



Sexual Assault Survivors

This *Quick Look* has been written for you, the sexual assault survivor. In a brief moment in time someone who chose to indulge his sinful passion for power and control chose you. Your life will never be the same again. You cannot undo the reality of the assault nor the aftereffects that continue to shake your sense of safety and security. But hope and healing are possible. It will involve a commitment to move out of denial and a willingness to let others walk beside you through the valley of secrecy, guilt, shame, doubt, and fear that you now walk alone. Whether the assault happened yesterday or years ago, there is a way out of the pain.

What to do immediately following an assault:

1. Go to a safe place. Check to be sure the windows and doors are locked and that the assailant did not take the keys to your residence or car.
2. If you want to report the crime, notify the police immediately. Reporting the crime can help you regain a sense of personal power and control and can also ensure the safety of other potential victims.
3. Call a friend, family member, or someone else you trust and ask her/him to go with you to get medical attention or file a police report.
4. Preserve all physical evidence of the assault. Do not shower, bathe, douche, or brush your teeth. Save all the clothing you were wearing at the time of the assault. Place each item of clothing in a separate paper bag. Do not disturb anything in the area where the assault occurred.
5. Go to a hospital emergency department to get medical attention. Even if you think that you do not have any physical injuries, you should have a medical examination and discuss with a health care provider the risk of exposure to sexually transmitted diseases and the possibility of pregnancy resulting from the sexual assault.
6. If you suspect that you may have been given a rape drug, ask the hospital or clinic where you receive medical care to take a urine sample. Rape drugs, such as Rohypnol and GHB, are more likely to be detected in urine than in blood up to 24 hours after the assault.
7. Write down everything you remember about the attack, including a description of the assailant. It's easier to do this now than when feeling pressured to remember later.
8. Arrange for someone to stay with you for a few days or plan to spend time at a friend's home until you feel ready to be alone again.
9. Keep the follow-up appointments with your physician.
10. Talk with a counselor who is trained to assist rape victims with the emotional and physical impact of assault. You can contact a rape crisis center or counseling agency to find someone who understands the trauma of rape and knows how to help.¹

- ✓ Nearly 60% of rape victims are under the age of 18
- ✓ More rape victims experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder than Vietnam veterans
- ✓ Sexual assault continues to represent the most rapidly growing violent crime in America
- ✓ For every rape reported, 10 are not

Some common reactions to sexual assault include:

- **Shock and disbelief.**
Feeling numb and dazed, withdrawn and distant from other people.
Desire to avoid people and places that remind you of the assault.
- **Remembering what happened and what it felt like.**
Unwanted memories, flashbacks, or nightmares.
Re-experiencing some of the sensations and feelings you had during the assault, such as fear and powerlessness.
- **Intense emotions.**
Anger, anxiety, grief, depression.

¹ www.911rape.org, Rape Treatment Center, Santa Monica—UCLA Medical Center.

- **Physical symptoms.**
Sleep disturbances, headaches, stomachaches, difficulty concentrating, and loss of interest in things formerly enjoyed.
- **Fear.**
Fear about personal safety, feeling powerless and vulnerable.
- **Self-blame and shame.**
Feeling dirty, devalued, humiliated, shameful or guilty.²

Some women experience more intense reactions. It is not uncommon for rape survivors to experience post-traumatic symptoms. If these symptoms are affecting your ability to effectively deal with normal life, an experienced, qualified counselor can help you make sense of what is happening:

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| 1) Re-experiencing the event through vivid memories or flashbacks | 5) Crying uncontrollably | 8) Being extremely moody, irritable, angry, suspicious, or frightened |
| 2) Feeling emotionally numb | 6) Isolating oneself from family and friends, avoiding social situations | 9) Experiencing disturbance in sleep, either too much or too little; nightmares |
| 3) Feeling overwhelmed by or diminished ability in performing normal tasks | 7) Relying increasingly on alcohol or drugs (prescription, over the counter, or illicit) to get through the day | 10) Feeling afraid and a sense of doom about the future ³ |
| 4) Developing unusual interests | | |

Personal thoughts for rape survivors

- The assault was not your fault. The rape occurred because one person, ruled by his sinful passion (to control, subdue, and humiliate), chose you. You did not choose to be raped. Most rapes happen in the home of the victim, the rapist, or a friend, and 82% of rape victims know the person who raped them. The rapist chose you because you were available. That also means that, most likely, there was some degree of trust in place which the rapist chose to betray.
- You may be feeling guilty about giving in to your attacker, wishing that you had resisted him or resisted harder. In reality, you made the best choice that you could in the middle of the crisis – and you survived! Being raped did not fundamentally change your character, values, strengths, or positive attributes. It was a bad thing that happened to you, not because of you.
- It is okay to ask for help. You may feel that if you avoid talking about the assault, you will be able to forget about what happened, or at the very least keep the pain in tolerable proportions. Most survivors who try this approach eventually realize they need to talk to someone. If unresolved feelings and fears are holding you back from enjoying your life and participating fully in relationships, talking about the assault can help relieve some of the control it has over you and help you begin the process of recovery. A counselor who is trained to assist sexual assault victims will be able to understand the unique concerns you have and know ways to help you cope with the physical and emotional effects of the assault. A counselor can also help you deal with the reactions of family members and friends.

*God is near to the
brokenhearted
And saves those crushed
in spirit.
Psalm 34:18*

It is not unusual for rape trauma symptoms to begin weeks, months, or years after a sexual assault. You may have been able to put the event behind you and gone on with life for a long time. Then, as if out of nowhere, you began to have nightmares, flashbacks, distressing emotions, or other symptoms that leave you feeling unsure of yourself. You may wonder if you are going crazy. Sometimes life events (the birth of a child, a death, a glimpse of someone who reminds you of your assailant, a movie, or other event) trigger symptoms that are frightening and confusing.

Resources

Will I Ever Be OK Again?, Kay Scott.
On the Threshold of Hope, Diane Langberg.
Invisible Wounds, Candace Walters.
www.safeplaceministries.com

² Adapted from www.911rape.org, Rape Treatment Center, Santa Monica – UCLA Medical Center.

³ American Counseling Association, *10 Ways to Recognize Post-Traumatic Stress*.