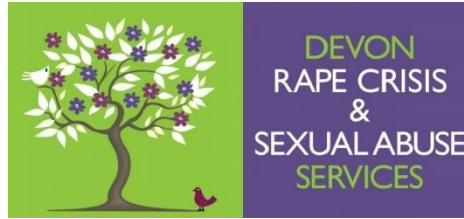


Specialist Support Work



What is Specialist Support at DRCSAS?

Specialist Support is a part of our support model, which focuses on supporting you to understand what has happened to you and how that is affecting your life now. We do this through:

- Psychoeducation – which tells you about how our brains work when we experience something traumatic and can explain and help you understand your feelings and responses following what has happened to you.
- We can offer strategies and tools for coping with the day-to-day impact of trauma. This can include grounding and breathing techniques, introductions to models of understanding trauma responses, and general self-care and coping strategies.
- We work with you to understand your needs and work creatively with you to help you find solidarity with others who have experienced Sexual Violence – this can be through group work and community events such as sea swimming, Bee Keeping, walks on Dartmoor and in nature.
- We also work with you to support and help advocate for you with other services that might be able to support with specific issues.

Specialist Support is offered over the course of 6 sessions, either weekly or fortnightly, followed by 2 follow-up sessions, 1 month and 2/3 months after the completion of support. This can be flexible, and you do not need to complete all sessions if you do not feel you need it.

We are not able to offer this service whilst you are accessing other structured support work but will always discuss with you the timings for support.

What is the difference between Specialist Support and Therapy?

Specialist support is a very flexible approach to supporting you with rebuilding your life following your experience of sexual violence. The focus is on what we describe as “trauma stabilisation” which is about helping you understand how trauma affects us, gives coping strategies and helps you build resilience and re-build confidence in yourself again.

Survivors tell us that understanding this helps them feel more in control of their experiences and that it helps them feel they can take their power back.

Specialist Support enables you to feel more connected to other survivors and your local community by looking at the support networks you already have and by introducing you to communities of support, that can help you on your recovery journey long term.

Survivors have told us it has helped them feel less alone, that what they are feeling is a normal response to a traumatic experience.

Therapy generally focusses more on processing the traumatic experience, which can be helpful for some people in their recovery journey.

What are the benefits of Specialist Support? What will I get out of it?

We understand that experiencing the trauma of Sexual Violence can make you feel extremely alone. It can be hard to share what has happened to you with your family and friends, you may be afraid of how they might respond.

The purpose of Specialist Support at DRCSAS is to firstly give you space to feel understood and believed. It is a space where you will be listened to, respected, and not judged, where we understand how complex your feelings and experiences might feel.

Every Survivor follows a different journey, we are here to help you understand and make sense of the world following your experience, to reconnect to a sense of belonging and a community of survivors that “just get it”.

Specialist Support does not require you to or want you to talk in depth about what happened to you, that is something you would do in Therapy.

Specialist Support is about focusing on the here and now, to give you tools to move forward into the future. Many of those who access Specialist Support feel this is enough to help them to move forward with their lives – often not wishing to go on to access therapy as they don't want to have to revisit or keep talking about the experience they had.

Support Planning:

- What is a Support Plan? It is a plan that we make with you to look at the areas you wish to be supported with. We will talk with you about what you hope to get from working with us, together we will then set some goals to work on with you. These goals may be something our service is able to offer, or it might be that we help you access other support.
- Who else might be part of a Support Plan? We work with other services that can help bring their own specialisms to help, so part of your support plan could be, for example, to work alongside someone from the ISVA service (Independent Sexual Violence Advisors). We will help support you along the way with this.

- What goals can I work on with DRCSAS? You can work on any goal within reason, we will try and help you find goals for yourself that feel achievable. Examples of goals you could work on might be:
 - To have coping strategies for coping with nightmares
 - To be able to attend a community group
 - To get help to be able to access support around your substance misuse
 - To write a Victim impact statement
 - To be able to have strategies for managing situations such as going to court
 - To get support to talk to your GP or to access alternative support e.g. Housing or debt advice
- Is there anything I can't work on in Specialist Support? Specialist Support workers are NOT able to help you deeply process your trauma or what has happened to you. We are here to support you in the "here and now" finding strategies to cope and understand what has happened to you, and deal with the resulting consequences or trauma symptoms, such as Nightmares or Flashbacks. We are here to help you to find re-connection and a sense of belonging, and to help you develop the tools needed to move on after experiencing sexual violence. We are here in solidarity with you whilst you find your feet on your recovery journey. Nothing can take away what has happened to you – but we can help you understand that you are not to blame, we can help you overcome any shame and support you to move forward in your journey.

Who will I work with?

You will mainly work with one of our trained and experienced Specialist Support workers, who will work alongside you to decide your goals for support.

We also have Specialist Support volunteers who may support you at times with specific activities linked to your goals, such as accessing a community group. Volunteers will also often be supporting our groups.

