



BROTTSOFFER
JOUREN
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HOW TO SUPPORT AND COMMUNICATE WITH YOUNG VICTIMS OF CRIME

**Information for adults who are close to
or in contact with a child who has been
the victim of a crime.**

**Victim Support Sweden/Brottsofferjouren Sverige
Victim Support Uppsala/Brottsofferjouren Uppsala län
Engelska**

How to support and communicate with child and adolescent victims of crime

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HELP THE CHILD WHO HAS BEEN VICTIM OF A CRIME

Just like adults, many children are affected by crime, either directly as a victim, or indirectly as a witness to or relative of someone who is a crime victim or a perpetrator. By law, everyone under the age of 18 is a child.

In order for children to be able to cope with the negative effects of crime, they need help from supportive adults. But it may be difficult for adults to know the best way to help and support the child. In some cases, parents may wish to protect their child by limiting their time spent outside the home, or not permitting the child to move as freely as previously. The child may perceive this as double victimization: first by being victimized, and then by being restricted.

The child needs help to realize that they are neither guilty nor responsible for what happened. The child also needs help to feel secure and to be able to trust again, as well as to strengthen their self-esteem. The ability to express feelings, thoughts and experiences is important for all of us. This process is something that you, as someone who is close to the child, may need to help with. Siblings may also need help coping with what they experienced. Such family members are also entitled to support.

This brochure provides simple tips and advice on how you, as an adult, can communicate with a child who has been the victim of crime. The brochure contains information about laws and community services that are available to protect and help children.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND LAWS IN SWEDEN

Children in Sweden have strong rights and adults have an obligation to ensure the wellbeing of children. This is mainly regulated by the law called the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child contains provisions on the human rights of children. Sweden adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child as law in 2020. This law strengthens the status of children's rights in Sweden. Government authorities, the legal system and other decision makers must follow and apply the rights set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the same way as other Swedish laws.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child states:

- Children have the right to express their views and be heard.
- Children have the right to life and development, to express themselves; for example, children should be allowed to play, be whoever they want to be and experience a sense of security.
- No child should suffer discrimination.
- Children must go to school.
- The best interests of the child must always come first.

It can be difficult to know what is in the best interests of the child, since each child is unique and context may vary. All authorities that make decisions that may affect a child must investigate and justify their decisions based on the best interests of the child.



Other laws you need to know about

- **Hitting a child is illegal**, even when it is done for child rearing purposes. Adults who need help in how to raise a child need to seek help themselves.
- **All types of domestic violence are illegal.** Allowing a child to see, hear or otherwise experience violence in the home is a crime for which the perpetrator can be convicted.
- Even if a crime against the child was committed many years ago, in many cases a police report can still be filed and **both adults and children are entitled to victim support, regardless of when the crime was committed.**
- **No girls may be genitally mutilated in Sweden or abroad.** All forms of genital mutilation are illegal. Parents must protect the child from this.
- **It is illegal to marry before the age of 18.** It is also a punishable offense to entice someone into going abroad in order to force the person into marriage.
- **It is illegal to control what teenagers wear;** they have the right to make that decision for themselves.
- **People may love whomever they want.** People over the age of 15 can decide for themselves with whom they wish to have sex.
- In Sweden, a person over the age of 15 can have sex with another person over the age of 15, as long as both parties are willing and no one feels pressured. **No one over the age of 15 may have sexual relations with anyone under the age of 15; that is a crime.**



Crimes that affect children

Children are mainly affected by juvenile delinquency, but also by crimes where adults are the perpetrators.

When the family is subjected to a crime, for example burglary, harassment, or a car accident caused by negligent driving, the child is also the victim of crime and will need to cope with any trauma that may arise.

Many crimes that affect children today occur online. Regardless of where the crimes occur, the same laws apply as anywhere else in society. Threats, harassment, discrimination and assault are serious crimes regardless of whether they occur online or in real life. As someone who is close to a child, you need to be aware of their social media presence, where the children spend much of their time and where perpetrators also lurk. What apps do the children use? Do they know how to block or report someone who behaves inappropriately?

