

## After Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is a trauma that threatens our sense of safety in the world. There are a range of responses that survivors have, and these can cause survivors to fear that they're going crazy. There is nothing wrong with you; these are normal responses to abnormal situations.

If you were sexually assaulted years ago, you may question why your reactions are still strong, or may have been told you should be "over it" by now. There is no time limit on the trauma caused by sexual assault, however, and you can ask for help in healing and managing the effects on your life. Sharing with other survivors can help to "normalize" the effects and reduce the sense of isolation, as well as being a source of suggestions for coping and healing.

You are most welcome to join and post on Pandora's Aquarium ([www.pandys.org/forums](http://www.pandys.org/forums)) about effects you've experienced - chances are somebody else has been there and come through! Counselling can also help you, and there are a range of good books on recovering from sexual assault.



***The mission of Pandora's Project is to provide information, facilitate peer support and offer assistance to male and female survivors of sexual violence, as well as their friends and family.***

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## Common Feelings after Sexual Assault



*A handout for  
survivors*

*Developed by  
Pandora's Project*

[www.PandorasProject.org](http://www.PandorasProject.org)  
[www.pandys.org](http://www.pandys.org)

## Survivors in general may experience some of the following:

- Nightmares about the sexual assault, or that contain the same feelings of dread and powerlessness
- Flashbacks - mental pictures, emotions, smells or physical feelings associated with assaults
- Triggers - situations, words, objects or other that remind you of the sexual assault and may cause you to feel as if it's happening all over.
- A sense that they will never feel clean again
- Fear and mistrust of men if the perpetrator was male, ditto for women or members of ethnic groups to which the perpetrator belonged
- A range of physical symptoms, such as headaches, nausea or back pain
- Powerlessness and sense of a loss of control over your world
- Sexual dysfunction
- Eating disorders such as Anorexia or bulimia

### Suggested reading:

*Recovering from Rape*, by Linda Ledray

*I Can't Get Over it: A Handbook for Trauma Survivors*, by Aphrodite Matsakis

*The Courage to Heal*, by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis

*The Courage to Heal Workbook*, by Laura Davis

## Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse is a sadly common phenomenon. It may have been once or many times, and some survivors feel the effects for decades later. These effects may include:

- A feeling of being childlike
- Fear of telling - even if the abuse happened a long time ago, the abuser's threats about telling can still feel very real
- A feeling that abuse is a necessary cost of being loved, if an abuser cloaks the abuse in affection
- A feeling that that sex is all they're good for, or that they should have indiscriminate sex with people who don't value them may be apparent in survivors sexually assaulted from a young age
- A feeling of worthless if they were not protected
- Teenage pregnancy
- Teenage drug or alcohol addiction as a way of distancing themselves from the pain caused by the assaults
- Overwhelming grief and a sense of betrayal if they loved the abuser
- Difficulty setting boundaries; perhaps being "walked over" by people

## Marital/Partner Rape

Survivors of partner rape may experience any of the following:

- Entrapment - for example they may be financially dependant on the partner, or may fear being killed if they leave
- Shame for loving the perpetrator; feeling as if they're betraying their partner by speaking about the assaults.

## Male Rape

Despite myths that deny the problem of sexual assault against men and boys, one out of six boys will be sexually assaulted by the time he is 18. Male survivors of child sexual abuse or adult rape may have specific responses such as:

- Shame as a result of society's wrong expectations that boys and men "should" be able to protect themselves
- Isolation because of myths that sexual assault doesn't happen to boys or men
- Fear of ridicule and disbelief if the abuser was a woman
- Fear that people will think they're gay and somehow invited the assault if the perpetrator was male
- Aggressive "acting out" as a way of proving that they are "real men"

### Suggested Reading:

*Victims No Longer* by Mike Lew;

*Abused Boys: The Neglected Victims of Sexual Abuse*, by Mic Hunter

- Intense fear of being sexually assaulted again
- High levels of physical injury
- Anger, betrayal

- Belief that they must endure the assaults because a "good wife" always submits

**Suggested Reading:** *Real Rape, Real Pain: Help for Women Sexually Assaulted by Male Partners*, by Patricia Eastal and Louise McOrmond-Plummer