

# Recovering From Adult Sexual Assault

NAVIGATING THE JOURNEY



A resource for women, their family and friends

***Recovering from Adult Sexual  
Assault: Navigating the Journey***

*Copyright © 2013 NSW Health  
Education Centre Against Violence*

*ISBN 1 876969 15 6  
First Edition 2008  
Second Edition 2012  
Third Edition 2013*

***For information contact:***

*NSW Health Education Centre  
Against Violence  
Locked Bag 7118  
Parramatta CBD NSW 2124  
Phone: (02) 9840 3737  
Fax: (02) 9840 3754*

*Email: [ecav@swahs.health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:ecav@swahs.health.nsw.gov.au)*

*Website: [www.ecav.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ecav.health.nsw.gov.au)*

*This publication is copyright except as  
is expressly provided in the Copyright  
Act 1968. No part of this publication  
shall be reproduced by any process  
without permission from the NSW  
Health Education Centre Against  
Violence. In all cases the NSW Health  
Education Centre Against Violence  
must be acknowledged as a source  
when reproducing or quoting from this  
document.*

*NSW Health Education Centre Against  
Violence, administered by Western  
Sydney Local Health District*

"The strength of victims  
to survive sexual assault  
is inspiring. We must find  
courage in the support of  
each other, strength in our  
unity, our passion for change  
and speak out to make a  
difference, to create a safer  
place for women."

Courage Website



**Education Centre**  
**AGAINST VIOLENCE**



# Acknowledgements

This booklet was developed and produced by the NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence (ECAV) with funding provided through the National Women's Health Program. This booklet was written and compiled by Julie Blyth and Maureen MacGinley, sexual assault workers who have many years experience working with survivors of sexual violence. Julie and Maureen's dedication to improving the health outcomes for women who have experienced sexual assault are evident in the sensitivity and thoughtfulness with which this resource has been developed.

This booklet would not have been possible without the commitment, effort and support of a group of courageous women who were willing to share their journeys through trauma with Julie and Maureen. We would like to thank Glenda, Heather, Melinda, Tanya and Deane for their remarkable contribution. Their insights into what helps and continues to help in their process of healing and recovery form an important element of this resource.

As with all resources, there has been a long gestation to ensure that information and contact details are accurate and current. This has required consultation and editing from a range of service providers.

We would particularly like to thank Joanne Campbell, Catherine Clarke, Beth Cullen, Marlene Lauw, Lorna McNamara, Ness O'Brien, Margret Roberts, Mailin Suchting, Pat Tierney and Amy Watts.



A special thanks goes to Judy Horacek, who kindly gave permission to use her wonderful cartoons within this booklet. Thanks also to Georgina Aliferis whose creativity with the cover, layout and colour has ensured that this resource is inviting to pick up and read.

This booklet is dedicated to all women who have experienced the trauma of sexual violence. It is our genuine hope that this resource will provide new information with helpful ways of assistance understanding the impact of sexual assault, as well as assistance with navigating a journey to recovery.

## About this booklet

The trauma of sexual assault tests every woman's capacity to survive and find a way forward. It is a challenge that requires you to access resources learnt from the past and to develop new skills.

This booklet is about navigating a journey to healing for women who have experienced sexual assault. It is divided into sections so that you can read and use what is relevant to you.

Every woman's experience of and her responses to sexual assault are different. Sexual assault can cause short term and long term negative effects, but women can and do recover.

Stories from women who have been sexually assaulted are featured throughout this booklet. These stories tell of women from different backgrounds, women from the country, young women, women assaulted by their partner, women who have been drugged and sexually



assaulted, Aboriginal women and women from non-English speaking backgrounds. These stories are about women who have navigated this road before you and share with you their struggles and their insights into what helped them in their healing journey. We hope you discover the experiences in healing that survivors share. More resources are contained in the last section and also include specific information for lesbians, women with disabilities and women who are hearing impaired. We encourage you to read this booklet at your own pace.

## Use of language

The terms 'rape' and 'sexual abuse' are sometimes used interchangeably with sexual assault. This booklet uses the term 'sexual assault' to include all forms of sexual violence. Some women use the term 'rape' to describe their experience although it is no longer a legal term in New South Wales.

When referring to a woman who has been sexually assaulted, we most often use the term 'survivor', to acknowledge the courage and strength of women to survive and overcome the experience and the impact of sexual assault. We have sometimes used the word 'victim' to reflect that women who experience sexual assault are victims of crime.