EXAMPLES OF COMMON CRIMES

Blackmail, theft, vandalism and robbery are perhaps the most common crimes that affect children and young people. In connection with robberies, crime victims are often threatened or assaulted.

Various types of sexual crimes can occur both online and in real life. These crimes include being forced to receive unwanted nude pictures, or being pressured to perform sexual acts against their will.

Obstruction of justice may occur when threats to crime victims or witnesses cause them to withdraw their police report, or change their testimony.

Bullying and discrimination are serious and the school has a heavy responsibility to ensure that all children and adults at school treat each other appropriately.

EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF VIOLENCE

What is violence? Violence against children may take many different forms. Perpetrators can be strangers, classmates, family members or perhaps a partner (if the child is a teenager).

Physical violence

Physical violence can involve hitting, slapping, kicking or hair pulling.

Material violence

In material violence, the perpetrator breaks things that belong to the crime victim.

Sexual violence

All types of sexual abuse are a form of sexual violence. Forcing someone to witness sexual acts against their will is also sexual violence, as is forcing someone to get married against their will.

Psychological abuse and neglect

This category can involve various types of insults and violations to make the victim feel belittled and worthless. Punishing a child by not giving the child food, allowing the child to freeze and feel bad, locking the child in or failing to give the child love also fall under this category.

Controlling abuse and oppression

This category can involve behavior that prevents the child from exercising their rights to be the person they wish to be. Behaviors that fall under this category include monitoring and controlling the child by reading their text messages and diary, stalking the child through GPS functions on their mobile phone, not permitting the child to spend time with friends of the opposite sex, or not allowing the child to participate in certain parts of the school curriculum.



CHILDREN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Violence against children is illegal. Allowing a child to witness violence in the home is also illegal. Even if the violence is not aimed at the child, children are strongly affected by being forced to witness domestic violence. Children see and hear more than what adults think and notice when a family member is feeling bad. Children who experience violence may be afraid that pets could be injured and feel responsible for taking care of and protecting younger siblings. They may worry that the person who is close to them and who is subjected to violence and abuse will actually be killed. In cases of domestic violence, it is not uncommon for the children to also be angry with the abused parent. But they may also worry that the perpetrator, who in most cases is their father, could end up in prison.

Children who have witnessed violence need help learning how to handle conflicts without violence and may need to speak to an adult from outside the family. It is advisable to seek professional help.

VIOLENCE IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

Violence in close relationships can start as early as adolescence, and it is important that adults react quickly and do what they can to help the child. Just as for adults, it can be difficult for adolescents to get out of a controlling relationship.

Young people have the right to be with whomever they want. But if their partner or family exposes the child to crime or treats the child badly, as an adult close to the child, you must help them exit from the relationship. A young person who is very much in love with their partner may find it difficult to realize that what they are being subjected to may actually be criminal. Young people may think that it is normal for their partner to hit them, or prevent them from meeting friends. But such behavior is never okay.

Teenagers may feel embarrassed about ending up in a difficult situation. They feel that they are old enough to manage on their own and feel reluctant to “burden” their parents. This is particularly difficult if the parents have also said that they don’t want the child to have any romantic relationship. The young person is then both stuck in a relationship where they are being abused, while not daring to ask their parents for help. It is difficult for teenagers to tell their parents that they are involved with a partner who abuses them, especially if it is sexual abuse. Young people who are afraid of being punished by their parents, or who are just very much in love with their partner, may develop a talent for defending their partner instead and coming up with excuses. Teenagers may come home with bruises and explain that they are sports injuries, rather than admit that someone has hit them.

When a young person ends up in a controlling relationship, this may manifest as tension, anxiety and passivity. A young person who was previously



cheerful and proactive must constantly be wary of the mood of the controlling partner. Suddenly the young person is not allowed to hang out with friends and must be available on the phone at all times.

As someone close to the child, you need to pay attention to changes in behavior and follow your gut feeling. Make sure the home is a safe place where the teenager can escape from the controlling situation.

Talk to the young person about healthy relationships. You can try to ask questions about the relationship, such as:

– How do you feel when _____ does this or that?

– I notice that _____ writes to you all the time and it seems to stress you, which I can understand, what would _____ do if you didn't answer immediately?

