

SURVIVING UNIVERSAL UK

ACCOUNTABILITY IS  
NOT PERSECUTION.

# The Exit Kit

For people leaving cults,  
high-control religions, or  
coercive faith groups

Created by Surviving  
Universal UK



# You are safe here

Welcome.

If you're reading this, you might be preparing to leave a harmful religious group or cult – or maybe you've already left and want to take your power back.

Either way, this pack was made for you.

Inside this kit, you'll find:

- Legal tools to stop contact and harassment
  - Templates to request your data
  - A risk assessment checklist
- Support resources and safety tips

If you are a young person under 18, from page 6 you'll find advice and support specifically for your age

You are not alone.

You are not overreacting.

You are reclaiming your autonomy – step by step.



# Just a word before we get into it...

This Exit kit is not legal advice – it's real talk, survivor-informed guidance, and practical tools to help you stay safe and take back control.

Everything here is based on current UK safeguarding law, GDPR, best practice, and lived experience. But every situation is different, and leaving a high-control group can come with risks.

If you're in danger now, please dial 999  
If you're mentally in crisis, dial 111

Use this resource in whatever way helps you most – take what you need, leave what you don't, and move at your own pace. You are the expert on your own life. And you are not alone.



# Legal Glossary – Know Your Rights, On Your Terms.

## A plain-language guide to key legal terms used in this toolkit:

### General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

This is the UK's data protection law that gives individuals rights over how their personal information is collected, stored, used, and shared. It allows you to access your data, request corrections, or have it deleted entirely – also known as the right to erasure.

### Subject Access Request (SAR)

Your legal right to ask an organisation for all the personal data they hold about you – including messages, photos, videos, financial records, and internal notes. (UK GDPR, Article 15)

### Right to Erasure (Right to Be Forgotten)

Your right to ask an organisation to delete all personal data they hold about you, including contact info, photos, or group records – without delay. (UK GDPR, Article 17)

### Harassment

Repeated, unwanted contact or behaviour that causes you distress or fear. Includes unwanted messages, stalking, or showing up after being told to stop. (Protection from Harassment Act 1997)

### Data Breach

When an organisation misuses or fails to protect your personal data – including ignoring a data deletion request, sharing your info without consent, or contacting you unlawfully.

### ICO (Information Commissioner's Office)

The UK regulator for data protection and privacy rights. You can report organisations that misuse your data at [ico.org.uk](https://ico.org.uk)

### Coercive Control

A pattern of behaviour that isolates, manipulates, and dominates you – including spiritual, emotional, or psychological control. Now recognised in UK law (Serious Crime Act 2015).

# One more thing before we start...

This is a reminder that this toolkit is simply guidance.

You have already started taking your power back, don't stop now! The following guidance is not one size fits all. We all come from unique and complex places.

It's important to remember that you are in the driver's seat. Always try and follow your instincts and do what's best for you.

I hope that this toolkit helps you to feel seen, and lets you know you have options and rights.

Things may seem hectic now, but take it from someone who's been out the other side-  
It will be alright. You are not alone.

Sincerely,  
*Rachael Reign*  
*Founder & Director*  
*Surviving Universal UK*



# What if I'm under 18?

If you're under 18 and want to leave a group that feels controlling or off – first of all, you're not alone, and you're not wrong for feeling that way.

Whether it's a church, social or youth group, or something else that's making you uncomfortable, you have rights, and there's help out there.

This first section is specifically for you. No pressure. No judgement. Just facts to help you through this time.



# First Things First: Are You Safe?

If you're in danger right now – like someone's threatening you, hurting you, monitoring you, or you feel scared:

**If you're in danger right now – like someone's threatening you, hurting you, monitoring you, or you feel scared:**

- *Call 999 (if you can't talk, press 55 when they answer and they'll know you need help)*
- *Talk to any adult you trust – a teacher, youth worker, neighbour, friend's parent or trusted adult family member*
- *Call Childline: 0800 1111 – open 24/7, totally free*
- *Or text SHOUT to 85258 for confidential support*

***Your safety matters. You matter.***



# What Counts as Abuse?

Sometimes stuff that feels normal in your group...  
isn't.

If you're being:

- Told you're possessed, sinful, or rebellious unless you obey
  - Forced to fast, confess, or go through "deliverance"
- Pressured to give money, always be in church or "serve" all the time
- Made to cut off friends, family, school, or online access
  - Told that you're not allowed to be LGBTQ+ or friends with those who are
- Punished for asking questions or speaking your mind

That's not just strict. That's harmful – and it's not okay.



