



Home Office

# The Role of the Independent Sexual Violence Adviser: Essential Elements

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# Introduction

Since 2005, Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs) have been working in local areas across England and Wales to provide continuous support, advice and help for victims and survivors of sexual violence. Over the past decade, access to support from an ISVA has emerged as an important factor in ensuring the needs of victims and survivors are met throughout the criminal justice process.

ISVAs perform diverse and challenging roles, and the demand for ISVA services is dependent on local need. ISVAs can be based within a variety of organisations, including specialist sexual violence and abuse organisations and Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs). The majority of funding for these roles is provided by a range of local commissioners including, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), NHS England, local authorities and charitable trusts.

This guidance document aims to raise awareness and understanding of their work, and to support ISVAs, ISVA managers, organisations employing ISVAs and commissioners by clarifying the essential elements and scope of the role. Importantly, this guidance is in no way intended to stifle innovation or development of the ISVA role and is not intended as an exhaustive list of the ways in which an ISVA may be involved in supporting a victim or survivor. This guidance is not intended as a training guide.

The guidance has been produced by the Home Office in close partnership with the sexual violence and abuse sector and other government departments. In particular we would like to thank Rape Crisis England & Wales, The Survivors Trust, St Mary's SARC and LimeCulture for their contribution to the development of this guidance.

## Terminology

In this document, sexual assault, sexual offence, sexual violence and sexual abuse are used interchangeably and not necessarily in their technical or legal definitions.

For the purpose of this document, the term 'victim/survivor' is used to refer to those subjected to sexual abuse and/or assault and encompasses 'victim', 'patient', 'complainant', 'client' and 'survivor'.

# What is an Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA)?

Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs) play an important role in providing specialist tailored support to victims and survivors of sexual violence. An ISVA is an adviser who works with people who have experienced rape and sexual assault, irrespective of whether they have reported to the police.

The nature of the support that an ISVA provides will vary from case to case and will depend on the needs of the individual and their particular circumstances.

The ISVA role has been supported by a range of agencies, organisations, and victim and survivor groups, all of whom have highlighted the value of the role. A number of independent reviews have also highlighted and reinforced the importance of the ISVA role in supporting victims and survivors. Further information is provided in Annex B.

ISVAs provide impartial information to the victim/survivor about all of their options, such as reporting to the police, accessing Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) services, and specialist support such as pre-trial therapy and sexual violence counselling. ISVAs also provide information on other services that victims/survivors may require, for example in relation to health and social care, housing, or benefits.

The benefit of the ISVA role is to provide ongoing continuity, advocacy and impartial advice and information to a victim/survivor of sexual violence. The ISVA role is distinct from that of an Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA), crisis worker, counsellor and support worker. Where an ISVA is required by their organisation to carry out multiple roles beyond the ISVA role, such as crisis worker or counsellor, this individual must not provide these services to a victim/survivor they are supporting as an ISVA. Where a victim/survivor is also a witness supported both by an ISVA and a victims and witnesses support organisation, such as the court based witness service, the two support providers will collaborate in the interests of the victim/survivor.

Whilst there are a variety of different job titles to describe the work of an ISVA, it is important to note that where they are carrying out a role similar to that described above, the essential elements set out in this document will apply to their role and should be followed.

# Essential Elements of the Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA) Role

## 1. Tailor Support to the Individual Needs of the Victim/Survivor

- 1.1 Sexual violence can have a severe psychological, emotional, as well as physical impact. The support offered by an ISVA should be tailored to the identified needs of the victim/survivor. Accordingly, the support offered by an ISVA will vary from case to case as each victim/survivor may require support from a range of different services.
- 1.2 To effectively facilitate the victim/survivor's access to other agencies or support services, ISVAs will need to have a thorough understanding of the different roles and responsibilities of other professionals, the support services available locally and the referral processes of other agencies.
- 1.3 In order to properly identify the needs of a victim/survivor an ISVA is responsible for completing the following for each individual:
  - Risk assessment
  - Needs assessment
  - Support Plan

