

SHUTTING THE MYTHS CHALLENGING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre

Tel: 01375 380609 – Helpline

Tel: 01375 381322 – Office Line

Fax: 01375 387053

www.sericc.org.uk

www.rapecrisis.org.uk

Charity no 287762.

Try to relax and have fun

Improve your self-esteem

Survivors of sexual violence can feel worthless and undeserving of care and respect as a result of their experiences. It can be useful to write down a list of all your positive qualities and add them to these reminders.

- *I have the right to be treated with respect.*
- *I have equal respect for myself and for other people.*
- *I have the right to say “no” to sex I don’t want.*
- *It’s okay for me to change my mind.*
- *No-one has the right to hurt me in any way.*
- *I can take responsibility for my behaviour that may be harmful to myself or to others*
– I am open to change.
- *It’s okay for me to make mistakes*
– I can learn from them.
- *It’s okay to express my feelings, thoughts and opinions.*

Myth: THE WOMAN HAD BEEN DRINKING ALL NIGHT

Truth: A man needs to be sure that a woman has the freedom and is in a fit state to make a choice about whether she consents to any sexual activity with him. If a woman is under the influence of alcohol or drugs and is unable to make a free choice, it does not give him the right to take advantage of her sexually.

Possible effects of Sexual Violence

Every individual can feel differently about her experiences and there are different ways of coping with the effects of sexual violence.

Examples of how you may feel may include:

- Powerlessness • Numb • Shock • Fear • Hatred • Anger • Dirty
- Confusion • Alone • Ashamed • Responsible • Self-hatred
- At fault • Worthless • Unloved • Out of control • Withdrawn
- Unable to trust • Sad • Guilty • Frustrated • Isolated • Grief
- Despair • Anxiety • Low self-esteem • Depression • Nightmares

What is Sexual Violence?

Sexual violence is the term used to describe any unwanted sexual attention including child sexual abuse, rape, assault, harassment (including verbal and non-verbal e.g. via email or text messages), organised and ritual abuse (e.g. paedophile rings) and exploitation through pornography or prostitution.

Tricks used by abusers

The abuser is usually, but not always, someone you know and trust; it could be a relative, family friend, neighbour or someone you know through school, college or work. Abusers often use tricks to get close to you and as a way of keeping you silent – these are known as grooming and silencing techniques.

Grooming is when a perpetrator seems really caring and gives you lots of attention, affection, flattery and gifts, and may pretend to share your hobbies or interests. If this person does something that makes you feel uncomfortable, it can be confusing and hard to know what to do. If you are unsure about anything that has happened or you start to feel nervous about being with this person, even if it is your boyfriend or a relative, phone a support line or talk to people that you trust.

Myth: SHE WAS ASKING FOR IT. SHE WAS FLIRTING/ DRESSED PROVOCATIVELY.

Truth: No one asks to be raped; no one deserves to be sexually abused. These are excuses perpetrators use to try and get away with their crimes. The abuser is always responsible for their own behaviour.

Often abusers start off with gentle touching but gradually increase the abuse and use threats, force, and violence to stop you from telling anyone so that they will not be caught. Sometimes children and young women do not know that there is anything wrong in what is happening, particularly if it's been going on since they were very young.

THE FOLLOWING POINTS ARE ALL WARNING SIGNALS

- The abuser telling you that what they are doing is okay even if it feels strange or uncomfortable to you.
- If you feel embarrassed and don't want anyone to find out.
- If they tell you to keep it a secret.
- If they tell you that something awful will happen if you tell.

- If they make you do things you don't want to do and then blame you for it.
- If they say that you deserve what is happening.
- If they make you do sexual things in exchange for treats, attention and privileges.
- Saying that if you loved them, you'd want to make them happy by doing these things.
- If they make you feel horrible, unloved and worthless, then treat you really well.
- If they make you look at pornographic pictures or films.
- If they tell you to look, dance or move in a sexy way while they watch or film you.

Myth: IT HAPPENED A LONG TIME AGO, I SHOULD BE OVER IT BY NOW. IT'S TOO LATE TO GET SUPPORT.

Truth: The abuse may have happened a long time ago. You may not have been able to tell anyone of your experience e.g. for fear of being blamed or judged. It may still be affecting you in different ways in your life - it is never too late to get support.