

## Feeling Guilty About Wanting Sex

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It is very common for survivors of sexual violence experience feelings of guilt about wanting or engaging in consensual sex. Examples of these feelings may include:

*It is wrong to want something that was used to hurt me in the past.*

*It must not have been that bad if I can still have sex.*

*If I enjoy sex, that must mean I enjoyed the rape.*

*If I enjoy sex, people won't believe I was raped.*

*If I am able to have sex, people will expect me to be over it.*

Although these feelings are very common, they could not be further from the truth. If you find yourself experiencing similar feelings, try to challenge those thoughts. Remind yourself that you have as much right to a healthy sex life as anyone else. The fact that you are a survivor of sexual violence in no way means that you are not entitled to have a good sex life.

### **Separating rape/abuse and sex**

It is important to learn to separate rape/abuse and sex. Healthy sex is nothing like the violation you experienced, and in working on your sexual healing and rediscovering your likes and dislikes, you can learn to differentiate the two. The actual acts may be the same, but that is where the similarities end.

This task can become complicated, as many non-survivors connect rape and sex, so their perceptions become skewed. Survivors may worry that others are judging them for wanting to become sexually active, or that the assault must not have been "that bad" if they are able to enjoy sex again. Some people may even openly question a survivor's desire to engage in sex after rape or abuse. As difficult and wounding as these types of comments can be, it is important not to let them interfere with your own views and desires. You are entitled to healthy sex, and no one can tell you how to feel.

## **Initiating sex**

An added problem may arise when a survivor is the one to initiate sex. A caring partner may worry about triggering you, and leave it to you to initiate sex when you are ready. This can make the survivor uncomfortable if they constantly feel as though they are asking for sex. If this is the case, try talking to your partner. It is likely that they are struggling with feelings of their own, or are trying to let you take the lead. You may also find that you hold back from asking for certain things, because you are worried about how it will be perceived. Once again, it is important to remember that sharing something willingly with a partner is much different from rape. It is perfectly natural for you to want something you enjoy.

Another reason survivors may have difficulties initiating or enjoying sex is because of comments that were made by their perpetrator during the assault/abuse. Survivors talk about being called a “slut” or a “whore”, or being told that they “wanted it” or “liked it”. You may feel as though your choosing to have sex, even consensually, makes those comments true. The reality is that you are the only one who can label your own experiences. These words were used to degrade or humiliate you; they cannot define who you are. Remember that you are not alone in this. If you struggle with knowing how to deal with such feelings, consider speaking to a therapist to learn how to separate these negative comments from reality.

## **Engaging in unhealthy sex**

Survivors may feel guilt because they are unsure of their true motives or reasons for wanting sex, and so they struggle with knowing whether or not they are truly engaging in healthy sex. It is common for survivors of sexual violence to use sex to distract themselves, punish themselves, or even as a way to re-live their assault. These types of reactions are normal, and you are not alone. If you are unsure of whether you are using unhealthy ways to cope, consider asking yourself the following questions:

*How do I feel before sex?*

*How do I feel after sex?*

*Why am I choosing to have sex?*

*Do I enjoy myself when I am having sex?*

*Would I change anything about my sexual encounters?*

Take the time to look at your reasons for wanting sex, what you enjoy about it and what you hope to get out of it. Evaluate how you feel before and after, and how that makes you feel about yourself. Sex is meant to be a fun and enjoyable experience for both people involved. It is completely possible to use sex as a positive way to move forward in your healing.

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