# If You're Thinking "I Want Out"...

Leaving can feel scary

You might be thinking:

*"What if my parents don't believe me?"*

*"What if I've got nowhere to go?"*

*"What if I get in trouble?"*

Those thoughts are valid. Cults and high-control groups are designed to make you feel trapped. But there is a way out – and you don't have to do it alone.



# Here's where to start:

Talk to Someone You Trust  
That could be:

- Ideally a parent or guardian (but only if you feel safe)
- A friend's parent, trusted adult family member
  - A teacher or social worker
  - Your GP or other healthcare professionals

And of course Surviving Universal UK is here if you feel that you have no one safe to talk to.

How do I start the conversation with a trusted person?

You could say something like:

“Can I talk to you about something that's been going on? It's personal and kind of hard to explain, but I don't feel safe where I am.”

If you're not sure how to start the convo, write it down or show them this kit.



# 2. Know Your Rights

In the UK, you don't have to stay in a group that's controlling, harmful, or unsafe – even if your family is in it.

You have the right to:

- Say no to religious stuff that feels scary or abusive
- Be protected from harm, even at home
  - Speak to a social worker or safeguarding person at school or college
- Choose your own beliefs, values, and future

And if someone's saying "you'll be cursed" or "God will punish you" for leaving – that's manipulation, not love.



# Remember:

Your life doesn't belong to anyone else. You get to choose who you are.

## Helplines Just for You

Childline – Call 0800 1111

Open 24/7, totally free, you don't have to give your name.

Shout – Text SHOUT to 85258

Text anytime, day or night, and get support from a real person.

NSPCC – 0808 800 5000

For young people or anyone worried about a child.

The Mix – 0808 808 4994

Support for anyone under 25, including mental health, home life, and religion

Remember Surviving Universal UK is here to help you with anything you are not sure about.

Send a DM, we've got you.



**The rest of this  
Exit Kit is for  
anyone over the age  
of 18 where  
different  
Safeguards  
apply**



# Choose Your Path

The following will help you to identify where you are now, and choose the safest way to proceed.



# “I’m ready to act now”

Option 1:

Stop Contact + Request Your Data

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# “I’m not ready yet – but I want to prepare”

Option 2: Plan your exit, limit contact, and delay requesting anything...

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# “I don’t feel safe”

Option 3: Pause. Focus on safety. Get the support you need.



# Option 1: Stop Contact + Request Your Data

What is this step, and why does it matter?

This option helps you:

1. Stop the group from contacting you
2. Legally request access to the data they hold about you (emails, videos, messages, etc.)



# Option 1

Firstly, it's advisable to exercise your right to see what data the group holds regarding you. Based on UK GDPR law (Article 15). This is useful if you ever want to report abuse, take legal action, or understand what records exist. It may not seem important now, but later on in this toolkit you will understand why it's a wise idea.

When submitting the access request for your data, you can also inform them that you do not want to be contacted...

**More info and template coming up.**

*Note: Some groups may react strongly. This is why you will find a risk assessment a few slides away to help you decide whether to send this now, later, or through an advocate.*



# Option 1: Request Template

Subject: Subject Access Request and No-Contact Notice

[Group Name],

*I am requesting access to all personal data you hold about me under Article 15 of the UK GDPR. This includes emails, photos, videos, attendance records, reports and communications involving me.*

*While this is being processed, I request that no member of your organisation contacts me for any reason. I do not consent to further communication and will treat any contact as harassment.*

*Please confirm receipt of this request and action within one calendar month, as per GDRR regulation.*

*Sincerely,*

[Your Full Name-the name they know you as]

[Name or address you attended group]

[Your Contact Email – or use a new one]

# Option 1:

## If things go wrong...

We understand that we may not be dealing with the most honest and ethical groups. Some groups are not above tampering with data, so here's some advice.

BEFORE making your intention to leave known, ensure you gather as much evidence as possible. This could be:

- Taking screenshots of abusive and controlling chats and emails (including group chats where others are being abused, controlled or groomed)

- ONLY IF YOU FEEL SAFE-Record incriminating conversations that may be used as evidence of your experiences

- Taking pictures or videos of things you know the group may deny down the line

After you have gathered your own evidence, you can move onto formally requesting information.

- If you feel that the group may/be swiping incrimination evidence that they know they hold, then you are urged to report this to the ICO urgently.

If you feel the group is withholding information regarding your request, you are also urged to contact the [ICO](#).

# Risk Assessment Tool

Is It Safe to Send the request Now?

Before you send a data request or boundary message to your group, pause and check in with your safety. This quick self-assessment will help you decide whether now is the right time – or if you may need a different approach.



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# If you would like Surviving Universal UK to advocate for you...

