

Your Response to Rape

- The one thing that matters most if you are raped is how you think and feel about yourself. *How you feel is more important than how anyone else feels.*
- There are no "typical" responses to rape. No two people react to the violence itself, nor recover from it, in exactly the same manner. Whatever you feel, it is an acceptable part of your adjustment. There may be, however, many similarities between you and other victims of rape. Knowing that you are not alone is important.
- Do not evaluate your behaviour by falsehoods that other people may impose upon you, or by myths you were taught prior to the rape.
- During an assault some women freeze, some fight, and others attempt to flee. Some focus on their attacker, cataloguing every detail that might be helpful. Some victims respond physically (for example, with orgasm or lubrication) as if they were love-making. Rape is not love-making, yet the body may respond in similar ways. Do not confuse these physical responses with sexual desire or pleasure. This is simply your body's way of protecting itself.
- Remember you need not feel guilty for how you responded, physically or emotionally, during the attack. **You survived; therefore, you did the right thing.** You must realize that you did what you did in order to stay alive.
- Remember that most rapists would have raped someone else had you not been there. They are not interested in sexual gratification with a particular woman. Rather, the real reason for the attack is the rapist's need to intimidate and abuse women in general. The rape occurred because of the rapist's deficiencies. **You did not cause the rape.**
- You should not blame yourself for where you were, or for what you may have said. **You are not responsible for the behaviour of a rapist.**
- Guilt is almost a universal feeling among rape victims. This usually occurs because victims focus on the sexual aspect of rape rather than the violence. **No matter what you did, there is no cause for guilt.** No one ever blames people robbed at gunpoint for giving up their money.
- **Do not blame yourself for judgements you may have made before or during the attack.** If the rapist was a trusted person such as a doctor or police officer, disguised as such, do not blame yourself for being deceived. There is no way to tell what a rapist may look like, so there is no point in assuming that had you been more careful you would have spotted him in time to escape.
- Unfortunately, it is all too common for women to be raped by someone they know, trust or even love. Remember, the victim is not to blame for the violent actions of another, even if he is a friend or lover.
- Your long-term response to having been raped may follow no set pattern or time schedule. Some women find that they recover quickly; others feel they will never get over the trauma. It may seem difficult to believe at first, but you will eventually learn to cope with having been raped.

The First Stage...

- You may experience a feeling of acute distress and severe anxiety. In other words, you are very upset. Not really believing what has happened to you or denying that the rape ever occurred is also common.
- You may encounter emotional and/or physical problems such as recurrent headaches or nightmares, nausea, confusion, paralysis, sleeplessness, loss of appetite and the like. Some women experience what might best be called an emotional void; they find it difficult to feel anything for awhile. Do not think of yourself as irrational or "going crazy". Such responses are very normal.
- During this time remember that you are most important; attend to the physical side effects of the rape, and as soon as possible try to resume your regular routine. This will help you overcome the initial effects of your trauma and help you to organize your thoughts. It will also help to convince yourself that life can, and will continue. Make some decisions. This will help you feel that you are taking back the control that was taken away during the assault.

The Second Stage...

- During this time you may feel calmer overall but there is still an underlying distress.
- You may feel more defensive, both emotionally and physically, or you may see yourself as somewhat helpless or confused.
- You may experience sudden mood swings, or become suddenly angered by things that would not have bothered you prior to the rape.
- What you may find even more troublesome during this time is that you may not be able to feel anger toward the rapist, especially if you often become angry at family or friends for "little things". *This does not mean that you secretly enjoyed the rape.*

The Third Stage...

- During this time you may start to feel fine. You find that you go through your day without having thought of the rape very much. To yourself and to others, you seem completely recovered. This is called *apparent readjustment* and may last a few weeks to a few months.

The Final Stage...

- During this time many of the old problems you first encountered reappear. Depression, anxiety, fear, insomnia, headaches, unpredictable moods, mistrust of men, feelings of guilt and sexual disturbances may unexpectedly manifest themselves. These feelings have been buried in your mind, waiting to reappear when you are better able to cope with them.
- It may be the first time you realize any real anger toward the rapist. This is a healthy reaction. It will finally allow you the needed opportunity to vent this emotion. It also indicates that you are blaming yourself less and the rapist more.
- During this time real healing will take place.