We have used the term 'offender' to describe the person who committed the crime of sexual assault. The offender is the person who is legally and morally accountable for the crime.



# Table of Contents

.....

**1** Women and sexual assault ..... 1-7

- Myths and Facts [1]
- What is Sexual Assault [4]

.....

**2** If you have recently been sexually assaulted ....9-25

- Your Safety [9]
- Finding Help and Support [10]
- Counselling after Sexual Assault [12]
- Your Medical and Health Concerns [13]
- The Medical Examination [15]
- Deciding Whether to Report to Police [16]
- The Court Process [19]
- Victim's Compensation [21]
  - *If you're from a rural area* [23]
  - *Strategies Aboriginal women have used...* [24]
  - *You are not alone if you have experienced sexual assault more than once in your life* [25]

.....

**3** Recovering from sexual assault .....27-41

- Reactions Women Experience Following Sexual Assault [27]
- Recovering from Sexual Assault [30]
- Maintaining Good Relationships [36]
- Making Meaning out of your Experience [38]
  - *If you have been sexually assaulted by your husband or partner* [41]
  - *If your first language is not English* [41]



# Table of Contents

*continued*



4

## For partners, family and friends .....43-51

- Common Feelings [43]
- Questions and Concerns [44]
- What can I do to Help? [46]
  - *Women who have a mental illness or disability* [51]
  - *Lesbian Women* [51]



5

## Finding information, help and support .....53-67

- Services for all Women [53]
- Counselling Services [53]
- Legal Information and Resources [58]
- Court Preparation and Support [59]
- Complaints about Service Providers [60]
- Specialist Services and Resources [61]
- Further Reading [67]



6

## Appendices .....69-78

- Do you know or think you may have been Drugged and Sexually Assaulted? [69]
- Developing a Safety Plan [72]
- Checklist [76]
- Relaxation Exercise [78]

# 1

## Women and sexual assault



Sexual assault is any behaviour of a sexual nature that you have not agreed or consented to.



*“A man is in court facing charges of sexual assault, following an attack on a young woman in a laneway in Darlinghurst at 2am last night. The woman was said to be walking home alone from a nightclub when the attack occurred. She had been drinking before the attack.”*  
*Radio News 8.30am*

This news story is familiar to us, it tells of the woman’s behaviour, where she was, the time of night and that she was on her way home alone. It uses these facts to reinforce myths that somehow she was at fault for the sexual assault occurring. It focuses on the victim rather than the person responsible for the crime.

### **Myth 1**

*Only certain ‘types’ of girls or women get raped because they dress, look or act in a certain way. For example, they may be young, drink or take drugs, go to nightclubs, or hang out with guys they don’t really know.*

### **Fact 1**

There is no such thing as a particular type of woman who gets sexually assaulted. Women of all ages, cultures, marital status and life experience are assaulted. Many more assaults occur in a victim’s home by someone the victim trusts, than by strangers.

## Myth 2

*Men can't control their sexual urges once they're sexually aroused.*

## Fact 2

Men can, and mostly do, take responsibility for their sexual behaviour. Sexual assault is not primarily about sex, it is an abuse of power and intimidation. Many offenders admit to planning the sexual assault ahead of time.



### Myth 3

*If it was rape, she would have fought back, screamed, or at least said no.*

### Fact 3

Offenders use many tactics such as power, physical strength, the element of surprise, threats, intimidation, drugging or humiliation of the person to silence their victims and ensure they don't fight back. They take away a woman's control of her body, her dignity, and reduce her to an object of sexual assault.

Myths shift responsibility away from the offender and onto the victim. They contribute to women remaining silent about their experience, blaming themselves or fearing others will blame them. *The offender is always responsible for sexual assault.*

Research by ACSSA\* shows that offenders also use a range of 'resources and strategies' to commit sexual assault and get away with it.

These include isolating the victim, controlling the situation and imposing their own desires, intentions and perspectives on the interaction.

What the news report didn't tell us is how the woman recovered from the experience. Every woman's experience of sexual assault and her responses to it are different. Sexual assault can cause short term and long term negative effects, but women can recover. This recovery is assisted by access to accurate information, medical care and support that allow survivors to regain control and make choices about their recovery.

If you're a young woman who has been sexually assaulted find someone you can really talk to about it, someone who won't judge you.

There are some great websites listed in Section 5 under Resources and Services for Young Women (page 62).

