

Supporting  
someone who  
has experienced  
sexual violence:

# INFORMATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE SUPPORTING FRIENDS

**RAPE  
CRISIS  
SCOTLAND**

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## If you are worried about your friend

Young people often phone the Rape Crisis Scotland (RCS) helpline. They may be worried because their friend has been raped or sexually assaulted; or they think someone is 'grooming'<sup>1</sup> their friend or putting pressure on them for sex; or threatening to post an explicit photo for everyone to see. These are common forms of sexual violence which can affect many young people.

Young people often tell us that they don't know what to do, what to say, or how to help. You might know that something is wrong because your friend has told you, or just have a feeling that things aren't quite right.

It's great that you want to help, because your friend may feel upset, confused, angry and/or hurt. You might feel the same sorts of things.

You may know the person who has hurt or is threatening your friend. It's quite often a mutual friend - someone in the same group of friends or club or class at school.

It can be really hard if a whole group is ganging up on your friend; or if your friend is worried about being outed because of their sexual orientation; or if they are from a very traditional community. You might be worried about these things too.

There are things you can do to help your friend. But remember it's OK for you to feel upset too. And there are limits to what you can or should do. You (or your friend) can phone the **RCS Helpline** and speak to us any day of the week without giving your name.

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<sup>1</sup> *Grooming is when a person deliberately sets out to get someone else to like and trust them in order to use or abuse or exploit them. They may do this online or in the real world. Young people might be 'groomed' by a stranger or by someone they know like a family member, friend or professional.*

*"I know this guy, he is 17. He is a survivor of rape. It happened to him about two weeks ago and he tells me how he can't get a hold of himself and speak up. I told him that there is nothing to worry about and I am here to help him but he still fears it, he tells me that he thought it would never happen to him. But... why would he? Nobody really thinks it will happen to them until it does. He is scared what people will think about him. He thinks he is weak because he was unable to protect himself. I keep on telling him not to care what other people think about him, but we are judged on every little thing we do, we are judged on our age, sexuality, our personal life, everything... I think he is strong, for coping with what has happened to him. I think he is strong for just getting out of bed today and continuing on with his day to day life after what has happened to him. I feel like I can't do much, but I told him about places he can get support, and I will always be there for him."*

Adapted from monologues written by young people as part of the 'Do You Know' theatre project with Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre

## Some ideas about what friends can do (and not do)

- Spend time with your friend. Just being there is enough. You don't need to treat your friend differently or as if they might break. Just treat them as normal - as your friend and not a victim - and do ordinary things with them
- Really listen to your friend and accept what they say, without judging them (even if you have thoughts which seem judgemental). Show your friend that you are listening to them. You don't need to have all (or any) of the answers
- Don't take over. Your friend needs to be in control now - because sexual violence took that away from your friend. So, you don't need to check up on them, text them all the time, tell them to report to the police, or feel that you have to cheer them up or take their mind off things - just let them be. You are not responsible for how your friend feels or what they do
- It's helpful for you and for your friend to know that no matter what your friend did or said, they did not deserve to be harmed or bullied or abused

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- Your friend might be thinking that it's their fault. It's good if you can tell them that it's not their fault; and that they didn't do anything wrong. The only person to blame is the person who raped or abused your friend (the perpetrator<sup>2</sup>)
  - Everyone is different. Your friend might or might not cry, be angry, want to hide away. They might act like nothing happened; or they might act weirdly. They might be OK some days and not others. They might push their friends away. Anything is possible and that is OK. It's good if you can tell your friend that whatever they do is a natural reaction, and don't expect too much of them
  - You don't have to know any details to help your friend. Your friend might not want to talk about it. The perpetrator might have threatened to hurt them or you or their family if they say anything. Or they may not remember much or not want to remember
  - If other people know about the abuse or are involved, you can help by not going along with it; not laughing along with jokes; and not ignoring it if you feel uneasy about what's going on. You can make a difference without putting yourself at risk
  - Your friend may feel really bad because, not only has the sexual violence happened, but they know that everyone is talking about it. So, just be nice to your friend, and be with them, for example around the school, if they want that
  - If your friend says that everything is fine but you think that someone is taking advantage of them, maybe 'grooming' them, and the way they are behaving makes you think that things are not fine, try to talk to them about it
  - If you are really scared and worried about your friend and think they might be in very serious danger, encourage them to tell an adult they can trust and help them work out who that might be, such as their mum, a teacher or the police (they can contact 999). You could offer to go with them. If the first person they tell, doesn't listen, help them to think of someone else

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<sup>2</sup> In this booklet, RCS calls the person who harmed your friend the 'perpetrator'.

