

The aftermath of sexual assault: Am I supposed to feel this way?

Whether you're a man or a woman, sexual assault is a trauma. The trauma of sexual assault involves losing control of your own body and possibly fearing death or injury. There are certain ways that human beings react to trauma that are the same for men and women. "Rape trauma syndrome" is a term that mental health professionals use to describe the common reactions that occur for both men and women after sexual assault. "Rape trauma syndrome" is not an illness or abnormal reaction - it is a **normal** reaction to an **abnormal**, traumatic event.

Below is a checklist of common reactions to sexual assault. Though each person and situation is unique, this checklist will help you to know the range of reactions that are **normal** to expect. Of course, there are also ways that men are affected differently than women by sexual assault. Following the list of *universal* reactions to sexual assault, we'll delve into some of the reactions to sexual assault that are more unique to men.

Checklist of Universal Reactions to Sexual Assault

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 this month? 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 what I'm supposed to be doing. I keep forgetting things.

Flashbacks: I'm still 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 herpes 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.

Where to get help

Call **000** if you are worried about yours or someone else's safety

Sexual Assault Crisis Line: 1800 806 292

Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria (FVPLS Victoria)

Provides assistance to victims of family violence and sexual assault, and works with families and communities affected by violence.

Phone: 1800 105 303 Web: www.fvpls.org

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria Web: www.dvrcv.org.au/support-services/national-services

1800 RESPECT (National Sexual Assault, Family and Domestic Violence Counselling Line)

Phone: 1800 737 732 (24 hour information and support) Web: www.1800RESPECT.org.au

Lifeline Phone: 13 11 14 Web: www.lifeline.org.au

MensLine Phone: 1300 78 99 78 Web: www.mensline.org.au

