

Your Reactions to Sexual Assault

Rape and sexual assault are traumatic experiences that may interrupt your life at home, at work, and at school, and possibly affect your relationships with partners, friends, family, and coworkers. You have survived the assault; now you can begin to recover. This process can be slow and confusing, but with understanding and persistence you can overcome the ordeal or at least begin the road to recovery.

After an assault you may experience a wide range of physical and emotional symptoms, including some that may not seem to result directly from the attack. Learning to recognize these symptoms will be helpful. Although there are some common reactions to the trauma of sexual assault, each person will respond in his/her own unique way. It is likely you'll experience different levels of intensity of some of these reactions, immediately or later in life. You may also experience some symptoms that are not on this list.

Some Common Reactions:

Physical

- Soreness
- Lack of energy
- Physical injuries (cuts, bruises, broken bones, etc.)
- Changes in eating patterns (loss of appetite or overeating)
- Sleep disturbances
- Nightmares
- Muscular tension
- Sexually transmitted Infections
- Involuntary shaking
- Flashbacks

Emotional

- Shock/sense of disbelief
- Fear
- Numbness
- Depression/sadness
- Anxiety
- Powerlessness
- Guilt/shame/embarrassment
- Mood swings
- Anger
- Irritability
- Despair/hopelessness

Cognitive

- Difficulty concentrating
- Memory problems
- Questions such as:
 - what will people think?
 - will they blame me?
 - will others reject me?
 - why did this happen to me?
 - what if I hadn't...?
 - if I forget about it, will it will go away?
 - Did I somehow deserve this?

Social

- Withdrawal
- Afraid to be alone
- Fear/uncomfortable around other people
- Afraid/nervous in crowds
- Difficulty trusting others
- Difficult time relaxing
- Sexual inhibition or promiscuity
- Difficulties/apprehension around people of the same gender as perpetrator