### Risk Assessment

- 1.4 Due to the dynamic nature of risk, ISVAs should conduct a thorough risk assessment that should be reviewed on an ongoing basis and, as a minimum, following every contact with the victim/survivor.
- 1.5 Where risks are identified, it is the ISVA's responsibility to ensure appropriate referrals are made to manage the risk, and, where appropriate, to ensure that support is provided to reduce the risk.
- 1.6 Examples of risks that the ISVA will be required to manage in connection with the victim/survivor include those set out below (note this list is not exhaustive; there will be other risks specific to individual cases):

- Safeguarding the physical and mental welfare of the client;
- Any further risk from the alleged perpetrator or potential perpetrator;
- Safeguarding issues in connection with any children or vulnerable adults in the care of the client;
- Risk to the investigation or court case;
- Risks relating to sexual health and pregnancy.

### Needs Assessment

- 1.7 ISVAs should conduct a thorough needs assessment that should be reviewed regularly and will enable the ISVA to facilitate access to follow on support and onward referrals based on the individual needs of the victim/survivor.
- 1.8 A needs assessment will assist the ISVA to determine whether the person has any specific needs that must be taken into consideration when working with that person, such as a hearing impairment or learning or physical disability. A needs assessment should be reviewed on an ongoing basis as some victims/survivors will have needs that relate only to a specific period or distinct timeframe, such as sexual health needs e.g., where a victims/survivors requires emergency contraception or post exposure prophylaxis treatment.

### Support Plan

- 1.9 ISVAs should develop a support plan that is based on the individual risks and needs of the victim/survivor (as identified by the risk and needs assessments).
- 1.10 This should be reviewed on an ongoing basis and will include what support is to be put in place by the ISVA for the individual victim/survivor including any referrals to support services that are required.
- 1.11 The support plan should include any planned exit strategies with appropriate regard to ongoing risk management.
- 1.12 The support plan will set out the work to be carried out toward the goal of an independent life.

## 2. Provide Accurate and Impartial Information to Victims/Survivors of Sexual Violence and to the Families of Children and Young People

- 2.1 ISVAs should provide non-judgemental, impartial information to empower individuals to make informed choices. While it is the ISVA's role to inform and represent their client they should not seek to influence their decision-making.
- 2.2 The service provided by an ISVA should be focused and led by the individual needs of the victim/survivor. ISVAs should respect and adhere to the wishes of the victim/survivor and/or any decisions they make. However, ISVAs should also make clear their safeguarding responsibilities and the possibility that they may have to share information with other agencies about the victim/survivors where there is an imminent risk of serious harm to a vulnerable adult or a person under 18, either because the victim/survivor is that person or because they have provided information about such a person.
- 2.3 Due to the nature of the ISVA role and the variety of support needs a victim/survivor may have, it is crucial for the ISVA to understand the roles of other professionals and agencies in order to provide accurate information to clients about the services available to them, enabling them to make informed decisions.
- 2.4 While the exact nature of support provided by an ISVA will vary depending on the individual needs of the victim/survivor, some of the key areas that ISVAs should focus their support and provide information on are:
  - victims' rights
  - health and wellbeing
  - reporting to the police
  - criminal justice process
  - support services.

### Victims' Rights

- 2.5 The Victims' Code sets out what the minimum standards of service that the victim/survivor can expect and an ISVA should provide independent advice and guidance on this (see annex A).



## Health and Wellbeing

- 2.6 ISVAs should have an understanding of the pervasive effects of sexual violence on an individual, including the impact on the physical, psychological, emotional and sexual health of the victim/survivor.
- 2.7 ISVAs should understand (and be able to clearly explain) when and why a forensic examination is available, for both the purposes of evidence collection and providing an immediate therapeutic medical assessment. The ISVA should be familiar with the associated referral pathways to local Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs).

## Reporting to the Police

- 2.8 An ISVA should provide accurate and impartial information to the victim/survivor regarding reporting a sexual offence to the police, including, how to report and what may happen once a report has been made. It is important to note that ISVAs should also provide support to those who have decided not to report to the police, and ensure that appropriate referral processes into the ISVA service are in place.

