



Rape Crisis National Service Standards: Summary

Foreword

Rape Crisis England & Wales (RCEW) and Rape Crisis Scotland (RCS) are the national charities working to transform attitudes, improve responses and ultimately end sexual violence and abuse in all its forms.

RCEW and RCS are also the membership organisations for specialist Rape Crisis centres (in England & Wales and Scotland) that provide immediate crisis and longer-term specialist counselling, support and independent advocacy to adults and children who have experienced any form of sexual violence and sexual abuse, at any time in their lives.

Our Rape Crisis National Service Standards (RCNSS) represent a long-term collaboration between Rape Crisis England & Wales and Rape Crisis Scotland. The standards provide a robust quality assurance framework that enables specialist Rape Crisis centres to demonstrate how their services prioritise safety, strong leadership and governance, empowerment and continuous improvement.

We recognise that survivors, partners, funders and commissioners need to be assured of the high quality and safety of services and the positive difference these services make to victims' and survivors' lives. The RCNSS provide that clear assurance to those accessing, resourcing and purchasing services.

Read on to understand more about the RCNSS, including an overview of the standards themselves.



[The RCNSS] are rigorous and robust and provide a structure that drives excellence in our centre.”

-Specialist Rape Crisis service

Introduction

The Rape Crisis National Service Standards (RCNSS) set out what it is that makes specialist services different from generic support services.

Much of what distinguishes a Rape Crisis approach relates not only to the quality of the services provided, but also to the value base and ethos that underpins all of our work. Values and principles are crucially important to our model for working with survivors of sexual violence and sexual abuse.

For nearly 50 years, Rape Crisis centres have been providing specialist services primarily to women and girls who have experienced sexual violence and abuse. A gendered analysis of sexual violence both recognises and responds to sexual violence as a cause and a consequence of gender inequality and, as such, a form of violence that disproportionately affects women and girls.

Over time, these specialist services have developed and grown in response to presented need and demand, and many specialist Rape Crisis centres have expanded their service provision to support children, young people, trans and non-binary people and men. However, the primary focus on providing services and dedicated spaces to women and girls remains.

Underpinning the approach of all specialist Rape Crisis centres is an evidence-based understanding of how experiences of sexual violence and sexual abuse can impact individual survivors. Rape Crisis centres provide a trauma-informed approach to practice and delivery that is both appropriate to and effective when supporting survivors of all forms of sexual violence.

The RCNSS enable specialist Rape Crisis centres to demonstrate the quality and professionalism of each of the services they provide, whether these be counselling, emotional support, group work, Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs) or advocacy workers, helplines, training, outreach services, prevention work, campaigning and influencing, and awareness raising activities. They provide an assurance of quality, alongside a benchmark for excellence in the delivery of specialist services for survivors of sexual violence.

The RCNSS reflect the high quality of services being provided throughout Great Britain and are the culmination of a long and ongoing process of research, reflection and consultation. They have been refreshed in collaboration with Rape Crisis centres, which means they are informed by the collective experiences of frontline practitioners and the voices of survivors.

Background to the Rape Crisis National Service Standards

The Rape Crisis National Service Standards (RCNSS) were first developed in 2008 as a joint collaboration between Rape Crisis England & Wales (RCEW) and Rape Crisis Scotland (RCS) to provide the specialist Rape Crisis sector with a set of quality service standards that both reflected the specialism held within the sector to meet the needs of survivors of sexual violence and assure survivors that they would receive a high quality service that was consistent across these countries. The standards were mapped against several existing quality assessment frameworks, including those of Rape Crisis Network Ireland.

In 2016, the RCNSS were integrated into the Sector Sustainability Standards, shared values that apply across the VAWG sector in England & Wales. These standards, produced by RCEW, Imkaan, SafeLives, Respect and Women's Aid Federation of England, are based on a set of agreed core principles used to underpin standards for all services working with women and girls who have experienced any form of sexual and domestic violence.

