergency contraception and sexually transmitted infections, and they can also ensure you receive appropriate care for any physical injuries

- Devon & Cornwall SARC offer both adult and children services and the team is specially trained to provide trauma-informed support
- The SARC will never share your data and personal information with anyone else without your consent, unless we believe that either you or someone else is at risk of significant harm
- More information on the services provided can be found at:  
[www.sarchelp.co.uk](http://www.sarchelp.co.uk)
- Devon & Cornwall SARC can also support access to other local, free specialist services such as Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs), counselling and emotional support. These services are available to anyone, regardless of whether you have reported to the police. Details of these services can be found on the Survivor Pathway:  
<https://www.survivorpathway.org.uk/>

### Additional information:

NHS England Joint advice on getting help after rape and sexual assault and the use of self-swab kits: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/south/2024/11/22/joint-advice-on-getting-help-after-rape-and-sexual-assault-and-the-use-of-self-swab-kits/>

NHS England SARC information animation:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Et6Ja2eCW6E>

There are 48 SARCs across England, supporting approximately 30,000 survivors a year. SARCs are co-commissioned by NHS England and police and crime commissioners, and are subject to Care Quality Committee regulations.

Further information on help available following sexual assault and abuse is available at [www.nhs.uk/sarcs](http://www.nhs.uk/sarcs).

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