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**CARA** (Centre for Action on Rape and Abuse) works with **victims** and **survivors** of **sexual violence** and **child sexual abuse**, providing **independent, specialist support** and **promoting and representing** their **rights and needs**.

Sexual violence is a term that is used to cover all forms of **sexual harm**, including **rape, sexual assault**, and **non-contact sexual abuse**.

Sexual violence is any sexual contact that is **not consensual**.

**CARA** is a registered charity working with **adults of all genders, young people** and **children** from across **mid and north Essex**.

**CARA** is part of **Synergy Essex** and works in partnership with **SERICC** and **Southend-on-Sea Rape Crisis (SOSRC)** to provide sexual violence and abuse services for victims and survivors of all ages and all genders across Essex, Southend and Thurrock.

## What services does CARA offer?

We provide face-to-face and remote services, working from our head office in **Colchester** and from outreach premises in **Braintree, Chelmsford, Clacton-on-Sea, Great Dunmow** and **Harwich**.

All services are free to those referred for support.

### CARA services include:

- ISVA (Independent Sexual Violence Adviser) support through the criminal justice process and advocacy for adults, young people and children.
- Specialist counselling for young people (12-19) and adults.
- Play therapy for children under 12.
- Support for parents, partners and other family members of survivors.
- Group work.

**CARA** is part of **Synergy Essex**, providing sexual abuse support services across Essex, Southend and Thurrock.

## How to make a referral

You can make referrals by calling **0300 003 7777** or by completing the online referral form for professionals at:

**[www.synergyessex.org.uk](http://www.synergyessex.org.uk)**

You must have consent from the young person to make a referral on their behalf.

CARA is committed  
to **preventing** all forms  
of **sexual harm**.

In collaboration with **young survivors** in Essex, we have made a series of animated videos to support **professionals** working with children and young people to understand the **impact** of **sexual violence** and to play their part in ***ending*** sexual violence, **sexual harassment** and **sexist bullying** in our schools and colleges.

- **“They just fob it off.”**  
Preventing Sexual Harm in Schools
- **“It’s all about paperwork and box ticking.”**  
Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Violence
- **“I felt like a burden.”**  
Providing Support After Sexual Violence
- **“I lost all my friends.”**  
The Impact of Sexual Violence on Peer Groups
- **From Disclosure to Closure:**  
Supporting Young Survivors Throughout Their Journey

The experiences presented in these videos have been compiled from real experiences of young people in Essex.

Names and identifying details have been changed to protect their anonymity.

The best practice outlined in these videos is supported by statutory guidance and input from specialist workers at sexual violence support services.

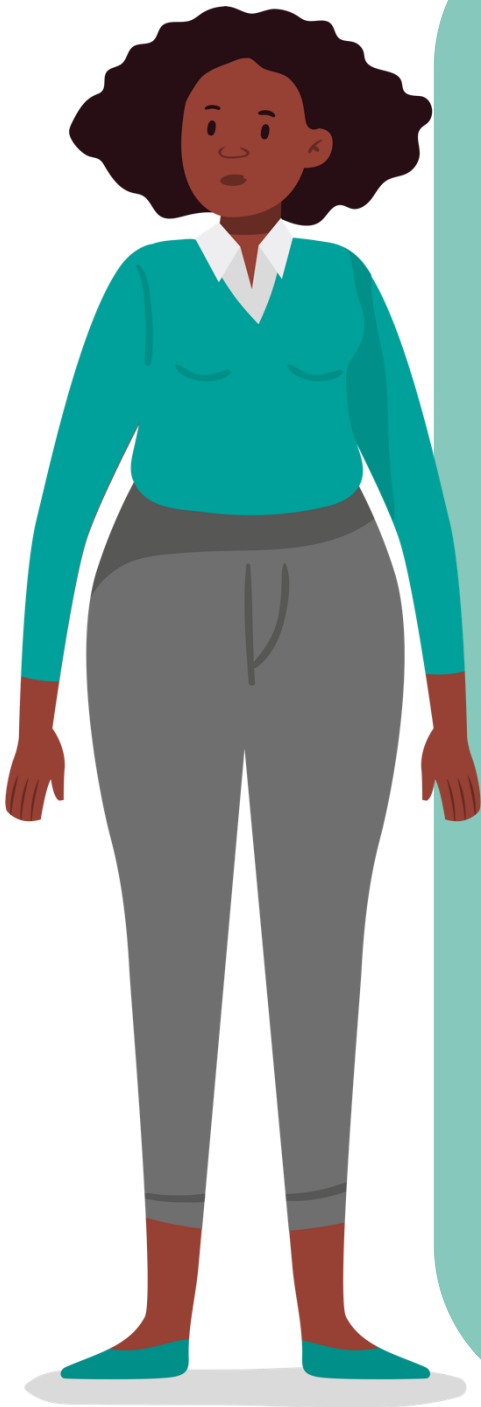
*We would like to thank every young person who so generously gave their time and shared their experiences to improve those of other young people.*