In 2018, the RCNSS were further revised and updated, including being re-mapped against key quality assessment frameworks including:

- Care Quality Commission (CQC): Key Lines of Enquiry for Healthcare Services
- The Care Inspectorate (Scotland) Health and Social Care Standards
- Quality for Health: Quality Assurance System
- Male Survivors Partnership (MSP): Quality Standards for Supporting Male Victims and Survivors of Sexual Violence
- Women's Aid Federation of England: National Quality Standards
- Scottish Women's Aid National Service Standards

At this time, the revised standards were also piloted with a representative sample of member services to ensure they accurately captured and reflected frontline knowledge and practice and could provide the quality benchmark for future provision.

Between 2021 and 2023, with support from Home Office funding, further work has been undertaken to review, refresh and update the RCNSS to ensure the standards keep pace with key practice and strategic developments - including taking into account the significant impact of, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic and developing best practice around equity, diversity and inclusion. In the latest iteration, the refreshed standards represent a robust and fit-for-purpose framework for assessing the high quality of specialist sexual violence services.

About the RCNSS

The standards are underpinned by the core requirement (“Standard 0”) for specialist Rape Crisis centres to show that they are independent and community-based, and work from a trauma-informed perspective to provide confidential, **specialist service provision** to victims and survivors of all forms of sexual violence and abuse.

The substantive standards are divided into four core sections:

1. Strong Leadership:

Rape Crisis specialist services have strong leadership and governance that ensures services are survivor-centred and delivered to the highest quality. There are robust strategic plans and frameworks in place to ensure that organisations are safe, sustainable and values driven. Strong leadership should also be evident in the way that intersectional feminist values operate in centres, driving anti-oppressive practices, to the benefit of survivors, staff and volunteers.

2. Responsive to Survivors:

Rape Crisis specialist services are responsive to the diverse needs of survivors and actively work towards ensuring that they are relevant, accessible and survivor led.

3. Safe Practice:

Rape Crisis specialist services seek to expand the safety and wellbeing of all survivors (as well as staff and volunteers) and work within safe, trauma-informed models of practice that facilitate this.

4. Lasting Impact:

Rape Crisis specialist services are dedicated to ending sexual violence and abuse, driving the impact and effectiveness of services, and fostering lasting change.

Each individual section contains up to four core standards and there are up to four core indicators under each standard, with 54 standards in total. The RCNSS are achieved via a process of:

- Self-assessment (including the provision of documentary evidence) and review.
- Site visits (mandatory for all centres undergoing assessment).
- Review and professional approval by an external independent panel.

Professional approval entitles a Rape Crisis centre to display the Rape Crisis National Service Standards Quality Mark.



Core Principles Underpinning the Standards

The Rape Crisis National Service Standards (RCNSS) are informed by the following core principles:

- **Understanding sexual violence and its impact**
Organisations demonstrate an appropriate and trauma-informed approach, relevant to their service users, that recognises and understands the dynamics and impact of sexual violence, using a gendered analysis within an equality and human rights framework.
- **Safety, security and dignity**
Organisations ensure that all interventions prioritise the safety, security and dignity of service users, as well as staff and volunteers.
- **Diversity and fair access to services**
Organisations respect the diversity of service users and positively engage in anti-oppressive practice, and support and assist service users to access services on an equitable basis.
- **Advocacy and support**
Organisations provide independent institutional/ individual advocacy and/ or support to promote the needs and rights of their service users.
- **Empowerment and participation**
Organisations promote empowerment and self-help to enable service users to take control of their lives, as well as creating opportunities to actively influence the delivery and development of services.
- **Confidentiality**
Organisations respect and observe service users' rights to confidentiality and all service users are informed of situations where that confidentiality may need to be limited.
- **A co-ordinated, multi-agency response**
Organisations operate within a context of relevant cross-organisational cooperation, collaboration and coordinated service delivery.
- **Challenging social tolerance of sexual violence and holding perpetrators accountable**
In all aspects of what they do, organisations challenge social tolerance of sexual violence and gender inequality and work from the core belief that it is preventable.
- **Accountability and governance**
Organisations' leadership and management approaches are effective, so that users receive a high-quality service from appropriately skilled staff who are valued and well-supported.

