

## Making Relationships and Coping With Loneliness

Many survivors feel a sense of isolation and loneliness after the trauma of rape or sexual abuse. You might find it difficult to maintain existing relationships or build new ones; this is common and understandable.

Some of your loved ones might know what you've been through, if you decided to tell them, others might know nothing at all. Preferring to spend time with people who don't know could help you to feel reassured, as you can't be reminded of the trauma you have faced. Alternatively, you might only want to spend time with people who know, as they can provide you with support and understanding. Some of the time you might even feel as though you don't want any company at all. If you're finding it hard to be with others this general advice on coping with the effects of loneliness, and how you might form relationships in the future could help.

### **There is support available to cope with the effects of loneliness.**

**You deserve supportive relationships.** Some people avoid personal relationships because they feel they're not worthy of a good relationship. This can arise from the damaging feelings of shame and guilt that abuse survivors can experience. If you identify with this feeling, addressing your self-esteem issues could put you in a better place to enjoy friendships and romantic relationships. No one can take away your self-worth.

**Go at your own pace.** If you're uncomfortable with sex and intimacy, you can, and should, say no. There is no strict timeline you need to follow. If you have a partner they must respect this. No one should put pressure on you to 'move forward'. Your wishes need to be respected, not just in the immediate aftermath of the assault, but forever.

**Trust, on your own terms.** You can't force yourself to trust people; abuse often occurs within relationships where trust is betrayed and this will have long-term effects. Trust needs to come in its own time. Trusting someone might make you feel vulnerable; take time to build trust at your own pace.

RSVP services: 0121 643 0301 Helpline: 0121 643 4136 Email: [info@rsvporg.co.uk](mailto:info@rsvporg.co.uk)



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**Coping with triggers and intimacy.** The way a person touches you when you are being intimate could trigger upsetting memories. Don't force yourself to go through with something you don't feel comfortable with. A caring person and partner should understand what's happening and respect your choices. When you're ready, try new ways of being affectionate and intimate that avoid triggering the same associations. Take control of your environment too and create a space to be intimate in that feels safe, comfortable and relaxing.

You can read more about the difficulties that survivors can experience in their sexual/intimate relationships, and learn new ways to cope. This article talks about how to establish a set of guidelines, to enable you to enjoy intimacy and a healthy sex life again. [www.healthyplace.com/sex/abuse/sexual-intimacy-after-sexual-assault-or-sexual-abuse/](http://www.healthyplace.com/sex/abuse/sexual-intimacy-after-sexual-assault-or-sexual-abuse/)

There are also useful resources about reclaiming your sex life after abuse, on the "My Body Back Project" website, including this page with advice and information: [www.mybodybackproject.com/tutorials-advice/](http://www.mybodybackproject.com/tutorials-advice/)

**Sexual violence and abuse does not define you.** If you have been abused, you haven't been 'spoilt' and you aren't 'damaged goods'. You can't make what happened disappear, but it doesn't have to determine and shape who you are, there is much more that shapes you and your life.

**Meeting new people.** There are many ways to do this, although it can feel daunting at first. Mixing with others can have a really positive impact on your well-being though. RSVP have a number of social groups where you can get together with other survivors and take part in social activities. Joining one of these free groups could reduce loneliness, they are a great way of meeting new people. They also help you to socialise in a safe and supportive environment [www.rsvporq.co.uk/services/free-social-groups/](http://www.rsvporq.co.uk/services/free-social-groups/)

There is also a free closed online group on for survivors. This establishes a community to help you and other survivors connect with and support each other, and feel less alone. Find out more: [www.reconnected.life/community/](http://www.reconnected.life/community/)

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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

@ isva@rsvporg.co.uk

@ www.rsvporg.co.uk/services

🐦 @RSVP\_West\_Mids

f facebook.com/RSVPWM

📷 instagram.com/RSVPWM

"My counsellor is amazing; she made me feel safe and helped me build confidence and self-love."

**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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