

Support Booklet



*working in partnership
to tackle domestic violence*



Wolverhampton
Domestic Violence Forum

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This booklet gives victims, families, friends and partners a brief understanding of what may be experienced following sexual assault, rape or buggery. The example rape is used throughout but the emotions/reactions may well be the same for all the different types of sexual violence or attempted violence.

Some victims will suffer from everything whilst others may experience a few of the examples that follow.

It is IMPOSSIBLE to say how long it will take to come to terms with what has happened. Life has changed, rape changes life, but that does not mean that life will always only ever be bad or only ever good. Victims can go on and live happy and fulfilled lives, and this is easier when they feel they are supported and loved.

If you have just been raped, turn to page 8 for emergency advice.

RAPE CHANGES LIFE

EFFECTS OF RAPE

GUILT

- For what was done
- For what s/he wanted to do and wasn't able to
- For what they didn't do
- For what they didn't think to do
- For what they can't remember
- For causing others to suffer
- For being where they were
- For doing whatever they did
- For wishing it wasn't them
- For being vulnerable

The guilt needs to be directed back to the guilty. The victim is not to blame.

ANGER

- About what happened
- About the procedures that follow rape and the process you have to go through
- Directed towards the rapist
- That no-one helped
- At court process or lack of it
- At people's lack of understanding
- For being vulnerable
- At the lack of support available

This anger may well be directed at those the victim loves the most, because it is "safe" to be angry with them.

Anyone can be angry about many things. Don't assume that a rape victim will only be angry about the crime.

HUMILIATION & DEGRADATION

Rape, buggery and sexual assault can be very humiliating and the ultimate degradation. People trying to be empathetic when they can't be can be very damaging.

Acceptance, love and support can help in an atmosphere of "no blame". Low self esteem and self worth can be a result of humiliation and degradation and apathy towards anything may be the result.

SHOCK

Shock can happen straight away or be delayed and suppressed. This may result in the victim denying what has happened or struggling to accept what has occurred.

Shock can make you react in a way you would not expect and appear to give you a lot of strength and energy.

Shock may have physical effects as well as causing mental distress. As the shock wears off the victim may be extremely tired. Shock may also be present when a victim discloses a historic assault, and they may feel that time has stood still and they are back at the assault.

FEAR

- ❑ A very real fear of what might happen in the future
- ❑ About whether the rapist may strike again; or has done so before;
- ❑ Of threats he may have made to or about family and friends or other people;
- ❑ Of being alone
- ❑ Of being in crowds
- ❑ Of what they may have contracted, or of having to have tests
- ❑ Of being involved in any hugging or kissing or any sexual activity.

Fear may result in different occurrences that seem irrational and make the victim feel they are “cracking up”, even though the fears are very rational.

Smells, tastes, sight, sound, or touch may all trigger feelings of fear.

Fear can take a long time to conquer.

LOW SELF ESTEEM AND SELF WORTH

The victim may not feel like doing anything. Just surviving may use up all their energy. Eating, sleeping, personal appearance, or household activities may be too much effort. They may feel totally unlovable and the desire to self harm may arise. They may have difficulty with short term memory loss, as they are trying to process so much information they cannot take anything new on board.

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BROKEN TRUST

Whether the rapist was known or unknown, victims may feel their trust has been broken. It could be someone who they felt was a friend or it could be their trust in the opposite or same sex has generally been destroyed. This trust may take a long time to rebuild.

In many instances where the offender is known the victim may well have been conned and feel guilty for the situations they were in. When they look back they can see the scenario had been planned and feel totally betrayed.

FAILURE & REJECTION

The consequences of rape may lead a victim to feel “a failure”. The rape may shatter all their dreams, hopes and expectations. Victims may feel rejected as rape is still such a taboo subject for most people and there is always room for more support. They may feel that future plans need to be changed rather than having to explain the past.

