

# 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 experienced a sexual assault. You are not alone; there is always someone you can talk to.

## 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	<b>To report a sexual assault</b>	Phone (08) 94281600 a/hrs 131 444
1800 Respect Line	<b>24 hour counselling for people experiencing sexual assault or domestic violence</b>	Phone 1800 737 732
RuralLink	<b>For mental health services</b>	Phone 1800 552 002
Lifeline	<b>Telephone crisis counselling</b>	Phone 13 1114 (24-hour line)
The Samaritans	<b>24 hour telephone support</b>	Phone (08) 9381 5725
Sexual Health Quarters	<b>Counselling &amp; sexual health services</b>	Phone (08) 9227 6177
Victim Support Service	<b>Counselling and court support service</b>	Phone (08) 9425 2850 Free call 1800 818 988
Women's Domestic Violence Helpline	<b>24 hour telephone counselling, information, referral and support</b>	Phone (08) 9223 1188 Free call 1800 007 339
Men's Domestic Violence Helpline	<b>24 hour telephone counselling, information, referral and support</b>	Phone (08) 9223 1199 Free call 1800 000 599
Crisis Care	<b>24 hour telephone crisis support including emergency accommodation</b>	Phone (08) 9223 1111

## Local Supports



Government of Western Australia  
North Metropolitan Health Service



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