Surviving Universal UK has a consent letter template for us to act on your behalf and request the information and set boundaries for No-Contact. If you would feel more comfortable going down this route, please email [Info@survivinguniversaluk.org](mailto:Info@survivinguniversaluk.org) with Exit Kit in the subject line.

## **Risk Assessment Checklist**

**How many of these apply?**

- I've already left the group or reduced my contact**
- I have blocked group members or leaders on social media and phone**
- I'm not living with anyone still in the group**
- I feel emotionally steady enough to handle pushback or guilt tactics**
- The group has not harassed others who've left**
- I have support from a friend, advocate, therapist, or trusted person**
- I feel safe to use my real name and contact info when submitting the letter**





## If you ticked fewer than 4 boxes you may want to:

- Delay sending the requests until you feel more secure
- Ask a trusted person to submit it on your behalf  
(Surviving Universal UK can do this for you, but you have to sign a consent letter, see next page)
- Use a new or anonymous email address to create distance
- Focus on safety and support first – then come back to this step later

# Your Safety Comes First

**The truth is, here's no prize for being brave. If sending these requests puts you at risk, take your time. You can still reclaim your power – just at a pace that honours your reality.**

**Surviving Universal UK is here to support you.**

**Email:  
[support@survivinguniversaluk.org](mailto:support@survivinguniversaluk.org)**



# **Next, request for them to clear your data**

**If you still feel that option 1 is the way for you, after requesting and receiving your subject access request, its time to get the group to remove your data.**

**This will directly combat potential harassment and blowback from the group because they will not have your data! In this section you will find a copy and past ready template you can use.**



# **Next, request for them to clear your data**

**It's worth noting that some groups may try and be difficult. But as always, knowing and standing up for your rights is going to be key.**

**According to the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) all non-statutory bodies (NHS, Social Services, police...) must comply with a Right of Erasure request. While compiling this toolkit, we've been in contact with the ICO, and they have confirmed a few things for us:...**



# Right to Erasure request

***-The group MUST be reasonable with accepting a request.***

***-As a requestee, it is advisable to submit any identifying information which proves you are who you say you are (this could be as simple as including which location or branch you were a member of the group, or even photographs of yourself in the group. You do NOT need to submit ID or fill out additional forms if it is a known fact that you were a member.***

***-If despite your best efforts to confirm you are who you say you are, the group continues to be unreasonable, you can then make a formal complaint to the ICO [here](#)***



# Right to Erasure request

**If you are ever unsure on your rights on data protection, the ICO is here to help.**

**Contact their helpline on  
0303 123 1113 or via their  
website**



# Request for Erasure Template

Subject: Request: Right of Erasure of Personal Data

[branch/location you attended, any position held]

[Group Name],

Under Article 17 of the UK GDPR, I am exercising my legal Right to Erasure and request that all personal data you hold about me be deleted without delay. This includes **all** contact details, social media handles, financial records, photos, addresses and videos.

I also request that this erasure extends to all individuals within your organisation who may store my data.

The only further communication I expect is confirmation that my data has been erased. I expect this request to be action within 1 calendar month as per GDPR guidelines.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Today's date]



# Option 2: I'm Not Ready Yet

Plan your exit, limit contact, and delay sending anything...

Leaving a high-control group or cult is not something you have to do all at once. You don't owe anyone speed. You owe yourself safety.

If you're not ready to submit a formal request, or let your intentions be known-that's okay. You can still take steps right now to protect your peace and prepare for later.



# What you can do now:

- Mute or restrict them on social media*
- Use a notes app or private folder to document experiences, threats, or patterns*
- Begin gathering personal items, bank info, and important paperwork quietly if needed*
- Speak to one trusted person outside the group (friend, family member, partner or Surviving Universal UK or similar trusted groups The Family Survival Trust is our most trusted fellow support and advocacy group)*
- Spend some time watching Surviving Universal UK content on social media. Many people find comfort and strength in knowing there are others who are and have faced similar challenges.*
- Quiet quit! Start to cut down on attendance and engagement in the group. This is sometimes less traumatic than suddenly leaving all together. Ease yourself into your new normal, away from the group.*



# Option 2: Remember...

This is your exit. It's not about being brave enough to fight today. It's about setting things up so that when you are ready, you're not starting from scratch. You can come back to this toolkit when the time is right.



# Option 3: I Do Not Feel Safe

If your physical safety or mental wellbeing is at risk, it's time to pause. Your safety comes first. This is not the time to send letters or escalate tension.

You are not weak for pausing. You are wise for protecting yourself...



# Signs you should not overlook

- You are being watched, followed, or stalked
- You live with someone still involved in the group
- You've received threats of harm, exposure, or retaliation
- You feel constantly panicked, frozen, or overwhelmed
- You're afraid that leaving could trigger violence or surveillance

Here's actions you can take now...



