

Press reporting on sexual offences

Information for the public

About this leaflet

This leaflet is produced by IPSO, the independent regulator of newspapers and magazines in the UK. It is for survivors and victims of sexual offences and the organisations who support them. It covers the rules the press should follow when reporting on sexual offences.

We recognise the language we use to discuss these sensitive issues matters. We have chosen to use the term 'survivors' or 'you.' We refer to 'victims' in relation to legal proceedings, where this terminology is used.

There are details of other useful organisations at the back of this leaflet.

The main points:

- It is your choice to speak or not to speak to the media.
- You have the automatic and lifelong right to be anonymous. Your identity must not be revealed by journalists without your consent.
- Journalists are allowed to attend court and choose which information to report.
- Journalists may use social media to get in touch with you, to gather information or to check facts.

We are here to provide advice and support if you have any concerns about a published article or the behaviour of a journalist.

How we can help

We are IPSO (the Independent Press Standards Organisation), the independent regulator of most of the UK's newspapers and magazines. We protect individual rights and uphold high standards of journalism under the Editors' Code of Practice (the Code).

Website: www.ipso.co.uk
Email: inquiries@ipso.co.uk

You can see the full Code here: <https://www.ipso.co.uk/editors-code-of-practice/>

We can help you if you need advice about published material or the behaviour of journalists and can offer support with urgent harassment issues.

In some cases, we can send out a specific notice on your behalf to the press (for example, to stop phoning you) or highlight concerns about the future publication of material which might break the Code. You can contact us on [0300 123 2220](tel:03001232220).

In an emergency after hours or at the weekend, you can also contact us using our emergency 24-hour advice service on [07799 903929](tel:07799903929).

We can take complaints about articles or journalists' behaviour which may have breached the Code. You can complain in writing through our website: <https://www.ipso.co.uk/complain/complaints-form>

Why does the press report on sexual offences?

As a survivor, you might find that you encounter journalists who are seeking to report on sexual offences.

By responsibly reporting on sexual offences, the press can raise awareness, campaign for better support for survivors, and highlight support available.

Newspapers also routinely report on crime and about what happens in court, including sexual offence cases.

To abide by the Editors' Code, the standards publishers agree to maintain, journalists must take special care in reporting on sexual offences.

For more details on court reporting, see IPSO's public information here: <https://www.ipso.co.uk/media/1584/court-report-v4-pleng.pdf>

Anonymity

The Editors' Code prevents regulated publications from identifying survivors. From making enquiries about a potential story through to the final publication, journalists are not allowed to identify survivors of sexual offences, unless they have your permission to do so.

As a survivor, you have the lifelong right to anonymity in the press. This is from the moment of allegation (by you or someone else) of a sexual offence. While journalists are allowed to make enquiries about a case or potential article, they must do so in a way that avoids disclosing your identity. Publications are also not allowed to identify you (or publish information which is likely to lead to your identification) in their final written articles.

Examples of information that might be likely to identify you depends on the circumstances, but may include your age, or information about the alleged crime such as the relationship between you and the defendant or the location where it took place.

The Editors' Code provides extra protections for children in sexual offence cases. Publications must not identify either survivors or witnesses if they are 16 years old or under.

Anonymity and the law

The Editors' Code closely follows the current law in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, where victims have a legal right to lifelong anonymity. Even in circumstances where allegations are withdrawn or in cases where a defendant has been acquitted of committing an offence, the right to anonymity remains. Identification may result in criminal prosecution for editors of newspapers and magazines.

Scottish law

The law is currently different in Scotland, where there is no automatic right to anonymity for victims. However, legal anonymity is likely to be granted by Court Order and victims are generally not named in the press without their consent.

Scottish publications that are regulated by IPSO must still follow the Editors' Code. They are prevented from identifying victims.

Court cases

It is normal for journalists to attend court cases and report on proceedings, as part of making sure justice happens fairly.

In general, journalists can:

- Attend one or more days of the trial.
- Take notes of proceedings.
- Approach survivors and other people related to the court case, to ask if you would like to be interviewed.
- Publish anything that has been said in open court or used as evidence, including testimony given by either a witness or a defendant.
- Publish identifying information of the defendant or witnesses in court cases, if the witness is over the age of 16.

