

Sexual safety in the workplace: resources and support

This toolkit is designed to support colleagues in NHS England to discuss and appropriately react to sexual safety of staff in the workplace.

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Author: england.domesticabusesexualviolence@nhs.net

Sexual safety charter

On 4 September 2023, NHS England launched the ‘**Sexual Safety in Healthcare – Organisational Charter**’ in collaboration with healthcare partners. The charter has been developed by NHS England, lived experience organisations, professional bodies, employers and partners across healthcare.

Those who work, train and learn within the healthcare system have the right to be safe and feel supported at work. Organisations across the healthcare system need to work together and individually to tackle unwanted, inappropriate and/or harmful sexual behaviour in the workplace. We all have a responsibility to ourselves and our colleagues and must act if we witness these behaviours.

As signatories to this charter, we commit to a zero-tolerance approach to any unwanted, inappropriate and/or harmful sexual behaviours towards our workforce. We commit to the following principles and actions to achieve this:

1. We will actively work to eradicate sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace.
2. We will promote a culture that fosters openness and transparency, and does not tolerate unwanted, harmful and/or inappropriate sexual behaviours.
3. We will take an intersectional approach to the sexual safety of our workforce, recognising certain groups will experience sexual harassment and abuse at a disproportionate rate.
4. We will provide appropriate support for those in our workforce who experience unwanted, inappropriate and/or harmful sexual behaviours.
5. We will clearly communicate standards of behaviour. This includes expected action for those who witness inappropriate, unwanted and/or harmful sexual behaviour.
6. We will ensure appropriate, specific, and clear policies are in place. They will include appropriate and timely action against alleged perpetrators.
7. We will ensure appropriate, specific, and clear training is in place.
8. We will ensure appropriate reporting mechanisms are in place for those experiencing these behaviours.
9. We will take all reports seriously and appropriate and timely action will be taken in all cases.
10. We will capture and share data on prevalence and staff experience transparently.

These commitments will apply to everyone in our organisation equally.

Where any of the above is not currently in place, we commit to work towards ensuring it is in place by **July 2024**.

Sexual safety in the workplace

- Sexual safety covers a range of **inappropriate sexual behaviour** with different legal and operational definitions and processes. It includes language of a **sexualised nature, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape**. Some behaviour will be unlawful, some will not. Consequently, there are different, sometimes overlapping, legal and operational processes in play, including safeguarding, employment or police.
- Every part of the NHS must take a systematic zero-tolerance approach to **sexual misconduct and violence**, keeping our **patients** and **staff safe**. It is crucial that when our staff come to work, they feel **safe and supported**.
- **We all have a responsibility** to ourselves and our colleagues and must act if we witness these behaviours. This pack has advice on the most appropriate courses of action
- While patients can also experience these behaviours in healthcare, this toolkit is for teams working and training in healthcare to provide them with the information needed to support conversations in relation to **sexual safety of staff in the workplace**.
- This toolkit is for adaptation within your organisations to reflect local policies, processes and support services. The areas highlighted in yellow are for organisations to embed individual policies and support.

Definitions

Sexual violence:

Sexual violence encompasses acts that range from verbal harassment to forced penetration, and an array of types of coercion, from social pressure and intimidation to physical force.

Sexual misconduct:

Sexual misconduct describes a range of behaviours including sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, voyeurism and any other conduct of a sexual nature that is non-consensual or has the purpose or effect of threatening, intimidating, undermining, humiliating or coercing a person.

Sexual assault:

Sexual assault is any sexual act that a person did not consent to, or is forced into against their will. It is a form of sexual violence and includes rape (an assault involving penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth by a penis), or other sexual offences, such as groping, forced kissing, child sexual abuse, or the torture of a person in a sexual manner.

Sexual harassment:

Sexual harassment occurs when a person engages in unwanted conduct of a sexual nature that has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them.

Examples of sexual harassment can include:

- *Sexual comments or jokes*
- *Displaying sexually graphic pictures, posters or photos –*
- *Suggestive looks, staring or leering*
- *Intrusive questions about a person's private or sex life, and discussing your own sex life*

What to do if you have experienced sexual misconduct in the workplace

If you have experienced sexual misconduct in the workplace, we encourage you to get in touch with [\[insert local mechanisms for support\]](#) so that we can support you confidentially and take necessary action.