The teenager may not answer your questions at all, but they hear you and will think about the answers on their own, which is at least as important. As someone close to the young person, it is important that you dare to ask these questions, so that they finally dare to speak up.

Different reactions of children and adolescents to crises and crime



Everyone reacts differently in a crisis and there is no right or wrong. The age of the child also matters. Children and adolescents are still learning about the best way for them to handle stress, and can therefore react in many different ways.

Crime can be perceived as more difficult for some than for others, including among children. However, it is more common that children may perceive even minor crimes as extremely traumatic. Sometimes the reactions may arise long after the crime occurred.

Both children and adults often feel guilty and responsible for what happened, even though the perpetrator is responsible. Here are a few examples of how children may react to trauma.

The child alternates between playing and being sad

Children have an ability to keep strong emotional pain at bay and can therefore quickly switch between playing a little and then being sad again. Children need to handle their emotions in their own way. It is important to understand that the child's feelings can rapidly change and that is perfectly normal. Children communicate and express themselves through play and this should be encouraged.

The child has explosive emotions

Children may have crying fits and aggressive outbursts because they do not know how to express themselves. Acknowledge the child's feelings and calm the child. Explain that it is okay to be sad and angry about what happened. If the child's reactions become a problem, as an adult, you will need to help the child to set limits. You can reach an agreement together on acceptable ways to show emotions; for example, it's okay to be angry, but not to

fight with your siblings because of that anger. Perhaps you can work together to come up with a good way to express anger or grief instead, one that suits your personal situation.

The child appears to be completely unaffected

If the child does not appear to be at all worried over the incident, then of course that could be the case. As someone close to the child, you may be more worried than they are. But it may also be a delayed emotional reaction from the child's side. Children need security to be able to share their feelings, and if they feel that an adult who is close to them is already feeling very bad, they may wait to show their worry until they feel that the people around them are ready to support them. The reactions may be delayed, and should not be interpreted to indicate that the child has not been harmed by the incident at all.

The child regresses

Regression means that the child begins to move backwards in their



development, and can affect both adolescents and younger children. They find it difficult to understand what is happening and therefore go back to a stage when they feel secure. For an independent teenager, this may mean relying too much on parents again, while younger children might suddenly revert to thumb sucking.

The child nags

Children learn and understand things through repetition, so you may need to explain

many times about what happened with the robbery, or the function of the police. Be patient.

The child feels anxiety, grief and worry that does not go away

The stress of being a crime victim plus the difficulties the child has coping with this stress can also become the most difficult challenge for the adult who is close to the child. Children have a hard time protecting themselves and often react with fear of becoming victimized again. In

some children, this fear may be expressed as suspicion and anger, while others become introverted, sad and worried and do not dare to go out. Many children experience sleep and concentration difficulties. Stress can also cause purely physical reactions such as stomachaches, headaches, palpitations, or panic attacks.

The child does not want to talk about what happened

Some children hide the fact that they are not feeling well and sometimes this may not be visible or noticeable on the outside. In other cases, the child is clearly unwell, but they do not want to talk about what happened. They may be too shocked, or they may be ashamed, or have problems finding the right words to describe their feelings. The child may feel that they are protecting their loved ones by not saying how they actually feel.

The child finds their own solutions

When children themselves find viable solutions to help

them feel better, those should be encouraged. The solutions can vary greatly depending on the age of the child and what the child experienced. Positive strategies are always those that ensure that the child has the opportunity to readapt to the routines of everyday life, and that address the trauma. The child may tell their friends about the incident, or they may be out playing or working out and doing things that make them feel good. The child may also want to help solve the situation, for example, by putting up posters to help the police catch the thief.

Explain to the child that it is completely normal to feel the way they do; these are normal reactions to abnormal situations.

Poor sleep can result in increased anxiety, so make sure the child gets plenty of sleep. Help the child to fall asleep if necessary.


Maintain routines to increase a sense of security and provide the child with an opportunity to recover.

If the child does not want to go to school because of an incident that took place there, it is important to discuss the situation with the school to solve the problem.

If the child is afraid to go outside alone, you could ask other trustworthy adults to accompany the child to school or afterschool activities for a while.

