

5. Preserving or Protecting Evidence

Note: In traumatic situations, it may not be possible to follow this guidance exactly. Do the best you can.

Your first responsibility is the **safety and welfare of the abused person**, but immediate action may be necessary to preserve or protect evidence.

Your action may be vital in any future proceedings and the success or failure of any investigation may depend upon what you **do** or **not do** in the time whilst you are waiting for the Police to arrive.

5.1 Incidents of Physical and/or Sexual Assault

Following allegations of physical and/or sexual assault, consideration will be given to organising, with the abused adult's consent, a medical examination. Any examination will ideally be carried out by a Forensic Medical Examiner who will be contacted by the Police.

- If the abused person has a physical injury and it is appropriate for you to examine it, always obtain their consent first.
- Only touch what you have to. Wherever possible, leave things as they are.
- Strongly advise the abused person not to wash or remove clothing.
- Preserve the abused person's clothing and footwear, do not wash or wipe them. Handle them as little as possible.
- Preserve anything that is used to comfort the abused person, for example, a blanket.
- Do not clean up, do not wash anything or in any way remove fibres, blood and the like.
- Try not to touch items/weapons. If you have to, as before keep handling to a minimum. Put them in a clean dry place until the Police collect them.
- The room should be secured and no-one allowed to enter unless necessary to support you, the abused person and/or the alleged perpetrator, until the Police arrive.
- If the alleged perpetrator is also a service user, a separate member of staff needs to be assigned to them.

5.2 Incidents of Theft/Financial Abuse

With the person's consent, secure all receipts, bankbooks, bank statements, benefit books and the like.

5.3 **Methods of Preservation**

- For most items use clean paper, a clean paper bag or a clean envelope. Do not lick the envelope to seal it.
- For liquids, use a clean glass.
- Do **not** handle items unless really necessary to move and make safe.