How to get help after an assault;

Everyone responds differently after rape or sexual assault. You may experience a range of emotions, or you may not feel very much at all. There is no right or wrong way to respond. Whatever you are feeling is valid, and support is available if and when you want it.

Some common feelings that you may experience;

- *Confusion* – trying to make sense of what has happened.
- *Fear* – Feeling unsafe, worried about what might happen next, or finding it difficult to trust others.
- *Anger* – Feeling angry about what happened or how others have responded.
- *Sadness* – Feeling upset or tearful over what has happened.
- *Helplessness* – Feeling overwhelmed or unsure how to move forward.
- *Guilt* – Feeling as though you are somehow to blame, even though responsibility always lies with the person who harmed you.
- Shame – Feeling embarrassed, exposed or ashamed because of what happened, even though what happened was not your fault.
- Detached – Feeling numb or disconnected, or as though things don't quite feel real.

Ways to care for yourself;

- If and when you feel ready, you may find it helpful to talk with someone you trust. This could be a friend, family member or support professional.
- Give yourself permission to experience your feelings in whatever way feels right for you. Everyone's response is different.
- If it feels manageable, you may find comfort in returning to parts of your usual routine, whether that's taking your dog for a walk, spending time outside or returning to work when you feel ready. Recovery is different for everyone, so take things at a pace that feels right for you.
- Looking after your basic needs, such as eating regularly, staying hydrated and getting some gentle movement if you feel able, may help support your wellbeing and sleep.
- It is okay to enjoy activities that bring you comfort or distraction, such as reading, listening to music or watching a favourite film. Rest is important too.
- Some people find themselves using alcohol or drugs to cope after an assault. While this may provide temporary relief, it can sometimes make it harder to manage difficult emotions over time. If this is something you're struggling with, support is available.

Your options after a recent assault;

If your assault is recent, you can contact your local SARC (Sexual Assault Referral Centre). SARC's provide confidential care, support and practical advice for anyone who has experienced rape or sexual assault.

If you feel that you may want to report it to the police at some point, you can also attend the SARC for a forensic medical examination – this is an examination by a specially trained practitioner whocollect forensic evidence, which may include samples from your body or clothing. This evidence can be stored if you are unsure whether you want to report to the police. You can change your mind about reporting to the police at any time.. In some cases, this evidence may be used in court.

You do not have to report to the police to attend the SARC. It is completely your choice whether you wish to attend and whether or not you would like a forensic medical examination. As well as the forensic examination, the SARC can support with other things including;

- Emotional support following an assault
- Medical care and treatment, including emergency contraception and sexual health advice where appropriate
- Forensic medical examinations, if appropriate
- Secure storage of forensic evidence if you choose not to report immediately
- Referral or signposting to specialist services, including Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs)

Follow-up support and information

Seeking medical care;

Some people have visible injuries after rape or sexual assault, while many do not. Both experiences are common. If you have experienced some form of injury or are hurt as a result of what has happened to you, help is available.

If you feel that you require urgent medical attention, a call should be made to 999 where you can request an ambulance. You also have the option to present at your local A&E.

If you feel that you need medical care, but that this isn't urgent, you can seek help from the SARC, your local GP or via 111.

Reporting to the police;

You have the option to report both recent and non-recent offenses to the police. Reporting to the police is your choice. Some people choose to report straight away, some report later, and others decide not to report at all. Whatever you decide, support is available. If you would like support to understand your options, an Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA) can provide information and practical support whether or not you choose to report to the police. The choice should always be yours. The ISVA service is here to support you whether you want to report to the police or not.

Be kind to yourself. Recovering after rape or sexual assault can take time. There may be good days and difficult days, and both are a normal part of recovery. You do not have to face this on your own.