

## Female Survivors of Rape and Sexual Assault

If you are a survivor of rape or sexual assault you might recognise some of the effects of sexual trauma outlined below. Rape and sexual assault is a frightening ordeal, and coping with the many and varied emotions that it causes, can feel and be overwhelming. Hopefully, recognising that much of what you are feeling is understandable, natural and shared by other survivors is of some comfort, and will give you the courage to seek advice and support.

### **There is support available to you, to cope with the effects of rape.**

**You are not to blame.** Guilt and feeling responsible are common feelings after sexual abuse, but the guilt and responsibility does not lie with you. Society often does a bad job of showing support to victims, sending out dangerous messages that suggest women can encourage rape or sexual assault. This is simply untrue, and it's important to have people around you who remind you of this.

**You have a right to be angry.** Feelings of anger after rape or sexual assault are healthy and an understandable reaction; often though survivors turn their rage inwards, or suppress it entirely. This is when anger can become unhealthy, turning into self-hatred and even self-harm. Vocalise your anger and frustration by talking to friends, a counsellor, joining a support group or even writing down your thoughts.

**You have nothing to be ashamed of.** Rape or sexual assault can be humiliating and degrading and can cause feelings of shame. Perpetrators often try to shame the person they abuse, encouraging them to feel they're at fault, or that there is something intrinsically wrong with them. You were subjected to and have survived an ordeal, the fault and shame does not belong to you, but belongs to the abuser.

**Shock comes in many forms.** Shock is a powerful thing and can affect our minds and emotional responses in many ways. A lot of women suffer denial or even memory loss after a rape or sexual assault. Memory loss can affect some women for several years. This can be your mind's way of dealing with the

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trauma; blocking out memories you're not quite ready to cope with yet.

**Be good to yourself.** Since you have suffered something traumatic, you deserve to set quality time aside and focus on looking after yourself. Take control of your life again, do things at your own pace and focus on what you enjoy and what nurtures you.

Sleep disturbance is common for rape and sexual assault survivors, and this can affect your emotional well-being. Exercise and a healthy balanced diet are good for sleep; mindfulness and meditation can also be helpful.

GINA (a social enterprise linked to RSVP) is run for survivors of abuse. It takes part in a weekly run and a walking group twice a month. You don't need any experience of running or any specific level of fitness, beginners are welcome to the runs and the walks. Email: [info@rsvporg.co.uk](mailto:info@rsvporg.co.uk) for more information.

Practice self-care whenever you can. Avoiding excessive drinking or drug taking, eating healthily and maintaining good hygiene will all effect how you feel about yourself. For example, alcohol is a depressant and can make an already low mood much worse. Coping with trauma can mean you feel differently about yourself, feelings of low self-esteem and self-worth are understandable and natural; by making self-care a priority you will improve your long-term physical and emotional health and start to feel good about you again.

**Talking to people.** Whether you choose to disclose what has happened to friends and family, or report the rape or sexual assault to the police, is entirely your decision. You shouldn't be pressured to talk about it if you don't want to.

If you do decide to tell the police, RSVP have an advocacy service that offers practical and emotional support to survivors going through the criminal justice process. Independent Sexual Violence Advocates (ISVAs) can offer you support while you give your evidence, talk to the police on your behalf, come to court with you, and support you to access other services, such as sexual health testing or counselling.

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If you decide to disclose the rape or sexual assault to family or a friend, choose somebody you trust and who will respect your feelings. It can be an enormous relief to tell somebody but a lot of survivors prefer not to do this; again, it's your choice. It can be easier to talk to somebody outside of your family and social circle, somebody who doesn't already know you. RSVP have a helpline where you can talk to a trained worker in confidence.

**Now is the time to focus on yourself.** Rape or sexual assault can make a woman feel powerless; regain control of your life by putting yourself first. If you are concerned about your physical or emotional health, you can talk confidentially to a range of different people and organisations to work out and access the support you need.

Take time out to do things that you enjoy, discover new interests. You are not defined by the rape or the sexual abuse. You are a whole person with interests, quirks and character. Make a list of what you like about yourself. When you're feeling low the list might be small and you might not be able to think of anything, maybe ask a supportive friend what they like about you as a starting point? As your well-being improves you can add to this list and keep it as a reminder of the interesting person you are. Put yourself first, be kind to yourself and give yourself time and patience.

### Useful links:

Psychologist **Nina Burrows** uses illustrations, and videos to discuss the impacts of rape, sexual violence and sexual abuse: [www.ninaburrowes.com](http://www.ninaburrowes.com)

**Mindfulness and meditation exercises** are one way of calming the mind and helping us stay in the present moment. Headspace provides short guided meditations, including specific topics e.g. stress, sleep and anxiety. For more information on Headspace visit: [www.headspace.com](http://www.headspace.com)

**Practicing Mindfulness** has ideas to "Quiet the Mind" and other mindfulness, stress reducing exercises. Visit: [www.practicingmindfulness.com](http://www.practicingmindfulness.com)

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**You don't need to deal with the effects of sexual violence, sexual assault or sexual abuse alone. RSVP are here to offer support to survivors, to enable you to live a life with hope and confidence which is free from abuse.**

**We offer:**

- Specialist counselling for survivors and their supporters
- Independent sexual violence advocates (ISVAs) to assist you through criminal or civil proceedings or in crisis, whether you have reported or not
- Social groups and coffee mornings focusing on self-help
- Emotional support on our helpline 0121 643 4136

These are some of our services. For more ways we can support you contact:-

☎ 0121 643 0301

@ [info@rsvporg.co.uk](mailto:info@rsvporg.co.uk)

@ [isva@rsvporg.co.uk](mailto:isva@rsvporg.co.uk)

@ [www.rsvporg.co.uk/services](http://www.rsvporg.co.uk/services)

🐦 @RSVP\_West\_Mids

f facebook.com/RSVPWM

📷 instagram.com/RSVPWM

"For the first time I'm able to accept what's happened and begin to look forward."

**This self-help sheet may be photocopied under the following conditions:**

Each page must be copied in its entirety, including RSVP information headings, where applicable. Copies may be made for use within organisations for training purposes or for clients/individuals for self-help purposes. Copies may not be resold.

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a world free from sexual violence and abuse

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