\*Ref: Clark, IT & Quadara, A (2010) **Insights into Sexual Assault Perpetration: Giving Voice to Victims/Survivors' Knowledge.** Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA) AIFS Research Report 18

## What is Sexual Assault?

Sexual assault is an **abuse of power and control** by one person using sexual means over another person. It is a **serious crime**, whether it is committed by a stranger, or by someone you know. As an act of violence it can cause injury to a person that may be physical and psychological. Every woman's experience is different, you may be very clear that you were raped or may feel confused about whether what happened to you was sexual assault.

Sexual assault is any behaviour of a sexual nature to which you have not agreed or consented.

Sexual assault can take many forms, including:

### Indecent Assault

Unwanted touching of another person's body. For example kissing, fondling, touching breasts, bottom or genitals, being exposed to sexual acts or if under eighteen years of age exposure to pornographic material.

### Rape or Sexual Intercourse Without Consent

Intercourse means penetration of any part of a person's body by another person's body or by an object. This includes vaginal, anal, digital or oral penetration.



## Sexual Acts Without Consent

The law recognises that consent to sexual acts must be freely given. A person is unable to consent when:

- Asleep, unconscious, or significantly affected by alcohol or other drugs
- Unable to understand what they are consenting to
- Surrendering from fear, threat, force or harm to themselves or someone else
- Pressured, forced or coerced into having sex

Even if the person doesn't protest or physically resist, it doesn't mean they agreed to the sexual activity.

## Sexual Harassment

Unwanted verbal sexual comments or actions that cause embarrassment, fear or humiliation.



## If you know or think you may have been drugged and sexually assaulted

### Sally's Story

*Sally is 20 years old. Her story begins when she and her girlfriend were asked to a party. The host of the party was a guy they had got to know through Sally's cousin. When they arrived at the party they didn't know many people, but had a few drinks and talked to a few guys.*

*Sally started to feel dizzy, sick in the stomach and heavy. She felt she couldn't get off the lounge. The next thing Sally remembered was waking up to find it dark outside. She noticed the buttons on her shirt were not done up properly and her undies were on the wrong way. All the others had left. The guy who owned the house told her she had passed out on the lounge.*

*When Sally got home she started to feel frightened about what had happened. She called her girlfriend who said she'd seen Sally in a car outside the party kissing one of the guys just before she left. Sally was distressed that she had no memory of this and that it was not like her to be kissing and going off with a guy she had just met. She also felt dizzy and unable to think straight, not like a usual hangover. Sally was scared that the guy may have drugged and assaulted her.*

*Sally rang a crisis telephone service for advice. They suggested some tests to try and detect if she had been drugged and/or assaulted. They helped her to think more clearly about her options. Sally asked her girlfriend to go with her to the hospital for the tests.*

Even if you acted out of character or took drugs voluntarily you did not ask to be assaulted.

You were not in a position to be able to give consent.

- It is a crime to drug someone without their knowledge, and it is a crime to sexually assault someone. You have a right to report it to the police.
- Contact a Sexual Assault Service or Sexual Health Clinic for a health check as well as drug screens and tests for possible sexually transmitted diseases. If you contact early enough it may be possible to test for semen or conduct a forensic examination.
- Talk about it to people you trust, they may be able to help you put the pieces of what happened together and support you.

For more information about drugs and sexual assault see Appendix 1 (page 69).

# 2

## If you have recently been sexually assaulted



You have a right to  
feel safe, supported  
and in control of  
what happens next.



The following section provides a guide to your safety, health and wellbeing and the legal process.

## Your Safety

Sexual assault *“robs the victim of a sense of power and control.... The first principle of recovery is to establish the survivor’s safety”* Herman<sup>1</sup> .

Feeling **safe in your environment** is important. Even if the offender does not know where you live you can still feel unsafe. Whether the offender is a stranger, is known to you, or you have an intimate relationship with him, there are options you can consider to increase your safety:

- Reporting to police and having the offender charged. This can give you legal protection so that the offender cannot approach you in any way. It can also give you an opportunity to seek justice for the crime that has been committed against you.
- Taking out an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO) or Apprehended Personal Violence Order (APVO) will also give you the protection of the law when you know the offender. These are legal documents that specify that the offender will not be able to make contact with you. You may apply for this yourself or the police may do this on your behalf. You don't have to have reported the sexual assault.
- Staying with other people you trust, moving house, changing locks or phone numbers.

## If you are in immediate danger contact the Police on 000

1. Herman, J., (1992): p.159 **Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror**, Basic Books. USA

Re-establishing safety is not only about a safe place, it also includes **feeling safe again within your own body**. Each woman has her own ways of regaining her sense of safety. This may include attending to any injuries, medical or health needs. It may mean re-establishing sleep and eating patterns, or other forms of self care

## Finding Help and Support

The following questions can help when thinking about whom to tell.