WANTING TO MOVE

Victims may want to get away from the area where the rape happened. They may feel that being in the same place is a constant reminder of what happened. The victim may want to be with people who don't know what has happened or didn't know them before the rape.

WANTING TO GET BACK TO “NORMAL”

Many victims want their life to get back to normal – how it was before the rape. This can be very difficult because the rape has changed their life. Their views may have changed, their ability to trust has changed and details of the assault may be triggered at any time. This may also be difficult as those close to them may be acting differently.

CRYING

Victims may cry river-loads of tears, often without being able to explain why they are sad at any particular point. They may also want to cry but not be able to, or not want anyone to know about it. Crying can be a helpful way of getting rid of pain. They may also find that they cry at things that usually wouldn't have affected them, and feel foolish.

INABILITY TO SLEEP PROPERLY

This may be due to nightmares, flashbacks, fear of going to sleep, stress or fear of being alone. It leaves the victim constantly tired and exhausted. Sleep is very important to help the body recover. Cat naps can be a way of catching up a little bit.

OVER OR UNDER EATING

This may be the result of stress, a desire to change personal appearance, lethargy or nausea. It is important to try to eat small amounts regularly even if the victim doesn't feel like it. Their body needs the energy to cope physically and mentally.

SEXUAL PROBLEMS

Intimacy may be too scary. The victim may only be able to think of sex in the context of fear. Sexual acts that were previously enjoyed may now cause disgust or revulsion. Sex may also be physically painful. It is not advisable to have unprotected sex with a victim until after they have been cleared of any sexually transmitted infections. This is not to be confused with forensics tests that will have been taken following a complaint to the police. Hugging, holding and reassuring are often what the victim wants initially. Talk together about the relationship.

COMPULSIVE WASHING OR CLEANING

Many victims describe feeling dirty as a result of the rape, and therefore try to get clean, or try to eliminate smells or tastes. If victims contract any sexually transmitted infections they may also feel dirty.

A victim should consult a GP or seek help immediately if they are feeling any of the following

CLINICAL DEPRESSION AND FEELING SUICIDAL

It takes a lot of strength to survive rape. It is possible but some victims feel they haven't got the strength or the support and want to end the pain.

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

PTSD is defined as an illness or disorder, which is triggered by an emotionally distressing event that is outside the range of normal human experience. If a victim feels they have PTSD they should seek medical attention.

SELF-HARMING

As most victims show no visible signs of rape, it can be difficult for others to accept the amount of pain they are in. This may lead to self-harming as a way of releasing the pain. It may also be a way of punishing themselves for the guilt they feel.

BEING RECKLESS

The victim may feel the worst has happened and dismiss danger and embark upon a course of self destruction, or feel that if they are reckless they can end the pain.

DEPENDENCY

Victims can become dependent on drugs, alcohol and people.

PARTNERS/FAMILY/FRIENDS

- ❑ Don't feel excluded if the victim doesn't want to talk to you. You may be too close, or they may need to talk and talk and don't want to impose a burden upon you.
- ❑ Don't ask for details. If the victim wants you to know they will tell you.
- ❑ Many victims don't want revenge. They may not benefit from hearing you express your anger in their company. If you are angry find somewhere/someone else to express it to. They need support and your getting angry is not helpful. Victims may want justice, but usually they just want to be free of their pain.
- ❑ Accept that there may be very little you can do for the victim, other than being there. This may leave you feeling useless.
- ❑ Don't assume that a victim is fine just because they look it. Many victims will describe "crying on the inside", yet putting a smiley face on for the world. You wouldn't expect someone who had major surgery to not need time to recover. The same is true for rape victims, and emotional damage can take much longer to heal, than physical wounds.
- ❑ Some victims will be fine one day and very down the next. It may not be possible for them to explain why. It may or may not relate to the rape.
- ❑ Moving on or changing their life does not mean running away, or not facing up to it. Rape has changed their life and new opportunities and new values can develop.
- ❑ Rape is very destructive and not all relationships will survive. Talking, caring and being supportive will help. Exercise, rest, healthy eating, sleep, pampering and talking are all very important factors in aiding recovery.