- If your friend doesn't want to do that, and you are scared and worried that your friend is in serious danger, then it is okay to alert someone. You don't have to keep it to yourself if you are frightened or worried. If you think that they are at immediate risk you should call the police or a responsible adult. You can also contact the **RCS Helpline** and speak to us. We can't act without speaking to your friend first, but we can chat things through with you
- If your friend confides in you, they trust you. Don't break the trust by telling other friends - it's up to your friend who they tell and not you
- It's also up to your friend to decide what to do, if anything. They might not take your advice or do what you think they should do. It's good if you can accept that
- You could tell your friend that there are places and people who want to help. Depending on what's happened, they might need to get checked out for any infections or pregnancy. Could you go with them to the school nurse or a clinic? RCS Helpline can give contacts where your friend can get that sort of help
- If your friend wants to tell someone about abuse but others (maybe their family) are telling them that it is private and they should keep it secret, it may help if you say to your friend that it's up to them who they tell. Your friend has a right to get help. They should not be blamed or shamed for abuse. Offer to help them phone the **RCS Helpline** or to tell the school or someone else
- Look after and protect yourself too - it's not betraying your friend if you do. Sexual violence has an impact on everyone; it can be tough for friends and on friendships and there will be ups and downs. You can phone the free **RCS Helpline** to talk about this every day from **6pm - midnight** on Freephone: **08088 01 03 02**

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## Find out more

You can find out more about sexual violence. If you know more, then you can help your friend by passing on what you have found out. You can also tell them where they can find information and support.

The RCS website is a good place to start: [www.rapecrisisScotland.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisisScotland.org.uk)

This website has got good information about how abuse can affect young people and about help: [www.disrespectnobody.co.uk](http://www.disrespectnobody.co.uk)

## Telling and not telling

Lots of young people are worried about what will happen if they tell someone like a teacher or the police or RCS. Can they talk in confidence or will other people find out and take over?

If you or your friend phones someone for advice, you don't have to give any names or anything that would identify you. RCS services are confidential, so we won't share anything you say with other people such as parents or carers, unless you want us to. Sometimes, for example if we think someone might be at risk, we might need to contact other services which can help but we would need your friend's contact details to do this and we would want to speak to them first. We can explain more about this when you get in touch.

RCS supports young people over 13. ChildLine supports any young person up to 19.

If your friend tells a teacher or social worker or some other agency that they have been harmed, then that person should listen and should act. They should explain to your friend what action they are going to take to help make them safer.

## Agreeing to sex

If your friend is under 16, then the law says that they cannot 'consent' to sex. The law says that 'consent' is 'free agreement' which means someone freely wanting to do something and understanding what they are agreeing to. The law understands that there are many reasons why a person may not be able to freely agree or consent. They may not understand because of their age. A person cannot consent if they are asleep or intoxicated (with alcohol or drugs) or unconscious or pressured or forced. Your friend might think that they should agree to sex because someone gave them gifts or money or took them on a night out. But you can't buy consent because if someone feels pressured that is not free agreement. We can speak to you or your friend more about this if you want. There is also a blog about it here:

<http://edinburghrapecrisis.wixsite.com/ercc/single-post/2015/11/05/ConsentIs>

Thanks to Paula Dunn, Glasgow Rape Crisis Centre, and Nadine Jassat, Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre, for help with this leaflet.

Text: Shirley Henderson [www.shirleyhenderson.co.uk](http://www.shirleyhenderson.co.uk)

Rape Crisis Scotland 2016



## Rape Crisis Scotland National Helpline

Confidential support by phone and email

**08088 01 03 02** (every day 6pm to midnight)

[www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)

[support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](mailto:support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)

The **RCS Helpline** offers free and confidential support and information by phone or email. It is for anyone over age 13 who has been affected by sexual violence, no matter when or how it happened. We also support friends, families and relatives. The helpline has a minicom service for Deaf or hard of hearing people. The minicom number is **0141 332 2168**. We can arrange for language interpreters for those whose first language is not English.

The **RCS Helpline** aims to be inclusive and welcoming to all regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, gender identity, intersex status or sexual orientation.

We can put people in touch with local Rape Crisis centres or other services for longer-term support. Many local centres have projects for young people and their friends; some centres offer one-to-one and group support for partners, friends and other family members.

## Other useful contacts

Rape Crisis projects for young people and their friends include:

**Rosey at Glasgow Rape Crisis**

[www.roseyproject.co.uk](http://www.roseyproject.co.uk)

**STAR at Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre**

[www.ewrasac.org.uk/The-STAR-Project](http://www.ewrasac.org.uk/The-STAR-Project)

**Young Persons Project at Fife Rape & Sexual Assault Centre, ask for Josie McGilly**

[www.frasac.org.uk](http://www.frasac.org.uk)

**RASAC Youth Initiative (RYI) at Perth & Kinross Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre**

[www.rasacpk.org.uk](http://www.rasacpk.org.uk)

**TESSA Project, Argyll & Bute Rape Crisis Centre**

[www.tessaproject.co.uk](http://www.tessaproject.co.uk)

**ChildLine**

**0800 1111**

free and confidential support to children and young people of any age by phone, email, chat

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

Calls to ChildLine are free and confidential and do not appear on home phone bills; nor do calls from 3 (Three), BT Mobile, EE, O2, Orange, T Mobile, Virgin or Vodafone mobiles