**SAFETY  
FIRST**



# Option 3:

## What You Can Do

- Contact the police on 101 and report harassment or threats (or 999 if it's an emergency)
- Save any voicemails, messages, screenshots, or evidence in a secure folder
- Avoid confrontation or explanation – you don't need to justify your silence or distance
- Reach out to Surviving Universal UK  
[info@survivinguniversaluk.org](mailto:info@survivinguniversaluk.org)
- Connect with a local domestic abuse or safeguarding service, even if you're unsure if it qualifies

*Remember: This toolkit will still be here for you when it's safe to use.*

*But right now, please prioritise one thing: your survival. That is the most powerful act of resistance there is.*

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## Did you know...

That the NHS now has a dedicated emergency mental health helpline? Dial **111** to access urgent mental health support 24/7



# What to Do If They Keep Contacting You After You've Said No

You've made it clear:

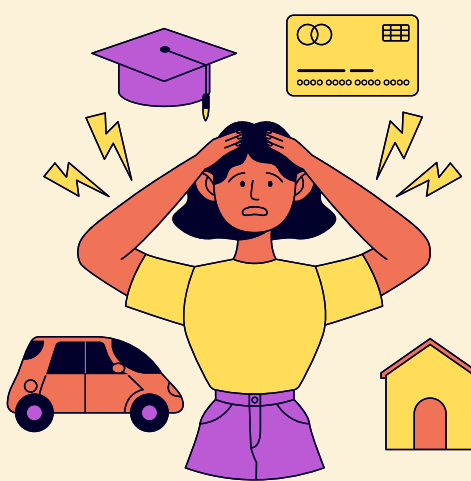
- You've left the group
- You submitted your Right to Be Erased request
- You told them to stop contacting you
- You blocked numbers, changed emails, and tried to move on

But they're still:

- Messaging you from new numbers
- Emailing/DMing you after you've asked them to stop
- Watching your social media or making fake profiles
- Turning up at your home, school, work, or places of worship
- Sending other members to guilt-trip or "check in" on you

This is not friendly follow-up.

This is harassment. And it's illegal.



# Your Rights Under the Law

Once you've told someone clearly and directly to stop contacting you, any further contact without your consent is harassment under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997.

**This includes:**

- Persistent unwanted contact
- Emotional intimidation or guilt-tripping
- Showing up at your home, school, workplace, or events
- Online stalking, fake accounts, or message chains from other members



# When to Involve the Police

If you feel unsafe or overwhelmed, you can and should report it.

You don't need to have physical violence or threats for it to count as a crime.

## Report to Police If...

- The group contacts you multiple times after being blocked
- They've ignored your Right to Be Erased request
- They show up uninvited anywhere you are
- You have evidence of stalking, intimidation, or distress

Call 101 (non-emergency) or 999 if you feel in danger



# Involving the Police

## Keep records:

- Screenshot texts, emails, or story views
- Log the dates and times of each incident
  - Save voicemails, blocked messages, DMs

Try to keep everything in a folder – even if you don't report right away



# Reporting to the ICO (Data Protection Breach)

If you submitted a Right to Erasure request and they:

- Ignored it
- Shared your data after you left
- Continued contacting you or let members access your info

This is a data breach under UK GDPR.  
How to report to the ICO:

1. Either by phone or online [here](#)
2. Select: Concerns about an organisation's handling of your data
3. Fill in the details about the group and your request
4. Upload your letter and any follow-up you received

They'll investigate and may issue warnings or penalties to the organisation.



## Helpful resources:

Apart from Surviving Universal UK, there are 3 other helpful resources available

The Family Survival Trust offers a wealth of cult education resources as well as support

Faith to Faithless offers a helpline for people leaving high control groups or religions.

Victim Support is an excellent way to keep records of your experience and receive support

All information in this toolkit is up to date as of July 2025. Changes in law and policy will be regularly implemented to ensure that this kit is always current.

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# The Exit Kit

We truly hope this Exit Kit helps. We know that this may be one of the most hardest times in your time, so thank you for allowing Surviving Universal UK to be part of this journey.

If you have any questions, comments or just need to talk, Surviving Universal UK is [here](#).



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# The Exit Kit

This Exit Kit was created by Rachael Reign with input from fellow survivors of cultic and spiritual abuse.

Surviving Universal UK is a grassroots, survivor-led movement committed to exposing coercive control, supporting and advocating for victims and survivors, and changing the systems that failed us.

Every word, resource, and tool in this kit was built with care, lived experience, and community wisdom. Please honour the work, and the people behind it.

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