

REPORTING SEXUAL OFFENCES

TO POLICE

REPORTING SEXUAL OFFENCES TO POLICE

If you decide to report a sexual offence to police, you will be treated with respect, courtesy and dignity. You can expect the following from us.

- **Wellbeing, safety and respect** | Your wellbeing and safety is our priority. We will listen without judgment and treat you with courtesy, respect and dignity. We will respect your cultural background and any individual safety and/or accessibility needs you might have. The decision as to whether to conduct a formal investigation will be discussed with you and your views will be respected and considered.
- **Information about support services** | We will discuss your informal and formal support needs with you. We will work in partnership with you to ensure you have appropriate support in place by connecting you with victims of crime and support agencies.
- **Help from a support person** | You may have a support person of your choice throughout your dealings with us. It is important that your support person is not a witness in the case and does not interfere with the police investigation.
- **Contact within police** | Your investigation will be handled by a specialist detective who will be your main point of contact. Their contact details can be written in the back of this booklet.
- **Information about the investigation** | We will discuss with you how you would like us to keep you informed throughout the investigation and will keep you updated as agreed. We will be available for any questions you may have.
- **Never too late to report** | There is no time limit for reporting sexual offences. Specialist detectives are trained to investigate sexual offences, no matter when they occurred.

CONTENTS

-
- 2** About this booklet
 - 2** What is a sexual offence?
 - 3** Reporting sexual offences to police
 - 4** What if the sexual offence happened a long time ago?
 - 4** How can I report to police?
 - 5** Support and welfare information
 - 6** What is involved in a police investigation?
 - 6** What if I no longer want to continue?
 - 7** Recording your statement
 - 8** Forensic medical examination
 - 9** Other evidence collection
 - 9** Interviewing the accused
 - 10** Examining the evidence
 - 11** Going to court and witness support
 - 12** Contact police
 - 14** Who else can I speak to?
 - 18** Glossary of terms
-

ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet explains what sexual offences are, what you can expect if you decide to report sexual offences to police, what happens during the investigation and at court, and the support options available to you.

Some of the terminology used in this booklet may be unfamiliar to you and there can be variation in the language used by different organisations and agencies. **You can find a glossary on pages 18-19 of this booklet.**

WHAT IS A SEXUAL OFFENCE?

A SEXUAL OFFENCE OCCURS WHEN SOMEONE DOES NOT CONSENT TO A SEXUAL ACT OR ACTS.

Sexual offences can refer to a broad range of sexual behaviours that make a person feel uncomfortable, frightened or threatened and can include rape, sexual assault and child sexual abuse.

Sexual offences are often perpetrated by someone known to, and trusted by, the victim and those close to them. Sexual offending can occur anywhere. This could be within the family home, the community and institutional settings (such as a school, church, club, aged care facility or disability service). A sexual offence may be experienced as a one off or repeatedly over a longer period.

REPORTING SEXUAL OFFENCES TO POLICE

REPORTING SEXUAL OFFENCES TO POLICE IS A SIGNIFICANT STEP.

We will listen without judgment and treat you with dignity and respect. Our detectives are specialists and are trained to understand the complex and diverse nature of sexual offences.

You don't need to worry about whether what happened to you is a criminal offence or not. It is our job to work that out. If you are concerned about something that has happened to you, we encourage you to speak with a detective from one of our Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams (SOCITs) or Sano Taskforce. **You can find contact details for SOCITs and Sano Taskforce on page 13.**

Telling us about what happened to you does not mean your case will proceed all the way to court. We will discuss your options with you and your views will be considered and taken into account.

We understand it can be difficult to report your experience to us. There are support agencies that can help support you regardless of your decision to report to police. **You can find a list of them on pages 14-17 of this booklet.**

ANY FORM OF SEXUAL OFFENDING IS SERIOUS. EVERYONE IS ENTITLED TO PROTECTION UNDER THE LAW.

WHAT IF THE SEXUAL OFFENCE HAPPENED A LONG TIME AGO?

IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO REPORT SEXUAL OFFENCES.

Deciding to report sexual offences years later is quite common. We understand that most people who experience sexual offences delay telling anyone or may never tell anyone.

It doesn't matter whether the offence occurred hours, weeks, months, years or decades ago. Our detectives will investigate.

We encourage you to report regardless of when the sexual offence occurred and even if you think or know the accused is dead.

HOW CAN I REPORT TO POLICE?

Detectives in our Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams (SOCITs) and Sano Taskforce are specially trained to investigate sexual offences.

To report a sexual offence to police:

- Call your local SOCIT (see page 13 for details)
- Attend your local police station
(go to police.vic.gov.au/location for details)
- Call Triple Zero (000) in an emergency.

