

RAPE AND THE EFFECTS OF RAPE (Information for supporters of survivors)

RAPE IS NEVER THE SURVIVORS FAULT. 85% of rapes are committed by someone we know. Or have just met. There are 3 things that someone will do when they are in danger of being raped, **FIGHT, FLIGHT OR FREEZE.** Most people freeze. There will usually be no scratches, no bites; no bruising on the outside but *inside* the survivor will be completely and utterly devastated. The effects on the survivor can range from flashbacks, self harm, self loathing, feelings of guilt, shame, fear, hysteria or silence and any other effect under the heading of Post Traumatic Stress. They will be having difficulties in almost every area of their lives, including reliving the event and blaming themselves for not recognizing a rapist, for trusting him and for not putting up a huge fight. However differently the person you know is behaving will be as a result of the rape. If they have confided in you, this is very positive - they are beginning to open up to someone they still trust. They may need to talk or they may need to remain quiet. What they will *not* need is:

- Being asked why they did not fight back/get into this situation/went back to his flat/got drunk or any other kind of blame for what happened.
- Being asked why they didn't tell you earlier
- Constantly being asked about what happened/how they are feeling
- Being told what to do to feel better
- Screaming and shouting abuse at the rapist and swearing revenge
- You to start making appointments for them to see people who will help them
- You to say after a few weeks 'Aren't you over it yet?'
- You taking **control** of the situation

What they will need from you is:

- ★ To listen when they need to talk
- ★ To believe what they say
- ★ To understand that all areas of their lives are going to be more difficult
- ★ To help them understand that it was not their fault
- ★ To understand that it will be difficult to trust people again
- ★ To give information (like this) and let them decide when to act upon it
- ★ Help when they ask for help
- ★ Treat them the same way you did before the rape to normalise their world
- ★ Be with them if they report to the police
- ★ Mention a SARC or GU clinic (see below)

This time is going to be difficult for you too and if you can find confidential support for yourself, it will be easier for you to support your loved one. The effects of rape can last for a long time unless the survivor is able to access face to face counseling from a **specialist rape** counselor. They did not deserve to be raped but they do deserve your acceptance and reassurance.

PHYSICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Pregnancy - Sexually Transmitted Diseases - Physical Injury - Internal Injury

If a survivor decides to get medical help or report the crime and asks you for help look for a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) in your area. They are usually attached to hospitals and are set up to help survivors of rape. They also take forensic evidence for those people reporting to the police. They are very understanding and treat all patients with dignity and confidentiality. If there isn't a SARC within easy reach, GUM clinics in hospitals can help.

REPORTING TO THE POLICE

A telephone call to the local station is better than just turning up. Ask them if they will come out to speak to the survivor. If not, make an appointment with an officer, ask for a female if the survivor would prefer, who is experienced in sexual assaults. The first thing the police will do is arrange for the survivor to have a forensic examination (if the assault was not too long ago) and they will take an initial statement so that they can begin to investigate the case. If the survivor is considering this action we have a Legal Handout which will explain the process.

Words from a female Survivor of Rape:

'I have learnt to fear the male species. Is every male capable of such a heinous crime? The rape itself may be seen as an attack on the vaginal area but it has impacted on my inner being as any violent crime would. When you rape a person you are raping their mind and soul not just their body.

Silence is the main reason that rape is allowed to keep continuing and affecting generations of women. The silence doesn't stop if you report the rape. Everyone is stunned, confused, and unsure of what to say and do but ultimately they see silence as a healing mechanism. The less you talk about it the more likely, they think, you are to forget the rape and lead a 'normal life'. This is done out of care but is not helpful to the survivor.

Silence eats away at you and silence turns the rape into your dirty little secret. Not very helpful when you are trying desperately to hold onto normality and feel like you're the same as anyone else. Maybe this is a mistake that we the survivor makes. We will never be 'normal' again, the fear and unease will always be there but our inner strength is so immense because we are surviving and not allowing ourselves to become more of a survivor than we already are. In a way silence becomes a habit and silence becomes safe.

One significant mistake that people make is that they think rape is just sex when a woman does not want it or a bit of 'rough sex'. The fact is that rape is not about men losing control and needing sex, it is about men being very much in control, exercising complete power and dominance over someone else in the worst, most degrading way possible.

Rape causes the woman humiliation and takes away her dignity. The lack of power as someone takes over your body against your wishes and reduces you to a sexual receptacle - whilst enjoying it - can never truly be described. Rape impacts on the survivor's memory and identity. It destroys a survivor's basic belief and trust in other human beings and becomes very hard to rebuild. After the rape you as a person no longer exists. You feel like a wooden shell that is deadened to the pain and it is living like this that reminds you of what you have lost and what you have become.

We become ashamed of the rape and its memories because we realise that it makes other people embarrassed and uncomfortable. We all recognise that rape is a terrible act and it takes a vile person to commit such a crime. Why then is it the survivor who is ashamed? Surely it should be the rapist who is ashamed but it seems that during the rape the shame is transferred to the survivor and thus causes silence.

One incredible burden on a survivor is the 'telling' of her story. You feel guilty for inflicting your pain and inability to cope on to others. In telling the people you're close to about the event, even if it isn't in any detail, you know that it will upset them and you run the risk of rejection. Silence, appearance of judgement or discomfort about my experience can feel like a major rejection to me. This results in the survivor feeling she has to forget her nightmare and this is like swallowing a time bomb. Any day you will explode and this is inevitable but we still do it. The worst thing is that talking helps us to heal yet no one wants to hear. How can anyone who hasn't experienced rape understand how you feel? The truth is they can't but they can still support you and listen. Being able to talk and be heard is a great healer. But they don't know what to say for the best, they are frightened of hurting you and hearing your pain. What can you possibly say to help? There is nothing you can say but just your presence and willingness to hear what we have to say is enough'.

(Extracts from a letter written by Siobhan Louise Davies).

READING LIST

Available from www.amazon.co.uk

FREE OF THE SHADOWS: Recovery from Sexual Violence

Caren Adams and Jennifer Fay

ISBN: 0934986703

Looks at common feelings for women who have been raped or sexually assaulted, from immediately after the assault to long-term coping. Positive and helpful, and includes advice for family and friends in each section.

RECOVERY: How to Survive Sexual Assault for Women, Men, Teenagers, Their Friends and Families

Helen Benedict

ISBN: 0231096755

This guide offers the survivors of rape and their friends and relatives a comprehensive body of knowledge drawn from social workers and social scientists on the short and long-term effects of rape. Includes survivor stories and how others can help.

WHO'S AFRAID OF THE DARK: A Forum of Truth, Support and Assurance for Those Affected By Rape

Ed. Cynthia Carosella

ISBN: 0060950722

Survivors of rape, both recent and long-past, women and men, tell their stories: "If you ever feel that your experiences have left you alone in the world, nothing comes as more of a relief than knowing that someone else has lived through something similar and understands ... my hope is that this book will help you find the words to describe what you are feeling and the strength to make the necessary changes."