Ask yourself would this person:

- Respect my privacy?
- Listen and not blame me?
- Let me decide what to do?
- Be prepared to support me during this difficult time?

Most people who care about you want to be supportive, but may respond in ways that are not helpful. Try and work out what you need and communicate this to people close to you, so they can give you assistance.

There are a number of specialist services that can be helpful in addition to the support you



receive from family and friends (see Section 5 of this booklet for contact details). These include:

## **Sexual Assault Services (NSW Health)**

These services are located in hospitals and community health centres across NSW. Many provide a 24-hour medical and counselling crisis service for anyone who has recently been sexually assaulted, and who needs crisis counselling and medical care. These services are for all survivors regardless of whether you go to the police. They provide follow-up counselling, advocacy, information and support after a sexual assault. They also provide assistance if you decide to report the sexual assault to police and go to court. The service can also provide support to family and friends as needed, it is free and confidential.

## **NSW Police Force**

As sexual assault is regarded as a serious crime in NSW, you may report it to the police at any time after the assault has occurred. It is up to you when and if you report the sexual assault, although it will assist with the collection of evidence if you report it soon after the assault took place. You do not need to have a lawyer to report a sexual assault to the police.

## **Victims Services**

Victims Services provide a range of services for all victims of crime in NSW. This is accessed through Victim Access Line (VAL) a 24-hour crisis telephone counselling service and also provides information to access short to medium term counselling, victims compensation, information and referral.

Victims Services may also assist victims of crime with financial expenses resulting from the sexual assault, such as changing locks. This can be accessed through the Victims Compensation or the Victim Assistance Scheme.

## NSW Rape Crisis Service

This 24-hour crisis telephone and/or online information and counselling service is provided for adult victims of sexual assault. They can be contacted by telephone or through their website.

## Counselling after Sexual Assault

Many women find it helpful to access some counselling following the experience of sexual assault. Counselling can provide you with an opportunity to express concerns, feelings and fears to someone outside your family and friendship groups.

A counsellor can also provide you with information about such things as legal processes and your rights as a victim of crime. They can assist you to take important steps in navigating your journey to recovery.

Some women choose not to see a counsellor immediately after the assault. However, some women find that they want the support of

### Your rights seeing a professional sexual assault counsellor:

- Have a safe, confidential environment
- Be treated with respect, dignity and understanding
- Have a support person with you
- Communicate in your own language and have access to an interpreter
- Be provided with accurate information about your rights, services available, and what to expect of the counsellor and service
- Have an opportunity to express your feelings and thoughts without being judged
- Make your own decisions and choices

a counsellor at a later time such as court proceedings or to assist them in their recovery processes.

The decision to seek counselling is a personal one – for some women counselling is part of their journey to recovery while others choose different paths. The important thing is to find the care and support that suits you.

## Your Medical and Health Concerns

Many survivors have concerns about their health following a recent sexual assault. Sexual Assault Services can assist in arranging appropriate medical care with doctors who are specifically trained. You can also see your GP or go to the Emergency Department of your local hospital.

**If you have injuries** – the most common injuries are bruises, muscle strain and scratches. These may not become evident for a day or more after the assault. A doctor can provide a check-up and advise about treatment and healing times. If you have experienced more serious physical injuries, you are bleeding, in significant pain, have been hit on the head or lost consciousness, or experienced attempted strangulation, it is important to seek medical attention as soon as possible.

Many women **fear they may be pregnant** – the ‘morning after pill’ is available for prevention of pregnancy without a prescription from pharmacies, or free from a Sexual Assault Service or Sexual Health Clinic. To be effective it must be taken as soon as possible after the assault.

You may be concerned you have contracted a **sexually transmitted infection (STI)** – this is a significant concern for many survivors. The risk of contracting infections such as Hepatitis B, HIV and Chlamydia from a sexual assault is generally very low. However, the possibility

increases if the offender is from a high-risk group such as an intravenous drug user or where there are vaginal or anal injuries.

Medications such as broad-spectrum antibiotics and Hepatitis B vaccinations are available to assist in prevention of some STI's. If there are significant concerns about HIV, Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) can be available. Again, these must be taken as soon after the sexual assault as possible.

An STI test immediately after the sexual assault will only determine whether you had a sexually transmissible infection prior to or at the time of the assault, not as a result of it. Any STI contracted as a result of the assault cannot be detected until some time after the sexual assault.