Rape Crisis National Service Standards (RCNSS)

Standard 0: Specialist Service Provision

Rape Crisis specialist services are independent, community-based services, which work from a trauma-informed, gendered analysis and empowerment perspective to provide confidential specialist services to survivors of sexual violence.

Core Standard	Core Indicator
<p>The organisation meets and adheres to Rape Crisis England & Wales or Rape Crisis Scotland membership criteria and is defined as a specialist Rape Crisis service.</p>	<p>The organisation is a Registered Charity, Company Limited by Guarantee (not for profit), Community Interest Company, Charitable Incorporated Organisation or Industrial and Provident Society – Community Benefit Society and so adheres to the principles and expectations of The Charity Commission (England & Wales) or The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (Scotland).</p>
	<p>The organisation has as its primary or major purpose to deliver services to women and girls who have experienced any form of sexual violence at any time in their lives.</p>
	<p>The organisation is women led and is committed to remaining women led.</p>
	<p>The organisation strives to maintain and develop services that meet the needs of survivors in their area who have experienced any form of sexual violence at any time in their lives.</p>
	<p>The organisation works from a feminist perspective that recognises sexual violence as a crime of violence, an abuse of power, and as a cause and consequence of gender inequality.</p>
	<p>The organisation provides and protects dedicated spaces and times for women and girls to access services.</p>
	<p>The organisation has a clear commitment to anti-racism and is working towards or already takes an actively anti-racist approach to working with survivors, staff and volunteers.</p>

Standard 1: Strong Leadership

Rape Crisis specialist services have strong leadership and governance that ensures services are survivor-centred and delivered to the highest quality. There are robust strategic plans and frameworks in place to ensure that organisations are safe, sustainable and values driven. Strong leadership should also be evident in the way that intersectional feminist values operate in centres, driving anti-oppressive practices, to the benefit of survivors, staff and volunteers.

Core Standard	Core Indicator
<p>1.1 Strategic plan, values and professional frameworks</p> <p>The organisation has a clear strategic plan that outlines the aims and objectives of the organisation and promotes values supporting empowerment, dignity and respect.</p>	<p>a) The organisation has clear and transparent aims and objectives that are clearly communicated to trustees, staff and volunteers. All trustees, staff and volunteers are aware of their part in achieving these aims and objectives.</p>
	<p>b) The organisation has clear values which are defined by being survivor-centred, trauma-informed, gender-informed, empowerment-orientated, embodying a culture of belief, actively anti-racist, and employing an intersectional feminist approach.</p>
	<p>c) The organisation has a written strategic plan that supports the long-term sustainability of high-quality service provision. The strategic plan is reviewed regularly and updated in line with changing circumstances.</p>
	<p>d) The organisation's approach and delivery is in line with relevant professional ethical frameworks, legislation and evidence-based good practice guidance appropriate to specialist service provision.</p>
<p>1.2 Good governance</p> <p>The members of the governing body are aware of their legal duties and responsibilities; quality, performance and risks are understood and managed.</p>	<p>a) Trustees are provided with sufficient information and training about their legal duties, responsibilities and liabilities to enable them to govern effectively, fostering a culture of accountability.</p>
	<p>b) Trustees regularly review and respond to relevant internal and external developments, identifying, assessing and taking steps to mitigate organisational risks, including those that might impact the wider movement.</p>
	<p>c) The organisation has transparent policies and procedures to support effective governance, including the lawful and relevant use and control of its funds. Governance policies and procedures are reviewed regularly.</p>
	<p>d) Trustees periodically review their efficiency and effectiveness and take steps to develop, adapt and improve where gaps are identified.</p>