Point out that the police can help and that there are laws that are intended to protect the child. This may help the child to feel more secure.

Inform the child about what is happening. Adults who are close to the child may feel they are protecting the child by not explaining, but children have vivid imaginations, especially when they have not received accurate information. They may imagine horror scenarios that are worse than reality and contribute to increased anxiety.



Respect the child's choice not to talk about the situation. If they are not ready yet, that should be accepted. Forcing the child to speak or nagging may be perceived as yet another stress factor and be counterproductive. Instead, try to instill security, and show that you are there for the child regardless.

You can also inform the child that many different services are available to help young people. Both municipal and non-profit organizations provide help free of charge. The child may feel that it is easier to talk to someone else about what happened first.

Make yourself available to the child and spend plenty of quality time together. Sometimes teenagers don't want to hang out with their parents, but invite your teenager to participate in family activities anyway. Eat dinner, go to the movies and show that you are there if and when the child wants you to be there.

Wait a few weeks, or perhaps months, before asking the child again if they can talk about the incident and their feelings. Then they will have had more time to understand what happened and to find the right words. Once the child opens up, you can show and say that you are proud and pleased that the child tells you about what happened, so that you can work together to help solve the problems.

Strengthen the child's self-esteem through conversation

Both adults and children who have been victims of crime are often ashamed of what happened and sometimes feel that they themselves did something wrong.

Obviously this is not the case; the perpetrator always bears full responsibility. This applies even if the child did something foolish prior to the incident. Explain this clearly to the child. When speaking with a child crime victim, it is easy for both the adult and the child to automatically focus on the actions of the perpetrator during the incident. For example, it may sound like this:

What happened?

Sam chased me, then he stole my cell phone and knocked me down.

Then what did he do?

Then he took my ball too.

Sam really misbehaved, you just shouldn't do things like that.

One way to strengthen the child's self-image during the conversation is to instead explore together what happened, focusing more on how the child acted. In other words, ask about the child's perspective throughout the narrative. This approach will often provide a more nuanced picture of the course of events.

When the child describes what they did, you can answer with encouraging words. Say that the child was brave, did the right thing, and was smart to try that specific tactic. You will see together how the child's sense of dignity and self-confidence is strengthened when you both focus on the child's actions during the incident.

What happened?

Sam chased me.

What did you do then?

I ran as fast as I could... then he stole my cell phone, even though I said no many times.

You were really brave when you said no! What did you do next?

I tried to call for help but then he knocked me over. I let him take my ball too so that he wouldn't hit me.

That really wasn't very nice of Sam. But you did just the right thing! You were chased and then he knocked you down, you must have been really afraid, I can understand that. I think you were brave and smart to call for help too.

In this narrative, it is clear that the child was not passive in any way, but did their best to protect themselves. When the child has the opportunity to relate the incident from their own perspective, you will understand together that the child acted the best way possible, given the situation. In this example, the child used several strategies: they tried to avoid the perpetrator, said no, called for help and negotiated (gave Sam the ball so that he would not injure the child).

BEING A WORRIED PARENT OR ADULT WHO IS CLOSE TO THE CHILD

Children need help coping with feelings of anger, fear, grief, worry and insecurity. As an adult and relative, your role is important to help the child to feel better again. It is common for the worry or fear of a parent or adult who is close to the child to rub off on the child. This may make the child feel worse, so try to instill security and calm instead, even if you are upset about what happened.

Avoid using strong descriptions and scary words like “fear,” “panic” and “terrible”. The child could become more worried if you use such language.

Also, avoid belittling what the child experienced as a method of reducing your own concerns. The child needs to feel validated and an incident like a robbery can be extremely traumatic, even if only a small amount of money is involved.

Even if you are worried that the child may be victimized again, you should avoid restricting the child’s life. This is often perceived by the child as punishment and sends the wrong signals.

IF YOU AS AN ADULT NEED SUPPORT

Being a relative to a crime victim can also be difficult. Don’t forget your own health. Contact your local victim support service for compassionate support. Victim Support (Brottsofferjouren) always provides support to relatives of crime victims, at no charge.