It is important to have follow-up STI checks with a Sexual Assault Service, Sexual Health Clinic or your local doctor, usually initially 10-14 days after the assault, then for up to 3 to 6 months following the assault. These specialist doctors can answer your concerns about your particular circumstances and advise you about the most appropriate course of follow up and/or treatment. You may want to use safe sex practices until all your STI tests are clear. Discuss this with the doctor.

## **Other health concerns**

You may find it helpful to talk to a doctor about other health concerns such as sleeping difficulties, feeling sick or the need to go frequently to the toilet. You may need a medical certificate for time off work.

Many women who have been sexually assaulted have found it helpful to write details such as appointments, doctors' names and treatments in a medical checklist. This can help you keep track of your medical care. These things are easily forgotten in a crisis but may become important later. There is a medical checklist for you to use in Appendix 3 (page 76).

# The Medical Examination

After a recent sexual assault, two different types of medical examinations may be performed.

## 1. Health check up

This can be done at any time, but is sometimes done alongside a forensic examination. This consultation allows you to discuss your health and emotional concerns, and if you wish, have a physical examination to identify and treat any injury or address physical concerns.

You may have a health check without reporting the sexual assault to the police. Doctors at the Sexual Assault Service can provide this, or you may prefer to go to your own doctor.

## 2. Forensic examination

This is a specialist medical examination that can only be done by a trained doctor or specialist nurse at a Sexual Assault Service. The purpose of the examination is to identify any physical evidence and collect specimens that may

Your rights when having a medical or forensic examination:

- Choose whether to have an examination or not
- Confidentiality
- Be treated with respect and dignity
- Request, if available, a female doctor
- Stop the examination at any time
- Have a support person present during the medical examination
- Take time to decide whether to release the Sexual Assault Investigation Kit (SAIK) to police
- Make an informed decision about whether or not to have the forensic examination

be used as evidence if criminal charges are laid against the offender. In order to collect evidence it is important that the examination is performed as soon after the assault as possible, usually within 72 hours. It can be done up to a week after the sexual assault. The evidence is collected in a Sexual Assault Investigation Kit (SAIK).

In the forensic examination, the doctor will ask you to briefly describe what occurred and record details of the assault, and any injuries in the SAIK. She/he will then conduct a physical examination and collect specimens relevant to your description of the assault. Some of your clothes can also carry evidence and may be included in the SAIK. The examination is done with careful attention to standards of forensic evidence collection.

If you decide to report the assault to the police, you may be asked to have the examination to assist the police investigation of the sexual assault. If you are unsure you can still have the forensic examination and the Sexual Assault Service will hold the SAIK pending your decision. If you decide not to report to police, the SAIK will be destroyed. The SAIK is only handed over to police with your signed consent.

## Deciding Whether to Report to Police

The decision about whether to report the sexual assault to the police is in your hands. It is an important decision to make, but is often at a time of crisis and extreme stress. Before you decide whether to 'make a complaint' to police, you may want to discuss the process and consider your options with family and friends, the police and a sexual assault counsellor.

The following outline may help you understand the process.

### Making a complaint

The main reasons why police are keen to hear about what happened to you as soon as possible after it happens are:



- Your memory of the sexual assault is usually better
- There may be forensic evidence of the sexual assault that can be collected from you, your clothing and/or at the crime scene
- There may be witnesses nearby who remember hearing or seeing something
- Police may be able to take immediate action to protect you from the offender
- The offender may have committed other sexual assaults and your evidence may help police to identify this person

Police will take some brief details from you to make an initial record of the crime. Once you make a complaint you can still choose whether you go on to make a statement.

## **Making a statement**

If you decide to formally report the sexual assault, you will be asked to make a detailed statement to the police about what happened. You should tell police if you don't yet feel strong enough to make a detailed statement, or need time to seek support.

You have rights when talking with police. These include the right to a support person of your choice, being treated with respect and courtesy, have your privacy respected and to request a female or male officer to take your statement. You can take breaks when making your statement and add to your statement if you remember details later. The police will give you a copy of your statement or tell you the reason why this is not possible. They should also give you information about the legal process and contact people.

## **The police investigation**

As sexual assault is a serious crime, the detectives will conduct an investigation once you have given your statement. You may also

be asked to assist the investigation in other ways such as having a forensic medical examination, sometimes revisiting the scene of the crime or allowing forensic specialists to collect evidence if the assault occurred in your home. Detectives may also want to speak with people you have told about the sexual assault. They will try and speak to anyone who may have seen or heard what happened. The police investigation can sometimes take many months to complete.