Core Standard	Core Indicator
<p>1.3 Survivors as organisational leaders</p> <p>The organisation works in a way that centres survivor voice and recognises the value of lived experience. Survivors of sexual violence and service users have opportunities to be involved at all levels of the organisation, from evaluation of services to strategic developments.</p>	<p>a) The organisation ensures it is addressing barriers faced by service users to enable them full access to participate in feedback and involvement opportunities in a way that is appropriate and relevant to their needs.</p>
	<p>b) Service users are informed about a range of opportunities to give feedback on all aspects of the service they receive. There are opportunities to respond to relevant external consultations and campaigns in relation to wider social issues affecting their lives.</p>
	<p>c) The organisation has a policy for actively involving service users and survivors in strategic planning, and in the planning of specific services.</p>
	<p>d) There are clear opportunities for service users and survivors to influence decisions within the organisation (for example, survivor reference groups feeding into strategic decision making).</p>
	<p>e) The organisation recognises that service users may wish to become trustees, staff or volunteers, and that trustees, staff and volunteers may themselves need access to specialist sexual violence support – and has an agreed approach to this.</p>
<p>1.4 Leading healthy work environments</p> <p>Trustees and the senior leadership team in the organisation create a healthy work environment where feminist leadership and anti-oppressive principles are put into practice.</p>	<p>a) Organisations foster empowering work environments that embrace feminist leadership, anti-oppressive and anti-racist practices. Power dynamics are reflected on, with active efforts to dismantle bias, discrimination, and privilege within the organisation taking place.</p>
	<p>b) Organisations embrace a mindset which values and celebrates staff and volunteers, nurturing their growth and their personal and professional development.</p>
	<p>c) Organisations cultivate open communication, fairness and respect. There are comprehensive support systems that empower staff and volunteers to consider their wellbeing as well as self and collective care.</p>
	<p>d) Organisations implement recruitment practices that actively dismantle biases, creating opportunities for marginalised groups and fostering genuine inclusion, fairness, and a sense of belonging.</p>

Standard 2: Responsive to Survivors

Rape Crisis specialist services are responsive to the diverse needs of survivors and actively work towards ensuring that services are relevant, accessible and survivor led.

Core Standard	Core Indicator
<p>2.1 Designing services for survivors</p> <p>The organisation understands and responds to diversity of need within the population it serves, and uses this knowledge to inform service planning, delivery and partnerships.</p>	<p>a) The organisation understands the complexity of sexual violence and its impact on marginalised groups. Staff and volunteers respond to the specific and diverse needs of service users through planning and delivery of services.</p>
	<p>b) The organisation conducts equalities monitoring of its service users and takes positive steps to listen and respond to needs identified by lesser heard or underrepresented voices in the service.</p>
	<p>c) The organisation has processes in place to ensure that its services recognise and respond to changing needs and demand regarding demographic changes, using robust data.</p>
	<p>d) The organisation seeks to work in partnership to meet survivor need and to develop robust referral pathways, where available and appropriate. Staff and volunteers have reliable and up-to-date information and are enabled to effectively signpost or refer service users to relevant organisations.</p>
<p>2.2 Service users are well informed</p> <p>Service users are informed about the scope, independence and any limitations of the services being provided.</p>	<p>a) Service users are informed about the scope, independence and provision of services available to them and systems are in place to enable appropriate access.</p>
	<p>b) The organisation supports children and young people in accessing the service in their own right in a way that is accessible, empowering and appropriate to them.</p>
	<p>c) The organisation follows an ‘empowerment model’ – working alongside all service users in a holistic, flexible and person-centred way to enable them to re-establish control and direction in their own lives.</p>
	<p>d) The organisation recognises that some survivors may be best served or may prefer to use specialist services run ‘by and for’ marginalised groups outside of the Rape Crisis centre, and actively signposts when asked.</p>

