

South Essex Rape & Incest Crisis Centre

**Information pack for women and girls
who have been raped or experienced
sexual violence**



Helpline: 01375 380609
National Helpline: 0808 802 9999
www.sericc.org.uk



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Introduction

This pack is for women and girls who have experienced any sexual violence, either by someone they know or a stranger, recently or in the past. It includes general information, the common myths of sexual violence, a brief overview of reporting to the police and information about what counselling involves. It does not need to be read all at once. Some parts of the pack may bring up thoughts and feelings that can be distressing to you, so take your time. If you feel overwhelmed, then reach out and get wider support.

You may be experiencing a range of feelings – from outrage to despondency, from anger to the deepest of sadness. At the end of the pack there are additional resources and contact numbers, as well as a number of websites throughout the pack if you would like further information; (if you are reading this on-line many of the websites will be active at the time of writing).

Most sexual violence is committed by men known to the women and girls they abuse, however, SERICC acknowledges that boys and men are sexually assaulted and that some perpetrators are women. It is also important to acknowledge that some women experience rape and sexual assault by more than one person, sometimes groups of men and women.

The ways in which women and men react immediately after being raped can also vary. Different people have different reactions; some will be angry; some will be calm; others may be silent and withdrawn. You may feel too shocked to face up to what has happened. You may feel that you simply want to try to forget that the rape ever happened. You may have a feeling of not daring to 'let go' lest you lose control completely once you let your feelings out. However you felt after being raped – *your reaction was normal*.

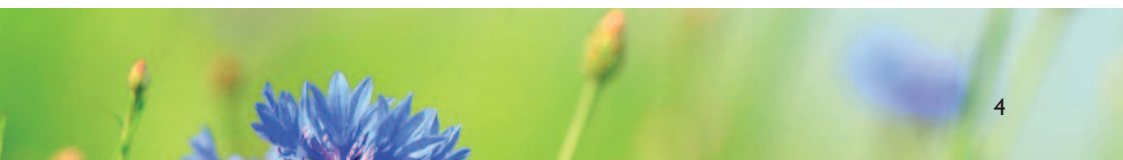
After suffering a sexual assault you are likely to find yourself going through all sorts of painful and uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. If you have people around you who you trust to be non-judgemental and accepting of your feelings, then you will probably find it very helpful to express to them what is going on for you.

Unfortunately you may encounter disbelief from some people who may ask hurtful questions and make unhelpful comments such as: 'Why didn't you fight back?' and 'Well I wouldn't have accepted a lift from someone I hardly knew in the first place' and there may also be people who want to help but who simply do not know what words to say to you.

It is important that you are kind to yourself, accept whatever support is available *and that feels right for you*. Do not expect too much of yourself and think that you 'should get over it' or 'forget it'. Rape is not something that can be forgotten, but you can work through your feelings and learn to live with it. You may find that you need to go over the details of what happened again and again. The type of support and the length of time you need support are personal to you, and *are quite normal*.

Try to hold onto the belief that you *will* get through this – you deserve to, and you will. No-one ever has a right to do things to us that we do not want to be done. Even if no physical violence was used, it is always wrong. Guilt, blame and shame belong to the rapist, not to you.

Remember, it is your needs and feelings that are important – **look after yourself**. You did not deserve to be raped and you do deserve to be nurtured now.



Myths and Realities

Rape is a subject which most people find uncomfortable. For women it conjures up all kinds of images. Some of us will think of dirty old men in plastic coats, or a monster too gross to think about. Others will have more specific ideas about rape, perhaps thinking about a certain group of men such as 'weirdos' in dark alleys.

Rape and sexual assault happen far more often than statistics indicate. You may find that the people around you do not really understand about rape – most of us are shielded from knowing what actually happens until we, or someone close to us, is affected. The rapist may have used physical violence and/or verbal intimidation. He may have done humiliating things to you. Perhaps he threatened the safety of your family. He may have been someone you know – a partner, ex partner, friend, neighbour, workmate, relative or carer.

Every woman in our society feels the fear of rape – no woman is allowed to ignore it. We are taught as children to be afraid of 'strange men' who offer us sweets, lifts, etc. Women are taught as adults to keep our doors locked, not to be alone, not to look or act in any way that might 'bring rape upon ourselves'. Perhaps the most obvious situation in which we are taught to be afraid is when we walk home alone at night. The threat of violence is a total intrusion into women's personal space and transforms a routine and/or potential pleasurable activity (for example, a walk in the park, a quiet evening at home, a long train journey) into a potentially upsetting, disturbing and often threatening experience.

Women from Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) groups

There are religious and cultural factors within some BAMER communities which have an impact on the levels of disclosure of sexual violence and childhood sexual abuse which makes it difficult to know its actual nature and extent. Although the barriers preventing some women from BAMER groups disclosing incidents of sexual crime are not necessarily religious in nature, there are similarities between faith communities in terms of the cultural stigma attached to being a victim of sexual violence. There are significant taboos that restrict women from feeling free to discuss their experiences. BAMER women experience additional forms of violence (e.g. forced marriage and female genital mutilation) and through the 'one year rule' of 'no recourse' to public funds, those with insecure immigration status are denied protections and safety available to other women¹.

¹See report by Amnesty International UK and Southall Black Sisters. For more information contact Southall Black Sisters on 020 7 571 9595. Information from End Violence Against Women Campaign. <http://www.endviolenceagainstawomen.org.uk/>

Women with physical and learning disabilities

Research by Brown, Stein and Turk (1995) found that there were 1,250 cases of reported sexual abuse against adults with a learning disability annually in England and Wales. This is a conservative estimate given the likelihood of under-reporting, and there are, unfortunately, no comparable figures for children with a learning disability. Women with a physical or learning disability may be targeted by sex offenders because they are vulnerable. Those with a learning disability may also be targeted because offenders think they won't be believed or that they won't make credible witnesses in court. Where the perpetrators are care workers or are in a position of authority, additional barriers to reporting and fear of being believed exist.²

Rape myths give people a false sense of security by minimising and/or denying the prevalence of sexual violence. They accomplish this by blaming the victim and making excuses for the perpetrator. In effect these myths perpetuate sexual violence because they play a powerful part in defining responses to rape and create an excuse not to address the realities of sexual violence.

Here are some of the most common myths that surround rape and sexual assault:

Myth *Women are most likely to be raped outside, in dark alleyways late at night. If you go out alone at night, you're asking for it and the best way for a woman to protect herself is to stay in.*

Reality The suggestion to avoid walking alone, especially at night is a common myth relating to how women can avoid a sexual assault. However, only 9% of rapes are outdoors. Women are far more often raped in their homes and in their work places where they are less likely to be believed and even less likely to report. This myth can control movements and it restricts freedom. This can feel like we are living under an enforced 'curfew' and that it is a woman's responsibility to be either in or out at certain times if she wishes to avoid being raped. The majority of rapes are committed in the victim's home.

Myth *Women who are sexually assaulted 'ask for it' by the way they dress or act. Rape only happens to young women*

Reality Many women are led to believe that if they are not part of a certain category of women then they are 'safe' from being raped. Women and girls of all ages, classes, culture, ability, sexuality, race and faith are raped. What a woman looks

² www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/sexualoffences/finalsvaap.pdf

like has little significance. Reports show that there is a great diversity in the way targeted women act or dress. Rapists choose women based on their vulnerability not on their physical appearance.

Sometimes women see themselves as 'unworthy' or 'undesirable' because of their age or physical appearance and therefore 'safe' from rape. Some men joke or make comments about women's appearances or age to indicate whether she is sexually desirable or available, or as part of their defence in court, saying he thought 'he was doing her a favour'. Women are raped from the age of three to ninety three. Rape is an act of violence not sex.

Myth *Everyone knows when a woman says no, she often means yes.*

Reality Rape is a terrifying, violent and humiliating experience that no woman wants or asks for. Legally a person has the right to change their mind about having sex at any point of sexual contact. If a sexual partner does not stop at the time a person says no, this is rape. If a person is in a relationship with someone or has had sex with that person before, this does not mean that they cannot be assaulted by them. Consent must be given every time two people engage in sexual contact. Sex without consent is rape.