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WHAT TO DO, IF YOU HAVE BEEN RAPED



- ❑ Make sure you are safe.
- ❑ Decide whether you want to report to the police what has happened. (It is much easier to make a complaint then withdraw it, than to try and get a case to be prosecuted once the forensic evidence has gone.)
- ❑ If reporting preserve the scene, if possible. Don't wash unless you have to- use a dry tissue to wipe any area prior to washing and place in a clean (preferably new) plastic bag which can be sealed. (Then tell the police you have done this). Don't drink, eat, go to the loo or take any medicine that isn't essential. Ring or go to the police straight away. If you think you've been drugged ask them to take an immediate urine sample.
- ❑ If necessary go to a chemist for a morning after pill (now called emergency contraception), or see a GP. These may be available free of charge via a supermarket or Genito Urinary Medicine Clinic (GUM) or they will cost you around £25. You will need a quick interview to check your suitability for the drug. The tablet can be taken up to 72 hours after intercourse but becomes less reliable the longer the delay.

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❑ If you do report the incident be aware that you will have to give a very detailed account of what has happened. The police may ask you various questions that seem irrelevant but they need the details to help get the best possible evidence. You will also be given a forensic medical examination, if the event has taken place within the previous week. (However the longer you delay the less chance there is of getting forensic evidence). This is a medical where they get the information from your body to help the case. It is not to see if you have contracted any infections as a result of the incident. Unless you have been to a sexual assault referral Centre (SARC) it's unlikely that any such tests will have been carried out and you will need to get them sorted yourself. It will also not check to see if any pregnancy has arisen from the rape.

❑ It is important to arrange an appointment at the GUM Clinic, and tell them at the time that you have been raped. The best time to have the STI screening is 3-4 weeks after the rape has happened. It is also important to have an HIV test, about 2 months later. It is very rare for HIV to be transmitted after one incident, but essential for your own peace of mind to be checked and treated accordingly if necessary.

❑ If the incident has been reported, allow police the time to do their job and investigate fully. There will be a lot of time when nothing seems to be happening. You can ring and check with the police on the progress of the case, but taking a case to court is a lengthy process.

❑ Get support where you can, not everyone will understand or believe you, or want to know about what has happened; however, there are people that are there to support you, so get whatever help you can. Remember that there are also books and web sites that can help you.

❑ Give yourself time to cope with what has happened. This is important, whether the rape has just happened or happened a long time ago and you are just acknowledging it now. Set yourself small goals and don't expect too much too soon.

❑ If you're not happy with the services you have received, you are able to make complaints. There are many things about reporting the incident that are unpleasant but you should receive a good quality of care.

❑ It is possible to report a historic rape, although the chances of getting a conviction may be very difficult. However, it is never too late to get support.

USEFUL CONTACT NUMBERS

WDFV Sexual Violence Support	01902 572505
Police	999 or 0845113 5000
GUM Wolverhampton (Male Apts)	01902 695500
GUM Wolverhampton (Female Apts)	01902 695501
GUM Heartlands	0121 4243359
GUM Birmingham	0121 2375700
GUM Burton	01283 531407
GUM Stafford	01785 230260
GUM Telford	01952 222536
GUM Dudley	01384 244820
GUM Redditch	01527 516398
GUM Tamworth	01827 263810
GUM Walsall	01922 633341
GUM Sandwel	10121 5800929
GUM Stoke on Trent	01782 554205

You do not have to attend your local GUM for tests. Please ring to check opening times and appointment availability.

Snow Hill Clinic	01902 444444
Samaritans	01902 426422
Base25	01902 572040
National Domestic Violence Line	0808 2000247
NAMSAS (List of specialist men's support)	020 73576222
Counselling @ St Peter's	01902 773375
Relate	01902 428447
Terence Higgins Trust	01902 711776
The Rowan Centre, (Walsall SARC)	01922 644329