## Criminal Justice Process

- 2.9 ISVAs should provide emotional and practical support and information to enable the victim/survivor to engage with the criminal justice system if they choose. This includes understanding timelines, processes and procedures that include a police investigation, Crown Prosecution Service decision-making and subsequent court processes. The victim/survivor should also be referred to the Witness Charter which sets out the entitlements of witnesses in the criminal justice process.
- 2.10 ISVAs should understand the law around sexual offences and the evidential processes, in order to support the victim/survivor's decision regarding the criminal justice process. However, ISVAs are not legal advisers and therefore must not provide legal advice or opinion to a victim/survivor in any situation.

## Support Services

- 2.11 An ISVA should be aware of all the support services available to the victim/survivor both locally and nationally, such as housing, medical support, and therapeutic support (both NHS and voluntary sector), and should refer or signpost accordingly. See Annex A for CPS guidance on therapeutic support pre-trial.

## 3. Provide Emotional and Practical Support

- 3.1 An essential element of the ISVA role is to provide practical and emotional support to the victim/survivor. People who have experienced sexual violence and abuse may be extremely vulnerable, and therefore the support provided by an ISVA should be undertaken with sensitivity and discretion. In the provision of emotional and practical support, ISVAs should communicate and engage with victims/survivors effectively.
- 3.2 ISVAs should identify and facilitate access to other agencies which the victim/survivor can be referred to for information and support they require. This will include making referrals on behalf of the victims to other support organisations, including therapy and counselling. In cases where the ISVA cannot make referrals directly, they will signpost the victim/survivor to relevant services.
- 3.3 Effective communication and understanding of the professional roles and referral processes of different agencies is crucial for the ISVA to provide accurate information to clients and facilitate access to support where needs are identified. It is good practice for the ISVA service to have clear referral protocols in place with local partner agencies. Referral pathways should be in place for referral into and out of the ISVA service.
- 3.4 It is important that ISVAs ensure that the victim/survivor is made aware of and fully understands the need for the ISVA to maintain strict boundaries when providing support as part of their role. This will help to minimise the possibility of victims/survivors providing the ISVA with disclosable information relating to the evidence in a court case and information relating to the offence itself. An ISVA who does not maintain strict boundaries and becomes aware of evidence or who discusses the evidence with the victim/survivor may not be permitted to support the victim/survivor at court<sup>1</sup> and it may give rise to a challenge by the defence of coaching a witness.
- 3.5 Examples of when this could occur include circumstances when a victim/survivor:
  - Discloses particulars of the offence itself to the ISVA. Any information recorded by the ISVA would be subject to examination to ensure it does not undermine the prosecution case or assist the defence. There is also potential for the ISVA to be called to give evidence at a trial and/ or the victim could be subject to cross examination about the disclosure;

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<sup>1</sup> Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Cases See Annex A

- Discusses with the ISVA the best way of giving evidence to ensure the jury believe what the victim/survivor is saying. This could preclude an ISVA from supporting the victim at court and additionally may result in the defence team making an application to 'stay' proceedings on the basis that this interaction is coaching and is an abuse of process;
- Is told by the ISVA about other evidence which may exist. This could influence the way in which the victim deals with questioning in a police interview or at trial. Again this may result in a defence application to stay and;
- Discusses with the witness the experience of other victims in court. This could influence the victim to react a certain way before the jury. Again the court could determine that the victim had been 'coached' and they case may not proceed.

3.6 Psychological therapy and counselling are outside the scope of the ISVA role and where the victim/survivors requires this kind of support, appropriate onward referrals should be made. In the situation where the ISVA is also a qualified counsellor/therapist (i.e. dual trained), they should not provide counselling or psychological therapy support to a victim/survivor to whom they are providing ISVA support. This is an important principle to ensure the boundaries of the ISVA role, and the key element of independence, are maintained. It will also serve to ensure that there is no potential for impact on the criminal justice process at a later date. This principle also applies to ISVAs working with victims/survivors who have not reported to the police and are not involved in the criminal justice system. This is to reduce the risk of a challenge to the case of any victim/survivor who decides to report at a later date.