If you're the victim of rape or sexual assault, the police and other organisations are there to help. Call 999 to report a rape or attempted sexual assault, as soon as possible. Further advice is [online](#). You don't have to report the assault to the police if you don't want to. You may need time to think about what has happened to you. However, consider getting medical help as soon as possible through the NHS Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) (see below).

Who can you contact?	How can they help?	How do you contact them?
HR and OD team	HR & OD are a confidential and safe team to speak to in relation to sexual safety in the workplace and can offer further guidance and information on other services, in addition to support.	[Insert]
Trade unions	Trade union representatives provide advice and support to their members when they have issues at work.	[Insert]
Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs)	NHS SARCs offer medical, practical and emotional support to anyone who has been raped, sexually assaulted or abused. SARCs have specially trained doctors, nurses and support workers.	Find your nearest SARC here . More information on the services SARC's provide is online .
Freedom to Speak Up Guardians	Freedom To Speak Up Guardians can raise issues or concerns in confidence, who will support you and ensure your complaint is listened to confidentially and taken down the correct channel, if appropriate.	[Insert]
Healthcare regulators	Regulators oversee conduct of professions. Healthcare regulators may have a role to play depending on the profession of the alleged perpetrator.	Contact details can be found on the Professional Standards Authority website .
Independent Acas helpline	The Acas helpline is open Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm for anyone who needs employment law or workplace advice in relation to sexual harassment. Provided by Rape Crisis, the online chat and rape and sexual abuse support line is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for anyone affected. Acas can also provide legal advice.	Visit the Acas website , for telephone number, text relay and online chat function
Citizen's Advice	Citizen's Advice provide information about your legal rights in the workplace if you are experiencing sexual harassment.	Information is on their website .

What to do if you witness sexual misconduct in the workplace

If you witness sexual misconduct in the workplace, **you must act** and consider the following:

- **Offer support** to anyone targeted or affected by the behaviour, and/or let them know that you feel that the behaviour you witnessed is unacceptable.
- **Speak to a colleague and / or Consider reporting** the behaviour to your line manager, a Freedom to Speak up Guardian, the HR & OD team or **[insert policy]**. Before you report the behaviour, you witnessed, try and make sure that the person who was targeted is aware of, and supports, your intention to report it. If they do not support your intention to report it and you are concerned, you should not disclose their identity, but you can speak anonymously to **[Insert]** for advice and support.
- **[for organisations to insert local policies and processes for if sexual misconduct is witnessed in the workplace]**
- **Challenge the behaviour** by speaking to the person responsible either at the time or at an appropriate time and place, but only if you feel comfortable and it is safe to do so.

If there is an emergency or threat to safety, the police and other organisations are there to help.
Call 999 for emergencies, or 101 for police in non-emergency situations, as soon as possible.

How to approach a conversation around disclosure

Somebody may wish to talk to you about their experiences, which is called a disclosure. This can be a daunting experience as we all want to be as supportive as possible, and you may understandably be afraid of “saying the wrong thing”. These are some “do’s” and “don’ts” which can help you in this conversation. Additional advice can be found at Rape Crisis’ advice page [‘supporting a survivor’](#).

DO

- **Listen**
- **Believe** them and take action
- Remember it’s **not their fault**
- **Recognise how tough** it might have been to disclose
- Let them **stay in control**
- **Respect** their **decisions**
- **Respect** their **boundaries**

