



RASASC
rape and sexual abuse
support centre
RAPE CRISIS
SOUTH LONDON

The impacts of rape

INFORMATION FOR SUPPORTERS OF YOUNG SURVIVORS

Helpline: 0808 802 9999
Telephone: 0208 683 3311
Email: info@rasasc.org.uk

Rape is **never** the survivor's fault. There are three things that a survivor may do when they are being raped: fight, flight or freeze. Most people freeze. There may be no scratches, no bites; no bruising on the outside but **inside** the survivor may be completely and utterly devastated. However the survivor is feeling and coping with what happened, their feelings are completely OK and is as a result of the trauma.

Rape and sexual assault are much more common than a lot of people want to think and many people do not understand rape and its impacts. Below is some information about why men rape and the impact this can have on survivors.

Power and Control

The rapist may have used physical violence and/or verbal intimidation. However, rapists are often quite calm and calculating which can be confusing for survivors. He may have done humiliating things to the survivor or involved other people. He may have been someone they knew - a boyfriend, husband, an ex-partner, a friend, neighbour, relative, someone they just met or a stranger. More than likely he was someone the survivor thought they could trust.

Common feelings

Survivors react in a wide variety of ways after being raped. However survivors feel after being raped is a reaction to being traumatised. They may find that they have been affected by some (or a lot) of the following:

- recurrent depression or anxiety
- panic attacks, phobias and/or flashbacks
- sleep disturbance such as nightmares and insomnia
- anger and feelings of worthlessness
- self-blame and feelings of guilt and shame
- difficulties trusting others
- have coped with the difficult feelings through substance dependency, self-injuring, aggressive behaviour and/or "acting out"
- difficulties with intimacy and relationships

Supporting survivors

When a young person tells you that they were raped, you need to be aware that doing this is an enormous step for them. It means that they are trusting you to hold this information and it is important to offer your wholehearted support without taking over. The survivor will be all too familiar with feelings of powerlessness and they need to feel in control now.

What they will **not** need is:

- being asked why they did not fight back / why they got drunk / how they got into this situation
- you blaming them
- you thinking this has happened because they have had consensual sexual experiences in the past



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- you doubting what they are telling you
- repeatedly being asked about what happened / how they are feeling
- being told what to do to feel better
- screaming and shouting at the rapist and swearing revenge
- you making appointments for them to see people who you think will help them
- being asked if they are 'over it yet'
- you assuming you know what is best for them
- you taking control of the situation

What they will need from you is:

- to **listen** when they need to talk
- to **believe** them
- to help them understand that it was not their fault
- acceptance that however they feel is OK and is as a result of the trauma
- to understand that all areas of their life may be more difficult
- to understand that it may be difficult to trust people
- to give information if they ask for it and let them decide when to act on it
- help when they ask for help
- if you feel you would like support, getting this separately from their support systems so they have a space that is just for them

If the survivor is thinking about reporting to the police, or has done so, what they will need from you is:

- all the time they need to make the best decisions for themselves
- understanding that the criminal justice system can be difficult and exhausting
- support to access and understand the criminal justice system
- space for how they are feeling
- accurate information from a specialist - it is OK not to have all the answers yourself
- you to be OK with them getting support from elsewhere
- for them to decide how they would like to receive information from the police, other agencies and an ISVA

What they will **not** need is:

- you speaking over them or for them
- you making things about you or your relationship with the rapist
- telling them what to do when they are considering what to do next
- pressure on them to make the same choices that you think you would make in the same situation
- pressure to report to the police because they are a young person

Rape is not something that can be easily forgotten, but if it feels right for the survivor, they can work through their feelings with a specialist counsellor and learn to put it behind them



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and recover. The length of time a survivor needs to recover is personal to them but talking things through with a specialist counsellor is an option for them to consider in their own time. They will know when they are ready to begin the healing process. It cannot be emphasised enough how important it is for a survivor to feel empowered by taking control of their recovery and not feeling that they are just going along with what someone else feels would be best, however well-intentioned that someone is.

Rape is **never** acceptable; no one has a right over anybody else's body. Guilt, blame and shame belong to the perpetrator, not the survivor.

Talking about feelings

It may also be useful for you to find someone that you feel able to talk to about your feelings around the sexual abuse of the person you care about - being supported will make you better able to support them. Sometimes you will need space for yourself and your feelings and it is important to acknowledge this.

Our national helpline (**0808 802 9999**) offers one call for supporters of survivors of sexual violence where you are able to talk through your feelings and experiences in a completely confidential and safe space with a trained specialist helpline worker.

Our helpline is open 365 days of the year from 12.00 - 2.30pm and 7.00 - 9.30pm.

If you would like more information about the criminal justice system and what to expect, our overview can be found on our website: <http://www.rasasc.org.uk/independent-sexual-violence-advocate-service/criminal-justice-system/>.