



Surviving the aftermath of rape and sexual trauma

If you've been subject to sexual violence, there are services that can help. You may need time to think about what has happened to you and you don't have to report the assault to the Police, immediately, or at all, if you don't want to. However, consider getting medical help as soon as possible because you may be at risk of pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections (STIs). You can do this by going to your GP or sexual health clinic in Loughborough.

Recovering from rape or sexual trauma

Regardless of age or gender, the impact of sexual violence goes far beyond any physical injuries. The trauma of being raped or sexually assaulted can be shattering, leaving you feeling scared, ashamed, and alone or plagued by nightmares, flashbacks, and other unpleasant memories. The world may not feel like a safe place anymore. You may no longer trust others or even trust yourself. You may question your judgment, your self-worth, and even your sanity. You may blame yourself for what happened or believe that you're "dirty" or "damaged goods." Relationships may feel dangerous, intimacy impossible. On top of that, you may struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression.

It's important to remember that what you are experiencing is a normal reaction to trauma. Your feelings of helplessness, shame, defectiveness, and self-blame are symptoms, not reality. No matter how difficult it may seem, the following suggestions can help you to come to terms with what happened, regain your sense of safety and trust, and learn to heal and move on with your life.

Recovering from rape or sexual trauma

It can be very difficult to admit and process that you were raped or sexually assaulted. You may also be afraid of how others will react. Will they judge you? Look at you differently? It can seem easier to downplay what happened or keep it a secret.

Try to reach out to someone you trust. It's common to think that if you don't talk about your rape, it didn't really happen, but you can't heal when you're avoiding the truth. Hiding only adds to feelings of shame. As scary as it is to open up, it will support the process of recovery.

However, it's important to be selective about who you tell, especially at first. Your best option is someone who will be supportive, empathetic, and calm. If you don't have someone you trust, talk to a therapist or call a rape crisis hotline.

Challenge your sense of helplessness and isolation. Trauma can leave you feeling powerless and vulnerable. It's important to remind yourself that you have strengths and coping skills that can get you through tough times. One of the best ways to reclaim your sense of power is by helping others: volunteer your time, give blood, reach out to a friend in need, or donate to your favourite charity.

Consider joining a support group for other rape or sexual abuse survivors. Support groups can help you feel less isolated and alone. They also provide invaluable information on how to cope with symptoms and work towards recovery. If you can't find a support group in your area, look for an online group.

Stay connected

It's common to feel isolated and disconnected from others following a sexual assault. You may feel tempted to withdraw from social activities and your loved ones. But it's important to stay connected to life and the people who care about you. Support from other people is vital to your recovery. But remember that support doesn't mean that you always have to talk about or dwell on what happened. Having fun and laughing with people who care about you can be equally healing.

Participate in social activities, even if you don't feel like it. Do "normal" things with other people, things that have nothing to do with the sexual trauma.

Make new friends. If you live alone or far from family and friends, try to reach out and make new friends. Take a class or join a club to meet people with similar interests, connect to an alumni association, or reach out to neighbours or work colleagues.

Be kind to yourself

Healing from sexual trauma is a gradual, ongoing process. This can make life seem difficult at times. But there are many steps you can take to cope with the residual symptoms and reduce your anxiety and fear.

Take time to rest and restore your body's balance. That means taking a break when you're tired and avoiding the temptation to lose yourself by throwing yourself into activities, you may benefit from relaxation techniques such as meditation and yoga. Be smart about media consumption. Avoid watching any program that could trigger bad memories or flashbacks.

Take care of yourself physically. It's always important to eat well, exercise regularly, and get plenty of sleep—but even more so when you're healing from trauma. Exercise can soothe your traumatized nervous system, relieve stress, and help you feel more powerful and in control of your body.

Avoid alcohol and drugs. Avoid the temptation to self-medicate with alcohol or drugs. Substance use worsens many symptoms of trauma, including emotional numbing, social isolation, anger, and depression.

For more information or advise you can speak to a Duty Assessment and Inclusion (DAI) Adviser by completing a self-referral form found here:

[Duty, Assessment and Incident Referral Form.](#)