



Safety and Dignity at Work

Effects of Abuse

Being sexually abused hurts physically and emotionally. If this has happened to you, the most important thing you need to remember is that **it was not your fault**. Whatever the circumstances, however you behaved, wherever you were, whatever you said or did or drank, the person who abused you chose to do that, and it was a violation of your body and your trust.

Someone who's experienced sexual abuse or rape can respond in many different ways, and there is no particular response which is more appropriate than any other. Some people don't have a strong emotional response, and that doesn't mean that what happened was not rape or assault. Survivors may experience many different feelings, be confused, or have unanswered questions.

Why did it happen to me?

Rape or sexual assault can happen to anyone, and there are lots of different reasons why perpetrators choose to do it. The most important thing to remember is that it was the responsibility of the person who raped or assaulted you, **not your fault**. Your choices and behaviour did not cause it to happen.

Why didn't I fight them off?

There's no right or wrong way to respond to being raped or assaulted. It's common for people to find that they 'freeze' when something very traumatic happens to them, and find themselves unable to move or shout. Being unable to fight someone off does not mean you agreed to what happened, or make you responsible for it.

I feel like I'm going mad

It can be very confusing and scary trying to deal with your feelings after a rape or sexual assault, but this does not mean you're 'mad' or 'crazy'. Lots of people feel like this, especially as perpetrators often tell survivors that the rape or assault was their fault.

How long will it take to get over it?

There is no set amount of time that it takes to deal with sexual violence. Everyone is different, and many things can affect how long it takes, such as the nature of the attack and for how long the abuse went on. Many people find that there are days or weeks when they feel better, and days or weeks when they feel worse, which is natural, though perhaps frustrating. It is important to try not to put pressure on yourself and to give yourself as much time as you need. Some people find it helpful to seek out other survivors as this helps them remember that others have similar experiences, and similar worries like this.

I didn't say "no" - is it my fault?

Consent means actively agreeing to do something with someone. Even if you didn't say 'no', this doesn't mean you consented. It is the responsibility of your partner to make sure that you are happy with everything that goes on.

Common feelings

Rape and sexual assault can have a significant emotional impact. If you have experienced sexual violence there are lots of different ways you might feel, many of which are very common. However you feel after rape or sexual assault is valid, and there is no right or wrong way to feel.

Some feelings can last a long time, whereas others may come and go quite quickly. Sometimes feelings and reactions can be delayed by weeks, months or years. The following are some common responses to being raped or assaulted; you might experience some or all of them:

- Feeling different or strange.
- Feeling guilty or responsible (this may be because the perpetrator told you it was your fault, but this is never true).
- Feeling lonely or isolated.
- Feeling like this has never happened to anyone else (but it has, and you are not alone).
- Having difficulty sleeping or having nightmares.
- Experiencing flashbacks of the event; this can be triggered by sounds, situations or smells, and can be very frightening.

- Losing confidence, trust in yourself and others.
- Feeling angry with your attacker and others too.
- Feeling confused (especially if the perpetrator is a family member or friend; you may still care about him or her, which is ok).
- Feeling depressed, upset and/or tearful a lot of the time, sometimes even suicidal.
- Finding it difficult to cope with day-to-day life.
- Feeling worthless, dirty or ashamed (though you have nothing to be ashamed of).
- Feeling afraid of some or all people, certain places, or of being alone.
- Having relationship or sexual difficulties. If you don't feel any of these things, that's fine too. There's no 'correct' way to feel after a rape or assault.

Mental health

For some people, sexual violence can also have a serious and/or long-term impact on their mental health. This can include mental health problems such as depression, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, obsessive compulsive disorder, anxiety, or personality disorders. These can all make day-to-day life more difficult, and can make coping with rape or sexual assault even harder.

Sometimes experiencing symptoms of these can be confusing or distressing, but try to remember that lots of people experience mental health problems at some point in their lives, and that it is nothing to be ashamed of.

There is more information about mental health, and living with mental health problems on the **Mind website**, or you can call them on 0300 123 3393.