



**POLICE CONNECT**  
*Keeping you informed, keeping your community safe*

Victims of sexual abuse and violence are being reminded they are not alone as the national lockdown to combat the pandemic continues.

They are being urged to speak out as Suffolk Constabulary supports Sexual Abuse & Sexual Violence Awareness Week to raise awareness and offer advice.

The week takes place across the UK from Monday 1 February until Sunday 7 February.

Specialist providers of support to victims and survivors of sexual violence across Suffolk are teaming up and calling on organisations, individuals and agencies across the county to join them in saying 'Suffolk says that all forms of sexual violence are not ok'.

Anyone can suffer from sexual abuse or sexual violence – age, gender, sexual orientation, social status, race or religion are no barrier. Raising awareness of this 'hidden harm' is a priority for police and partners.

The force is acutely aware that the pandemic and current lockdown does mean that women, children and men who already face sexual violence, abuse and domestic abuse in the home, is making it even harder to get help.

Fears over jobs, financial pressure, school closures, working from home and all the other current changes to our day to day lives can be contributory factors but there is no excuse for perpetrators - any form of abuse is a crime and police will deal robustly with offenders.

DCI Barry Byford said: "Clearly, with the lockdown restrictions very much still in place, it's vital victims realise there is help out there.

"Sexual Abuse & Sexual Violence Awareness Week is just seven days in duration, but the physical, emotional and mental abuse victims face is much, much longer.

"In many respects, because of lockdown, it is more important than ever that people are aware of the #suffolksaysitsnotok campaign. The current situation of self-isolation can make the home even more like a prison with an abuser. It may also be used as a means to exert coercive control. Due to the need to self-isolate, people may not be able to see the friends and family who they normally rely on for support.

"We take all reports of sexual violence and, indeed domestic abuse, extremely seriously and we take this opportunity to reassure victims that police and partners are committed to supporting survivors across Suffolk."

Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner Tim Passmore said: "This pandemic is impacting on every single one of us in one way or another, but I am sadly very aware that victims of sexual abuse and violence are also facing the additional trauma of having to spend time at home with their abuser with no chance of getting out to see friends and family for support. I'm also conscious the backlog in the courts is compounding the situation for those victims whose cases are going through the judicial process.

"Regardless of the situation we are in, I want to reassure all victims that the services I commission continue to work tirelessly to support you. I provide funding to support

victims of sexual abuse through Rape Crisis, Fresh Start – New beginnings and Survivors in Transition, and more recently Restitute. It is important that all victims of sexual abuse and violence know help is available whether they want to report to the police or not.

"I fully support this national awareness campaign and encourage others to do the same by adopting the colour purple during the week-long campaign and take the opportunity to talk to people about the issue.

"It is crucially important that victims of sexual abuse and violence know there is always someone here to help."

The SARC, called The Ferns, is jointly funded by Suffolk Constabulary and NHS England and has supported over 3500 victims since it opened in 2011.

<https://www.theferns-suffolk.org.uk>

The centre provides ongoing specialist tailored support to victims through Crisis Workers and Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs). This includes medical examinations following a recent rape or sexual assault, which can be done without any police involvement. If, at any time, a victim decides to talk to police, this can be arranged. The Ferns also supports those who have suffered abuse in the past as well as providing impartial information to victims concerning their options, accessing health services such as sexual health screening and specialist support including counselling. ISVAs also provide information on other services the person may require including health and social care, housing, or benefits.

Anyone who would like to speak to someone in confidence about sexual abuse or violence can contact Suffolk Police on 101, or staff at The Ferns on 0300 1235058 or via email [contact@theferns-suffolk.org.uk](mailto:contact@theferns-suffolk.org.uk)

During the awareness week, Suffolk police are encouraging messages social media accounts using the hashtag #SuffolkSaysItsNotOK

For further information, support and advice visit

[www.suffolk.police.uk/advice/assault-abuse-threats/rape](http://www.suffolk.police.uk/advice/assault-abuse-threats/rape)

[www.survivorsintransition.co.uk](http://www.survivorsintransition.co.uk) Survivors in Transition - Specialist support in Suffolk for female and male survivors of childhood sexual abuse, violence and exploitation

[www.fsnb.org.uk](http://www.fsnb.org.uk) Fresh Start – New beginnings, provides a therapeutic service for children and young people up to 21 years who have reported being sexually abused and to offer support for their families.

[www.suffolkrapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.suffolkrapecrisis.org.uk) Suffolk Rape Crisis – Support service open to females aged 14 or above who needs support following a rape or sexual assault

Help us keep our communities safe.

Police advice on a variety of subjects can be accessed

via <https://www.suffolk.police.uk/advice>

To report something, or to otherwise contact Police, use

the link <http://www.suffolk.police.uk/contact-us>

To report something anonymously call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 or

visit [www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org)

Alternatively call **101** for non-urgent matters.

**Always call 999 in emergencies, or if an immediate police response is required.**

Police Connect Team