Reports of child sexual abuse (either historical or current) that occurred in a religious or institutional setting can also be made to Sano Taskforce via:

- telephone on **1800 110 007**
- email to sanotaskforce@police.vic.gov.au

If you are not ready to speak to us, you can contact the Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) to speak with a counsellor. **For more information about CASA and the other support services available to you, refer to pages 14-17 of this booklet.**

SUPPORT AND WELFARE INFORMATION

A detective or CASA counsellor will work with you to ensure you have appropriate supports in place. We will provide you with information about support services that are available to you free of charge.

These services include:

- Follow-up short, medium and long term counselling and support
- Medical assistance and follow-up medical treatment
- Information and support during the investigation and court process
- Emergency housing
- Support with Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal applications
- Information and counselling for family, friends and support persons.

Information about the support services available to you is provided on pages 14-17 of this booklet. These services are available to you regardless of your decision to report to police.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN A POLICE INVESTIGATION?

SEXUAL OFFENCE INVESTIGATIONS ARE CONDUCTED BY SPECIALISED DETECTIVES.

Your investigation will be led by a detective who will be your main point of contact.

We will keep you informed of the progress during the investigation and will be available for any questions or concerns you may have. We can discuss with you how you would like us to update you during the investigation – in writing, by phone, email or in person. If you would prefer not to be kept up to date, let us know, or ask us to provide progress reports to your support person instead.

There are several stages in a police investigation including recording your statement and collecting and examining evidence. **More information on what is involved in an investigation is provided on pages 7-10.**

WHAT IF I NO LONGER WANT TO CONTINUE?

We will encourage and support you throughout the investigation. However, we understand you may decide that continuing with a police investigation is not the best option for you.

Deciding not to continue does not stop you from proceeding later. However, a delay in the investigation may result in some evidence being lost. Where there is a risk to community safety, we may still need to proceed with an investigation.

Regardless of your decision, your safety and welfare will be our priority and we will work with you to connect you with support services.

RECORDING YOUR STATEMENT

AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THE INVESTIGATION IS FOR POLICE TO TAKE YOUR STATEMENT.

We will usually take your statement very early in the investigation in a private setting. A statement records what you can recall about your experience in as much detail as possible. We will ask you about everything you can remember about what happened, including sounds, smells, how you felt and what you did. Try not to leave anything out. Even small details that you might not think are important can help us with the investigation.

We know recalling sexual offences can be difficult. It is not easy to share information of a personal and physically intimate nature. Our detectives will treat you with dignity and respect. They are trained to understand the impacts of sexual offences and will support you through the process. You may also have a support person present for emotional support.

Take the time you need to make your statement. It is important you feel comfortable when giving your statement. Giving your statement may take several hours and may sometimes require several appointments.

You will be given a copy of your statement when you have finished. If you remember something later or find a mistake in the statement, speak to the detective looking after your case.

FORENSIC MEDICAL EXAMINATION

SEXUAL OFFENCES DO NOT ALWAYS INVOLVE PHYSICAL INJURIES.

Depending on the circumstances of your report and the timeframe, you may be asked to undergo a forensic medical examination. If a forensic medical examination is appropriate, we will explain what it will involve and will arrange the consultation for you with your consent.

Whether to undergo a forensic medical examination is your choice, however be mindful that evidence may be lost with time.

Forensic medical examinations are conducted by a trained medical professional who will address any immediate medical needs, collect evidence for use in the investigation, may take photos of any injuries and will discuss any concerns you may have relating to sexually transmitted infections or pregnancy. You have a right to have a CASA counsellor advocate and/or a support person present during the examination.

For more information about forensic medical examinations, please visit the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine website at vifm.org

OTHER EVIDENCE COLLECTION

WE WILL COLLECT EVIDENCE RELATED TO THE CRIME. WHAT WE COLLECT AS EVIDENCE WILL DEPEND ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE SEXUAL OFFENCE.

The evidence collected during the investigation will be stored securely and any items taken as evidence will only be kept as long as necessary. At the completion of the proceedings, we will discuss with you which items you would like returned.

We will take statements from people who may have witnessed the sexual offence or may be able to provide information that could assist the investigation. We understand you may be reluctant to have detectives speak to your family or friends.

We respect your privacy and will not reveal any unnecessary information when speaking to witnesses. If you are concerned or worried about anyone we might speak to, let us know so we can discuss your concerns.

INTERVIEWING THE ACCUSED

If the accused is known or has been identified, we may interview them.

Depending on the circumstances, the accused may be kept in custody, released or granted bail until the court case starts.