Myth *The woman was drunk / took drugs / had a bad reputation / was hitch hiking / wore tight clothes / seduced him / probably got what she was asking for.*

Reality If a person is unconscious or their judgement is impaired by alcohol or drugs, legally they are unable to give consent. Having non-consensual sex with a woman who is intoxicated is sexual assault or rape.

Rapists use a variety of excuses to attempt to discredit the women they rape and to justify their crime. No woman asks for, or deserves to be raped or sexually assaulted. Often a rape case is defined more by the woman's character than by what has happened to her. Newspapers and the mass media often refer to women in the roles that they have within society – 'young mother', 'grandmother', 'prostitute', 'doctor's wife' etc.

If the woman's role or social position is not universally acceptable, the focus of the case often changes. For example, serial rapists like 'Jack the Ripper' and Sutcliffe in the late 70's and 80's were glorified (Jack the ripper has his own books, museum, computer games and even tourist walks in London named after him!) by the press until they attacked 'ordinary girls' as well as prostitutes.

The rules imposed on women's behaviour allow rapists to shift the responsibility for rape onto women wherever possible, so that most of the men who rape are seen as victims of malicious allegations, carelessness or stupidity. There is no other crime in which so much effort is expended to make the victim appear responsible – imagine the character, sexual history or financial background of a robbery victim being questioned in court.

Myth *Women eventually relax and enjoy it. Women secretly want to be raped.*

Reality There is a widely held belief that women enjoy rape or that it is 'just sex at the wrong time, in the wrong place'. Rape is a crime of violence and humiliation which can involve being beaten, physical restraint, the use of knives and sticks, urination and defecation. Studies have consistently shown that most rapes involve physical force to some degree. Frequently when a woman is raped she is afraid that she will be killed – rapists often use the threat of killing a woman or her children to ensure her 'submission' and her silence after the attack. Women do not enjoy sexual violence. Victims of murder, robbery and other crimes are never portrayed as having enjoyed the experience.

Myth *The woman did not get hurt or fight back. It could not have been rape.*

Reality Men who rape or sexually assault women and girls will often use weapons or threats of violence to intimidate women. The fact that there is no visible evidence of violence does not mean that a woman has not been raped.

Another myth that goes hand in hand with this is that '*rape is a fate worse than death*' and this links with the belief that women should fight and resist throughout. Faced with the reality of rape, women make second by second decisions; all of which are directed at minimising the harm done to them. At the point where initial resistance, struggling, reasoning etc have failed, the fear of further violence often limits women's resistance. The only form of control that seems available to women at this point is limiting the harm done to them.

Myth *Men of certain races and backgrounds are more likely to commit sexual violence.*

Reality There is no typical rapist. Studies show that men who commit sexual violence come from every economic, ethnic, racial, age and social group. 85% of rapists are men known to their victims.

Myth *Men who rape or sexually assault women are mentally ill or monsters.*

Reality Studies have indicated that as few as 5% of men are psychotic at the time of their crimes. Few convicted rapists are referred for psychiatric treatment. The most common defences to rape are:

- Nothing happened
- It wasn't me
- She consented

Myth *The man was drunk / on drugs / depressed / under stress / wasn't himself.*

Reality Men use a variety of excuses to justify the act of rape.
There is never an excuse.

Myth *Once a man is sexually aroused he cannot help himself. He has to have sex.*

Reality Studies show that most rapes are premeditated i.e. they are either wholly or partially planned in advance. All rapes committed by more than one assailant are planned. Men can quite easily control their urges to have sex. Rape is an act of violence - not sexual gratification. Men who rape or sexually assault do so to dominate, violate and control a woman.

Myth *Men who rape are sexually frustrated if they do not have the opportunity to have sex with a willing partner.*

Reality Men who rape are as likely as any other man to be cohabiting or to be in a significant relationship with a woman. More than one in five women are raped by their partners, husbands or ex partners. Women who work as prostitutes or in the sex industry are usually dismissed as rape victims because of bias by the police, criminal justice system, juries and society in general. Men rape women to secure power and control. Men commit child abuse to secure power and control. Men are therefore motivated by power and control, and using a forced sexual act to achieve this is just another way of gaining power – not a way of gaining sexual relief.

Myth *Women make up stories about being raped.*

Reality Reporting to the police can be a difficult decision. There are many myths that underlie the belief that women make false and malicious allegations of rape against innocent men. Studies show however, that the allegations of rape that are false are exactly the same as that of any other crime i.e. 3- 8% (Gap or Chasm 2005)

Myth *Women cannot rape other women*

Reality The majority of sexual assaults are committed by men against women, but anyone can be sexually assaulted and emotional, physical and sexual abuse does happen in same sex relationships. Often when women are assaulted by other women they fear they will not be believed. It is important to realise that women who are assaulted by other women need to be able to access support and are believed.

Why These Myths Exist

Rape is an act which is totally controlled by the perpetrator. During rape a woman's right to be self-empowered and sexually self-determined is completely denied. Our sexuality is fundamental to our sense of ourselves and such a violation takes away the control we expect to have over our bodies and our lives.

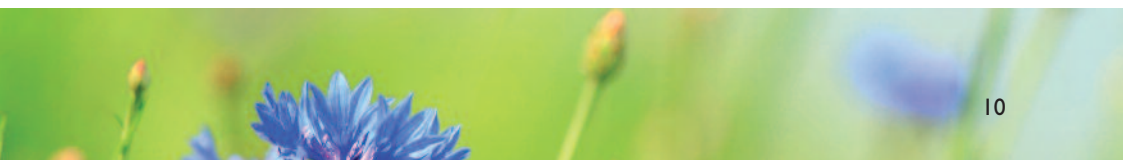
Everyone has their own ideas about what rape is – who perpetrates it and why; and women who have been raped will be affected by whatever preconceptions they themselves have held about rape, as well as by the attitudes of others they come into contact with.

Often women will go over in their mind, things like, *'I accepted a drink from him....'*, *'I refused to have a drink with him....'*, *'I shouldn't have gone on that second date....'*, *'I invited him in for coffee...'* and find a way of blaming themselves; but since when was meeting for a coffee, or having a drink an invitation to rape?

If you have always thought of rape in terms of strangers in the street, and a friend or partner assaults you in your own home, it may be hard initially even to recognise that what happened was rape.

Talking with other women who have experienced sexual violence about what has happened can help to validate our own experiences and release ourselves from the myths that surround us in society. Rape is not only an individual experience, but it is part of a much larger pattern of the power relationships between men and women.

As it is, many women are left in a position of being on their own to deal not only with the physical effects, but also with feeling isolated, angry, guilty, and full of shame; surrounded by the myths and prejudices that deny their reality.



Does pornography lead to rape?

Studies show that of the 200 million people online at any time between 25 to 30% are using pornography sites. The only words entered in search engines more often than 'sex' are 'the' and 'and'. At the time of writing there were more than 400,000 websites worldwide that offer child pornography, which is illegal in every country in the world. Despite this there was a 345% increase in child porn websites in a 5 month recorded period in 2003³.

There are differing opinions and views on the issues of pornography within society. However, in the majority of pornography, women are depicted as passive and submissive and the men are depicted as being in control. This form of inequality may lead to some men wanting to replicate that power relationship within their relationships with women.

Except for the minority of people who think that you should be able to access and buy any form of pornography - including images of rape – most people support some form of censorship. Therefore, it is not a question of being for or against censorship; it's about where you draw the line and why. Why would one consider censorship? Research has clearly shown that attitudes in society are influenced and shaped by the ideas and images that we are constantly exposed to. Take advertising as an example. If advertising didn't work, multi-national companies would not spend literally millions of pounds on advertising their wares. It is therefore safe to assume that if advertising can have such a huge influence on the choices and decisions we make and how we live our lives; exposure to pornography will also help to influence and dictate societal attitudes

What is Rape?

