

Coping 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.

Understanding your reactions

You have recently experienced a traumatic event. You will respond to it in your own unique way. You may, or may not experience some strong emotional or physical reactions. Sometimes the reactions are delayed. Everyone is different and no particular reaction or lack of reaction is right or wrong.

The reactions may last a few days, a few weeks or a few months and occasionally longer. This depends on a whole range of issues, such as how much support you have, whether you have experienced other trauma, how others respond to your experience, your beliefs about the sexual assault and any other stressors in your life at this time.

Some of the things you may experience include changes in your thoughts, feelings and behaviour. If you have experienced other traumas in your life you may think about these now. You may notice changes in your mood or activity patterns, such as being tempted to increase your drug or alcohol intake, or to socially withdraw. You may just not feel like 'yourself'.

Common concerns and questions are:

- "What will happen if I do (or don't) talk to the Police?"
- "How will my family cope with this?"
- "What will people think of me?"
- "How will I get back to a normal sex life?"
- "Was it my fault?"

What if distress continues?

While friends and family can be a good support there may be details that you don't want to discuss with them, or you may not want to upset them. You may find some people to be more helpful than others.

If you find that the changes that have occurred as a result of the sexual assault continue to seriously disrupt your life, ask for help. The need to seek assistance when dealing with a sexual assault is understandable. There are trained counsellors and health professionals available to assist. They provide information and support in a confidential and supportive environment. Asking for help doesn't mean that you are 'crazy' or 'weak'. You are not alone; there is always someone you can talk to.

Steps to Recovery

- Remember that your reaction is unique to you and normal
- Talk to those you feel safe with and who support you
- Maintain your usual activities as much as possible
- Return to normal employment or school as soon as possible
- Be patient, time is important in recovery
- Ask for help if you need it



Partners, family and friends can assist by:

- Believing the person
- Listening and allowing them the opportunity to talk about the event in their own time and in their own way
- Not judging them
- Spending time with them
- Allowing them some private time
- Reassuring them that they are safe
- Allowing them the opportunity to express their feelings if they want to
- Not taking the person's anger and feelings personally
- Assisting with some tasks such as minding the children or cooking, if this is what they want
- Avoid saying things like "lucky it wasn't worse", or "time to move on". Those who have experienced a trauma do not usually find these kinds of statements to be helpful.

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	(08) 9223 3442 A/H 131 444
• The Respect Line	24 hour counselling for people experiencing sexual assault or domestic violence	1800 737 732
• Mental Health Emergency Response Team	For mental health emergencies	1300 555 788
• Lifeline	Telephone crisis counselling	13 1114 (24-hour line)
• The Samaritans	24 hour telephone support	9381 5725
• Sexual and Reproductive Health WA	Counselling & sexual health services	(08) 9227 6177
• Victim Support Service	Counselling and court support service	(08) 9425 2850 1800 818 988
• Women's Domestic Violence	24 hour telephone counselling, information, referral and support information	(08) 9223 1188 1800 007 339
• Men's Domestic Violence Helpline	24 hour telephone counselling information, referral and support	(08) 9223 1199 1800 000 599
• Mensline Australia	24 hour support service	1300 789 978
• Crisis Care	24 hour telephone crisis support including emergency accommodation	(08) 9223 1111 1800 199 008

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

(08) 6458 1828 or 1800 199 888 (freecall from a landline)

SARC

SEXUAL
ASSAULT
RESOURCE
CENTRE