### Practical Support

- 3.7 It is a key role of the ISVA to provide practical support to a victim/survivor, which may include the following:
- making referrals or signpost to the other services;
  - booking and/or accompanying the victim/survivor to medical or other appointments;
  - assisting the victim/survivor to communicate with employers for example in relation to time off to attend police meetings/court, negotiating a phased return to work or ongoing sick leave;
  - accompanying clients to meetings, such as CPS pre-trial interview, introduction to other services, tribunals, and additional support services such as those provided by Citizens Advice Bureau;

- supporting the victims/survivors to engage with other statutory services such as, sexual health, education providers, housing services and benefits agencies;
- facilitating access to therapeutic counselling and mental health services where appropriate;
- supporting the victim/ survivor to engage with the criminal justice process including, supporting the victim to make a report to the police should they wish to, attending pre-trial court visits, requesting special measures, understanding the victim impact statement;
- assisting the victim/survivor to access additional support services such as interpreters, intermediaries, drug and alcohol services, domestic abuse services;
- facilitate support for family members where appropriate, such as significant others/parents/carers bearing in mind potential for multiple witnesses from the same family/peer group and explaining the criminal justice process and support services that may be available to them. Further information regarding speaking to witnesses at court is available in Annex A. The guidance outlines the various support that can be provided to family and friends not only by the ISVA but also by Citizens Advice Bureau.

## Emotional Support

3.8 Providing emotional support is a key role of the ISVA, which may include:

- helping the victim/survivor understand the potential impact of sexual violence and abuse on health and well being;
- dispelling myths and stereotypes surrounding sexual violence to challenge feelings of shame and blame;
- supporting family members where appropriate by helping them to understand the potential impact of sexual violence and signposting to available support services;
- responding to any concerns that the victim/survivor may have regarding the investigation, specialist support services, impact on work, education and relationships.

## 4. Provide Support Before, During and After Criminal and Civil Court Proceedings

- 4.1 It is an essential element of the ISVA role to support victims/survivors progressing through the criminal justice process. However, it is also the role of an ISVA to support victims/survivors who have decided not to report to the police, or whose cases are no longer in the criminal justice process (for example following a conviction or acquittal, or following a police decision to take no further action).
- 4.2 ISVAs are not legal advisers therefore they should only provide impartial information regarding the criminal justice process and not attempt to provide legal advice. They should not advise the victim/survivor on the specific details of the case or what to say in a police interview or in the courtroom as this will amount to coaching the witness and will affect the outcome of the court process.
- 4.3 Where an ISVA has been providing support to a victim/survivor and this has been instrumental in their decision to report, the ISVA should ensure that the police and CPS are made aware of the pre-existing support relationship, so as to minimise the risk of a challenge to the ISVA of coaching a witness.
- 4.4 Where an ISVA has been supporting a victim/survivor to report, this may have included supporting them through the process of the Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interview. In these cases, it should be made clear to the victim/survivor that ongoing support through criminal justice processes will need to be provided by another ISVA.
- 4.5 Due to the strict requirements of a court, and specifically who can provide support to a witness at court, it is important that ISVAs should limit their knowledge of the evidence to information required to make an informed risk assessment, help assess support needs and develop a care plan. In no circumstance should an ISVA ask the victim/survivor to recount the sequence of events that they have reported to the police in any detail. This does not mean that the ISVA cannot discuss how the victim feels about what has happened and the emotional impact it has had on them.
- 4.6 Although an ISVA may attend with the victim/survivor to report a sexual offence, the ISVA should not be present while the victim/survivor makes a statement or provides a (video) interview. Furthermore, the ISVA should not hear the details provided by the victim/survivor either, via live audio-link or a audio recording of the interview at a later date.
- 4.7 Where an ISVA does become aware of in-depth details relating to the case, they should seek immediate advice from the CPS and police, as it may mean that they are not permitted to support their client in court. Such details could include

information about other evidence such as forensic results, CCTV, enquires about other witnesses, and evidence on social media. ISVAs should take care not to encourage disclosure about the specific nature of the offence as the chance that it could affect the support that the individual ISVA can give the victim at court will be limited. Safeguards will need to be put in place for the client's ongoing support to ensure that there is no conflict with any on-going trial process. This may involve transferring the support of the victim/survivor to another ISVA.