## **If charges are laid**

If the offender is identified and there is sufficient evidence, police will usually arrest and charge him. The decision to charge the offender rests with the police officer in charge of your case. The officer may seek advice from the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP). The ODPP is responsible for prosecuting serious crimes in NSW. The decision to charge and prosecute will depend to a large extent on the strength of the evidence that can be given to the court. A decision not to charge or prosecute does not mean you are not believed or taken seriously. You have a right to know when the offender has been charged or if a decision has been made not to charge or prosecute the offender.

Once charged, the offender will usually be given bail with strict conditions not to contact you. The police should tell you what those conditions are. The offender is now called the 'accused person' and you (the victim) will become a 'witness' for the Crown. This means that you do not need your own legal representation; the law regards the crime as a crime against the State and you as a witness for the State prosecution service (ODPP).

The Witness Assistance Service (WAS), which is part of the ODPP, can provide information and support to you through the legal process. The WAS assists victims and witnesses in a range of cases but prioritises sexual assault matters. The Sexual Assault Service can also provide court preparation and court support.

If you have had counselling about issues in your life, there is some legislation to protect confidential counselling notes being used in court. Ask the WAS officer or ODPP solicitor more about this.

## The Court Process

There are a number of stages in the court process. The offender can plead guilty at any time during the process, even during the trial. If the offender pleads guilty, you will probably not have to give evidence at court. However, many offenders plead not guilty. In most sexual assault cases, the case is first heard before a magistrate in a local court. This is known as committal proceedings. The magistrate decides if there is enough evidence to commit the offender for trial in the district court. You will usually not be required to give evidence at the committal proceedings in the local court. If the offender is committed for trial in the district court, a judge and jury will hear the trial. Unless the offender pleads guilty, you will be required to give evidence in the district court.

If the offender is found guilty or pleads guilty there will be a sentencing hearing. You have the option to submit a Victim Impact Statement (VIS). The VIS can detail to the court how the assault has affected your life. The judge may refer to the statement when handing down the sentence.

The offender can appeal against the conviction or sentence they receive. The ODPP may also appeal the sentence.

See Section 5  
for Legal  
Information and  
Resources  
(page 53).

If the offender is found not guilty, you may wish to apply for an ADVO or ADPO to ensure the offender cannot contact you.

The court process is often a lengthy one, and it can take many months, and sometimes well over a year for the matter to be finalised in court.

Court can be a stressful experience for victims of crime, especially of sexual assault. There are a number of provisions for victims of sexual assault in the legal process to make it easier. These include giving evidence via closed circuit television, having closed courts and having support people.

For resources and contact details on the legal system see Section 5 (page 53). There are checklists in Appendix 3 (page 76) you can use to record your contact with the police and legal system.

### **The Charter of Victim's Rights gives all victims of crime in NSW the right to:**

- Be treated with courtesy, compassion and respect
- Access to services, information and support, depending on need
- Protection from the offender when necessary
- Information about any investigation
- Make a victim impact statement if the offender is convicted
- Protection of your privacy
- Information from the Victim Register if the offender is in custody
- All agencies working with victims of crime must abide by this Charter. Seek assistance from Victim Services if you think your rights have not been respected

## Victims Compensation

If you have been injured (physically and/or psychologically) as a result of sexual assault, you may apply for victim's compensation.

You may claim for certain expenses, such as medical expenses, loss of income, loss of personal effects, as well as an award for compensation. You must apply within two years of the crime being committed, though you may apply outside this time if you are able to provide reasons for the delay.

You need to have reported the assault to the police or statutory authority, such as the Department of Family and Community Services, however, seek further advice from Victim Services in relation to this.

The offender does not have to have been located or charged for you to be eligible to apply. You do not have to attend the tribunal. The decision is based on your application and the reports and documents submitted in support of your claim.

Victims Services may assist you in applying for compensation. You may wish to consult a lawyer to assist you with the application. Victims Services will meet legal fees at a set amount. Contact details are located in Section 5 (page 53).