Rape is an act of violence and domination and anger. It uses sexual acts including penetration as weapons.

Current Legal Definition of rape

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 (the Act) came into force on the 1st May 2004. The purpose of the Act was to strengthen and modernise the law on sexual offences, whilst improving preventative measures and the protection of individuals from sexual offenders. The Act extends the definition of rape to include the penetration by a penis of the vagina, anus or mouth of another person. The 2003 Act also changes the law about consent and belief in consent.

³ Cornwall Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre

The word “consent” in the context of the offence of rape is now defined in the Sexual Offences Act 2003. A person consents if he or she agrees by choice, and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice. The essence of this definition is the agreement by choice. The law does not require the victim to have resisted physically in order to prove a lack of consent. The question of whether the victim consented is a matter for the jury to decide, although the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) considers this issue very carefully throughout the life of the case.

What is sexual (indecent) assault?

Sexual assault is an act of physical, psychological and emotional violation, in the form of a sexual act, which is inflicted on someone without consent. It can involve forcing or manipulating someone to witness or participate in any sexual acts, apart from penetration of the mouth with the penis, the penetration of anus or vagina (however slight) with any object or the penis, which is rape.

‘Date’ Rape

Recent reports in the media and attention by researchers has led to the (inaccurate) naming of certain types of rape such as ‘date’ rape. However, despite this not being a new phenomenon, it has had an impact on the reporting of rape cases both in terms of women reporting rape and the outcomes of court cases. There is the belief that being raped by a known man is not as traumatic as being raped by a stranger. Our experience shows us that this is most often not the case. Women invest a lot of trust into the relationships they form with men and if this trust is abused it can leave the woman doubting all relationships, past, present and future.

‘Drug’ Rape

The so called ‘drug rape’ (particularly the drug Rohypnol) is a label that the media has used in response to attacks on women and girls that have happened in the UK and Europe over the last ten years where drugs have been given to the women (unwittingly) in social settings e.g. a dance club, pub or bar by a man, or men who are known/unknown to the woman. The drug/s are usually ‘delivered’ through alcoholic or non-alcoholic drinks. Drug assisted rape has actually been happening since time began, but was labelled ‘drug’ rape in America in 1993. Media attention has focused on drugs like Rohypnol but other drugs such as alcohol, prescription medication and street drugs have been used for many years in order to gain access and incapacitate women as potential victims. The forced misuse of tranquillisers and other prescribed drugs are regularly used in the rape of women and girls in their own homes

It is important to point out that reactions to this form of rape will vary from individual to individual and will depend on which type of drug was used. Drugs used may result in a woman becoming physically 'helpless' to respond, may result in loss of memory of the assault (which may or may not return) or may stimulate sexual response. Even if she consented to take the drug (and that might be the case) she is still not responsible for any subsequent abuse. Women may experience extreme fearfulness or an 'out of control' sensation, particularly if they cannot remember clearly what happened when the memories start to come back. Women may have suffered physical injury but will be unaware of it immediately or unaware of how the injury happened.

Rape in Marriage

Rape in marriage became a crime in 1991; before then it was considered that women consented to their husbands for the length of their marriage

'I stopped responding sexually to my husband because of his treatment towards me in other areas of our life together. I couldn't turn my body and my feelings on off at will. He was increasingly aware that sex between us was against my will but he just went ahead anyway and I know that he felt able to use me this way because I was dependent on him for food, clothes and a roof over my head'

Even now, both men and women often feel that having sex is part of a woman's duty in a relationship

Sexual Harassment

Before the mid 1970s, sexual harassment had no name, it existed but the language to name it did not exist. Since that time, there has been a growing awareness and reporting of sexual harassment. Sexual Harassment can include:

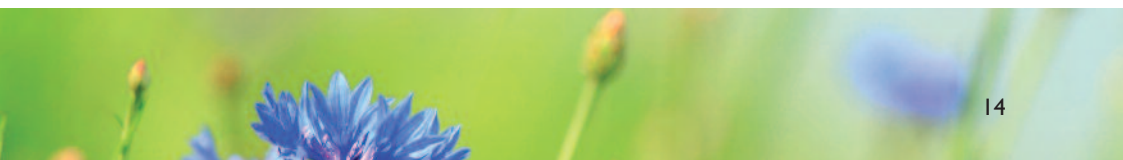
- Suggestive looks and gestures;
- Staring and leering;
- Threatening behaviour;
- Brushing against another's body, pinching, touching or rubbing in a sexual manner;
- Promises of job benefits or promotion in exchange for sexual favours, threats of risks to job security if sexual favours are not granted;

- Verbal conduct – sexual remarks, jokes, catcalls, whistling and teasing, asking questions about personal or sexual life, turning discussions to sexual topics, telling sexual stories, making sexual innuendoes, sexual comments about a person's clothing, anatomy or looks, patronising, derogatory remarks or references, repeated requests for dates or sexual favours; and
- Non-verbal conduct – pin-up calendars, sexually explicit materials, pornography, computer pornography, mobile phone pornography, sexist graffiti.

Most women have had the experience of men pushing up against them in an uncomfortable manner in a crowded place or on public transport, without being able to do anything about it other than by getting away as soon as possible. Many men and women would see it as 'harmless fun' or being friendly whilst the women who express not feeling comfortable about this behaviour are often accused of not having a sense of humour. Sexual harassment is part of the intimidation many women face in their everyday life.

None of this behaviour can clearly be defined by the law, (or probably by women) as sexual assault. This behaviour can include comments, and a feeling like you are being undressed, "...*Someone will always stand really close or sit next to me and want to touch me*", obscene phone calls, pornography, flashing, kerb crawling, being watched or followed (stalking) and sexual assault from male work colleagues, "*Men at work – comment on the way you dress, the shape of your legs, the size of your bum, your bust and look up your skirt at any opportunity*", men on building sites, groups of men in public and / or social places; "*I hate it in the local pub, the men there look at you as if they are stripping you*". Some women are coerced or pressurised into sex through violent intimidation, verbal threats, and pornography – but do not identify it as rape or sexual assault.

"I remember an occasion where he wouldn't let me get up and he was strong. He pulled my arms over my head. I couldn't put up much of a struggle. I wouldn't have seen that as rape because I associated rape with strangers; night and struggle".



Reporting to the Police

For a detailed booklet on Reporting to the Police (and what this is likely to involve) – please contact SERICC for a copy of ‘Report to Court’. This booklet is provided by Rights of Women or you can visit their website www.rightsofwomen.org or contact them direct 020 7251 8887.

Immediately after being raped there are decisions that you will have to make, the consequences of which will last for a long time afterwards. The first is whether or not to report to the police. Rape Crisis, friends and family can help you by obtaining information for you about the process and procedures of the police and criminal justice system, and Rape Crisis will support you through that process if you do choose to report your assault. You are the only one who can make the decision and no one else should make that decision for you.

Some advantages of reporting:

- It is an opportunity for you to present your side regarding the rape / incident.
- It is the only chance you have of getting your attacker punished.
- If your attacker is known to you or has power over you; it may be a way of stopping a future situation in which you are likely to be raped again by him.

Some Disadvantages:

- Reporting does not necessarily mean the rapist will be convicted neither does a conviction necessarily result in a prison sentence.
- You will set in motion a process over which you have little or no control and which is difficult, although not impossible, to stop.

The next step is to get help:

- If you are not sure what you want to do, go along, with a friend, to your nearest Sexual Assault Referral Centre (see list at back) where you can have a forensic and medical examination. They can store the forensic results until you make up your mind whether to report to the police or not. In London there are the Haven centres where specially trained experienced professionals can give you medical help and advice. They can also help and support you through the immediate trauma.

- The Havens can also carry out tests for pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

Forensic evidence is needed to prove that sexual intercourse took place and it is vital in prosecuting a case. In cases of stranger rape it can also provide a profile of the attacker. These tests are swabs taken from any area that the assailant came in contact with so:

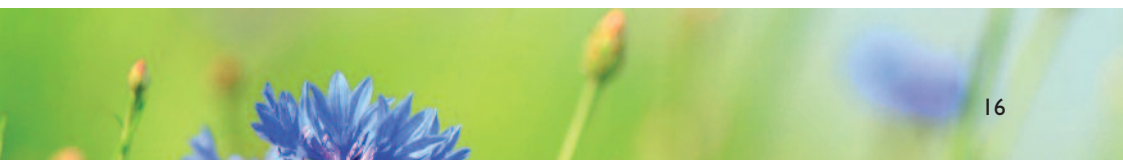
- Do not wash;
- Do not brush your teeth;
- Do not have a cigarette;
- Do not eat or drink;
- Do not change your clothes (or keep them safely to one side);
- Try not to go to the toilet; and
- Do not clear up anything from the area of the incident.

Don't worry if you have already done some of these things. It is quite possible that there is still evidence to collect as well as injuries that can be documented.

When you give your statement to the police, do not leave anything out, however embarrassing you think it may be. If you really can't remember, tell them you don't remember, rather than imagining what may have happened. Tell them the truth about how much you had to drink, or if you took any recreational drugs because if the police find out any conflicting evidence later, it will not help the prosecution and may look like you are trying to cover something up.

Even if you do not wish to take legal action, it is important that you receive medical attention. You do not have to have a forensic examination if you go to a SARC. You may need to receive treatment for your injuries, emergency contraception, and checks for sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Deciding whether or not to report to the police is a very difficult decision and unfortunately one which needs to be made as soon as possible. There are many points of view about whether or not to report – whichever decision you make, it is up to you and no one should make you feel guilty whatever you decide. If you decide to report do so as soon as possible.



Any delay will lessen the chance of forensic evidence being gathered successfully. Tell someone what has happened as soon as you feel able because the person who has seen you after the attack will be a useful witness. Even though your first reaction may be to wash and change your clothes do not do this or tidy yourself up as you may destroy valuable forensic evidence.

If you have changed, take your clothes with you when you report and try writing down what happened. Important things to remember are in what order things happened, what was said and, if it was a stranger, what the attacker looked like. Take a change of warm clothing with you as the police may want to keep some or all of your clothes for tests and evidence. Do not take any alcohol or drugs apart from medication prescribed by your Doctor for a medical condition.

Police Procedures

Be prepared to stay at the Sexual Assault Referral Centre, the police Rape Suite or station for several hours. You can ask for a woman police officer to deal with your case. You will be asked intimate and often embarrassing questions. You do not need to talk to any other officer other than the one in charge of your case. You will be asked to make a statement about what has happened. A police officer will write it down for you but you can ask to write it yourself. The police will want it to be very accurate as it is used by the Crown Prosecution Service to prepare any court case. You can ask for a copy of your statement. A medical forensic examination will be carried out by a police surgeon. This examination is not a medical check-up; it is solely for forensic evidence gathering purposes. This will involve both an internal and external examination to collect evidence and photographs may be taken of any injuries. You can request a female doctor, although you may have to wait longer for one to be found.

After the first interview and examinations are complete, the police may wish to talk to you again. If you do not want them to come to your home, ask them to phone or write to arrange a meeting at the police station or somewhere else. Once you have told them all you know, it is up to the police to decide whether to arrest and charge the perpetrator. If you wish to find out more you can ring the police and ask to speak to the officer in charge of your case, who will have been specially trained in sexual offences.

If you have been raped abroad

You can contact the local British Consulate or Embassy to ask for assistance in getting medical and legal help if you are still abroad. If you have reported the incident/s to the police abroad, you will then need to report it to your local police on return; as they may be involved in handling any legal papers. All papers for the prosecution will have to be in the local language to the country where the attack took place. A good solicitor in the UK will help with this. Once you are home the Foreign Office is the place to contact for up-dates on the case. Please contact SERICC for a list of rape crisis centres abroad or visit www.rcne.com

Sexual Assault Referral Centre

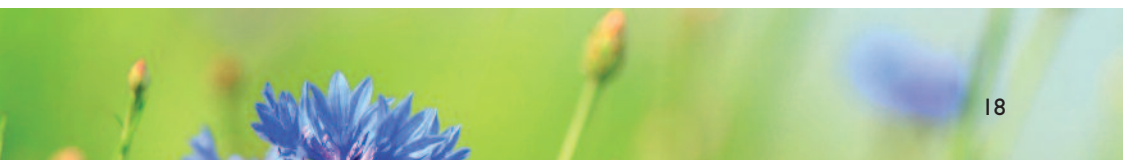
In some areas there are Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs). The Essex SARC, Oakwood Place, opened in January 2011. SARCs have doctors who will carry out a forensic medical examination. Oakwood Place refer women to SERICC for advocacy support from our Independent Sexual Violence Advisor who can support them through the criminal justice system. If you are interested in further information about SARCs or want to contact the SARC please contact SERICC.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

There is a scheme from the government for anyone who has suffered physical or mental injury as a result of a criminal offence. Everyone has the right to apply, although not everyone is awarded a payment. Time limits, whether you reported the assault, long term difficulties, and the circumstances of your case are all contributing factors to how a decision to pay compensation to a victim will be made. Compensation can sometimes be awarded even if the abuser was not successfully prosecuted. Monetary compensation cannot undo the effects of rape and sexual assault, however it can be viewed as a form of justice and a way of society acknowledging what happened - whether the abuser is punished or not. SERICC can provide support and advice about filling in the form.

Taking Care of your Health

Having been raped or sexually assaulted, you may feel that you have suffered a loss of power and control over your body and life. One way of beginning to take back some of this control is by taking care of your health.



Injuries

If you have serious injuries such as bruising or bleeding, you can visit the Accident and Emergency Department of your local hospital for immediate treatment. You do not have to give anyone details of what happened to you if you do not want to - even though you may be asked to do so. If, for example, you have severe vaginal bleeding (heavier than a period and continuous) go straight to hospital. If you are bleeding you will need to tell the hospital what has happened or they may not be able to treat you effectively.

Any cuts and tears are best treated quickly. If you are suffering from pain and /or bleeding you should try and see a doctor as soon as possible. If you have a doctor that you like it is worth visiting her or him if you have only slight injuries; however, doctors may refer you to the local casualty department if they consider that stitches are required.

If you have reported the assault to the police you may have had an examination by a police surgeon. This is to collect forensic evidence only and is not a medical check-up so you may still need to have another check up if you need treatment for any injuries or infections.

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Apart from getting treatment for bruising, cuts or other injuries it is important to be aware of the other possible physical effects of rape on your body. It may be very difficult to think about immediately but if you have been raped vaginally, pregnancy is a possibility. Sexually transmitted infections (STI) are a possible result of vaginal, anal and/or oral rape. Knowing what is going on in your body enables you to begin to take back control over it.

If you are worried about the possibility of minor injuries, vaginal or anal tears for example, then the department in the hospital called the Genito-Urinary Medicine Clinic (also known as the GUM Clinic, or Special Clinic) should be able to help you. At the clinic, all the information is kept confidential; you do not have to give your name, address, Doctor's name, or the details of the assault, even though you may be asked to do so. The clinic will be able to test for many infections including HIV and they will be able to offer you a smear test (a test which can show up any changes in the cells at the neck of the womb). There should be no pressure to report to the police.

Some infections are not always obvious without a medical check-up. If you catch a sexually transmitted infection this is entirely because the rapist has one. Contracting an STI through being raped has nothing to do with whether you have had sex before or not, or how many times, or with how many people. It is nothing to feel ashamed or embarrassed about.

Although the numbers of documented cases are small, we know that women and children can be infected by HIV and other sexually transmitted infections through rape and sexual assault. Physical violence is often associated with rape and sexual assault and can involve damage to oral, genital, vaginal and rectal tissue; therefore technically facilitating the transmission of HIV and other STIs such as Chlamydia, Hepatitis, and the Genital Wart virus.

Symptoms are often similar for different infections and include pain on passing urine, vaginal discharge, lower abdominal pain, pelvis pain, itching, soreness, painful lumps or warts in the genital area. For more details of all various infections and STIs we suggest going to specific services that specialise in sexual health.

Try to take someone to support you when you attend a clinic. Women counsellors or clinicians should be available at the clinic.

At the clinic you can be offered preventative treatment for oral and reproductive infections. Emergency contraception can be taken within 72 hours of assault to prevent unwanted pregnancy and you can also get information about an abortion referral. Any infection can be easily treated if detected quickly, but if left untreated some STIs can cause serious internal damage. You should not wait to see if symptoms appear and assume that if there are not any, then there is no infection. Some STIs show no symptoms until a fairly late stage.

It is common to have an STI and not to notice any symptoms at all for some time. Do not wait for symptoms to appear before having tests. It is, of course, extremely upsetting to find you have an STI. Being raped can leave you feeling dirty anyway, so finding you have an infection can make this feel so much worse. Starting an effective course of treatment as soon as possible is one of the best ways to address this.

If possible, do try to attend any follow up appointments at clinics for test results. Some results can be given over the phone, but some, such as HIV will only be given to you in person as pre and post test counselling will form part of that process.

STIs are often associated with promiscuity and many women are made to feel embarrassed or ashamed for having an infection or even admitting it as a possibility even when they have not chosen to have intercourse. There are frightening myths about these illnesses being incurable or even making you mad. These are not true and these myths only exist because of the taboo around STIs and because of people's fear and ignorance. In fact many commonly sexually transmitted infections are bacterial infections and are easily treated with a course of antibiotics (in the same way that tonsillitis would be treated).

Pregnancy

If there is a chance you might be pregnant as a result of the rape, you may need to speak to a Doctor. You can arrange to see your Doctor or contact your local Family Planning Clinic. You can consider using the Emergency or Morning After Pill, but treatment needs to start within 72 hours of the assault. Again you will need to contact your Doctor or your local Family Planning Clinic (FPC). You can talk to a counsellor at SERICC who will support you in accessing services.

If you are pregnant and considering an abortion then contact your Doctor, your local Family Planning Clinic for a National Health abortion, or the British Pregnancy Advisory Service for a private abortion. You may find your periods become irregular after the assault and this may be due to shock and stress but it is always worth getting things checked out.

Give yourself permission to really take care of your health and be aware of longer term general health problems. All of these can be seen as a result of the experience itself, but neglecting your well-being can eventually become quite self destructive. If you seek medical or mental health support, the practitioner should respect the connection between ill health and sexual violence. Prescribed drugs can give temporary relief from insomnia or depression, but it is important not to 'cut off' or detach from your feelings permanently as this may lead to long term depression.

Responses to experiencing sexual violence

Rape Trauma Syndrome is a recognised crisis response to rape or sexual assault and is a term sometimes used to help explain the impact of sexual violence. Immediately after being assaulted you may feel shock, denial, disbelief and a determination to carry on as if nothing has happened. You may also feel dirty as if you cannot wash away what has happened. In the longer term you may experience

insomnia, nightmares or flashbacks. You may experience depression, either persistently or perhaps on the anniversary of being raped. You may feel tension, or lose the ability to totally relax. You may experience disturbances to your normal eating patterns or difficulties in close relationships. You may experience an overwhelming desire to flee from your present life, feel different to everyone else, or perhaps not feel that you are 'normal'. You may also want alcohol or other drugs as a way of coping; or generally feel overwhelmed by fears which you would normally be able to cope with.

However, there is no right or wrong way to react to sexual violence. You may wonder if you should or should not be feeling a certain way, or how long you should feel it for, or whether you should be 'over it by now'.

Whatever you do feel is valid and right in respect of how you're feeling. Each woman responds in her own way. If you can talk about your feelings with other women it can help you to understand your responses and can start to help you to regain some control over your own life. Holding on to what happened in isolation can lock you into a circle of self-blame and variations of 'What did I do...' 'What was it about me?' This denies you the support and reassurance to be gained from talking to other women. Being able to affirm the reality of what you experienced and the validity of what you feel will help you take back control.

The following descriptions of some of the reactions to rape and sexual assault are aimed to hopefully give women the strength to recognise and cope with some of their feelings.

Shock

You are likely to suffer some degree of shock after being raped. Shock usually follows any injury or traumatic experience. Physical reactions can take various forms from being completely calm and unemotional, to shaking, crying, laughing hysterically, twitching, an inability to think, or your mind going blank or experiencing difficulty in concentrating. You may experience a dry mouth, loss of muscle control, inability to sit down, or numbness. You may have some or all of these reactions. They may occur immediately or some time later (delayed shock). They may occur for an hour or two, or they may recur regularly, or they may last for long periods of time. Even though this can be frightening, recognise it as a natural response to shock. Allow yourself to cry if you want to. This type of shock will take its course and will pass in time. It is very helpful to try to keep warm but try to avoid direct heat or sudden changes in temperature, which can cause fainting. It is also a good idea to ensure that you are eating and drinking enough and it is preferable to have a friend with you for support if possible.

It is possible that the feelings of numbness or detachment from what has happened (and is happening), may have occurred because you were drugged or given alcohol. However, this type of dream like state may also be a result of 'switching off' as a means of survival or enduring the rape.

Fear

This can paralyse you after being raped. It can appear to be beyond your control. You may well find it impossible to go into a place or situation in any way resembling the one in which you were raped. It could be anywhere: a car, a telephone box, a certain street or area, a pub, or even a room in your own home. There are also other things that may bring the fear back in a flash – certain words, phrases, films, books, a smell, or a particular kind of car; all of these can become terrifying in their own right. You may feel scared of going out or be afraid to stay in.

It is possible to fight this fear and to function despite the fear. You will probably have had previous experiences of overcoming fears even before you were raped. There is often an illusion that we are safe from rape because we are not a certain 'type of woman', or because we do not live in a certain 'type of area' and this can help us to function normally. However being raped shatters these illusions, especially if someone you know and trust has assaulted you. Counselling and other support can help you overcome your fears.

Nightmares

Many women have nightmares after being raped. These can take the form of specific and detailed images of the rape itself, or they can be vague terrifying shapes or feelings. The nightmare may take a long time to stop, or they may stop straight away. They can make you feel afraid to go to sleep, and this will inevitably affect your energy levels. One way to deal with the nightmares is to talk about them and the feelings they are bringing up for you, and the details of the rape itself with someone you can trust. Ask for support when you are having them. For example, being able to call a friend after you have had a nightmare, rather than suffering another sleepless night. By talking about your nightmares, you can share what is happening and you can pick the dream to pieces; and in doing so be able to gain some control over them.

Flashbacks

Many women who are survivors of any form of sexual violence experience flashbacks at one time or another. Flashbacks are temporary states of



remembering something painful or traumatic which has been hidden for quite some time in the subconscious mind. During a flashback you may feel as though aspects of the rape or sexual assault are actually happening to you now; and the duration of a flashback differs, it could last from a few seconds to a few hours.

If you have experienced one or more flashbacks then you may be feeling frightened, confused, disorientated, and/or overwhelmed. These feelings are understandable and they are normal reactions to what can be a terrifying experience. You are not going mad or crazy. You are remembering experiences, feelings, thoughts and images, which were too frightening or impossible to deal with at the time that they occurred.

Flashbacks can feel very frightening, but are often a good sign that you are unearthing the buried trauma and that you are on your way to recovery.

It is important that you reassure yourself with the knowledge that this is a temporary state, it will not last forever; and through time the flashback will reduce in frequency and intensity. You may find yourself trying to avoid all potential triggers for these memories. This is not possible as there are so many situations which could trigger memories. While it is not possible to control the nature and strength of the flashbacks, you can do a lot of things to help lessen the power and impact that they have on your life.

Shame

The fact that very few women have bodies, which conform to the images that 'fashion' portrays, usually makes us unhappy with them. Having our bodies violently abused can confirm our feelings that they are not worthy of respect. Many women feel ashamed about what has happened and feel physically dirty after an assault and they may spend a lot of time washing over and over again in order to feel clean. The act of rape deeply affects our innermost selves and that sense of shame reflects how powerful the myths are which allow and encourage women to feel responsible for the crime.

The sense of feeling dirty can extend to your home, especially if you were attacked there. This may be because everything touched by the rapist reminds you of the attack, so those things can feel contaminated and violated. Cleaning your home and washing your body a lot can be a way of washing away your feelings of shame and the sense of feeling dirty. This cleaning may appear to be out of control and you may feel like you are unable to stop it. Equally you may

not feel like cleaning your home or keeping yourself clean as you may feel you are not worth it. As you begin to feel better about yourself you will regain control over this area of your life along with others.

It is important to know that such behaviour and emotions are quite usual. When you begin to realise that it was nothing about you personally that made him rape you, and that you were raped because you are a woman and for no other reason - whatever he or anyone else says - then your feelings of shame will lessen.

Guilt

Almost every woman who has been raped feels guilty to some extent for what has happened. You can always think of something you could have done to stop it happening: *'If only I had screamed more loudly or not screamed at all', 'If only I had not gone on that second date', 'He is my children's father and they need him'*; the list of 'if onlys' can be endless. That feeling of guilt can be emphasised through the process of reporting, or by the attitudes you may encounter from family and friends. Try to spend time with people who will put the responsibility and blame where it belongs – with the person who raped or attacked you.

Powerlessness and Loss of Control

As well as feeling guilty about the rape many women also feel completely powerless to make decisions. For some, it is as though they feel so bad and worthless by having brought such a terrible thing upon themselves, that any decision they might make is totally invalid or irrelevant. Family and friends are not always helpful in this, in that they are often anxious to make decisions for you. It is important that you learn to make your own decisions again and realise that they are good and valid. Once you stop feeling responsible for what has happened to you and recognise where the blame lies, then you will come to see that you probably had very few choices anyway. As women, we have usually had very few choices in our interactions with men. However, we can and do make positive decisions about our own lives and we have the right to do this.

Physical Contact

You may feel unable to touch anyone else, or have anyone touch you in any way. This could include contact from friends, relatives, children and partners. Having had your body violated sexually you may, quite rightly, want to protect it from further abuse. You may however feel that you want physical contact that is safe and reassuring. If you are in a sexual relationship it can be very hard to explain

what you want. You may want to be held or hugged by your partner without this being interpreted as a desire for sexual contact. It is important that you are able to feel in control over when you do or do not want sexual contact.

If your lover is a woman those difficulties about sexual contact will feel the same, however, most women do have a better understanding about the importance of control and the implications of being raped and sexually assaulted. Wanting a hug or a cuddle one minute and not wanting to be touched the next can be very confusing for you and your partner and you will both need to work together to overcome this.

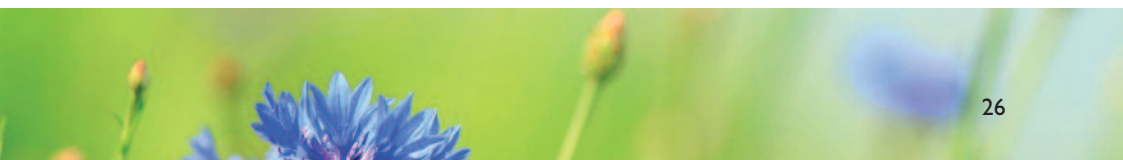
Women in general are taught from childhood to be loving and physically acceptable and accepting. It can be a very positive experience to change this to positively decide how and when you are touched or who you have sexual contact with. After being raped you may feel that you might be going 'over the top' with such control, but it is more probable that what you are actually doing is exercising some real control for the first time in your life.

It may also occur to you that the way to 'recover' from being raped, and not to be defeated by the experience, is to show yourself and the world that your ability to relate to men sexually has not been 'damaged'. It is unlikely that this 'recovery' will endure in the long term or that you will feel any better about yourself, or that you will feel in more control of your sexuality by having sexual contact with lots of men. A better way to feel in control is to think about yourself, who you want to relate to sexually, when, where and how you want to do this. By exercising these kinds of choices you are likely to feel much stronger.

If you can begin to do this and recognise it as a good and healthy development then you will eventually feel better about yourself and your choices. It is essential that you begin to take some control over as many areas of your life as possible and sexual control is a fundamental part of this.

Depression

Although depression is a common reaction to being raped, it often goes unrecognised. So the early morning waking, the general lack of feelings, or the crushing dull moods which are recognisable characteristics of depression, can be scattered with times of feeling far more 'up' and 'normal'. There is often no way of telling when the moods of despair will come or for how long they will stay, or when they will disappear once and for all. You may feel at times that you can't



communicate with anyone. You may feel completely overwhelmed by the betrayal of trust, the injustice of the Criminal Justice System, and the isolation of how you are feeling.

Sometimes depression can be anger turned inwards. Recognising your depression as a specific reaction to the event is the first step towards dealing with it. Being able to say to yourself – ‘this is depression and I am feeling depressed for a good reason,’ is an important way of learning to cope with it. Try reaching out for support. Talking about how you feel with someone you trust and who can understand what you are saying can usually bring a sense of release, relief and strength as well as helping to clarify why you are feeling depressed.

Anger

This can be the culmination of many different feelings. Anger is a positive and very natural reaction to such an outrageous act as rape. Shifting the blame from yourself to the perpetrator, who chose to commit the crime, encourages your anger to become focused on him rather than you.

Carrying on ‘As Normal’

Many women carry on (or appear to be) living ‘as normal’. This can be a surprise to other people who have a set of beliefs and fixed ideas about what a ‘rape victim’ should behave like.

Control over your sexuality, your actions, and your life are taken away from you when you are raped. Therefore, it is not surprising that you might decide to hang on to what control you can after such an experience.

You may refuse to let it affect you at all. You might carry on going to work, caring for your children and not telling anyone; but instead bury it deep inside. However, although you may try to ignore the experience or ‘cut off’ to detach from your feelings, there will always be things such as newspapers, television, conversations at work, friends’ and relatives’ comments to act as reminders and you need to allow for that. At some point you are also likely to feel very angry and very vulnerable. It is important to take time for yourself, to be cared for, and not to expect too much of yourself.

Loss

Women can experience a huge sense of loss when they have been raped or sexually assaulted. This can include loss of safety, loss of independence or autonomy, loss of control, loss of confidence and self-esteem, loss of memories,

loss of status, loss of trust, loss of a positive attitude towards sexuality, loss of housing and property, loss of jobs, children and educational opportunities, loss of support networks including relatives and friends, loss of health, and in the most extreme cases the loss of life itself. Try and build on the things you appreciate in your life.

Reactions of Family and Friends

Each family member and friend can and will respond differently to rape and sexual assault. Most families will go through a crisis stage, which will involve an emotional reaction and distress in learning that a woman or girl in the family has been raped or sexually assaulted. The way families and friends react is crucial to the woman or girl's well-being. Women are, at the best of times, aware of how other people are reacting to them; and as such, other people's approval becomes very important. After being raped, a woman's self-esteem can be very low and she will be especially sensitive to how others are treating her. This is why the reactions of friends and family can be very important in her recovery.

What you can do as a Friend or Relative

Most women who have experienced sexual violence choose to tell someone close to them. This will be someone who they feel safe enough with to disclose the abuse that they have experienced. They need to believe that the person they are confiding in is trustworthy, will believe them, and will not tell others without speaking to them about it first. As a 'safe' person to tell, you are a woman's most important source of support.

Whether you are helping someone cope with the immediate trauma of a recent experience or are helping someone coming to terms with sexual abuse they suffered as a child, you will be very important to her. Therefore, it is important that you recognise the implications of this and take good care of yourself and your own needs. The woman is not going to get over the trauma quickly, so you need to pace yourself in terms of how much time and energy you can realistically offer the woman you are supporting. Consistency over a long period is much more important than sitting up all night for a week - thus setting up unrealistic expectations that you will 'always' be there for her.

Remember that no two people are the same and their reactions to rape and sexual abuse will be as varied as they are to bereavement. However, it is likely that whatever her experience, at some point she has feared for her life and she will feel numb after the attack, or 'cut off', or in shock. If this is the case, she may

appear perfectly calm and unaffected. She may fear that she is 'going mad' - these are all normal ways for a woman to process what has happened to her.

Other responses may include flashbacks or panic attacks. Her behaviour may change, so for example, her eating habits may alter or she may feel the need to wash repeatedly; she may vomit or have other physical symptoms. Being able to talk about the rape alleviates all of these problems. The need to recount the trauma is common and this can be a good way of helping her to reclaim or gain some power and control back into her life, although some people do not need to do this repeatedly.

Be aware that you may feel a range of feelings about what has happened e.g. anger, guilt, upset, anxiety, overwhelmed, helplessness, confusion, shock. You might even find it hard to believe that what she has told you is true. If this is the case then it is important that you get support for yourself. You may need to talk to somebody about what you are feeling; without such support it can be really hard for you to be there for her. You can always try asking a trusted friend, or family member, or contact SERICC.

Firstly, it is really important to make it clear that you believe what the woman tells you. Make time to listen if she wishes to talk. Reassure her that no one has the right to rape or assault a woman or girl no matter what the circumstances were. Take your cue from her as to how much, how often, and when she wants to talk about it. Do not force her to talk if she does not want to.

Talk through her options with her: for example, whether to go to the police, or whether she wants counselling. You can offer practical support with all these things. Try not to let your own anger or fear intrude. She will have enough to cope with without having to worry about what you are feeling. But remember, it is important to also explore your own feelings with someone else to help you to understand them before you start to try and understand how she feels.

It is important that you respect her decisions, and that you take your lead on what to do from her. Try and take your own feelings and distress elsewhere. Support her when she is telling you what happened.

One of the most common reactions, of those closest to a woman who has been raped is to want to take over, or to spare her the pain of having to make any decisions about any action she may need to take. While your feelings and actions

are understandable they can continue to make a woman feel like events are entirely out of her control. The way to ensure that she retains control is to not make decisions on her behalf, or act as if she is helpless by over-protecting her, but by providing her with information, choices, space, and the time to make her own decisions.

- Listen - to what she has to say and let her take her time. It might not be easy for her to start talking about an event, especially if it is something that she may have kept silent about for a long time.
- Believe - people rarely lie about rape or sexual abuse. Why would they? It is important to believe what she is saying.
- Respect - both her feelings and her decisions. If she feels like crying, let her, it can be part of her healing process.
- Remember - it is not her fault - no one asks to be raped or deserves it and she cannot be blamed for not preventing it. The blame lies with the rapist.
- Recognise - the courage it takes for a woman to speak must be recognised and praised. It takes a great deal of courage to face up to fears and to talk about an experience of sexual violence.
- Don't judge - it is important to be accepting of the way she reacts, even if this is not what you were expecting. It is best to get rid of any ideas you may have of how a person who has been raped should behave, and to accept her reactions as normal.

One of the most important decisions a woman will have to make after being raped is whether to report the crime to the police. Relatives and friends, on hearing about the rape, can pressurise a woman to report; or they may actually take the matter out of her hands and phone the police for her. Apart from reinforcing her feelings of helplessness, this action will embroil a woman in a very painful and lengthy legal process. It is much more helpful in this situation to find out what the process involves and tell her about it and then discuss whether or not she wants to report – always leave the decision up to her. She, not you, will have to live with the consequences of that decision. If you have set ideas about what the woman should do, then it is better to leave it to someone else to talk to her about it. One of the concerns that might come up is that the

woman must report in order to prevent the man from raping someone else. It is not her responsibility to prevent a rapist from reoffending.

Most people have an immediate sense of anger towards the rapist for what he has done to their friend or relative. Anger is perfectly understandable, but whilst you need to let the woman know you believe her and are angry with the rapist (and not her), it is important not to let your anger override any decisions she might want to make.

Men especially, are prone to protective anger, which can be expressed, for example as: 'I'm going to kill him'. Saying this to a woman who has just been raped is not helpful. She will then not only feel responsible for what has happened to her and how she feels, but also for what might happen to you if you do carry out the threat.

Equally, it is not helpful to express any anger you might feel towards the woman for 'getting herself into the situation' or for 'asking for it'. It is extremely unhelpful to make judgements about how serious her experience was, or to criticise her behaviour before, during or after the assault. Under no circumstances or in any situation does a woman ask to be raped or sexually assaulted. Instead, she will be busy blaming herself for what has happened and reinforcing her self-blame will only make her feel worse. It must be recognised that the only person responsible for rape is the man who commits the crime.

You might feel guilty about something you may or may not have done in the time leading up to her rape e.g. not sharing a taxi home with her, and then she was raped at the taxi rank. Again you are not responsible for what has happened. It is important to remember that the majority of rapes are premeditated. Blaming yourself will only make the woman feel guiltier than she already feels by bringing that pain to you. You may not know what to do when a friend or relative tells you that she has been raped. Tell her you care for her and try not to treat her any differently from before she was raped. If you are doing so then you need to be clear about why that might be. It is important that you take responsibility for that change and not expect the woman to take it on.

You may feel that the woman herself has changed and it is important that you discuss those perceived changes with her and accept them. Sometimes change can be a positive thing.

If you are a man supporting your partner, friend, or relative it will be very difficult for you to empathise with what the woman has experienced. It is important to support

her in getting help and information from SERICC or any Rape Crisis Centre and other supportive female friends and support services.

Most people, once the initial shock and trauma has worn off, want their friend or relative to be 'better' or back to 'normal'. However, rape significantly changes your perception of life and of the world you live in. There is no time limit after which she should have recovered. Each individual woman learns to cope with the experience in her life according to her individual circumstances. This can take months or years.

Finally, it is important that women get a chance to talk to someone they feel comfortable with about their experience. If you are that person then it is important that you listen and empathise with what she is saying. Hearing of a friend's or relative's rape might remind you of a similar experience you might have had as an adult or a child. If this happens then it is important that you get support and recognition of your own feelings either from your friend(s), SERICC or any Rape Crisis Centre.

If you are having a sexual or emotional relationship with a woman who has been sexually assaulted or raped, be prepared to show that caring and trust are important in your relationship. Take your cue from her as to the kind of attention, affection or physical contact she may want. Be prepared to concentrate on care and affection rather than sex. Never pressurise her into feeling guilty about not trusting you, or not wanting to have sex with you. Do not act defensively if she needs to spend time on her own, or wants to talk to someone other than you. Supporting someone can be stressful so if you are feeling confused and do not know what to do then contact SERICC.

Experiencing sexual violence can lead to depression, substance misuse, loss of self-esteem, eating disorders, difficulties in sexual relationships, and an inability to trust people. It is important therefore to remember that with the right help and support these difficulties can be overcome and survivors can move forward with their lives.

Reaching Out

You can ring SERICC if something is happening in your life now, or if you are having difficulties about something that has happened in the past. You can also phone if you are worried about your child, someone else in your family, or someone you know. If you ring us we can offer telephone counselling and 'one to one' counselling, practical and emotional support and practical information. We will not tell you what to do or judge your actions.

What is Counselling?

Counselling provides a space to help you gain a clearer understanding of yourself and your situation. SERICC's counsellors will never force you to talk about anything you are not ready to. At any of your appointments the counsellor will answer any questions you have about counselling or other support needs. You and your counsellor will review whether you feel the counselling is meeting your needs on a regular basis.

Deciding to have counselling and making that commitment is a very powerful and life affirming choice. In counselling you will be looking at yourself, your relationships, and your life in general. Counselling is not always easy or comfortable and perhaps the hardest part to come to terms with is the fact that you have to do the work yourself. Your counsellor can help to support you and explain what is happening, but she cannot do the work for you. You will have to do the remembering, feel all of the emotions and make the changes.