- 4.8 It is important to note that these boundaries do not prevent an ISVA from discussing with the victim/survivor coping strategies and their understanding of the different processes within the criminal justice system.
- 4.9 Where a support organisation requires an ISVA to carry out an additional (or dual) role to meet the needs of the service, such as a crisis worker or counsellor, it is important to ensure these distinct roles remain separate. It is crucial where an ISVA has taken the first account (or provided the initial crisis support) that alternative ISVA support is provided for the client, as the initial ISVA may have to appear in court as a witness.
- 4.10 In cases where there are a number of victims/survivors (including family members) in the same court case it is advisable that the same ISVA **does not** provide support to more than one, to minimise the risk of challenges with regards to coaching. In cases where ISVAs are supporting a number of victims/survivors or when alternative support is not available, ISVAs should seek advice from the CPS.
- 4.11 ISVAs should provide the following support during the Criminal Justice process:
  - Pre-trial support, including reporting
  - Support during a trial
  - Post Trial Support
  - Provide Information about Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

### Pre-trial Support, Including Reporting

- 4.12 In the run up to or before a trial including reporting to the police, the ISVA may provide the victim/survivor with the following types of support:
  - Providing accurate and impartial information regarding reporting to the police;
  - Emotional support to the victim/survivor as they decide whether to report;
  - Helping the victim/survivor understand the police investigation process;
  - Supporting the victim/survivor through interviews (but not any investigative interview; see section 4.7), hearings and pre-trial meetings with Prosecution;

- Providing accurate and impartial information on the prosecution process and what will happen in the court, for example facilitating pre-trial familiarisation visits for the victim/survivor;
- Ensuring that ISVA support is listed on the special measures application.

### Support During a Trial

4.13 The court process can represent a particularly challenging stage for a victim/survivor, and one that they can expect their ISVA to support them through. As outlined in the Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) guidance, during this process the ISVA should support the victim/survivor by:

- accompanying the victim/survivor to the court;
- providing emotional support to the victim/survivor during the trial however they must not discuss the evidence;
- keeping the victim/survivor updated on how the court case is progressing;
- support the victim/survivor in court or in the live link room while they are giving their evidence, providing this is what the victim/survivor requests and the court approves. This is a formal approval process that should be made to the Judge in advance of the hearing;
- discussing with the victim/survivor coping strategies and grounding techniques to reduce anxieties, providing they have the relevant professional knowledge and skills to do so.

### Post-trial Support

4.14 The conclusion of an investigation or trial should be managed carefully regardless of outcome, and an ISVA should ensure that the victim/survivor can access further appropriate support services where there is an identified need.

### Provide Information about the Criminal Injury Compensation Scheme

4.15 ISVAs should ensure that victims/survivors have access to independent advice and guidance on the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme and civil actions, and can assist them in making an application if they are eligible.

## 5. Act as a Single Point of Contact

- 5.1 The ISVA role is unique because of the continuity they provide for the victim/survivor by being a consistent point of contact for both the victim/survivor and other agencies who may be involved in the response to sexual violence.
- 5.2 The support provided by an ISVA is not limited to the time that the victim/survivor is within the criminal justice process, but until the client no longer requires their support to access other services.
- 5.3 Navigating the criminal justice process can be complex for the victim/survivor and to simplify the communication process an ISVA may take on the role of the Single Point of Contact (SPOC). Where the ISVA takes on this role it should be agreed with all parties as soon as possible once the case is in the criminal justice system, via protocols and agreements that may be in place locally with police or prosecutors.
- 5.4 As a Single Point of Contact for the victim/survivor the ISVA may be required to liaise with the following organisations:
  - Police
  - Crown Prosecution Service
  - Court-based Witness Service
  - Social Care and other agencies

### Police

- 5.5 An ISVA may receive updates from the Officer in Charge regarding how the investigation is progressing, including relaying information to the victim/survivors about charges and cautions. Where there is a decision to take no further action (NFA) because there is insufficient evidence to charge, it is the police's responsibility to inform the victim/survivor of the decision. However, the ISVA can support the police when the victim/survivor is given this information.
- 5.6 The police Victim Right to Review scheme relates to the right of a victim of a crime to ask for a review of a decision by the Police not to prosecute a suspect. The scheme applies to National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) offences. ISVAs should support the victim/survivor to understand whether the Right to Review criteria are relevant to their case (link at Annex A).



