



Kind • Safe • Supportive

## How do people react to sexual assault?

Many men and women who have experienced rape or sexual assault report feelings like these. It is not unusual. Try to allow yourself time to experience these feelings – they are your body's natural response in your situation. However painful they may be, denying them is not helpful in the long run.

- **Emotional Shock:** I feel numb. How can I be so calm? Why can't I cry?
- **Disbelief and/or Denial:** Did it really happen? Why me? Maybe I just imagined it. It wasn't really rape.
- **Embarrassment:** What will people think? I can't tell my family or friends.
- **Shame:** I feel completely filthy, like there's something wrong with me. I can't get clean.
- **Guilt:** I feel as if it's my fault, or I should've been able to stop it. If only I had...
- **Depression:** How am I going to get through the day? I'm so tired! I feel so hopeless. Maybe I'd be better off dead
- **Powerlessness:** Will I ever feel in control again?
- **Disorientation:** I don't even know what day it is, or where I'm supposed to be. I keep forgetting things.
- **Flashbacks:** I keep re-living the assault. I keep seeing that face and feeling like it's happening all over again.
- **Fear:** I'm scared of everything. What if I have STDs or AIDS? I can't sleep because I'll have nightmares. I'm afraid to go out. I'm afraid to be alone.
- **Anxiety:** I'm having panic attacks. I can't breathe. I can't stop shaking. I feel overwhelmed.
- **Anger:** I feel like killing the person who attacked me!
- **Physical Stress:** My stomach (or head or back) aches all the time. I feel jittery and don't feel like eating.

It's important to understand that you may not be able to function at 100% capacity for a while following a major trauma like sexual assault. You may have problems concentrating or remembering things and may feel tired or edgy. You may also take longer to recover from everyday stresses.

Don't be too hard on yourself — you need time to recover emotionally and that may detract from your energy for a while.