Core Standard	Core Indicator
<p>2.3 Service users shape the individual services they receive</p> <p>Services are informed by the needs of service users and each service user is an active partner in the service they receive.</p>	<p>a) The organisation seeks explicit and informed consent from service users, in line with relevant consent and decision-making guidance and legislation, to enable service users to engage meaningfully with services provided.</p>
	<p>b) Service users are enabled to make their own choices about the support and interventions they receive and who provides them.</p>
	<p>c) The organisation ensures that children and young people are enabled to be active partners in the support they receive and are empowered to make their own decisions in line with their age and development stage.</p>
	<p>d) Individual support needs are understood, and plans are in place that are tailored to meet service users' specific needs – and are flexible to meet these needs. Service users are active partners in their development and review.</p>

Standard 3: Safe Practice

Rape Crisis specialist services seek to expand the safety and wellbeing of all survivors (as well as staff and volunteers) and work within safe, trauma-informed models of practice that facilitate this.

Core Standard	Core Indicator
<p>3.1 Safety for service users</p> <p>The organisation has robust and reliable systems and practices in place to keep people safe and safeguarded from harm.</p>	<p>a) The organisation has in place robust policies, procedures and practices that reflect good practice guidance for safeguarding children and adults, which adhere to legislation and local statutory frameworks.</p>
	<p>b) The organisation has robust risk assessments in place that reflect and respond to specific risks to service users and client facing staff, and these are reviewed and updated at regular intervals.</p>
	<p>c) Staff and volunteers (and where relevant, trustees) are supported to carry out needs and risk assessments, and receive sufficient training and information to do so safely within the remit of the service.</p>
	<p>d) The organisation keeps up to date with knowledge and good practice in relation to changing legislation, forms that abuse may take, and potential risks related to service users and this learning is incorporated into the service's policies, training and response to safeguarding issues.</p>
<p>3.2 Safety for staff</p> <p>The organisation ensures a safe working environment for staff, volunteers, trustees and service users.</p>	<p>a) Robust policies and procedures are in place to assess and manage the physical safety and emotional wellbeing of staff, volunteers and service users, both within the centre and when working off site, and action is taken to provide and maintain a safe place of work.</p>
	<p>b) The organisation prioritises robust recruitment practices, and implements comprehensive systems of training, support and supervision to ensure a culture of safe and reflective practice.</p>
	<p>c) The organisation sets out and observes clear professional boundaries to guide appropriate relationships between service users and staff/volunteers.</p>

Core Standard	Core Indicator
<p>3.3 Secure data</p> <p>The organisation follows policy and guidance on confidentiality and data protection that is compliant with current legislation and good practice.</p>	<p>a) The organisation has clear policy and procedures in place that protect service user confidentiality. Limitations to confidentiality are clearly communicated.</p>
	<p>b) The organisation has transparent policy and procedures in place that relate to the lawful collection, handling, processing, movement and disposal of data and all trustees, staff and volunteers are aware of their rights and responsibilities in line with current data protection legislation.</p>
	<p>c) Service users are active partners in the collection and control of their personal information and are made aware of their rights to access, amend or delete data in line with data protection legislation.</p>
	<p>d) Where information is shared with a third party, it is relevant and proportionate, and governed by robust protocols that protect the interests and privacy rights of service users.</p>
<p>3.4 Implementing learning</p> <p>The organisation has processes in place to support the continuous improvement of safety and protection across the service.</p>	<p>a) The organisation has a process in place to enable the recording, review and learning from safety incidents and relevant staff, volunteers and trustees are involved in this process.</p>
	<p>b) The organisation has an open, transparent and blame-free culture that encourages reporting, learning and continuous improvement.</p>

Standard 4: Lasting Impact

Rape Crisis specialist services are dedicated to ending sexual violence and abuse, driving the impact and effectiveness of services, and fostering lasting change.

