

After a Sexual Assault

Sexual assault can be a very traumatic experience. It is also a common occurrence- with many women and men in Australia being sexually assaulted by a stranger, a partner or someone they know.

Short Term Effects of Sexual Assault

There is no right or wrong way to feel after a sexual assault. In the days following the assault, you may find yourself experiencing a range of physical and emotional reactions. These reactions could include:

- Feeling isolated, alone and thinking that no one understands
- Emotional reactions such as shame, guilt, anger, rage, fear
- Unable to stop thinking about the assault
- Confused thinking
- Feeling responsible for the assault
- Not wanting to be touched by anyone
- Feeling unsafe when alone
- Feeling empty and numb
- Experiencing headaches, nausea, stomach aches, loss of appetite & fatigue
- Changes in sleep patterns and experiencing nightmares
- Feeling a sense of grief and loss
- Feeling disgusted and dirty
- A change in the way you feel about sex
- Finding it difficult to trust others
- Feeling nervous and anxious
- A range of other emotions

Remember

These are all common reactions to a traumatic event.
It's important to know that you are not going 'crazy'.

It can be very difficult to make sense of what happened and you may start to question some of the things you have always believed.

It is your choice whether you report the sexual assault to Police or not. If you decide to report to Police, there may be an opportunity for Police to gather forensic evidence- the sooner the evidence is gathered, the better.

There are services available to help, whether you choose to report to Police or not.

There are people you can talk to who are trained and experienced in counselling people who have

Long Term Effects of Sexual Assault

Almost everyone who goes through a sexual assault will be emotionally affected in some way. For some, the experience will have a range of detrimental effects on them and the people around them. Some people recover more quickly. There is no right or wrong way to how you react following the assault.

Some of the longer term impacts following a sexual assault can include:

- Intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, nightmares
- Depression
- Alcohol or substance abuse
- Fears or phobias
- Anger issues
- Mental health issues
- Anxiousness
- Self harm or suicidal thoughts
- Mood swings
- Difficulty with intimacy and sex
- Isolating yourself socially
- Post traumatic stress disorder

Counselling

If you, or someone you care about, is continuing to struggle weeks or months after experiencing trauma, contact a GP or professional service for help.

Counselling can provide you with an opportunity to talk to a supportive, non-judgemental person about what happened and how it has affected you. It can help you to manage your feelings, reduce your feelings of isolation and recover from the experience. It is usually best to see a counsellor who is knowledgeable about trauma and has experience in working with people who have experienced sexual assault. If you aren't satisfied with the first response you receive,

Some tips for taking care of yourself

Do

- Spend time with people who care
- Talk about how you feel or what happened, to someone you trust, when you are ready
- Make time to rest
- Try to keep a routine going, such as work or study. Make a timetable and schedule at least 1 enjoyable or relaxing activity each day
- Do make time for relaxing (e.g. breathing exercises, yoga, walks, baths, reading, music) whatever works for you
- Eat healthily and do gentle exercise if you can
- Do things that you enjoy

Don't

- Use alcohol or drugs to cope
- Work too much and become too busy
- Engage in stressful family or work situations
- Make major life decisions
- Avoid talking about what happened and bottle up your feelings
- Withdraw from family and friends
- Stop yourself from doing things that you enjoy
- Take risks
- Be hard on yourself and expect too much from yourself

Remember

The assault was NOT your fault.

A range of strong feelings is common soon after a traumatic event.

It may take time to heal after you have been sexually assaulted.

Most people will recover with the support of family and friends.

Be patient with yourself and ask for help when you need it.

There is always somewhere you can go to for help.

Telephone Contacts

Police Sex Assault Squad	To report a sexual assault	Phone (08) 94281600 a/hrs 131 444
1800 Respect Line	24 hour counselling for people experiencing sexual assault or domestic violence	Phone 1800 737 732
Mental Health Emergency Response Team	For mental health emergencies	Phone 1300 555 788
Lifeline	Telephone crisis counselling	Phone 13 1114 (24-hour line)
The Samaritans	24 hour telephone support	Phone (08) 9381 5725
Sexual Health Quarters	Counselling & sexual health services	Phone (08) 9227 6177
Victim Support Service	Counselling and court support service	Phone (08) 9425 2850 Free call 1800 818 988
Women's Domestic Violence Helpline	24 hour telephone counselling, information, referral and support	Phone (08) 9223 1188 Free call 1800 007 339
Men's Domestic Violence Helpline	24 hour telephone counselling, information, referral and support	Phone (08) 9223 1199 Free call 1800 000 599
Crisis Care	24 hour telephone crisis support including emergency accommodation	Phone (08) 9223 1111

The Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC)

SARC offers support services for both recent and past sexual assault and sexual abuse.

The SARC 24-hour Emergency Telephone Line provides access to an experienced counsellor and doctor for people who have been sexually assaulted during the past 14 days.

Free counselling is available for past sexual assault and sexual abuse



Government of Western Australia
North Metropolitan Health Service



Tel: (08) 6458 1828
Or Freecall 1800 199 888