Your safety will be our priority at every stage of the investigation. We will keep you informed and discuss with you how to manage your safety.

EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

At the conclusion of the investigation, all the evidence collected will be examined by a person who is specifically trained to make decisions about matters that may proceed to court. The decision is made after careful consideration of the available evidence and the rules of law.

NOT ALL INVESTIGATIONS PROCEED TO COURT.

This does not mean we don't believe you. It simply means we do not have enough evidence to meet the required level for criminal prosecution. If this happens, we will talk to you about it and explain the reasons why.

GOING TO COURT AND WITNESS SUPPORT

If the matter proceeds to court, a detective or the prosecutor will explain the process to you and will keep you up to date throughout. There are several stages in the court process and these vary depending on what court your case is being heard in.

There are special arrangements at court that are designed to minimise trauma. These include giving evidence from another location by closed-circuit television, using screens in the courtroom to ensure the accused is not visible to you and allowing a support person to be present with you when giving evidence.

For more information about going to court, please visit the Department of Justice and Community Safety website at victimsofcrime.vic.gov.au

There are services available to you and your family to assist and support you at court, such as the Office of Public Prosecution's Witness Assistance Service. We can make referrals to these specialist support services if required.

For more information, please visit the Witness Assistance Service website at victimsandwitnesses.opp.vic.gov.au

CONTACT POLICE

SEXUAL OFFENCES AND CHILD ABUSE INVESTIGATION TEAMS (SOCIT)

You can report sexual offences to SOCITs. We have SOCITs located across Victoria.

SOCIT locations and phone numbers are listed on the following page. The locations are divided into regions to make it easier for you to find your nearest unit.

SANO TASKFORCE

Sano Taskforce is based in Melbourne but operates state-wide. You can report child sexual abuse (either historical or current) that occurred in a religious or institutional setting to Sano Taskforce.

In an emergency dial Triple Zero (000).

SEXUAL OFFENCES AND CHILD ABUSE INVESTIGATION TEAMS (SOCIT)

North-West Metropolitan

Mernda (03) 9216 1310
Fawkner (03) 9355 6100
Brimbank (03) 9313 3460
Melbourne (03) 8690 4056
Westgate (03) 9216 0566

Southern Metropolitan

Dandenong (03) 8769 2200
Seaford (03) 8770 1000
Bayside (03) 8530 5100

Western Victoria

Ballarat (03) 5336 6055
Central Victoria (Bendigo)
(03) 5444 6752
Colac (03) 5230 0044
Geelong (03) 5246 8100
Horsham (03) 5382 9241
Ararat (03) 5355 1500
Mildura (03) 5023 5980
Swan Hill (03) 5036 1600
Warrnambool (03) 5560 1333

Eastern Victoria

Bairnsdale (03) 5150 2677
Benalla (03) 5760 0200
Box Hill (03) 8892 3292
Knox (03) 9881 7939
Central Gippsland (Morwell)
(03) 5120 0300
Sale (03) 5142 2200
Seymour (03) 5735 0208
Shepparton (03) 5820 5878
Wangaratta (03) 5723 0848
Wodonga (02) 6049 2672

SANO TASKFORCE

1800 110 007

sanotaskforce@police.vic.gov.au

WHO ELSE CAN I SPEAK TO?

There are a range of organisations independent of Victoria Police that you can contact for further information and support. These organisations can support you regardless of your decision to report to police.

CENTRES AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT

1800 806 292

casa.org.au

Centres Against Sexual Assault provide free counselling and support to women, children and men who are victims/survivors of sexual assault. To access your nearest CASA during business hours, phone **1800 806 292**.

AFTER HOURS SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS LINE

1800 806 292

casa.org.au

The after-hours Sexual Assault Crisis Line provides a state-wide crisis counselling and support service to all victims/survivors of sexual assault at any time in their lives and coordinates after-hours crisis care responses with CASA for recent victims/survivors of sexual assault. It operates between 5pm weeknights through to 9am the next day and throughout weekends and public holidays.

NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT, DOMESTIC FAMILY VIOLENCE COUNSELLING SERVICE

1800 737 732 (1800RESPECT)

1800RESPECT.org.au

The National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service is a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week nation-wide telephone and online counselling service for victims/survivors of both past and recent sexual assault and/or domestic family violence. They offer an interpreting and sign language (Auslan) service.

