

Why an assessment?



This document is available in large print, in translated format on request, and in audio format.

Welcome to Beira's Place - Edinburgh Women's Sexual Assault Support Centre. We're glad that you have come to us for support. We will do all we can to offer you the support you need, and we welcome your feedback on the service you receive from us so that we can continue to improve our service for survivors.

When you first contacted us, the support worker you spoke to will have explained that we would like you to complete a comprehensive assessment while you're here. Wherever possible, the assessment will be carried out at a face-to-face appointment.

We have produced a factsheet '**How we work with trauma**' that you will be given by the support worker who carries out the assessment, or that you can read from the website if you don't want to have a paper copy. If you have any questions after you have read it through, just call us and we'll be happy to answer them.

We carry out this assessment with every woman who comes to the centre and there are several reasons why the process is important. You don't have to answer the questions if you prefer not to, and we guarantee that you will get the same service from us whether you choose to answer or not. We want to ensure that women are as safe as possible when they are using our service and we will work with women to make that happen. Safety, safeguarding and confidentiality are central to how we work.

If you feel that any of our questions are intrusive and you don't want to answer, that's fine. You might want to answer them later, or not at all. We know that it's hard to speak about very personal issues to someone you have never met before, and we certainly respect that.

As well as getting personal information such as your name and contact details, below are some of the questions we will ask, and the reason we're asking them.

- **We will ask you why you've come to Beira's Place and what you hope to get from us.** We don't need full, or intimate details of the abuse you have experienced. We will just ask you for some brief information so that we can make sure we are the right service for you, and you get the right support worker for your needs.
- **We will ask you about your physical health and mobility.** The reason for this is that our centre is a rather old, listed building so we're very limited in what we can do to alter it for access. The internal stairs are steep, but we have a ground floor support room so if you have limited mobility but can manage the four steps into the building, we can offer support at the Centre. If you are a wheelchair user or are unable to climb the stairs at the entrance, we may suggest having your support delivered at one of our outreach offices. We will always do our best to arrange accessible and confidential space for your support sessions. We also have ways of providing support by phone, online or by email or letter if that is best for you. We will always work with you to make sure you get the support you need in a way that is most accessible and comfortable for you.

- **Some women are at risk from ex partners who may be harassing them, stalking them, or threatening them with further violence and abuse.** We want to be sure that while a woman is here, she is safe but also, if possible, to work with her to help improve her safety outside of the support room. No woman should ever have to be responsible for men's violence and abuse, but we are often faced with limited options for ensuring our safety and need to make plans to increase our own resilience and safe space. We will ask you if you feel that you're in danger or if you fear that a partner or ex-partner may turn up when you are accessing our service. We will work with you to ensure your safety as far as we possibly can.
- **Some women may be in danger of sexual exploitation** and if we know this, we can work with you to think about a safety plan, and contacts that you can use if you feel that you are in danger.
- **Some women struggle to cope with the trauma of abuse** and rely on a range of coping strategies to help them survive. If you are using drugs, alcohol, or other ways of coping, it's useful for us to know so that we can offer you as much support as we can. If you regularly use drugs or alcohol, you are welcome at our service, but we will work with you so that you get support in a way that is safe for you.
- **For some women, their coping strategy is cutting themselves, or other ways of harming.** Again, we know this is a way that women have found to help them deal with the trauma they are living with and it's useful for us to know this so we can support you where we can and make sure you feel safe.
- **We will also ask you if you have every had suicidal thoughts or have planned or attempted to take your own life.** Many women who are survivors of sexual violence and abuse have felt despair and have thought about taking their lives as the only way to escape their feelings. We will ask about this as it will help us to support you.
- **Some women are taking medication for physical conditions** so if we know about this and there is an emergency while you are in the building, we will know what to tell emergency services if or when they attend.

Please note: We are not asking for medical information for any other reason than to be able to inform emergency services about this if ever required. If a woman becomes unwell at Beira's Place, we will organise emergency medical care as appropriate. Staff at Beira's Place are not medically qualified and cannot administer medication or advise on medical conditions.

- **We'd also like to know if there is anything that is a potential trigger for a woman who is coming to our centre.** This can be something very common that can have a really significant effect on a woman – for example, a woman who was attending an art class once described having a severe panic attack when a man in the class began tearing off strips of tape for his picture. Tape had featured in her attack, and his action had a major impact on her. If you know about any triggers that might affect you, please let us know – it can be a picture in the support room, the colour of a carpet, in fact anything. We will always do our best to ensure that you feel safe when you are in our centre.
- **We will also ask if you have any concerns about coming to Beira's Place because your culture or faith means that you're worried about discussing your abuse outside of your community.** We won't ask you to disclose anything that has happened to you if you feel uncertain or uncomfortable about it. We will discuss ways of making the process easier for you, for example you might feel that email support would help you preserve your

anonymity. Any discussion you have with support workers at Beira's Place is completely confidential (please see our Safeguarding Policy which is available on request) and we will never require any personal details if you do not want to give them to us.

When the assessment is complete, we will ask you to read it over and confirm with us that you are happy with us having this information. If you are unable to read it (for example if your sight is poor or your first language isn't English) we will read over what we have written (or have your interpreter read it to you) to ensure that you know what the paper contains.

We know that risk is not static, and your level of risk can change over time. If there are any new risks you need to tell us about we can make sure your file is updated and support you when you need us.

The information you give us will be put on your file. This is an electronic file that is secure, and password protected. Your confidentiality is one of our primary concerns and we ensure this by storing your contact details separately from the file containing information about your appointment dates, and your risk assessment. On our files you are given a code number that's automatically generated by the system to protect your identity. If you'd like to know more about this, please ask your support worker and she will explain it in more detail and can show you how your file is stored.

We will keep the information on our system for a minimum of two years after you have left our service. We do this in case you need that information because you have decided to report to the police, or you are submitting a criminal injuries compensation claim. You have the right to request this information at any time. You will also receive a Service User Privacy Notice that tells you what we do with any information we have about you.

In order to minimise any risk to you, we will not share any information about you to a third party unless you instruct us to do so. If you want us to share your information, we will ask you to sign a mandate that gives us permission to do this. The exception to this is, of course, Safeguarding. If we are concerned that anyone using our service is in danger, if there is someone vulnerable in danger, or a child is in danger, we may have to share this information with or without permission.

If we are concerned about the safety of a woman, child, or someone vulnerable, we will always speak to the woman first to tell her about our concerns. We will always seek the woman's support to share the information before we do anything. However, if we believe there is a danger to someone, we may have to share the information with the relevant services without permission.

We define 'safety' in this context as any danger to the life, health, or wellbeing of a person. This means that if we are concerned that a child is in danger of violence or abuse, it will trigger a safeguarding discussion between the support worker and the organisation's Safeguarding Officer.

If a woman has told us that she has taken an overdose of drugs to end her life, we will call emergency services if we know where that woman is. If a woman tells us that she has a child and her partner has a history of child sexual abuse, grooming or sexual abuse, we may be concerned for the safety of that child and speak to the relevant child protection services. Our sole aim is to protect women, children, and vulnerable adults as far as we can.