

A GUIDE TO POLICE STATION PROCEDURES

The logo for Rights for Women features a stylized female symbol (a circle with a vertical line and a horizontal line) in the center. Above the symbol are four horizontal bars of increasing length from top to bottom, resembling a staircase. Below the symbol is one horizontal bar. The text "RIGHTS for WOMEN" is written in a white, sans-serif font across the middle of the logo, with "for" in a smaller font size and lowercase letters.

RIGHTS for WOMEN

This information sheet explains how the police station system works and what you need to be aware of if you are the victim of a crime and want to report this to the police. It discusses various police station procedures. Police stations can sometimes be intimidating places for anyone who is unfamiliar with this environment and the investigation process. This information sheet refers to the perpetrator as “he” although we acknowledge that this will not always be the case. We use the term “victim” because this is the term used in the law. However we acknowledge that many women would prefer to be referred to as “survivors”. We refer to the perpetrator as the accused as this is what a person suspected of committing a crime will be known as at the police station.

How to make a report

The victim can report a crime to the police by phoning the police station, going into the local police station, or by phoning 999. It is also possible to report a crime online at www.police.uk. A friend, relative or witness may also make a complaint on behalf of the victim. The victim will need to give the police full details and information about what happened. However, the victim’s complaint may not go any further if the police do not believe that they have enough information to proceed.

Giving a statement

If the police have reasonable grounds to believe that an offence has been committed

they will need to take a formal statement from the victim.

The victim will be required to attend the police station and sit in an interview room with at least one police officer and give her account of what happened. In some circumstances the police can attend her home and take a statement from her. With certain types of cases, such as sexual offences, the police may need to ask the victim intimate questions about the offence committed against her. She will also then be asked to check and sign her statement. This statement will be the basis of the complaint against the accused.

Some police stations have special facilities for cases involving sexual violence, such as

a rape suite, specially trained police officers and rape victim chaperones. These should be more informal surroundings and the police involved should have experience of dealing with these types of cases.

What will happen next?

Once a formal statement has been made the police will begin to investigate the offence.

A police liaison officer (PLO) should be appointed to the case to keep the victim up to date with the investigations and inform the victim whether or not the suspect is charged or if he has been granted bail.

The police will speak to the accused in an interview to obtain his account of events; this interview will be recorded and later typed up. The police may arrest the accused to do this or he may attend voluntarily at the police station.

The accused will be entitled to seek legal advice from a solicitor if he wishes.

Decision to charge

The decision to charge the accused with an offence is made by the police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). A CPS lawyer will look over the victim's statement and any other information given to them by the police and make a decision about whether or not there would be 'a realistic prospect' of the accused being found guilty of the offence if the case went to court. In making their decision, the CPS also consider whether a prosecution is in the public interest. These are the criteria that the CPS must use in deciding whether or not to charge a suspect.

The accused will then be informed about whether he will be charged or if there will

be no further action taken against him (NFA'd). If there is no further action then nothing else will happen in respect of the report to the police and the file will be closed. The file will be kept by the police for seven years before being destroyed. This would also be the case at the conclusion of any prosecution in the courts.

The police officer in charge of the case should inform the victim of the outcome of the case.

The decision to grant bail at the police station

The police should take details from the victim about any fears she may have in relation to the accused. The solicitor on behalf of the accused may offer suggestions of conditions to attach to bail to allow the accused to be released from the police station until his first court appearance. Common conditions include not to contact the victim or not to go within a particular geographical area.

If the offence is a serious one and the police decide not to grant the accused police bail he will be held overnight in the police station to attend court the next morning. If the police allow the accused police bail then he will be given a formal document indicating when he must attend court for his first appearance. This will be within 7 days of being charged at the police station.

The police liaison officer should keep the victim up to date with the court proceedings and should inform her within 24 hours whether or not the accused has been granted bail by the court after his first appearance.

Police investigations and obtaining evidence

The police will start some investigations before charging the accused but once the accused has been charged investigations will be ongoing. They may look more closely at details which have been highlighted by the interviews. There may be DNA evidence (such as blood, skin, and bodily fluids) available and in cases of sexual violence a Forensic Medical Examiner (FME) will need to examine the victim and preserve any evidence they obtain from the examination. This kind of examination will normally take place at the police station in the FME room but it could also take place at a Sexual Assault Referral Centre. If the victim wants to see a woman FME then the officers should try and accommodate her request, however it will depend on the number of woman FMEs on call. If the victim went to a GP in relation to injuries received in the alleged offence then the doctor's notes or report may need to be obtained and used as evidence in the court proceedings.

If the injuries are visible, then whilst the victim is at the police station photographs may be taken of the injuries to use as evidence if the case goes to trial.

There may be other types of evidence such as witness evidence. This may be available if someone else saw the offence happen or the events leading up to the offence. If so the police will need to contact the witnesses and ask them to give a witness statement.

