Briefing Note on Initial Contact in Rape Cases

Your role
As a call taker or member of front desk staff at a police station, you will often provide the initial response to a report of rape. It is your responsibility to take steps to ensure the immediate safety of the victim, provide reassurance, respond to medical needs and protect any evidence while deploying the police first response.

If a report is made to the front desk, control room staff and supervisors should be informed of this immediately. Victims should be invited to move from a public area to a suitable private waiting area. An officer should be asked to take a first account and preserve evidence using an early evidence kit (EEK), if appropriate.

Safety and medical issues
A victim making a report might still be at risk, particularly if they are injured, in a vulnerable location or if they know the suspect and the incident took place recently. Keep the victim informed about the deployment of officers. If the victim is on the telephone and is susceptible to harm or in need of reassurance, telephone contact should be maintained until a physical police presence is established.

The victim should be asked if they require medical assistance and, even if they decline, you should consider calling an ambulance if the report has been made immediately after the incident, and you believe it is necessary.

Call grading
A report of a rape should receive an immediate response unless the victim is reporting an incident which took place some time ago (and immediate forensic opportunities will not exist) and specifies when and/or where they would like contact with the police.

In all other cases you should take steps to prevent any potential loss of evidence by ensuring that there is no delay in police contact with the victim or other scenes. Consider the wishes of the individual victim, some may not want a visible police response, for example, if they are making the report from home or their place of work.

Taking an initial account and confirming information
When taking an initial account from a victim, at a police station or over the telephone, check exactly what is being said and clarify when details are difficult to understand. Always use non-leading questions.

If a 999 call is terminated, the case should be urgently reassessed and upgraded if necessary, as the safety of the caller may be threatened.

In-depth questioning of a victim is not appropriate during the initial contact stage. Interviews will be conducted later by a specially trained officer (STO). Record the initial account verbatim then flag the case in line with local policy.
**Possible actions to increase victim safety and preserve evidence**

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<tr>
<th>Circumstances of the caller</th>
<th>Action to take to increase victim’s safety and preserve evidence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suspect is still present at the scene or close to the scene and/or is near the caller.</td>
<td>Keep the caller on the line, any background noise from a 999 call will automatically be recorded and could be used as evidence. It is also a means for you to monitor the incident. Check if the suspect is out of earshot.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suspect has left the scene and the victim is secure.</td>
<td>Advise the caller to lock and secure the premises and return to the telephone. Take a full description of the suspect and record their identity (if known) and any other relevant information such as vehicle type and registration, and circulate it to officers in the area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victim is in a vulnerable outside environment and/or is unsure of their exact location.</td>
<td>Keep the caller on the line so that their location can be traced and/or their safety monitored. If the victim is unable to identify their exact location, they should be advised to remain at the scene, if it is safe to do so. If remaining at the scene compromises their safety, the victim should be asked to leave an object or a non-valuable personal item to mark the exact location of the crime scene. Provide them, where possible, with directions and suggestions of safe premises in the vicinity.</td>
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**Information gathering from the victim (or caller)**

Seek, record (verbatim) and disseminate the following information:

- Location and identity of the victim/caller and details of contact telephone numbers;
- Time of the incident and exact (where possible) location of the incident;
- Identity and location of the suspect (if known) with a first description of them;
- Identity and location of any other witnesses, for example, friends, children;
- Whether the victim/caller and any other person(s), including children, present are safe and if urgent medical assistance is required;
- Whether any weapons have been used and if yes, whether these are still available to the suspect;
- Whether communication difficulties exist and if first response officers will require an interpreter;
- Whether there are any special needs, eg, sight or hearing impairment;
- Whether any person present has been drinking or has taken drugs;
- Whether there is a known history of sexual offences or violence by the suspect;
- Whether any court orders apply (eg, civil court orders or bail conditions);
- Details of the demeanour of the victim, suspect and any others present, and background noise (including shouting, words spoken).
Preserving forensic evidence

Sometimes victims of rape will give very little detailed information about the offence(s). In these circumstances you should inform them that the first response officer will take details of the nature of the offence and will advise them of action to preserve evidence.