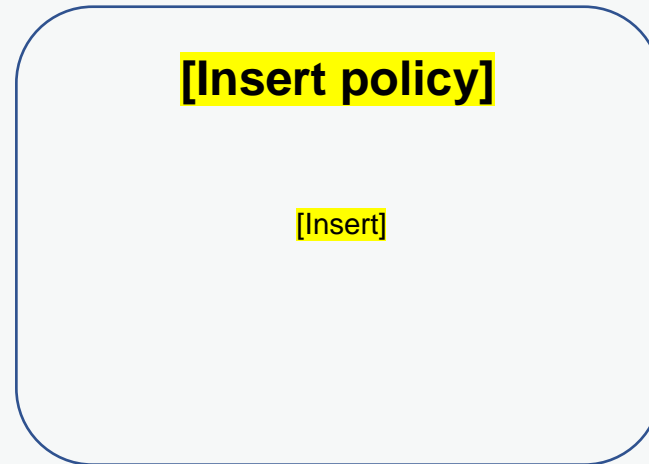
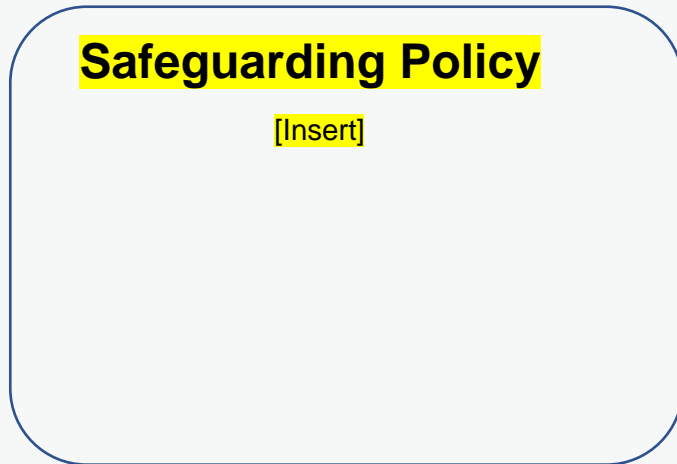
DO NOT

- **Ask why** they didn’t say anything sooner
- **Judge**
- **Ask why they didn’t run-away or fight back**
- Judge them for **how they’ve responded** to sexual harassment or abuse
- **Tell anyone else without their permission**

What to do if you are a line manager handling a sexual misconduct disclosure

[Insert local policy]

Line managers should read the following policies and be familiar with them, seeking advice from [insert] if they need any advice or clarity:



Line managers should direct individuals if they need support to the services **on slide 5**.

If you are considering reporting the behaviour to HR, try and make sure that the person who was targeted is aware of, and supports, your intention to report it.

If they do not support your intention to report it and you are concerned, you should not disclose their identity, but you can speak anonymously to [insert] for advice and support.

You can also download the [NHS Safeguarding app](#) for support. This has been developed to act as a comprehensive resource for healthcare professionals, carers and citizens. It provides 24-hour, mobile access on up-to-date legislation and guidance across the safeguarding life course

Further support services

There are local and regional support services in your area for anyone who has experienced any form of sexual misconduct.

[Bi Survivors Network](#) are a group of bisexual survivors facilitating peer-led, online support groups for survivors of sexual and/or domestic violence/abuse.

[Galop](#) support the LGBT+ community and have experienced sexual assault, abuse or violence.

[Loving Me](#) support for people who are trans and non-binary victims and have experienced domestic or sexual violence.

[Man Kind](#) supports people who self-identify as male who are affected by unwanted sexual experiences.

[NAPAC \(National Association for People Abused in Childhood\)](#) offers support to adults who have experienced of all types of childhood abuse, including physical, sexual and emotional abuse or neglect.

[One In Four](#) supporting people who have experienced sexual violence and abuse.

[Rape Crisis](#) provide 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.

[Respond](#) support services to people with learning disabilities, autism or both who have experience abuse, violence or trauma.

[Safeline](#) provides specialist, tailored support for anyone affected by or at risk of sexual abuse and rape, that empowers them to make choices about the lives they want and helps prevent abuse.

[SARSAS](#) support for people affected by rape or any kind of sexual assault or abuse at any time in their lives.

[Southall Black Sisters](#) is a support service for black and minoritised women who have experienced sexual violence.

[The Survivors Trust](#) work with people of all ages, all genders, of all forms of sexual violence, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, including support for partners and family members.

[Survivors UK](#) provide a national online helpline, individual and group counselling for boys, men and non-binary people aged 13+ who have experienced sexual violence at any time in their lives.

[Stop It Now](#) provides support for people who have concerns that they may commit sexual abuse or sexual violence or are concerned about another person's behaviour, or a child's behaviour.

[Rights of Women](#) offer support services providing free legal advice for women in the UK who are experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace.