COMMON REACTIONS TO SEXUAL ASSAULT

Sexual assault, which includes rape and sexual harassment, is a violation of one’s body and sense of safety in the world. Often the assault includes overt violence or threats of violence, and is or may be experienced as, a life-threatening event. Although reactions to sexual assault vary, some common reactions are listed below. All reactions and feelings are normal.

SHOCK: Appearing dazed, confused, disconnected or numb.

DISBELIEF: Experiencing a sense of unreality, dissociation from the experience: “Did this really happen to me?”

EMBARRASSMENT: Reluctant to notify family or friends for fear of how they will react.

SHAME: Feeling dirty, unclean in the eyes of others, “damaged goods”.

SELF-BLAME: Going over and over what they could have done differently to prevent the assault; assuming they were responsible for the assault.

SLEEP DISTURBANCES: Sleeplessness, nightmares, interrupted sleep or restlessness.

EATING DISTURBANCES: Eating too much or little to dull the pain or regain control over their body.

GUILT: “I must deserve this because…”

DEPRESSION: Feeling hopeless, fatigued, finding little interest in things previously enjoyed.

LOSS OF CONTROL: Feeling vulnerable, insecure, indecisive, exposed.

POOR CONCENTRATION: Inability to concentrate or focus on things for too long.

DENIAL: Blocking out the experience or aspects of the experience as if it had not occurred.

FEAR: Fearing recurrence, retaliation. Fear for safety and reluctance to go out.

ANXIETY: Nervousness, apprehension and physical symptoms such as muscle tension, sleep disturbances, nausea, and/or stomach problems.

THOUGHTS OR ATTEMPTS OF SUICIDE: Over 30% of survivors surveyed made at least one suicide attempt or experienced suicidal thoughts.

ANGER: Anger towards the perpetrator or towards those who haven’t been supportive. Anger may be inhibited, redirected to the self, or displaced onto innocent others seen as safer targets.

SEXUAL DISTURBANCE: May temporarily lose interest in sexual activity or become hypersexual.

SOCIAL WITHDRAWAL: May terminate friendships or refuse to participate in social activities.

If you need further assistance please contact SAVI at (212) 423-2140

*Adapted from material developed by Saint Vincent’s Hospital Rape Crisis Program
Survivor Resources

Mount Sinai Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention (SAVI) Program | 212-423-2140
Free counseling, emergency department advocacy, training and support to survivors and co-survivors

Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center | 212-423-3000
Wellness care, medical treatment, counseling, etc. (ages 10-22)

Day One | 1-800-214-4150
Youth-oriented community education, supportive services, legal advocacy and leadership development.

Planned Parenthood of NYC | 1-800-230-PLAN
Reproductive health services for adults and adolescents; sliding-fee scale.

The Anti-Violence Project | 212-714-1141
Provides in-the-moment support, safety planning and connects LGBTQ+ with resources

WomanKind | 1-888-888-7702
24-hour free crisis helpline with staff fluent in 18+ Asian languages

Safe Horizon | 212-227-3000 (Sexual Assault)
Patient advocacy, legal support, shelter placement

Emergency Departments for Medical Follow-up Care
www.svfreenyc.org

NYC WELL
(800) NYC-WELL – press 2 (English), 3 (Spanish), 4 (Mandarin)
City-wide Multilingual and multicultural helpline for crisis intervention, Mobile crisis intervention team

NYPD Special Victims Hotline | (212) 267-RAPE
Specially trained female detectives answer your hypothetical questions 24 hours/day

Love is Respect Hotline | 1 (866) 331-9474
Trained peer advocates are available 24/7/365 to offer education, support and advocacy to teens and young adults who have questions or concerns about their dating relationships.

Survivor Options

Medical

General Medical Exam
Every survivor can choose to be examined and treated for injuries and infections.

Best Option: SAFE Centers of Excellence – visit www.svfreenyc.org for a list.

Medication Options
HIV PEP: up to 36 hours after exposure
Emergency Contraception: 72 - 120 hours after the sexual assault
"Never be afraid to ask questions of your medical team"

Reporting and Legal

Evidence Collection & Drug Facilitated Sexual Assault Kits
Done at the hospital up to 96 hours after the incident
Stored for 20 years

Evidence Collection does not require a Police Report

Filing a Police Report
Survivor can choose to report or not report
Can be done at any stage - tomorrow, next month, never

How to Support a Survivor
Listen...Validate...Believe

Don'ts
victim blame, interview/quiz, force them to do anything they do not want to do at that time

Do's
give power back, remember that not all survivors will react in the same way, remind them of available resources they can choose

What a survivor needs to hear...

This is not your fault. I believe you. Help is available to you...

www.mssm.edu/savi | 212-423-2140