There are no easy answers and although you may get angry with your counsellor, you must keep reminding yourself that she can support you through this stage. *Feelings can be confusing for some women who are going to counselling and they often say, 'I felt bad before I started this, but I feel ten times worse now'.* At times you may feel like running away and forgetting all about it, this is a normal part of the counselling process. It often feels like it gets worse before it gets better, but it's important to remember, it will get easier.

One of the first things to be learned in counselling is that it is healthy to have feelings. Some women are afraid of 'cracking up' or going 'mad' when they start to experience emotion. When you work with a counsellor who is right for you, then you should feel understood and supported. Women are encouraged to express their feelings in safe and appropriate ways. This may well mean going through long bouts of sadness and depression with many painful tears.

What does counselling involve?

Counselling does not bring with it the promise of total happiness. There will be other issues and situations in your life that can and will cause pain. Nor does it offer the possibility of being able to forget all about the abuse. What it offers is the ability to accept the abuse and live with it as part of your life. You will never forget the abuse but you will remember it with less acute pain.

As time goes on you will be able to recognise your own patterns and to feel and interpret your own emotions. You may have to face things that you do not want to face, and make changes that are very hard to make or see things in a different way.

A lost childhood can never be regained. This is one of the saddest realities that many women have to face.

You will probably feel differently about yourself, your relationships and the way you are living, as well as the lifestyle you lead. You have to be prepared to take these changes in your stride and believe that at the end of it you will know where everything fits and belongs. The aim of counselling is to enable each person to achieve that for herself.

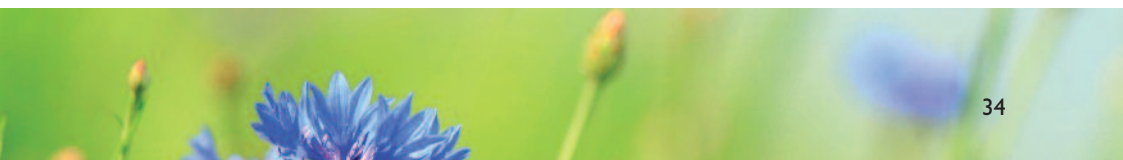
This means that you will have to work between sessions. It is not enough to come and see your counsellor every week, fortnight, or month and then forget all about it during the in between times. It is your work and what you need most is courage - you have survived sexual abuse then you may already have plenty of it. It takes courage from the moment you begin to think 'maybe I need to work this out', right through to the very end. It takes courage to believe that you can work it out and that you have the right to do so. It takes great courage to face ourselves as we really are.

If you think you have got to this point or you are thinking of going for help and support, then the reality is that there will be a part of you that feels ready to confront the issues. It is the part of you that has never given up, that has always believed and hoped that things should and could be better.

Trust this deep and very strong part of yourself and go forward. Your courage and determination will lead you to where you want to go.

There will be good and bad days during this process. Sometimes you may feel very low. This may disrupt your daily routine, your attention and your concentration. You may think that you are 'falling apart' and you will feel fragile for a time; this is all part of the counselling process and is normal.

It is really important that you give yourself permission to take the time to look after yourself, develop a support network, create a safe place in your home, or a friend that you can trust and can talk openly with when you need to talk, or to get



as much support from as you can. As such, telling someone outside of the counselling is important as it can help to make it more real for you. They may not always know what to say or how to be, but they can listen. It may be someone close to you, or someone you feel will understand. Other people may have to be put on hold for a while and you may have to decide to drop things that are not essential, or release the pressures in any way that you can. Some things are more difficult like holding down a job, or looking after children, but being honest with yourself and looking for solutions e.g. extra child care, quitting activities that you do not enjoy, avoiding unsupportive people, or lightening your work load are all positive changes that can help you to free up time for yourself.

When you are immersed in working through the trauma of sexual violence it is easy to feel that all you are is a 'person who has been sexually assaulted'. Although some time to focus on the issues is often inevitable and vital, it helps if you can take breaks and appreciate how far you have come. Acknowledging the other parts of your life outside of your abuse affirms that you are allowed to be a complex, multifaceted person.

Resources and Additional Information

The literature on rape, sexual assault and trauma is extensive and this listing is by no means exhaustive. You will find additional reading suggestions on the DABS web based book service, which provides recommended books with free postage. Directory and Book Services (DABS) www.dabsbooks.co.uk. You can also look on www.amazon.co.uk and your local bookshop or library.

Title	Author	International book standard number
After Silence: Rape and My Journey Back	Nancy Venable Raine	1860496431
Telling: A Memoir of Rape and Recovery	Patricia Weaver Francisco	0060930764
Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape	Susan Brownmiller	0671220624
Rape: The Misunderstood Crime	Julie Allison & Dr Lawrence S Wrightsman	0803937075
Surviving Sexual Violence	Liz Kelly	0816617538
Hurting and Healing: How to Overcome the Trauma of Sexual Abuse and Rape	Gloria Wade	1843330954
I Never Called It Rape: The Ms Report on Recognizing Fighting and Surviving Date & Acquaintance Rape	Robin Warshaw	0060925728
Raped (Poetry)	JC McFee	ASIN: B000WIVJGY
Surviving the Silence: Black Women's Stories of Rape	C PierceBaker	0393320456
Rape As Bereavement	Judy Hanson	1851742115
Quest for Respect: A Healing Guide for Survivors of Rape	Linda Braswell	0934793441
Partners in Healing: A Handbook for Partners of Rape Survivors	Teri Platt	ASIN: B000Z6WZT8
Recovering From Rape	Linda Ledray	0805029281
Date Rape	Christine Watkins	0737736828

Useful telephone numbers and websites

Organisation	Helpline Number	Website
South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre	☎ 01375 380609	www.sericc.org.uk
Rape Crisis England and Wales	☎ 0808 802 9999 Weekdays: 12pm–2.30pm, 7pm – 9.30pm Weekends and Bank Holidays: 2.30pm – 5pm	www.rapecrisis.org.uk
Rights of Women Free legal advice by women for women	Family Law advice line: ☎ 020 7251 6577 Criminal Law advice line: ☎ 020 7251 8887 Immigration & Asylum Law advice line: ☎ 020 7490 7689	www.rightsofwomen.org.uk
Eating Disorders	☎ 0845 634 1414	www.b-eat.co.uk
Alcoholics Anonymous	☎ 0845 769 7555	www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk
Narcotics Anonymous	☎ 0300 999 1212 National helpline	www.ukna.org
Samaritans	☎ 08457 90 90 90	www.samaritans.org
MIND	☎ 08457 660163 Information Line ☎ 0300 466 6463 Legal Advice Service	www.mind.org.uk
Women's Aid	☎ 0808 2000 247 National Domestic Violence Helpline	www.womensaid.org.uk
Broken Rainbow National Helpline for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender survivors of domestic violence	☎ 0300 999 5428 Monday: 2pm – 8pm Wednesday: 10am – 5pm Thursday: 2pm – 8pm	www.broken-rainbow.org.uk
Victim Support	☎ 0845 303 0900 Supportline	www.victimsupport.org.uk
Foreign & Commonwealth Office	☎ 020 7008 1500 Consular Assistance	www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/when-things-go-wrong/rape
British Association of Counsellors	☎ 01455 88 33 00	www.bacp.co.uk
Survivors UK Male rape and sexual abuse	☎ 0845 122 1201 Monday & Tuesday: 7pm – 9.30pm Thursday: 12pm – 2.30pm	www.survivorsuk.org

Do you need to talk to someone about

rape or sexual abuse?

It could have happened long ago or more recently.

If you are worried, need support or information,
you can call our helpline:

**SOUTH ESSEX RAPE
& INCEST CRISIS CENTRE**

01375 380609

www.sericc.org.uk



**South Essex
Rape & Incest
Crisis Centre**

Registered charity No. 287762

Our 24 hour answerphone will tell you our helpline times, or leave a message and we will call you back as soon as possible.

We offer a confidential helpline, 'one-to-one' counselling and support for women and girls who have suffered or are suffering sexual violence.

Run for women, by women