## Crown Prosecution Service

- 5.7 The CPS must be notified by the Officer in Charge of the case where there is an ISVA involved in supporting the client and when a client is being provided with or referred for pre-trial therapy.
- 5.8 ISVAs should discuss Special Measures with the victim/survivor and ensure that any application has been granted by the court by liaising with the CPS.
- 5.9 The CPS Victims' Right to Review Scheme enables victims/survivors to seek a review of a CPS decision not to charge or terminate all proceedings. ISVAs should support the victim/survivor to understand their rights in relation to how their case was handled and how the decision can be reviewed should they wish (see annex for CPS guidance).

## Court-based Witness Service

- 5.10 The court-based witness service provides emotional and practical advice and information to victims and witnesses giving evidence at criminal courts, and also to non-witnesses where such support is material to supporting the witness. An ISVA should liaise with the court-based witness service to let them know where they are acting as Single Point of Contact for a victim/survivor, and also to discuss and agree areas of shared or joined-up support where this is in the best interests of the victim/survivor.

## Social Care and Other Agencies

- 5.11 An ISVA may be required to engage with social care and other agencies on behalf of the victim/survivor. This may be to arrange support or to make referrals for the victim/survivor if they have a specific need. Alternatively, where the ISVA has identified a safeguarding risk, the ISVA will be required to work in partnership with social care and other agencies to protect the victim/survivor and/or their children.

## Organisational/Institutional Advocacy

- 5.12 An ISVA should advocate and challenge appropriately on behalf of the victim/survivor. This may need to be done to ensure the victim/survivor receives the appropriate response from agencies and professionals, according to the Victims' Code.
- 5.13 ISVAs should also provide information and support to victims/survivors in terms of making complaints or providing feedback about other agencies within or outside the criminal justice system.

## 6. Ensure the Safety of Victims/Survivors and their Dependants

- 6.1 Ensuring the safety of the victim/survivor should be of paramount importance to an ISVA. They have safeguarding responsibilities in respect of the victim/survivor and any children or vulnerable adults that the victim/survivor is responsible for. If they consider that they are at risk of serious harm. Where ISVAs become aware of any information which may impact on the welfare of children or vulnerable adults they must follow their local safeguarding policy.
- 6.2 Where an ISVA is working with a victim/survivor who has been identified as being at risk of serious harm, it is likely that a range of organisations will already be involved in their safeguarding. ISVAs should work in partnership with these agencies and share information where it is necessary.

### Safeguarding Responsibilities

- 6.3 All ISVAs, whether they work with children, young people or adults at risk, must have knowledge and understanding of implementing safeguarding procedures. Therefore, it is vital that ISVAs should also have access to local training about local safeguarding pathways and referral protocols.
- 6.4 ISVAs should also ensure that their clients are aware of the limits of confidentiality in the context of the safeguarding policy. An ISVA should explain this to the victim/survivor on their initial meeting so that there is clarity about information sharing requirements from the outset.
- 6.5 ISVAs should be aware of child and adult protection legislation, and local arrangements including thresholds for statutory intervention and the safeguarding policies of any agencies they carry out work for (See annex A for further information).

### Partnership Working

- 6.6 ISVAs should develop and maintain effective working relationships with a range of local partners, including statutory agencies and voluntary services to ensure the best provision of support services are available for their clients. To this end, depending on the needs of the individual victim/survivor, ISVAs should work in partnership with:
- the police;

- the Crown Prosecution Service;
- Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs)
- local specialist sexual violence and abuse services providing counselling and support, including pre-trial therapy;
- voluntary and statutory agencies (such as domestic abuse agencies, IDVAs, housing agencies, benefit support agencies);
- Public health services (such as sexual health services, GPs and mental health services);
- local authority safeguarding teams;
- court-based witness service;
- local HM Courts and Tribunal Service;
- schools, colleges and universities;
- victim liaison service;
- other local services that may provide support

### Information Sharing and Confidentiality

- 6.7 ISVAs will need to understand the legal requirements for information sharing and confidentiality. Although an ISVA's aim is to provide independent advice, they are still required by law to share information in certain circumstances. For more information see Information Sharing Guidance <sup>2</sup>.
- 6.8 Additionally, it will be of benefit for ISVAs to have information shared with them by other agencies or professionals. Therefore, ISVAs should establish information sharing protocols with a range of partnership agencies and services that may be required to respond to the needs of the victim/survivor.