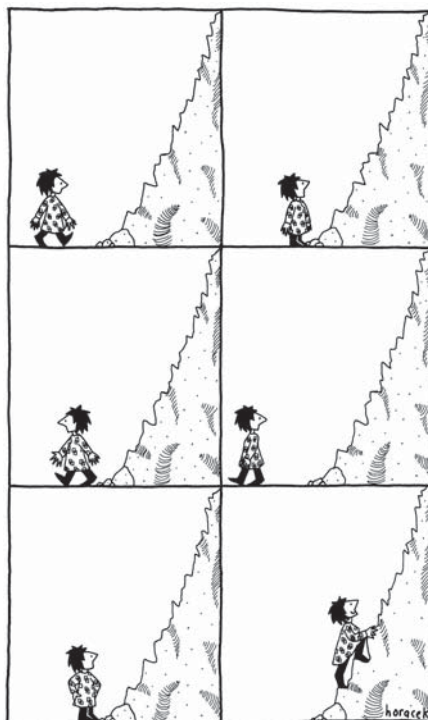


## Natalie's Story

Natalie is a 35 year old Aboriginal woman who lives in a rural community. She had been seeing a friend of her cousin's who lived up the coast. Natalie was very excited about this relationship as it was a long time since she had a boyfriend. One night they had gone out to a club together and when they got home he wanted to have sex with her. Natalie told him she was tired and didn't want to. She went to bed. She woke up with her boyfriend climbing on top of her and forcing her to have sex. He ignored her pleas to stop.

The following morning Natalie felt scared and ashamed. She started to recall times from childhood when her uncle would come into her room and touch her. She had felt ashamed about this abuse and had not told anyone because her uncle was respected in their community.

Natalie did not know what to do - she did not want to report her boyfriend to the police because she felt she would be blamed for making him go to jail and it would bring shame on her family. Weeks later she felt like she was going mad, couldn't sleep and couldn't get pictures of the assault out of her mind.



*She broke down at work and ended up telling her boss. The boss put her in touch with a counsellor who visited her town each week. At first, talking about it felt overwhelming and Natalie was very worried about anyone finding out. But slowly over a few months Natalie began to feel a great sense of relief that she had someone to talk to and who respected her privacy. She was even able to tell her sister, and discovered that her uncle had also assaulted her sister.*

## **If you're from a rural area**

- You may be worried about your privacy. Be clear with family and friends what you expect of them in terms of privacy. Let them know that you might need their help sometimes.
- Find a safe and confidential way to access local services, such as seeing a counsellor or police at a different location or town or using internet/phone counselling.
- Ask someone you trust to go to appointments with you, especially if you have to drive long distances.
- Use spaces such as the bush, or open spaces to help you feel safe again, eg. going to your favourite place, spending time with the animals or working the land.
- Request another police officer if you are finding it difficult to talk with your local police officer. Contact the NSW Police Customer Assistance Unit or discuss options with the sexual assault counsellor.
- Use websites to get information and connect with other survivors.
- Decide for yourself who you want to know about the sexual assault, what you tell them, and what you want done about it.

## Strategies Aboriginal women have used...

- **Join with other Aboriginal women taking a stand against sexual assault.**

Joyce Donovan has lived for the past 40 years in the Illawarra. She is a Woddi-Woddi woman.

Joyce works as a health worker and was one of the elders to organize the first Walk Against Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities in April 2006. Over 600 people were on the road for three days going to Moruya, Nowra, and Wollongong, where they ochred up and corroboreed through the streets to break the silence about sexual assault. Since the walk, Joyce is proud of the many Aboriginal women survivors who have gone on to have professional counselling, apply for compensation and take on healing and changes in their lives. In breaking the silence, she has seen many Aboriginal women empowered to speak out and stand straight and strong<sup>2</sup>.

- Find someone to help you feel safe and respected again. This could be a friend or family member, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worker or non-Indigenous worker, or an Elder. Most areas have an Aboriginal family health worker who is trained in issues of sexual assault and family violence.
- Decide for yourself who you want to know about the sexual assault, what you tell them, and what gets done about it.

---

2. Little Black Book for Strong Black Women. 2007 VAW Central Coast NSW



## You are not alone if you have experienced sexual assault more than once in your life

As many as one in three to four girls and one in seven to eight boys experience some form of sexual abuse by the time they are 18 years old<sup>3</sup>. Approximately one in five women experience unwanted sexual contact or sexual assault in their adult lives<sup>4</sup>.

If you have been recently sexually assaulted and experienced sexual abuse before, the trauma from past sexual assaults may re-emerge. If this is your experience you may experience a post-traumatic stress reaction (PTSD). It may be important to seek professional guidance to manage these effects. A local doctor, a sexual assault counsellor, or health professional may be able to advise you about local help available.

If you have tried to get assistance previously and it has not been helpful, don't give up. It sometimes takes persistence to find the right counsellor or support person for you.