# “They just fob it off.”

## Preventing Sexual Harm in School



[Play Animation](#)



*“I was sexually abused when I was at primary school. It was years before I understood what had happened to me. For ages, I blamed myself and the lessons we have on sex are always about what girls need to do to not get raped.*

*Teachers make snarky comments and ignore rape jokes.*

***They just fob it off**  
and say ‘get on with your work’.  
When I get angry, I’m sent out.  
They say ‘boys will be boys’.  
I hate that.*

*Girls get punished for their responses when boys aren’t punished for their actual behaviours.*

*Why are boys allowed to do that and I have to be OK with it?”*

Sexual violence can happen **anywhere**.

It can happen to **anyone** of **any age** and **any gender**.

**Anyone** can potentially cause sexual harm.

Allowing some **attitudes and behaviours** to go **unchallenged** creates a culture where more harmful **behaviours are excused** and **survivors are blamed**.

Not talking openly and honestly about sex, relationships and sexual violence makes disclosures **more difficult** for young survivors and **allows those causing sexual harm to continue to do so**.

## **What can schools do?**

- **Challenge** harmful attitudes, comments and behaviours. **Intervene** so everyone knows it will not be tolerated.
- **Seek support** from specialist organisations to provide comprehensive and regular, age-appropriate relationship and sex education for all children and young people.
- **Provide specialist training** on sexual harassment and sexual violence for all staff as part of safeguarding.

# “It’s all about paperwork and box ticking.”



[Play Animation](#)

It is important to remember that sharing a **disclosure** with anyone in any way takes an **enormous amount of courage**.

Treating young people who make a disclosure with **dignity** and **respect** means they are better able to access appropriate support going forward and it helps ensure that all members of the school community are **safeguarded**.

## What can schools do?

- Work on the principle of ‘no decision about me without me’. Keep survivors **informed** of what is happening and, as far as possible, ask for their input in decisions.
- Always respects **confidentiality** and only share information when it is absolutely necessary.
- Use the guidance provided in part 5 of **Keeping Children Safe in Education** to manage disclosures of child-on-child sexual abuse.
- **Seek advice and support** from specialist organisations and make contact with the Children’s Independent Sexual Violence Advisors in your area.

# Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Violence

*“After I disclosed, I was asked loads of blunt questions and they seemed angry with me for not disclosing in the way they wanted me to.*

*It’s more about paperwork and box ticking.*

*They expected me to describe what had physically happened. They demanded information from me. Why did they need to know? I felt used and I felt embarrassed knowing they knew that stuff about me. They made me feel like they just wanted a name so they could report it to the police and not have to deal with me anymore.*

*When the police said there was no further action, my school acted like none of it had happened. For them it was all over but it wasn’t for me. I felt let down by the police and school. Nothing I did was enough.*

*I wish the school had asked me what I wanted and how I wanted things handled*



*“After I was raped,  
I felt like a burden.*

*My anxiety was supposed to have a  
time limit, I was made to feel like I was  
making a fuss over nothing.*

*Teachers don't want to know how you  
feel because then they have to deal  
with you and they don't have time to  
care.*