Alternatively, a victim may ask for advice or disclose details of the nature of the offence(s). In these circumstances, refer to the table below and record any advice given to the caller. Provide an estimate of how long it will be before an officer can reach them to conduct forensic evidence retrieval and arrange for a forensic medical examination. Any given advice should balance the victim’s wishes with the need to preserve potential evidential opportunities.

Advice for victims on preserving forensic evidence

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<th>Nature of complaint</th>
<th>Actions to preserve evidence</th>
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<tr>
<td>The victim reports being given or having taken alcohol or drugs.</td>
<td>Advise victim to collect any passed urine into a clean container and give it to the police officer on arrival.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The victim reports oral intercourse occurring. This information may not be disclosed at this stage. The first response officer will usually address these circumstances. If there is a delay in first response and the victim requests advice, provide this further information.</td>
<td>If a victim wishes to clean their teeth, drink, take non-essential medication or smoke and will not delay until a mouth swab can be taken, advise them to clean their teeth and place the toothbrush into a clean plastic bag and give it to the police officer on their arrival with any water used for rinsing in a clean cup.</td>
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<td>The victim reports penetrative intercourse or external ejaculation close to the genitalia. Sometimes the exact nature of the offence will not be fully disclosed at this stage. In most circumstances the first response officer will address these circumstances.</td>
<td>Advise delaying use of the toilet (until police arrival). If this is not possible, advise to use the toilet and place soiled products, eg, sanitary towels, tampons, tissues, into a clean plastic bag and give it to the police officer on arrival. If anal rape is suspected, advise retaining any stool sample in a clean receptacle. Advise to avoid washing, showering or bathing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The victim reports being kissed, licked and/or bitten on a skin surface or held/gripped in a particular area (skin or clothing).</td>
<td>Advise avoiding washing, showering or bathing as well as hand washing. Advise not removing, washing, discarding or destroying clothing or jewellery worn at the time of the incident or subsequent to it.</td>
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<td>Items were discarded at the scene, such as tissues, clothing, items relating to offender, eg, brought to scene and/or used at scene. Record lost items as they could have been lost at the scene or be with a potential offender.</td>
<td>Advise avoiding disturbing the scene or allowing other people or animals to enter areas where the incident took place, if possible. Take full details of the location of the scene and deploy officers to protect it and locate any discarded items.</td>
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Deploying specially trained officers and real-time supervision

Follow local procedures to ensure that STOs are deployed as soon as possible. If STOs are not available as the first response to a rape, an investigating officer (IO) or STO should be available to provide real-time advice to the first response officer.

Inform a nominated IO of the report immediately so that they can appoint an STO to the case.

During the early stages of an investigation you may be the only person who has an overview of the whole incident. Therefore, record all information that you receive and any advice given to the victim or person making the report.

Reviewing deployment

Control room or patrol supervisors attending the scene should monitor and record the location of the offence and all the initial tasks which have been allocated to officers attending the scene until the nominated IO assumes control.

These records will assist the IO to manage any cross-contamination issues in the investigation and any subsequent legal proceedings.

Records of all deployment decisions should also be maintained.

Local procedures should be followed for the deployment of resources to support the first responder, and the on-duty supervisor should be informed immediately.

As further details of the incident emerge, supervisors should review deployment with you regularly and deploy additional resources, as necessary.

When notifying the on-duty supervisor, the following information should be provided as a minimum:

- The nature of the reported offence and the medical condition of the victim;
- The identity of the suspect (if known), victim and any witness and their details;
- Whether the suspect is known to the victim;
- The location of the victim, suspect (if known) and crime scene(s);
- Efforts made to preserve forensic evidence (eg, advice given to the victim before deployment) and details of deployment to the victim/scenes.


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