Depending on the offence and information available to the police they may need to look at telephone records, complete identification procedures, send off samples

of DNA or clothing/ items/ fingerprints/ fibres involved to the forensic laboratories for them to examine the samples and make a report on them.

They may also need to examine any CCTV evidence that is available either at the scene of the crime or in areas where the victim or the accused may have been before the offence.

Identity parades

If the accused was not known to the victim, she may be asked to help the police with identity procedures. The police may ask the victim to look through an album of photos of known offenders. She may also be asked to attend an identification parade (ID parade) or view a video ID parade if she believes that she can identify the accused and she could possibly be asked to identify someone from CCTV video evidence.

The most common identification procedures are the live and video ID parades. The victim will be required to go into the police station and view a line up of individuals in a live parade to see if she can identify the accused. If the victim is required to view a video ID she will need to go into the police station and view a video of 9 individuals one of which the police believe is the accused. This is a very formal procedure and in the case of the video ID procedures the accused will not be in the police station or ID suite at the same time as the victim. In live ID parades the accused may be in the line up but the victim and accused will be in separate areas and the accused cannot see the victim.

Support systems to help you through the process

When someone reports an offence the police should put the local Victim Support unit in contact with the victim.

The victim can take a friend, family member or colleague with her to the police station for support. The police may allow someone to sit in on the interview with the victim. However, it is advisable to check with the police officer dealing with the case beforehand.

If the victim is in contact with other support organisations or counsellors, they may also be able to attend the police station with the victim (see the other useful telephone numbers for details of support organisations).

From investigation stage to court stage

Once the accused is charged the case will move from the police station to the court. However, the police may still be active within the case and investigations may continue. The police liaison officer should keep the victim up to date with what is

happening at the court appearances and the time scale of the court proceedings. The day to day control of the case will be taken over by the CPS who will work together with the police on the case.

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime

Also known as the Victims Code this tells the victim what she can expect from the agencies involved in the criminal justice system, such as the police or the CPS and sets out the standards of service which they should offer the victim. If she needs to make a complaint please see our information sheet *A Guide to Complaints Procedures and Compensation*. The Victims Code can be downloaded from www.cjsonline.gov.uk.

For full details of the investigations and proceedings involved in sexual violence cases, please order our handbook *From Report to Court: A Handbook for Adult Survivors of Sexual Violence*. This guide is free and gives you an overview of each stage of the legal process.

The law relating to this issue is very complex. We have provided only a very basic overview of the terminology, law and procedure. We would strongly advise any woman involved in or considering reporting an offence to seek further advice and support from our advice line or the organisations listed overleaf.

Order Form – *From Report to Court*

Your details

Name

Occupation/position

Organisation

Address

.....

Telephone Fax

Email

Number of copies required

Rights of Women have produced this new publication which is free of charge. To order a copy please send a stamped SAE (71p per copy) to Rights of Women at the address below.

We will send you a book within 14 days of receiving your order.

Please return your completed form to:

Rights of Women, 52-54 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8RT

This book is translated into Chinese, French, Punjabi, Somali and Spanish and is available to download from our website at www.rightsofwomen.org.uk. Translated handbooks may also be available on hard copy if you do not have access to the internet, please contact us at our offices for further information.

Rights of Women can be contacted at 020 7251 6575/6 (admin), 020 7490 2562 (textphone), or by email at info@row.org.uk.

Industrial and Provident Society No 23221R.

For more information on Rights of Women, the publications we produce and services we offer please go to our website at www.rightsofwomen.org.uk.



For free confidential legal advice on sexual violence and the criminal law please call our sexual violence advice line on 020 7251 8887 (telephone) or 020 7490 2562 (textphone).

Mondays 11am – 1pm and Tuesdays 10am – 12 noon

Other useful telephone numbers

London Lesbian & Gay Switchboard	020 7837 7324	www.llgs.org.uk
National Domestic Violence Helpline	0808 200 0247	www.womensaid.org.uk
One in Four	020 8697 2112	www.oneinfour.org.uk
Rape Crisis Federation (for details of local helplines)		www.rapecrisis.org.uk
Rape & Sexual Abuse Support (RASAC)	0845 122 1331	www.rasac.org.uk
Samaritans	0845 790 9090	www.samaritans.org.uk
Sexual Assault Referral Centres		www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/sexualoffences/referralcentres.html
Southall Black Sisters	020 8571 9595	www.southallblacksisters.org.uk
Support for Disabled Survivors (Respond)	0808 808 0700	www.respond.org.uk
Women and Girls Network	020 7610 4345	info@wgn.org.uk
Victim Support Line	0845 303 0900	www.victimsupport.org

Rights of Women, 52-54 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8RT

Office/Admin: 020 7251 6575/6

Textphone: 020 7490 2562

Fax: 020 7490 5377

Email: info@row.org.uk

Website: www.rightsofwomen.org.uk

Industrial and Provident Society No: 23221R