Core Standard	Core Indicator
4.1 Setting outcomes The organisation identifies outcomes for its service users that are meaningful to those users and to funders and commissioners.	a) The organisation has an outcomes framework in place that is meaningful and relevant to all of its service users.
	b) The organisation monitors progress towards service user outcomes and uses monitoring methods that give opportunities for all service users to express themselves in their own words.
	c) The organisation recognises that minoritised survivors may face additional barriers due to oppressive and inaccessible systems that affect their ability to contribute feedback, and puts measures in place to overcome these barriers.
4.2 Gathering data and feedback The organisation has a structure in place for collating and analysing service user feedback and using it to inform service provision, quality and improvement	a) The organisation demonstrates that service user feedback is used to inform and improve service planning, development and campaigning priorities (where relevant).
	b) The organisation has processes in place to ensure need and demand are identified and responded to and there are clear service performance measures that support continuous quality and improvement.
	c) Service users are informed how and to whom they can complain if not satisfied with any aspect of the service or response they receive.
4.3 Effective staff The organisation ensures that staff and volunteers have the relevant skills, knowledge and experience to deliver effective and high-quality service provision.	a) The organisation ensures that all staff and volunteers are sufficiently skilled, trained and experienced to work effectively within their role and the aims and objectives of the service.
	b) The organisation has effective policies and procedures in place to support the on-going training, learning and development of staff, volunteers and trustees to ensure they are sufficiently trained for their specific role and client group.
	c) The organisation sets clear development objectives for all staff, reviews progress against these regularly and takes effective steps to improve performance.
	d) Staff and volunteers are equipped with up-to-date information and knowledge, empowering them to deliver specialist support services effectively.

Core Standard	Core Indicator
<p>4.4 Impact on wider society</p> <p>The organisation recognises violence against women and girls as a human rights violation, raising awareness of the impact of sexual violence including challenging misperceptions and social tolerance.</p>	<p>a) The organisation provides anonymous data to their national Rape Crisis membership body on service delivery outputs and outcomes, to enable national pictures around prevalence and demand to be formulated and used in all its work.</p> <p>b) The organisation actively contributes to ending sexual violence – through engaging in public awareness activity across wider communities regarding the impacts of sexual violence, challenging rape myths and rape culture, and empowering survivors to be involved in this work.</p>

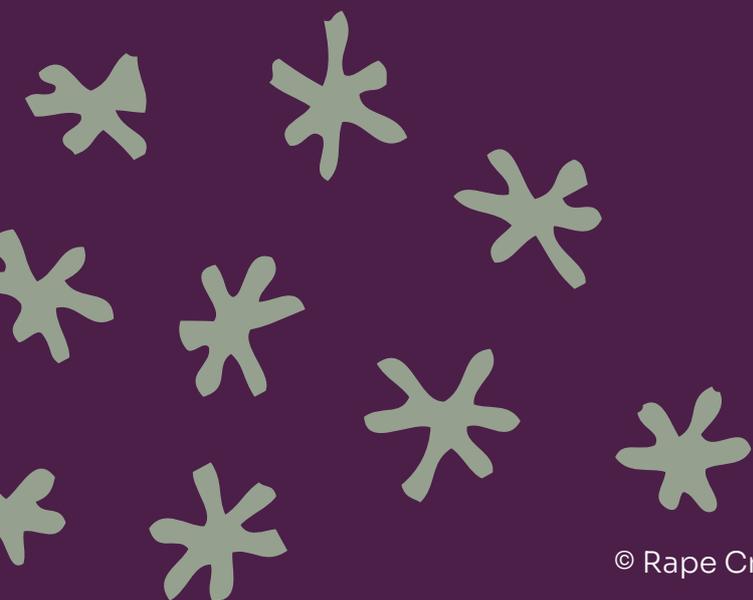
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