



**ISVA POLICY FOR SUPPORTING SURVIVORS WITH ADDITIONAL  
NEEDS TO ENGAGE WITH SERVICES**

**Statement**

The Independent Sexual Violence Advisory Service (“ISVA service”) of Nottinghamshire Sexual Violence Support Services (“Notts SVSS”) offers practical support to anybody aged 18 and over who has experienced sexual violence. Our ISVA team assists clients in understanding their rights and the services that they can access. The ISVA can accompany and support clients through the criminal justice process and any subsequent Court proceedings. ISVAs can also help with practical matters, such as access to housing, benefits and health services etc. The service is open to anyone regardless of when the abuse took place and whether or not they are engaging in criminal justice proceedings.

Notts SVSS is fully committed to ensuring that its ISVA service is accessible and inclusive and recognises that some clients may have additional needs and require additional help and support in gaining access to this service. The organisation recognises that certain client groups may also face other barriers to accessing services and therefore offers a tailored, flexible and client-led service to ensure the diverse needs of anyone wishing to use this service can be met. This includes interacting with professionals, third parties, carers and/or family members of the client in order to facilitate them being able to engage fully with support.

**Who May Need Support to Access Services**

As part of our commitment to supporting those with additional needs and ensuring access to services, we also work with families, partners and carers of survivors and this is an important part of delivering person-centred care. Those close to a survivor are often a vital part of the life of someone who needs care and support. Here at Notts SVSS, we believe that outcomes for individuals can be improved where we also involve and engage with those around them (where this is applicable to do so), as well as other professionals/agencies.

People with certain characteristics may present with additional needs and/or face barriers to service engagement but at Notts SVSS we believe that everyone has the right not to be treated less favourably, or subjected to an unfair disadvantage, by reason of that characteristic. Characteristics may include (but not limited to):

- Children and Young People
- Those with disabilities, including learning difficulties
- The elderly
- Those with complex mental health needs
- Those who lack mental capacity

- Characteristics which include (but not limited to) gender, sexuality, culture, religion, race, pregnancy, etc

The ISVA service and the organisation as a whole works in accordance with the Equalities Act 2010 legislation in this regard.

### Consent & Collaboration

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 states that we should assume that someone (aged over 16) has the mental capacity to make their own decisions. If someone has the mental capacity to make a decision, when it needs to be made, their choice should take precedence over anyone else's. However, where a person lacks the mental capacity to make a decision, we may need to work in line with relevant legislation and guidance, including the Mental Capacity Act (2005) and the Human Rights Act. We must ensure that the survivor is always at the heart of any decisions and discussions where it is necessary to include and work with families/carers/partners in order for the survivor to be able to access support.

It is a legal and ethical principle that valid consent must be obtained before starting "any treatment, physical examination or investigation, or providing personal/health care" (Mental Capacity Act 2005). This principle reflects the right of survivors to determine what happens to them and is a fundamental part of good practice. There may be times when ISVA staff need to work in conjunction with other professionals/agencies, make onward referrals/signposting or liaise with other third parties in order to enhance or facilitate a safe and holistic approach to a survivor's care and support plan. Our engagement is driven by the individual survivor's needs and with their consent – ***unless there are exceptional circumstances around this*** (see Notts SVSS Policy on Mental Capacity & Consent). The survivor should remain central and fully informed at all times to ensure their preferences and requirements are always heard and are not lost or over-ridden by third parties (see below).

### How the ISVA Service supports Survivor Engagement

The ISVA service of Notts SVSS works hard to engage with all survivors including those with protected characteristics, from minority or marginalised backgrounds and those other barriers and additional complexities. The ISVA Service offers:

- easy single point of access referral system into the service (by self or professional) by telephone or online
- fast contact times when a referral is received (24 hours or 72 hours for acute cases)
- support which may be provided through different mediums including face-to-face, telephone, email, text and online
- support which is provided at various geographical locations throughout the city and county in safe and appropriate spaces – this includes ground floor spaces, female and male only spaces and is provided 7 days a week across daytime, evenings and weekends (also in line with Court opening times)
- ISVA Helpline / 24hr Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline

- frequency of support sessions will be client-led and driven by client need; session frequency may fluctuate and the service is therefore flexible to accommodate such changes
- support and communication to be in accordance with age, ability and language competency
- an Interpreter service where English is not the first language and live translation service
- Hearing loops and British Sign Language interpreters
- staff of different ages, gender, religion and cultures
- client allocation will have regard for the competence and experience of the ISVA which will accord with the level of complexity and presentation of each client
- website and online resources
- leaflets, service support packs and online information available in different formats and in different languages
- a robust and collaborative Safety and Support Assessment (“SAS”) with each client to determine and action risks, identify support needs/additional support needs and goals, aims and requirements to achieve desired outcomes
- regular review of SAS with risks and needs assessment at each meeting to safeguard personal safety and take account of any changing needs or ongoing barriers to engaging with the service
- support to access service user involvement activities, policies, organisational information
- robust package of in-house training and Continuing Professional Development package to ISVA staff to ensure skills and competence continue to meet the diverse needs of clients
- established referral pathways and partner agency service level agreements to support a safe, effective and holistic approach to each client’s care and support needs.
- robust Information Sharing and Governance Policies which set out clear guidance for the lawful exchange of data with those other agencies, professionals and statutory bodies that comply with current legislation.