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<sup>2</sup> HM Gov (2015) Information Sharing: Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers

## 7. Provide a Professional Service

- 7.1 It is essential that ISVAs provide a professional service, offering high-quality support to meet the individual needs of victims/survivors.
- 7.2 In order to do this effectively, the ISVA role must be recognised by other professionals and agencies as a vital element of the multi-agency response that is required in order to respond appropriately to sexual violence. To this end, providers of ISVA services must ensure that ISVA services are established and maintained with a number of key principles at their core.
- 7.3 These principles include:
- Creating an Independent Service
  - Maintaining professional boundaries
  - Prioritising staff welfare
  - Effective Case Management
  - Ongoing Professional Training

### Creating an Independent Service

- 7.4 It is important that an ISVA should sit within a specialist ISVA service. Due to the nature of the support provided by ISVAs, and the independence of their role, it is imperative that organisations providing an ISVA service recognise the skills and professional boundaries that are required to effectively and safely support people through the criminal justice process.
- 7.5 The ISVA service should have specific policies and procedures that relate to the operational delivery of the ISVA service. While the ISVA service may well be within an organisation that delivers a number of services (e.g. specialist counselling, forensic medical services), the ISVA services should have distinct policies and procedures to ensure the bounded nature of ISVA role is adhered to. ISVA service policies and procedures should reflect the unique requirements of the ISVA service to that of other support services.

### Maintaining Professional Boundaries

- 7.6 ISVAs should ensure that the victim/ survivor understands their role, and the professional boundaries within which they must work. It is also the responsibility of

an ISVA to ensure that the victim/survivor understands that the services are not open-ended.

- 7.7 An ISVA should take special care in the execution of their role, maintaining professional boundaries and remaining within their own area of expertise and knowledge. Due to their links and working relationship with a range of other organisations and agencies, ISVAs often develop excellent knowledge of the professional roles and responsibilities of others. It is important that ISVAs do not extend their own roles by assuming the responsibilities of others.

## Prioritising Staff Welfare

- 7.8 Personal safety is vitally important for ISVAs, and maintaining physical and psychological safety and wellbeing will be essential if they are to be able to perform their role to the best of their ability.
- 7.9 ISVAs frequently work within challenging environments, amongst difficult and emotionally complex situations in support of vulnerable people. Therefore, employing organisations and ISVA managers should be aware of the importance of staff welfare and recognise that coping strategies and self care are essential to ISVAs.
- 7.10 It is recommended that ISVAs are provided with access to separate clinical and management supervision. Clinical supervision should be used to assess the ISVA's caseload and provide advice and guidance on specific or complex cases. Clinical supervision can help to reduce the risk of serious oversight by an individual in terms of their own personal competencies, and/or health and wellbeing needs. The Clinical Supervisor should also be impartial and where possible be external to the ISVA's organisation. It is important that Clinical Supervisors are aware of and, understand the role of the ISVA, boundaries for the role and risk and needs management of cases in the criminal justice system. Clinical supervision is distinct to that provided during management supervision, which is primarily intended to support the operational management of the ISVA. Employing organisations should ensure that the ISVA receives appropriate management supervision from an ISVA manager.

## Effective Case Management

- 7.11 The caseload for each ISVA will vary and is dependent on a number of factors, including the complexity of the support needs, the level of risk of an individual, and the resilience of a particular worker. The ISVA manager should take into account these factors, and determine a safe caseload structure.
- 7.12 It is the responsibility of an ISVA to ensure that the victim/survivor understands that the service provided is not intended to be open-ended. However the ISVA will help

signpost/refer the victim/survivor to any services that can provide any ongoing support if necessary.