SAFE STEPS

1800 015 188

safesteps.org.au

Safe Steps is a state-wide service for women and children experiencing violence and abuse from a partner or ex-partner, another family member or someone close to them. They provide a comprehensive range of support services to enable women and children to become – and stay – free from violence. Women experiencing family violence can call 24 hours a day 7 days a week and speak confidentially to another woman for information on family violence support services, legal rights and accommodation options.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

1800 819 817

0427 767 891 (Text)

victimsofcrime.vic.gov.au

The Department of Justice and Community Safety provides free information and support 7 days a week between 8am and 11pm. They provide information and advice on reporting a crime and information about your rights, the court process and other services that can help you. They can also help you in applying for compensation and financial assistance.

NATIONAL REDRESS SCHEME

1800 737 377

nationalredress.gov.au

The National Redress Scheme provides support to people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse. The Scheme helps people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse gain access to counselling, a direct personal response from the institution and a Redress payment. The National Redress Scheme can be contacted from Monday to Friday between 8am and 5pm. Details of free, confidential redress support services are also available at nationalredress.gov.au/support or by calling the number above.

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC ADVOCATE

1300 309 337

publicadvocate.vic.gov.au

The Office of the Public Advocate promotes and safeguards the rights and interests of people with disability. Its advice service provides expert advice and information to people with disability, families, carers, health and welfare professionals and other interested parties on issues including guardianship, administration, powers of attorney, medical consent, capacity and advocacy. The advice service can be contacted during business hours. An after-hours Duty Officer is available to provide urgent advice outside business hours.

WOMEN'S LEGAL SERVICE VICTORIA

03 8622 0600 (Metro)
1800 133 302 (Country)
womenslegal.org.au

Women's Legal Service Victoria assists women experiencing disadvantage who are facing legal issues due to a relationship breakdown and violence. They can assist with issues such as protection from family violence and personal safety intervention orders, child custody and access, division of property after separation, separation and divorce and victims of crime applications. Financial advice is also available to women experiencing problems with debt, financial hardship or accessing financial entitlements following a relationship breakdown.

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL LEGAL SERVICE

1800 064 865
vals.org.au

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service provides legal aid services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria. They offer information, initial legal advice, minor assistance and referral. They also provide legal casework services including representation and assistance in criminal, civil and family law matters. They have offices in Melbourne and regional areas and provide after-hours service for those in the custody of police.

ESAFETY COMMISSIONER

**[esafety.gov.au/key-issues/
image-based-abuse](http://esafety.gov.au/key-issues/image-based-abuse)**

eSafety can help with the removal of intimate images or videos, and in some cases, take action against the person who shared intimate images or videos without the consent of the person in the images.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Accused

The term used in this booklet to describe the person who is alleged to have committed an offence. They may also be referred to as the suspect, an offender, defendant, respondent or perpetrator depending on the context.

Detective

A highly trained specialist police officer who investigates sexual offences, child abuse and other criminal activity.

Forensic medical examination

A medical examination to initially treat, assess, document and interpret injuries sustained during a crime. It is conducted by a trained medical professional called a Forensic Medical Officer or a Forensic Nurse Examiner.

Office of Public Prosecutions

A solicitor's office that prosecutes serious criminal cases on behalf of the Director of Public Prosecutions. It is a separate organisation to Victoria Police.

Sano Taskforce

A specialist unit within Victoria Police that investigates reports of child sexual abuse (either historical or current) that occurred in a religious or institutional setting.

Sexual offence

A broad range of non-consensual sexual behaviours. These include rape, sexual assault and child sexual abuse.

Sexual Offence and Child Abuse Investigation Teams (SOCITs)

A specialist team of detectives that investigate reports of sexual offences and child abuse.

Statement

A detailed description of facts and events witnessed by a person that are relevant to the crime. It is usually written down but can sometimes be recorded on video.

Support agency or service

An organisation, separate to Victoria Police, offering various welfare support and assistance services such as counselling, information about the investigation and court process, medical assistance and emergency housing.

Support person

A person who offers emotional support during the investigation process. They can be a friend, family member or a worker or volunteer from a support service. This person cannot be a witness to the offence and should not interfere with the police investigation.

DETECTIVE:

PROVIDING FEEDBACK

If you believe that we have not treated you with respect or given you the right information, you can make a complaint by:

- Contacting your local police station (go to police.vic.gov.au/location for details)
- Emailing complaints@police.vic.gov.au

If you would like to provide positive feedback on the service you have received, email compliments@police.vic.gov.au

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

Victoria Police pay our respect to the Traditional Owners of lands on which we live and work.

We pay our respects to Elders and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who continue to care for their country, culture and people.

Authorised and published by Victoria Police
Victoria Police Centre
PO Box 913, Melbourne VIC 3001

Published by Victoria Police February, 2020
© The State of Victoria, Victoria Police 2020

This publication is copyright. No part may be reproduced by any process except in accordance with the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968*.



VICTORIA POLICE