CHECKLIST FOR WHEN A CRIME HAS BEEN COMMITTED

Here is what you should do if a child close to you has been the victim of a crime.

- 1. For a crime in progress, or when someone has been seriously injured, call the police or ambulance using the telephone number 112.**
- 2. Take care of the child.** Calm the child and make sure the child is in a secure environment.
- 3. Seek care for any injuries.** The injuries need to be documented by a doctor and recorded as evidence.
- 4. Save other evidence.** This could be clothing that was damaged (do not wash the clothes), SMS conversations or photos.
- 5. Save receipts.** Sometimes you can be reimbursed for any expenses associated with the crime afterwards, such as medicine, travel, or a psychologist.
- 6. Report the crime to the police.** You can do this at the police station or by calling the telephone number 114 14. The police speak Swedish and English, but you also have the right to an interpreter. You do not have to be certain that a crime was committed when you make a police report. As a parent, you need to help the child with the police report.
- 7. Contact the insurance company.** You can report injuries and damage to the insurance company and receive compensation for psychological or physical injuries, as well as material and financial damages.
- 8. Seek support.** Crime victims, witnesses and relatives have the right to support throughout the entire legal process, even if they do not wish to report the incident to the police. Siblings of child crime victims may also need support.



HELPFUL INFORMATION ABOUT THE LEGAL PROCESS

- Crime victims have the right to receive information regarding police decisions and the right to an interpreter, such as during questioning by the police. This also applies to children.
- You do not need a Swedish personal identity number to file a police report.
- Everyone has the right to victim support, whether or not they are Swedish citizens.
- In many cases, it may take a long time to hear anything from the police after submitting a report; if you have questions about the case, you can call 114 14. If an investigation is initiated, the police usually begin by calling the person who was victimized for questioning, followed by witnesses. The crime victim has the right to know if and when the perpetrator has been contacted.
- If the investigation is closed, you have the right to appeal the decision.

- Children receive special support from a legal adviser throughout the legal process.
- If the case goes to trial, the victim can receive damages from the perpetrator. The legal adviser can help with this matter.
- Almost all courts provide witness support, people who explain and show how the trial works for all visitors. They can be contacted prior to the trial and it is also possible to visit the court before the hearing.
- The police record the deposition for children under the age of 15 so that they do not have to be present at the trial. Individuals older than 15 who find it uncomfortable to be in the courtroom can request a videoconference. This allows the young person to listen to the trial from another room.
- Children are often questioned in premises other than the police station. These facilities are called “Children’s Houses” (Barnahus) and are adapted for children. The police who conduct the hearing are specially trained for this purpose.

Official support services

Social services

Social Services (Socialtjänsten) is an authority that can be found in every municipality. People who work at Social Services are called social workers and their job is to provide support to all residents of the municipality. The job also includes counseling for children and their families. Social Services must always listen and take into account the views of the children, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In cases of domestic violence, Social Services can help with sheltered housing.

Any suspicions that a child is being abused or neglected must be reported to Social Services. This is called a suspected child abuse or neglect report. Anyone can submit a suspected child abuse or neglect report if they suspect that a child is being abused or neglected; no evidence is necessary. People who work with children

are obligated to report any concerns regarding child abuse or neglect. In such cases, Social Services will investigate the child's situation and offers support and counseling to the family based on the best interests of the child. The child may be assigned a contact person, or counseling may be provided for the entire family. These measures are completely voluntary. In some cases where the child is having a very difficult time at home, for example if there is violence against the child, Social Services may recommend temporarily removing the child from the home. This measure requires a thorough investigation and must be based on what is best for the children. Children are never taken into care because of religious concerns. The Social Welfare Board and the Administrative Court decide whether a child is to be taken into care, not the social worker at Social Services.

Support Center (Stöd-centrum)

The municipality has a special responsibility to offer support to all crime victims. Many municipalities have a Support Center for young victims of crime. This service is aimed at young people, often between the ages of 10 and 20, as well as their parents. Counselors work here, where the service is free of charge and you can be anonymous. The Support Center offers counseling, practical assistance, advice and trial support.

