

What Do Victims Feel?

It is important for you not to judge a victim's response. One victim may react very emotionally and another may be extremely calm. No matter how victims react, their emotions are normal and okay. Following are some common and immediate reactions to sexual victimization:

- Crying, sobbing
- Shaking
- Laughter due to shock
- Denial
- Feelings of fear, anger, shame
- Self-blame
- Feelings of guilt and helplessness
- Abrupt mood changes
- Embarrassment

Over time, these immediate reactions may fade, but other emotions and difficulties may continue for sometime throughout a victim's recovery. Other long-term reactions include:

- Fear of being alone
- Fear of the dark
- Trouble sleeping, nightmares
- Trouble concentrating
- Depression
- Fear and dislike of sex
- Trust issues in relationships
- Flashbacks of the assault
- Anxiety
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Engaging in high risk behaviors
- Suicidal thoughts

Remember, help is available for victims and their loved ones during all phases of recovery.

There is help... you can talk with someone who will listen, who will understand.

You don't need to hide your feelings or pretend they are not there.
You are not alone.

**For more information,
contact your
local rape crisis center.**



Florida Council Against Sexual Violence

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How to Help a Victim

R A P E

RAPE: HOW TO HELP A VICTIM



Sexual violence is any unwanted sexual contact. Sexual violence includes such crimes as rape, incest, statutory sexual assault, sexual harassment and sexual assault, or any sexual contact without consent. Anyone who has been a victim of a sexual assault needs compassion, sensitivity, and caring. This is where you can help.

Many people want to help friends and family members who have been hurt, but sometimes they don't know what to say or do. Unless you have been victimized by sexual violence, you may not be able to understand a victim's feelings. It is important to remember that not

all victims react or feel the same.

You are likely to experience some strong reactions when you learn of a friend's or loved one's assault. Reactions or feelings of anger, rage, shock, revenge, a desire to "fix it," to move on, and feelings of helplessness, or rationalizing that "it wasn't that bad" are common.

For victims to become survivors, they need empathy, understanding and perhaps a listening ear. Do not be judgmental and ask victims why they did a certain thing, wore a certain item of clothing or went to a certain place. Remember, no one deserves or asks to be raped.

You can provide important information and support. By reading this brochure, you are taking an important step in educating yourself about sexual violence. The fact that you care will make the biggest positive difference.

- Remain calm. You might feel shock or rage, but expressing these emotions to the victim may cause the victim more trauma.
- Encourage medical attention. Care is important because there may be internal injuries that are not obvious, or the victim may have been exposed to sexually transmitted diseases. Victims are entitled to a forensic medical exam, whether or not they decide to report the assault.
- Give the victim control. All control has been stripped from the victim during the assault. Allow the victim to make decisions about what steps to take next.
- Maintain confidentiality. Let the victim decide who will know about the assault.
- Let the victim express feelings. Listen without adding your opinions. If the victim wishes to remain silent, do not force a discussion. Say you will be there to listen always.
- Believe the victim. Make it clear to the victim that you believe the assault happened and that the assault is the fault of the abuser, NOT the victim.
- Encourage counseling. Give the victim the hotline number for the nearest rape crisis center, but let the decision be the victim's.
- Seek help for yourself. Don't ignore your own feelings, even though you may not be able to share all of them with the victim right now. Your local rape crisis center can provide counseling for you if you need to talk.

How You Can Help