



## Common reactions to Rape and Sexual Assault

You have experienced a trauma and the way you respond and cope with this is unique to you. **There is no right or wrong for the way you to behave, feel or think.** How you respond is just the right way for you to respond. To survive and cope with this situation, you will draw on your own unique strengths and skills.

However, it can help to recognise the commonalities of how people can respond to rape and sexual assault. These responses are sometimes referred to as **Rape Trauma Syndrome**, which outlines a number of stages someone goes through in the recovery process. These are the phases:-

### **The Acute phase:**

This is the stage you may be in now. The immediate stages after the rape you will be in shock that this has happened. Perhaps you thought this sort of thing doesn't happen to someone like you? Perhaps you had pre-conceived ideas about who this happens to? In the acute phase your self-perception may be challenged and you may start to question your memory or what you did to provoke this. ***You are not to blame for what happened to you. Your attacker is 100% responsible for his actions. No means no.***

**Your body:** You may be sore and hurting physically from being raped/ assaulted. ***Emotion is often let out through the body.*** You may cry a lot, need lots of sleep, be calm and detached, be sick, shake, have a headache. This is all your body's way of dealing with distress and shock.

**Your thoughts and feelings:** You may doubt yourself and your story. This is common for people who have experienced trauma as they want to disbelieve someone could violate them like this. You may also want to blame yourself for not screaming louder/ fighting harder. ***You did what everyone does in a crisis situation, what you had to do to survive it.*** You may feel fear, guilt, shame, anger, revenge or betrayal. You may have nightmares and flashbacks. ***You may feel unsafe in many situations even if they don't pose a threat – this is a common response to trauma.***

**Looking after yourself:** You have had your control forced away from you by someone else. This can leave you feeling powerless and out of

control. Every decision, however small you take from here, will help you on your road to healing. Perhaps you need to make a decision about whether or not to go to the police? Have a medical examination? Identify one person in your world who you can talk to? ***If you want to talk through any decision you need to make, speak to your Support Worker and they can act as a sounding board to assist you.***

### **Outward adjustment phase:**

The acute phase may last days, weeks or months. After the initial shock has faded, you may feel able to resume parts of your old life, like work and socialising, and find some normality again. However, underneath you may still be experiencing a range of the emotions such as fear, anger, loss of confidence, depression. This is all normal. ***Remember during this time to continue to treat yourself well and let others care for you. Don't expect too much of yourself***

### **Re-organisation phase:**

During this period there may be many major changes in your life such as employment, place of living and close relationships. You may experience difficulties in relationships and sex, and suffer depression and continuing fears and anxieties.

At some stage you may start to feel in control of your life once again and be able to establish your old routines. ***From such a traumatic and harrowing experience it is not uncommon for people to discover personal strengths and coping skills they didn't know they had.*** This is not to suggest that you will ever forget this experience but that in time it may be less painful and easier to cope with.