Although journalists attending court may have access to sensitive information about your experience, it is important to remember your right to anonymity is still protected.

Unless you are over the age of 16 and choose to waive your right to anonymity, journalists cannot publish anything which might identify you. Journalists also cannot publish a story which is inaccurate, distorted or misleading.

It is possible that even if you are not named and the journalist has not written anything likely to identify you, your story may be recognised by friends, colleagues or acquaintances. Charities supporting survivors have advised planning how you would respond to any questions that might be raised.

Talking to the press

Sharing your story can be an empowering experience. Most journalists will want to make sure it is as positive and comfortable as possible.

We also know that speaking to journalists can be daunting. It is your choice to speak to the press about your experience and what you choose to share.

Waiving anonymity

If you are over the age of 16 you can choose to waive your right to anonymity and agree to be named. We encourage you to think carefully about waiving your anonymity before you do so.

You may find it helpful to speak to a lawyer or an organisation that supports survivors before deciding.

If you are under the age of 16, you cannot waive your right to anonymity, and it *cannot* be waived on your behalf.

Social media

Social media is often the best way for journalists to contact the public. Newspapers and magazines can also publish information found on social media.

Journalists must consider both how they make these approaches and what information they publish in case there is a potential breach of the Code.

Publications must not publish names or identifying information of survivors named on social media. The only exception is if an adult survivor chooses to waive their anonymity.

If you are concerned about a publication's social media posts or comment section, you should make the publication aware. You can also contact us.

The interview process

Before you agree to be interviewed, you should consider:

1. Who is the journalist you are speaking to and for which publication? While no story will be the same, this may help you get an idea of the format and style it may take.

2. Where would you like the interview to take place? You may want to choose somewhere private where you feel safe. You may also like to be accompanied by a friend or family member.

3. Would you like to remain anonymous? If so, what details are you prepared for the journalist to publish?

If you decide to go ahead with an interview, remember that a journalist will ask you questions about your experience and may take notes or record your answers. This is to make sure they can accurately report your story. You may also like to take your own notes or recording.

It is normal to be nervous. Remember that you have the right to support and to ask for regular breaks throughout the interview.

You can end an interview at any point.

The publication process

It is important to remember that being interviewed is only part of the publication of a story. Before agreeing to an interview, it is also worth considering that:

- Journalists do not have to include everything you have said.
- The interviewer may not be involved in all stages of a story's publication. They may not be able to tell you when it will be published or what the headline will be.
- Your story may be shared across different platforms, both in print and online.
- If a publication belongs to a larger group, a story may appear in sister publications.
- Once published, your story may also appear in other publications.

Concerns about the press

If you have concerns about how your story is being or has been covered, including the behaviour of journalists, we are here to help.

We operate a 24 hour emergency anti-harassment helpline. If calling out of hours, please contact **07799 903 929**.

During office hours, please contact **0300 123 22 20**.

We can give you advice about what to do next or about making a complaint.

Useful organisations

Galop is a LGBT+ anti-abuse charity, working with and for LGBT+ victims and survivors of abuse and violence. As well as national support Helplines, Galop also provides longer-term support through its advocacy services. <https://galop.org.uk/about>
National Helpline: 0800 999 5428

Rape Crisis England & Wales gives specialist information and support to all those affected by rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment and all other forms of sexual violence and abuse in England and Wales. It is also the membership organisation for 39 Rape Crisis centres. <https://rapecrisis.org.uk>
24/7 Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Line: 0808 500 2222

Rape Crisis Scotland is the member organisation for 17 rape crisis centres in Scotland. <https://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk>
National Helpline: 08088 01 03 02

Rape Crisis Northern Ireland provides support for survivors in Northern Ireland. <https://rapecrisisni.org.uk>
National Helpline: 0800 0246 991

The Survivors Trust is made up of 130 specialist organisations which provide support for anyone who has been affected by rape, sexual violence and childhood sexual abuse throughout the UK and Ireland. <https://www.thesurvivorstrust.org/>
National Helpline: 08088 010818

Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. It is a federation of just under 170 organisations which provide local lifesaving services to women and children across the country.

Contact Page: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/>

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