



RASASC
rape and sexual abuse
support centre
RAPE CRISIS
SOUTH LONDON

The impacts of rape

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

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

Power and Control

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

Fighting for survival

Women react in lots of different ways during assault. Maybe you screamed, fought back and tried to get away. But it is more likely that you froze, or flopped, unable to move or make a sound. Or that you tried to befriend him, to negotiate with him. This is not a passive response, it is your body taking over and doing what it needs to do to survive. No matter how you reacted at the time, remember it was the right response for you to help you get through it.

Common feelings

Women react in a wide variety of ways after being raped. You may feel too shocked to think about what has happened, you may feel that you want to try to forget that the rape ever happened. You may have a feeling of being terrified to “let go” in case you lose control completely once you let your emotions out. However you felt after being raped was a reaction to being traumatised.

The longer term effects of rape can also vary but it is natural to experience flashbacks, sleeplessness, anxiety, feelings of guilt and blaming yourself. These are all symptoms of post-traumatic stress. You may be coping with difficult feelings by trying to block out the memory of what happened. Some people use alcohol, drugs or self-injury in an attempt to stop the feelings taking over. Unfortunately, the memory, which you are trying to avoid is still with you, just below the surface, and can pop up when you least expect it.

Talking about feelings

Surviving a sexual assault means you are likely to find yourself experiencing all sorts of painful and uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. If you have people around you who you trust to be non-judgemental and accepting, try to talk to them. Lots of women find contacting our helpline (0808 802 9999) a useful first step, as they are able to talk through their experience and feelings in a completely confidential and safe space with a trained specialist support worker.

Be kind to yourself

You may experience disbelief from some people who ask hurtful questions and make unhelpful comments: “Why didn’t you fight back?” and “You shouldn’t have put yourself in



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that sort of danger in the first place". These people know very little about sexual assault and probably believe in the myths around sexual violence and what they read in the newspapers. They have no idea what you have been through and what you are feeling now. Their responses can be very hurtful.

There may also be people who want to help but who simply do not know how to start. It's important to be kind to yourself, accept whatever support feels right for you. Don't expect too much of yourself and think you should "get over it" or "forget it". You did not deserve to be assaulted but you do deserve to be nurtured now. Rape is not something that can be easily forgotten, but if it feels right, you can work through your feelings with a specialist counsellor and learn to put it behind you and recover from this.

The length of time you need to help you recover is personal to you but talking things through with a specialist counsellor is an option for you to consider.

Try to hang on to the knowledge that you will get through this - you deserve to, and you will. Rape is never acceptable; no one has a right over your body. Guilt, blame and shame belong to the perpetrator, not to you. Remember, your needs and feelings are important - look after yourself.

Rape Crisis Centres are a phone call away and will be able to help you recover. You can find your local Rape Crisis Centre at: <http://rapecrisis.org.uk/centres.php>.

Our helpline is open 365 days a year from 12-2.30pm and 7-9.30pm. It is also open Monday to Friday from 3-5.30pm. Call us on 0808 802 9999. Support is here.