

Male Survivors of Rape and Sexual Assault

All kinds of sexual trauma, including rape or sexual assault can, and does, happen to men and boys. Male survivors often feel isolated. 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 be overwhelming. Hopefully, recognising that much of what you are feeling is understandable, natural and shared by other male 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

Acknowledge your feelings. It can be difficult for men and boys to talk about, or emotionally address, rape and sexual abuse. Society creates the idea that men and boys should be physically and emotionally tough, and able to take care of themselves without support from others. These ideas are unfair and untrue stereotypes, and can make dealing with the effects of male rape and sexual assault harder. You have survived something extremely traumatic, it is important to know that talking about your feelings can help and that there is support available.

Coping with anger. 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 or direct it at people close to them. This is when anger can become unhealthy, turning into aggression, 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. Survivors Manchester offers services for male survivors, there is information on their website including about anger: www.survivorsmanchester.org.uk/impact/emotional-issues/anger

Rape won't define your sexuality. It is common for male survivors to feel confused about their sexuality when they're raped or sexually assaulted by another male. However, rape and abuse does not define your sexuality or mean you're gay. Similarly, men and boys who rape other men and boys can be any

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sexuality. Rape and sexual assault is more about power and control than sexual orientation or desire. Some male survivors have an erection or ejaculate during the assault, which can be confusing. This bodily response is a normal response to physical stimulus, it doesn't mean that you wanted it to happen or that you enjoyed it.

Women can, and do, abuse. In this country, current law states that only men and boys can commit the offence of rape. Despite this, rape and sexual assault is experienced and committed by people of all genders. It can be difficult for males to talk about abuse when it is perpetrated by females. Society puts across stereotypes that men and boys are more powerful, suggesting they're weak when they're raped or abused by women and girls. All sexual trauma is distressing and serious, and can have long lasting effects.

You have nothing to be ashamed of. Rape or sexual assault can be humiliating and degrading and 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 it belongs to the abuser.

Shock comes in many forms. It's a powerful thing and can affect us in many ways. A lot of men and boys suffer denial or memory loss after rape or sexual assault, affecting some for several years. This can be your mind's way of dealing with trauma; blocking out memories that you're not 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 or 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

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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 for more information.

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 abuse 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 of all ages and genders 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.

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 volunteer of any gender in confidence.

Now is the time to focus on yourself. Rape or sexual assault can make you feel powerless and cause you to question many things; 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. You're a whole person with interests, quirks and character. You might find comfort to learn how other men and boys have coped after rape.

Useful links

Survivors Manchester have a range of resources on their website for male survivors including self-help information www.survivorsmanchester.org.uk

Survivors UK is a national charity for male survivors with self-help information, a helpline and more www.survivorsuk.org

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Living Well has a range of other self-help information for male survivors visit <http://www.livingwell.org.au/managing-difficulties/>

The Male Survivors Partnership has a directory to make it easier for boys and men to find services local to them <http://www.malesurvivor.co.uk/male-survivors-services/#1496241499449-f0f9b123-c429> There is also a National Helpline for male survivors. You can call them on: 0808 800 5005

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 the telephone 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

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"I feel my self-esteem has come back and I've gained confidence and much more of an understanding of my feelings."

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