

COMMON FEELINGS AFTER EXPERIENCING SEXUAL ASSAULT

SHOCK AND NUMBNESS

- **How You May Feel:** Confused, easily overwhelmed, unsure of how to feel or what to do, spacey or out of it.
- **What You Can Do:** Be aware that these are normal reactions to trauma. Each person handles crisis differently, so think of things that helped you get through crises in the past. Get help to sort out what you would like to do and how you may want to organize your time, thoughts and decisions. Be compassionate toward yourself and give yourself time to heal.

LOSS OF CONTROL

- **How You May Feel:** Like your whole life has been turned upside down and that you will never have control of your life again; like your thoughts and feelings are out of control.
- **What You Can Do:** Ask how other people have handled similar situations. Try to make as many of your own decisions as possible, this may help you gradually regain a sense of control over your life. Try to get as much control over your life as you possibly can, even over small things.

GUILT AND SELF-BLAME

- **How You May Feel:** Like you could have or should have done something to avoid or prevent the assault; doubtful of your ability to make good judgments.
- **What You Can Do:** No matter what the situation was, you did not ask to be hurt or violated. Blaming yourself is sometimes a way to feel control over the situation, thinking that if you avoid similar circumstances, it will not happen to you again. Talk to someone about the situation and remind yourself that it wasn't your fault.

ISOLATION

- **How You May Feel:** That this experience has set you apart from other people; that other people can tell you have been sexually assaulted just by looking at you; not wanting to burden other people with your experience.
- **What You Can Do:** Recovering from an assault can be a very lonely experience. However, you are not alone in what you are feeling. You may find it reassuring to talk to others who have been assaulted or to a CARE advocate who has worked with other sexual assault and relationship violence survivors.

FEAR

- **How You May Feel:** Fear that the assailant may return; fear for your general physical safety; fear of being alone; fear of other people or situations that may remind you of the assault.
- **What You Can Do:** If you want company, don't hesitate to ask people you trust to be with you day and night. You may want to make your physical environment feel safer

(for example, moving, making your home more secure and/or getting to know your neighbors better).

VULNERABILITY, DISTRUST

- **How You May Feel:** That you're at the mercy of your own emotions or the actions of others; unsure of who to trust or how to trust yourself; suspicious and cautious.
- **What You Can Do:** Trust your instincts in regards to who you want to talk with about what happened to you. Try to talk with people whom you have found to be the most dependable in the past, select those who have been good listeners and non-judgmental. Feelings of general suspicion may subside as you begin to find people you can trust.

SEXUAL FEARS

- **How You May Feel:** That you don't want to have sexual relations; wondering whether you will ever want or enjoy sexual relationships again; fearful that being sexually intimate may remind you of the assault.
- **What You Can Do:** Try to tell your partner what your limits are. Let your partner know if the situation reminds you of the assault and may bring up painful memories. Let your partner know that it's the situation, not him/her, that's bringing up the painful memories. Let your partner know what level of intimacy feels comfortable for you, you may feel more comfortable with gentle physical affection.

ANGER

- **How You May Feel:** Angry at the assailant; thinking about retaliation; angry at the world since you no longer feel safe.
- **What You Can Do:** Be accepting of your anger. Angry thoughts toward the assailant doesn't mean that you're a violent or bad person — you have the right to feel angry about the violation you have experienced. You may want to talk to people who understand these feelings.

DISRUPTION OF DAILY ACTIVITIES

- **How You May Feel:** Preoccupied with intrusive thoughts about the assault; unable to concentrate; having nightmares, sleep disturbances and/or changes in appetite; experiencing "startle reactions," phobias, general anxiety or depression; triggering of memories of a prior crisis or trauma.
- **What You Can Do:** Although these are common reactions, they can be quite disturbing. Take things very slowly. Some people find it helpful to keep a notebook on hand to write down feelings, thoughts, ideas or details of the assault. Keeping your thoughts and feelings in one place may make them feel more manageable.

CONNECT WITH A CARE ADVOCATE.
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