*I was sent away from the pastoral office  
and told to get back to my lesson.  
Students shouldn't have to put their  
grades and the school's reputation  
above their own wellbeing.*

*There was nowhere private to speak to  
anyone. Everyone knew when I had  
counselling. I wanted to speak to  
someone outside school who  
got it and that wasn't offered.*

*Sometimes, I just wanted to sit in  
silence but they kept at me, asking  
questions, telling me to talk but I had  
nothing I wanted to say. It was like they  
wanted my story before they'd help*



# “I felt like a burden”

## Providing Support After Sexual Violence



[Play Animation](#)

It can be **very challenging** to meet the needs of young survivors in schools and colleges and this means they often feel like their emotional wellbeing and mental health are **not taken seriously** or considered important.

### What can schools do?

- Be **empathetic and gentle**. Avoid asking for reasons and explanations for feelings or behaviours.
- **Prioritise the survivor’s needs** by asking them what they think would be most helpful. Aim for a flexible and individualised approach to support.
- **Be realistic and honest** about what can be provided in school and be open to advice and provision from external, specialist support services.
- **Provide training for all staff** on the impacts of trauma on young survivors and how to best support them.

# “I lost all my friends.”



[Play Animation](#)

Friendships and **peer groups** are an **important** part of young people’s lives and the impact of sexual violence on a group of young people can be **significant and enduring**.

Being aware of the **dynamics within groups** of young people is essential to being able to best support survivors and safeguard all young people.

## What can schools do?

- Carefully consider the **consequences of separating** young people from their peer support networks, both in class and at social times.
- Provide all young people involved with access to their own **trusted adult** who can help them navigate complex group dynamics.
- **Seek support from specialist services** to help with assessing risk of sexual harm and safety planning

for all young people connected with an incident of sexual violence.

# The Impact of Sexual Violence on Peer Groups

*“The impact on my friendship group after I was assaulted by my friend was massive. I lost all my friends and had no one to talk to about it. Schools just don’t get the power plays in friendship groups.*

*People were forced to not be friends with me anymore and tried to justify why they could stay friends with the boy who assaulted me. One said it would be too awkward not to speak to him anymore.*

*I was told not to tell anyone anything but what about safeguarding my friends?*

*They moved me out of my class and left him there. I liked my class and I was the one who had to leave while he got to carry on like nothing had happened.*

*They took away my friends who were my support. They were crucial to me.”*



# From Disclosure to Closure: Supporting Young Survivors Throughout Their Journey



[Play Animation](#)

Responding appropriately to disclosures of sexual violence can be **challenging** and, as a result, young survivors' experiences vary widely.

However, every adult working with young people has a **responsibility to safeguard** them from **all forms of harm**, including the **long-term impacts of sexual violence**.

## Before Disclosure

- Make sure all young people know **what constitutes sexual harm** and that these behaviours will not be tolerated.
- Demonstrate to young people through policies and actions that disclosures of sexual harm will **always be taken seriously**.
- **Build relationships** with specialist agencies who can offer advice and support for staff and young survivors.

## At Disclosure

Provide a means of **reporting** that allows young people to share concerns **anonymously** if they want to and preferably to a **specially trained** member of staff or to an independent, external agency.

## After Disclosure

- **Involve** young survivors in any decisions about them.
- Provide a **safe, physical space** for young survivors which they can access when needed.
- Have at least one **trusted adult**, preferably someone the young survivor has chosen themselves, who can check in as and when needed by the young person.
- Make sure the young survivor and the person who has caused them harm are supported by **different adults** in different spaces.
- **Seek specialist support** to learn the basics of the criminal justice process and be aware that a decision to take 'no further action' by the police does not mean the sexual violence did not happen.
- Make sure support **remains in place** until the young survivor says they no longer require it.

## Ongoing Support

- Be **mindful** of changes to timetables, of teachers or around exam time. Ensure support in place **isn't forgotten** or assumed to not be needed anymore.
- Young survivors are moving through challenging life transitions and responses to sexual violence **may change over time**. The journey to recovery can be very long and complex and **'closure' may not be possible**.
- Supporting young survivors to **manage safely** and in the best way they can should always be the priority.

