

After an Assault

No matter your gender, sexual assault is a trauma. The trauma of sexual assault involves losing control of your own body and possibly fearing death or injury. There are certain ways that human beings react to trauma that are the same for men and women.

Below is a checklist of common reactions to sexual assault. Though each person and situation is unique, this checklist will help you to know the range of reactions that are normal to expect.

Checklist of Universal Reactions to Sexual Assault

- Emotional Shock: I feel numb. How can I be so calm? Why can't I cry?
- Disbelief and/or Denial: Did it really happen? Why me? Maybe I just imagined it. It wasn't really rape.
- Embarrassment: What will people think? I can't tell my family or friends.
- Shame: I feel completely filthy, like there's something wrong with me. I can't get clean.
- Guilt: I feel as if it's my fault, or I should've been able to stop it. If only I had . . .
- Depression: I'm so tired, I feel so hopeless, maybe I'd be better off dead.
- Powerlessness: Will I ever feel in control again?
- Disorientation: I keep forgetting things.
- Flashbacks: I'm still reliving the assault!
- Fear: I'm scared of everything.
- Anxiety: I'm having panic attacks, can't breathe. Overwhelmed.
- Anger: I feel like killing the person who attacked me!
- Physical Stress: My stomach (or head, back) aches all the time. I feel jittery and don't feel like eating.

Common Emotional Responses to Abuse

- Inability to express emotions
- Sleeplessness
- Fear of sex
- Fear of being alone
- Feelings of grief and despair
- Problems with authority figures
- Alcohol/drug abuse
- Displaced anger
- Appetite loss/overeating; weight loss or gain
- Loss of self-confidence
- Inability to concentrate
- Nightmares
- Denial
- Suicide attempts
- Sexually offending
- Anxiety
- Stress-related illnesses

- No trust
- Depression
- Anger or fury
- Guilt
- Feeling like a freak or feeling crazy
- Loneliness
- Feeling dirty or ashamed
- Hurt and feelings of powerlessness
- Isolation and/or lack of friends
- Hostility
- Cruelty to animals
- Sexually aggressive
- Emotional deadness
- Respiratory and digestive problems
- Difficulty making decisions
- Self-mutilation; cut; burn