

What you may be feeling....

Common reactions to sexual assault

Most survivors experience physical and emotional trauma as a result of the assault they experienced. Responses to sexual assault can be immediate or delayed, and change over time. Each survivor responds uniquely, and the recovery process is different for each individual. You may experience a few, none, or all of these reactions in varying degrees during the recovery process. All of these are common and natural responses to a traumatic experience.

PHYSICAL

- Disruption of daily activities: changes in eating and sleeping patterns
- Loss of appetite
- Fatigue
- Nightmares
- Physical injuries (cuts, bruises, broken bones, etc)
- Eating disorders
- Pregnancy
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Headaches
- Immune system responses (less ability to resist colds, flu, etc.)
- Startle reactions: feeling jumpy
- Flashbacks of this or a prior crisis

THOUGHTS

- Confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Flashbacks
- I deserved it because...
- What if I hadn't done...?
- Why me?
- If I forget about it, it will go away...
- Will they blame me?
- What will people think?

All of these reactions are common and normal.

Survivors often find it helpful to talk about their experience and their reactions.
To talk confidentially to a trained advocate, please call our 24-hour HelpLine: 734-995-5444

What you may be feeling continued

Common reactions to sexual assault

EMOTIONAL

- **Anger:** feeling angry at the assailant and a desire to retaliate; may be angry at the world or self
- **Anxiety:** feeling unsafe, fear of being alone or that the assailant may return, fear of situations that may remind you of the assault
- **Shock/Disbelief:** feelings of numbness, confusion, unemotional, not knowing how to feel or what to do; surreal feelings or feelings of spaciness; denial
- **Guilt/Self-Blame/Shame:** feeling like you could have or should have done something to avoid or prevent the assault; doubts regarding your ability to make judgments
- **Loss of control:** feeling powerless and like your whole life has been turned upside down; overwhelmed; unable to make choices
- **Depression/Sadness**
- **Vulnerability/Distrust:** not knowing who to trust or how to trust yourself; feelings of suspicion and caution; feelings of helplessness
- Feelings of **embarrassment or humiliation**, feeling **hopeless**

SOCIAL

- Changes in lifestyle
- Difficulty getting things accomplished
- Sexual fears: feeling that you do not want to have sexual relations; wondering whether you will ever want or enjoy sexual relationships again; fears that being sexually intimate may remind you of the assault
- Fear of being alone
- Isolation: feeling that this experience has set you apart from other people and that no one can relate to your experience; feeling that other people can tell you have been sexually assaulted just by looking at you
- Nervousness in crowds, fear of leaving house
- Withdrawal from people, relationships, activities
- Loss of trust in self and others

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