## Ongoing Professional Training

- 7.13 Due to the complex nature of the ISVA role, it is essential that all ISVAs have completed accredited training in order to ensure that they can support victims/survivors safely and effectively.
- 7.14 There are identified core competencies for the ISVA role, known as the National Occupational Standards. <http://nos.ukces.org.uk/Pages/index.aspx>. These competencies provide the framework for the ISVA role.
- 7.15 All ISVAs are expected to have undertaken a full, comprehensive, accredited specialist ISVA training course, which provides them with the core competencies and skills required to carry out their role.
- 7.16 Where an individual is carrying out ISVA duties but has not yet fully completed their training this should be made clear, for example in their job title; or, they should only work under the supervision of an ISVA who has fully completed an accredited training programme.
- 7.17 The ISVA manager should provide oversight of the training and development needs of the ISVA, and develop plans to address those needs. ISVAs should have access to on-going continued professional development (CPD) training to ensure that they are able to maintain their professional skills and competencies. ISVA managers should complete training that equips them to understand the context in which the ISVA is working, the boundaries of the role and caseloads.
- 7.18 Where an ISVA is supporting children and young people (under 18 years old) there are additional core skills and training requirements that are essential for the ISVA to have undertaken. This is due to the differing processes and responsibilities of agencies in response to children.

## Complaints Procedures

- 7.19 ISVAs also should make the victim/survivor aware of how they can make a complaint about the service provided by the ISVA, if they so wish to do so. This should be done in line with the ISVAs employing organisation's procedures, including grievance and disciplinary procedures and whistle blowing policy and procedure.

# Annex A: Useful Resources

## Legislation

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 provides the legal framework

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/42/contents>

## Victims' Code

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-code-of-practice-for-victims-of-crime>

## National Occupational Standards

<http://nos.ukces.org.uk/Pages/index.aspx>

## CPS Guidance - Provision of Therapy for Vulnerable or Intimidated Adult Witnesses Prior to a Criminal Trial

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/prosecution/pretrialadult.html>

## CPS Consent Toolkit

[CPS Consent Toolkit](#)

## EU Directive: Minimum Standards on the Rights, Support and Protection of Victims of Crime

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1421925131614&uri=CELEX:32012L0029>

## The CPS Speaking to Witnesses at Court Guidance

<http://www.cps.gov.uk/Publications/Prosecution/speaking-to-witnesses-at-court-guidance-mar-2016.pdf>

## Pre-trial Therapy Guidance

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/prosecution/pretrialadult.html>

## Victims' Right to Review Scheme

[http://www.cps.gov.uk/victims\\_witnesses/victims\\_right\\_to\\_review/](http://www.cps.gov.uk/victims_witnesses/victims_right_to_review/)

## Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings

[https://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/best\\_evidence\\_in\\_criminal\\_proceedings.pdf](https://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/best_evidence_in_criminal_proceedings.pdf)

## Information Sharing Guide

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/419628/Information\\_sharing\\_advice\\_safeguarding\\_practitioners.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/419628/Information_sharing_advice_safeguarding_practitioners.pdf)

## **Safeguarding Children and Young People**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-children-and-young-people/safeguarding-children-and-young-people>

## **Service Specification for Sexual Assault Referral Centres**

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/service-spec-30.pdf>



# Annex B: Independent Reviews

## **Baroness Stern Review 2010**

[http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100418065537/http://equalities.gov.uk/PDF/Stern\\_Review\\_acc\\_FINAL.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100418065537/http://equalities.gov.uk/PDF/Stern_Review_acc_FINAL.pdf)

## **Dame Angiolini Rape Review 2015**

[https://www.cps.gov.uk/Publications/equality/vaw/dame\\_elish\\_angiolini\\_rape\\_review\\_2015.pdf](https://www.cps.gov.uk/Publications/equality/vaw/dame_elish_angiolini_rape_review_2015.pdf)

## **An Audit of ISVAs in England and Wales (2015) Kings College London & LimeCulture**

<http://www.limeculture.co.uk/recent-research>

## **More than Support to Court: ISVAs in Teesside**

[http://www.nr-foundation.org.uk/downloads/More\\_than\\_Support\\_to\\_Court.pdf](http://www.nr-foundation.org.uk/downloads/More_than_Support_to_Court.pdf)