**The reporting, investigation and court process for victims of sexual violence**

For more advice, videos and resources visit the Victims Information: For people affected by sexual violence website at sexualviolence.victimsinfo.govt.nz

Step 1: Sexual assault happens

It’s your choice whether or not to tell the police what happened to you.

Step 2: Report assault to the police

You can do this over the phone or by going to a police station.

Step 3: Police investigation

It’s hard to say how long the investigation will take, however police will keep in touch with you.

Note: The decision whether to arrest the suspect and prosecute will be based on a number of factors including all the evidence available and other considerations.

Step 4: Arrest and charging

The process now moves from the New Zealand Police to the Courts of New Zealand.

It could be months or more than a year between arrest and trial.

During the trial, the person accused of the crime is called the defendant.

Step 5: Plea

The defendant can choose to plead guilty or not guilty.

If the defendant pleads guilty the case will go straight to sentencing (usually at a later date). More information on sentencing is given in step 8.

If the defendant pleads not guilty the case will go to trial. From the time the defendant enters a plea, it can take up to 1 year or more for the case to get to trial.

The defendant can choose to have a judge-alone trial or a jury trial. Jury trials are more common than judge-alone trials.

Step 6: Trial

You can be shown around the court and meet the prosecutor before the trial.

The average length of a trial is 2-4 days.

During the trial, the victim is called a witness. As a witness you have to be at court to give evidence.

After the trial the jury or judge decides on the verdict, this can take a few hours.

Step 7: Verdict

There are three possible verdicts, these are:

1. Not-guilty of all charges. The defendant is free to go.
2. Hung jury. The jury cannot agree. There may be another trial.
3. Guilty. The defendant is found guilty on all or some of the charges. The defendant will then need to be sentenced. This can take place 4 weeks or more after the trial.

Step 8: Sentencing

The judge decides what happens next to the defendant, taking into account a number of factors including the impact on you.

Your victim impact statement is the way to tell the judge this. You may be able to read it out in court.

If you are concerned about your safety you can ask for a protection order as part of the sentence.

Step 9: Defendant may appeal

Note: This is optional for the defendant.

Step 10: Post sentence

If you are on the victim notification register, you will be contacted if the defendant is released on parole.

End of process.