Family division (Familjeenheten)

The family division offers support to families with children and adolescents. A family therapist provides counseling to help the family achieve improved communication and interactions. Undergoing a crisis, such as after a burglary, may be a reason for the family to seek help. Every municipality has a family division, though the name may vary.

School

Every school has a counselor who offers counseling to students who need it. If the school becomes aware that a child has been abused at school, they have a responsibility to ensure that this abuse stops. If the school fails to do so, a complaint can be filed with the School Inspectorate, which will then investigate the case.

Child and adolescent psychiatry

If the child has major problems related to their mental well-being, you can contact Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (BUP) for support and help. You may need to wait a long time for counseling with BUP, which has a long waitlist.

VICTIM SUPPORT IN UPPSALA COUNTY

Search for this service online for current contact details.

- **Victim Support Uppsala County** is a non-profit organization that provides support to crime victims, witnesses and relatives in Uppsala County, regardless of age or type of crime.
- **Victim Support Enköping** is a non-profit organization that provides support to crime victims, witnesses and relatives in Enköping Municipality, regardless of age or type of crime.
- **Support Center for young victims of crime Uppsala** (Stödcentrum för unga brottsutsatta Uppsala) is a municipal service that provides support to child and adolescent crime victims and their family members, regardless of type of crime.
- **Children's Ombudsperson in Uppsala County** (Barnombudet i Uppsala län) is a non-profit organization that can provide guidance regarding what support or therapy is available, as well as information regarding rights, laws and guidelines.
- **TRIS – (Girls' Rights in Society)** is a non-profit organization that works against honor-related violence and oppression.
- **Social Services** (Socialtjänsten) or the family division (familjeenheten) can be contacted by calling the municipality.



Non-profit women's support centers specializing in violence in close relationships:

- Kvinnobyrån Uppsala Stadsmission
- Kvinnojouren Uppsala
- Kvinnojouren Enköping
- Kvinnojouren Liljan, Tierp och Älvkarleby
- Kvinnojouren Freja, Östhammar
- Kvinnojouren Solrosen, Heby

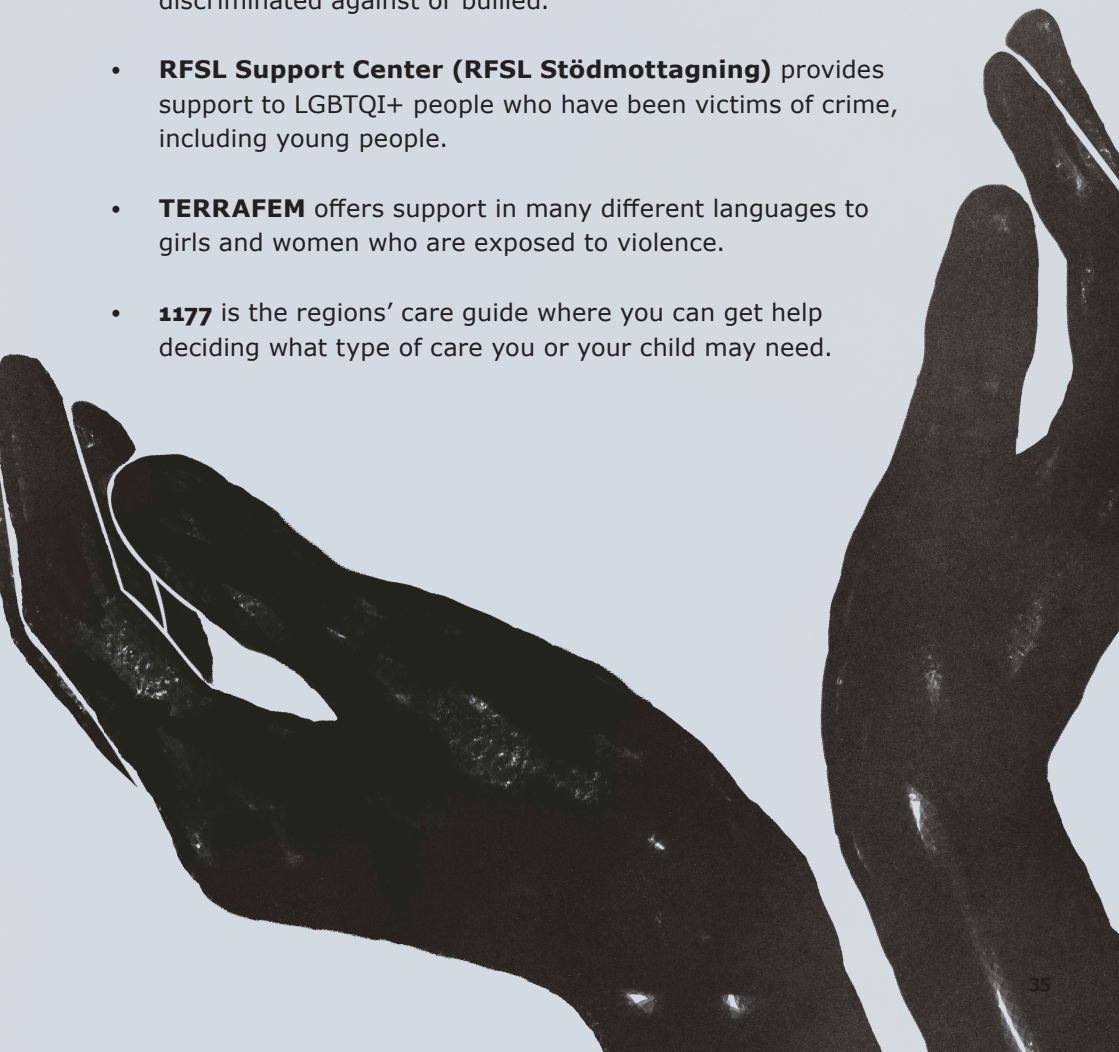
Non-profit men's shelters:

- Mansjouren Uppsala
- Mansjouren Frej, Östhammar

SERVICES THAT PROVIDE SUPPORT THROUGHOUT SWEDEN

- **BROTTSOFFERJOURN** provides support and assistance to all crime victims, witnesses and their family members.
- **BRIS (Children's Rights in Society)** provides support to children and counseling to parents.
- **The ATSUB Association** provides support to family members of sexually abused children.
- **RISE Sverige** is an association for those who have been subjected to assault or abuse in childhood.
- **The STORASYSTER (BIG SISTER) Association** provides support to young people who have been victims of sexual abuse and rape.
- **UNGARELATIONER.se** provides support to young people who are exposed to violence in close relationships.
- **UNGASJOURER.se** maintains a list of hotlines and shelters for women, men, trans people and youth in Sweden to which young people can turn if they need to talk to someone.
- **BUFFF** is an organization for children with a parent or other family member in prison and that provides support to both children and adults.
- **ECPAT** works to prevent children from being exposed to sexual abuse. They provide support to children and parents. They also help take down nude pictures that are spread online.

- **MASKROS BARN** provides support to children who are having a hard time at home, for example where there is violence, abuse, or mental illness.
- **UMO.se** is a joint website for youth clinics with information and support for young people.
- **GAPF** has a support center for people exposed to honor-related violence and oppression.
- **FRIENDS** provides support to children who are discriminated against or bullied.
- **RFSL Support Center (RFSL Stödmottagning)** provides support to LGBTQI+ people who have been victims of crime, including young people.
- **TERRAFEM** offers support in many different languages to girls and women who are exposed to violence.
- **1177** is the regions' care guide where you can get help deciding what type of care you or your child may need.



CONTACT VICTIM SUPPORT

Victim Support is a non-profit organization that is unaffiliated with any political or religious beliefs and that provides support to crime victims, witnesses and relatives. You can remain anonymous in your contact with us, the support is free of charge, we observe confidentiality and no police report is required. We provide support in over 20 different languages.

Victim Support offers support and assistance from someone who listens and understands, information about how to submit a police report, the legal process and compensation issues, support in the event of a trial, as well as help contacting the authorities and insurance companies.

For support in Swedish or English: call us at **116 006**, send an email to **fraga@boj.se**, or chat with our advisers on our website **boj.se**.

For support in other languages: fill in the contact form at **boj.se/spes**

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Support that gives power.