

Introduction

Sexual assault is a violent, humiliating and traumatic experience. If you have been sexually assaulted you may experience a range of feelings and reactions.

This pamphlet will identify some of the common reactions and suggest ways of coping with them.

How You Might Feel

Relieved

The assault is over and you survived.

Fearful

A lot of things that felt safe before may no longer seem that way. You might feel scared or threatened in familiar places or situations – being at home, going out, being in a crowd, or walking to work.

Powerless & Helpless

Rape is a violation of your right to control what happens to you, your body, your emotions and your senses. It can leave you feeling that nothing you do or say matters anymore.

Ashamed & Embarrassed

You might feel that you are different from everybody else or that people will know that you have been raped.

Confused

You may have a lot of confused emotions, cry a lot or you may just feel numb. Sometimes people want to forget all about the rape or find it is too hard to talk about at first.

Angry

You might be angry at your attacker or at the fact that there are men who rape. Sometimes anger is wrongly directed at yourself because you think you should have been able to avoid the attack. The list of "if onlys" can be endless and this can leave you feeling guilty even though you are in no way to blame.

Other Reactions

The way you feel about yourself might change. Some people feel dirty and unclean and spend time trying to wash that feeling away. Others have trouble sleeping or develop eating difficulties after sexual assault. You might also find that you search through everything that happened prior to the assault looking for a reason for why it happened.

Your behaviour did not cause the assault. The only person responsible for the assault is the man who raped you.

Being raped may also affect how you feel about relationships. It is very important that you regain control – establishing with whom, where, how and when you have contact.

You may not want to have sex or be touched even by people you are close to, or you may feel a great need for physical contact and comfort.

Coping

As already mentioned in this pamphlet, most people will experience a range of reactions after being sexually assaulted.

This is normal and to be expected – you are not going "crazy".

Given the trauma you have experienced, it is really important to take care of yourself and have support available.

The following suggestions are intended as a guide only. You may already have ways of coping that work well for you.

Remember, people can and do deal with the impact of sexual assault on their life. You will not always feel like this.

Looking After Yourself

- Seek out support from people who are important to you, try not to isolate yourself
- Write down how you are feeling
- Get plenty of rest even if you find it difficult
- Make time for relaxation
- Get regular exercise such as walking, cycling or swimming
- Talk it through with someone you trust eg: friend, counsellor, family member
- Try to eat regular and well balanced meals

After an assault you may find you use of alcohol, drugs or other stimulants such as coffee, cigarettes and chocolate increases. It is important to keep in mind other coping strategies may be more healthier.

Ideas for Relaxation and Release of Stress

- listen to music
- read a book or magazine
- meditate
- go for a walk
- do some gardening
- ask a friend to give you a massage
- work out at the gym
- cook a nice meal
- try techniques like yoga, aromatherapy
- spent time with pets
- take deep breaths
- relax in a warm bath
- watch TV or go to the movies
- if you have children, ask a friend to mind them and have some quiet time to yourself.

Yarrow Place Services

A range of counselling and medical services which may be accessed according to individual need:

- 24 hour crisis response for recent assault which can include counselling and/or medical
- Counselling support for recent victims of rape
- Long term counselling if requested or required
- Support for those close to the survivor of rape and sexual assault is very important for healing. Support persons such as family members, partners and friends are offered a limited number of counselling sessions at Yarrow Place. This provides an opportunity for support people to express their reactions to what happened, to explore coping strategies and to discuss how to support the survivor.
- Specialised medical care and follow-up
- Collection of forensic evidence as requested by those people who have made, or may wish to make, a complaint to police
- Group programs offered throughout the year
- Education, training and consultation for workers
- Community Education to increase knowledge and awareness

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Coping After Sexual Assault

feelings and reactions



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