### **ISVA Staff Approach**

- Build trust and empathy
- Be person-centred and client-led
- Use styles and forms of communication that are appropriate to the needs and circumstances both in discussions with survivors and when advocating with agencies on their behalf
- Be aware of the importance of non-verbal communication, such as body language, and how different cultures use and interpret body language in different ways
- Be aware of additional needs and supporting those needs to access support, engage with other services and work appropriately to achieve the individual’s aims and outcomes
- Be aware of possible barriers to communication and disclosure of SV, their causes, and ways to overcome them. Be sensitive to feelings and reactions which survivors may have that hinder their ability to engage with agencies.

- Understand all legislative, regulatory and organisational requirements that impact upon information and advocacy support to victims and how they relate to Notts SVSS, e.g. data protection, health and safety, safeguarding, equality and diversity

### **Engaging with Family/Carers/Partners/Third Parties**

The ISVA service adopts various methods to engage with people close to the survivor and third party agencies (where it is deemed necessary and appropriate) in order to support the safety and well-being of the survivor. The main benefits of family and other involvement are that:

- Family/carers/partners may provide relevant or different information
- They can contribute to and support decision-making
- They can support a survivor in attending sessions/meetings and remaining engaged
- They can help improve the quality and safety of care being provided
- Expectations, goals and ultimately survivor recovery may be better achieved

Where consent has been sought or grounds/rationale have been established to involve and work with family/carers/partners of the survivor and other professionals, then the following protocols should be followed (which align with NICE Clinical Guidelines CG138):

- Listen to the survivor about what they want, their requirements and preferences and any concerns they may have (do not make assumptions); talk to the survivor about their existing support network ensuring they have as much control as possible.
- Together, identify next of kin/carers, those with responsibility for the survivor and/or the person(s) elected by the survivor to be involved (if appropriate) and who has ultimate decision-making capacity
- Maintain and model clear boundaries when liaising with significant others (and third party professionals) to ensure that your role as an ISVA remains clear and consistent for the survivor and that they remain at the heart of any decisions, actions or discussions.
- Help family/carers/partners to understand the role of the ISVA by sharing information about your role, the service and staff team with them and how they can access policies and procedures (incl. website/leaflets/online resources).
- Gain consent to share their contact details with other professionals/agencies involved in the case to uphold a holistic approach to supporting the survivor in line with information sharing, confidentiality and data protection legislation and policies
- Recognise the importance of family relationships and your role in this; be mindful of any cultural issues that may have a bearing and of which you need to take account
- Make early contact with the identified family/carers/partners and offer to visit or meet with them with the survivor to understand their needs and concerns and how and when they would like to be involved
- Understand and respect that each survivor has different perceptions of the role of family members and that their level or nature of involvement may differ

- Establish positive relationships with family/carers/partners and respect their knowledge of their relative, and their history. Use this information to plan and inform effective care and support.
- Agree how family/carers/partners would prefer you to communicate with them, for example, email, phone, face to face or text messaging.
- Represent accurately and clearly survivors' views and wishes to agencies where appropriate, in line with agreed safety and support plans. When necessary, challenge constructively any discrimination against survivors
- Facilitate effective communication with agencies, encourage survivors to express their opinions, and where necessary negotiate with agencies to make sure victims' needs and rights are understood
- Work pro-actively with other agencies to ensure a cohesive and joined-up approach to the survivor's care and support; ensure the survivor (and/or their relative) is kept fully informed as to all actions and progress
- Identify where family/carers/partners need their own support and assist in referring/signposting them to relevant services
- Adopt a flexible approach which allows for individuality and a changing level and nature of involvement of family/carers/partners.
- Ensure that the safety, health and wellbeing of survivors is central to the advocacy process and regularly update them about progress and the outcomes. Make sure that survivors are treated with dignity, respect and empathy
- Role model dignity, respect, empathy and compassion in all interactions with family/carers/partners and third party professionals.
- Work in accordance with this policy, the ISVA SOP and all other Notts SVSS policies and procedures that apply – including (but not limited to) Confidentiality, Data Protection, Information Sharing, Mental Capacity, Safeguarding, Professional Boundaries.
- The service routinely monitors uptake and disengagement of its services (via DPMS Database Management System) and is pro-active in addressing areas for improvement in this regard.

## **Summary**

In summary, involving family members and other professionals in some survivors' care and support within the ISVA service of Notts SVSS may, at times, be essential. Applying the above guidance should facilitate this involvement and enable family/carers/partners to participate in the survivor's care without over-riding the survivor's autonomy and rights. Involving significant others in this way can help survivors with additional needs to feel more confident, safe and secure. This way of working can have a direct link on the survivor's experience and expectations of accessing the ISVA service and the outcomes they personally gain. Notts SVSS is committed to ensuring that it operates an inclusive and equitable ISVA service and to working jointly with other agencies/professionals.

*Last review: July 2022  
Next review due: July 2024*