Will the work be 1-1?

We offer Specialist Support 1-2-1 or as a group. When it is a group setting, we will invite you to the space a week before to come and see the space and meet the Women facilitating the group. The groups are small and single gender.

Where do I need to go to receive support?

We have office bases in Exeter, Torquay and Barnstaple which you can come to, however we can be flexible to meet your needs. For example, we could also meet you in the community and do support sessions outside, whilst walking in your local park, or we

can come to your home and work with you to get out and about more – should this be something you want to work on.

Toolkit Group:

- What is the Tool Kit Group?

Specialist Support Groups currently follow a similar model to 1-2-1 Specialist Support, focusing on psychoeducation, grounding/breathing techniques, coping strategies and self-care. These will be supported where possible by the Specialist Support Volunteers.

The Specialist Support Groups currently run for 8 weeks and are 1 hour 30 minutes each week. We meet all group members on a one-to-one basis before they attend the group and meet them again after the group has finished.

The group is available as stand-alone support, as well as being available to those waiting for therapeutic support.

- What Happens in a group? Groups follow a basic plan with part of the session covering psychoeducation, grounding/breathing techniques, coping strategies and self-care and the other part doing a craft activity.
- Who Else might be in the group? There will be a small group of others who have experienced Sexual Violence. We only run single gender groups.
- How will I be kept safe?
 1. We always start groups with a 'Group Agreement' to agree how we keep each other and ourselves safe.
 2. We will also spend time with each person individually before the group begins to talk through any concerns or worries.
 3. All groups have 2 members of the team for support, and they will be able to step out of the room during sessions with you should you need some space.
- Will I need to tell others about what happened to me in the group? No - this is a space where we try to focus on the present, and you will not be asked or expected to disclose anything.

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy support can include support with accessing other services, writing letters or filling in forms, and support accessing housing/medical care/benefits advice.

We aim to respond to advocacy needs in a time-sensitive manner, depending on how urgent the need is. Advocacy support can be delivered whilst someone is on the waiting list or whilst they are accessing other support. On occasion, advocacy is all someone needs from our service, for example, onwards referrals/signposting to more appropriate services for the needs they are expressing.

What have other Survivors said about their experience of Specialist Support?

“Felt connected with other women in the group. Getting myself out of the house a bit more; helpful to have something to go out of the house for. Doing more craft/self-care activities.”

“So glad I did it. Felt like a positive experience, with a shared understanding and respect shared within the group. I felt understood, heard and connected, and have formed a friendship outside of the group too.”

“I’m So grateful for DRCSAS group support; I’ve noticed significant changes in feelings of safety and feels like a massive achievement to have been able to come along to the group and stay for the duration. Really enjoyed the craft elements and have continued to do this in my own time.”

What adjustments can you make to help me access Specialist Support and give my best?

There are several ways we can support you to give your best, these could include:

- Finding a space that works for you, for example: wheelchair accessible spaces, online sessions or visiting you at home
- Working with you to find a time that works best for you to meet with us or to attend groups
- Giving you opportunities to share your views on the support we offer – that we will then use to improve our services
- We can be flexible and creative with supporting you – this might be going for a walk with you or supporting you to attend a community group.
- Offering you women only spaces as well as offering All gender spaces.

What if I still want or need therapy?

Currently, we are not adding anymore names to our Therapy Waiting list. This is because we understand, from our work with our Lived Experience group and other feedback, that waiting for therapy makes people feel more alone and like their life is in limbo.

Our current waiting list is very long, and we don’t feel comfortable making anyone wait for years for the support they need.

What we absolutely will do is help support you to find alternative options for therapy, this will not be a recommendation to a particular therapist as choosing a therapist is a very personal journey and its best for you to choose this for yourself. We will help by:

- Providing a leaflet with tips on how to find a therapist
- Signposting to services that have low cost/no cost services
- Helping to make onward referrals to other services such as Talkworks

What alternative support can I access?

We are also developing a menu of community events that you will be able to access, we have found these events have created opportunities to connect in solidarity with other Survivors, help connect you to nature which has therapeutic and healing properties itself, and helps Survivors build a sense of “belonging” in a world where Sexual Violence makes you feel alone.

Some of our past community events include Sea swimming, Bee keeping, Walks on Dartmoor, drumming workshops, sleepy yoga, dance, and sound baths.

As we find more opportunities to collaborate with other organisations who are kind enough to support us with these events, we are developing a booking system which will allow you to book onto events.

Is Specialist Support work appropriate if I am pre-trial?

Yes – all our services can be accessed if you are pre-trial, we work in line with the CPS guidance on pre-trial support. DRCSAS is accredited with the Bluestar Project, and this means we have worked with an organisation who has delivered training to us, completed an audit of our service and have approved us as a centre to work safely with those survivors going through the criminal justice system following the reporting of their sexual violence. We can discuss this further if you have any worries or concerns.