3. Fergusson, D & Mullen, P (1999) Childhood Sexual Abuse: An Evidence Based Perspective Sage Publications

4. Personal Safety Survey (2005) Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005 Commonwealth of Australia Canberra

# 3

## Recovering from sexual assault



"I will not let violence take any more from me, not my friends, my family and my ability to hold on to life, to hope and to speak out for other survivors." Glenda

## Reactions Women Experience Following Sexual Assault

For many women sexual assault can be an overwhelming experience. You may have endured violation of your body and your sense of self at the hands of another person. It may have been by someone you have known and trusted. You might have felt fear that you had no control or say over what happened to you, or that you were going to be hurt.

Just as every woman's experience of sexual assault will be different, so will her responses. There is no right or wrong way to feel. There is no set time for when you may begin to feel in control again. You are not alone in having these feelings.

In the weeks and months following the sexual assault some reactions you may experience include:

- Acute distress – feeling completely overwhelmed or crying constantly
- Anxiety – about your safety, health, other's responses, everyday coping
- Depression – “how can I get through this...?” “I don't want to get up in the morning...” “It's all too hard”
- Sleep disturbance and nightmares
- Physical symptoms such as nausea, headache, fatigue, loss of appetite or pain
- Fear – of places, people, any reminders of the assault can trigger it
- Guilt and shame – “I shouldn't have... if only... what will they think of me now?”
- Emotional mood swings – a roller coaster of being okay one minute, then falling apart the next
- Feeling dirty – no matter how much you wash you cannot get rid of the smell or feeling of being unclean
- Loss of control of your life

## Understanding these reactions

These reactions have been named **Acute Stress Response (ASR)**. It is a usual response to trauma and often begins immediately after, or within a few weeks, of the sexual assault. It usually lasts up to a month or so. These reactions may be more intense in the first few days and weeks following the sexual assault and then slowly subside.

It is normal to experience a 'roller coaster ride' of effects, feeling OK for a while, thinking you are getting over it and then the reactions coming back with full intensity.

Sometimes these reactions persist or worsen over time. They may also appear some time after the assault has occurred. They may be characterised by:

- Hyper-alertness – your body being in a constant state of alertness to danger. This can result in persistent sleep disturbance, daytime anxiety and feelings of panic.
- Intrusive memories – a re-experiencing of the trauma in many different forms – flashbacks, constantly re-playing parts of what happened, nightmares and sensory experiences. It can make you feel like you are losing your mind.
- Avoidance – deliberately or unconsciously avoiding anything that is a trigger or reminder of the assault, such as the place the assault occurred, avoiding intimacy or sex, distancing yourself from others, or emotionally shutting down.

You may hear this referred to as **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**. If these effects do persist or worsen you should seek professional help.

"You feel numb, then shock, then you panic, then you feel like a little ball of nothing. What did I do to deserve this?" Deane

## Meg's Story

*"I was raped by a guy I had been friends with. He was part of our group. I was in shock for days afterwards, telling myself I'd wake up and find it was just a nightmare, so I could pretend it didn't happen. I just shut down. I stayed away from people, made excuses I had to work. I felt numb inside... and like the part of me that was fun loving and enjoyed life had died. But I couldn't sleep. I kept dreaming what happened over and over and I was screaming, but no words would come out.*

*I was a zombie in the day... didn't return friend's calls, just wanted to be curled up in a ball and sleep. I drank to get it out of my mind. Finally, after about six weeks I told a friend. That was the beginning of breaking the cycle and getting my life back on track."*



The following information looks at how survivors have managed the impact and effects of sexual assault.

## Recovery from Sexual Assault

### Paying attention to your safety

Feeling safe again is an important part of recovery. Attending to your **physical safety** is the first step.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are you safe from further contact with the offender?
- Do you feel safe at home?
- What can you change in order to feel and be safe?

Feeling **safe in your relationships** is important. Survivors often find that their relationships are affected after sexual assault. For instance, people you trust may no longer be as supportive as you expected, whilst others may be unexpectedly helpful.

Safety also encompasses **emotional safety**. Though you may be physically safe from the offender and further abuse and be supported by those who love you, you may not necessarily feel safe. It is worth thinking about what will help you to regain a feeling of safety. For instance, if night time is hard for you, does leaving lights on, having people stay with you, listening to calming music, or going out, make a difference? You may have to try a number of things before you find what works for you. See Appendix 4 (page 78) for a safe place exercise.

In Appendix 2 (page 72) there is a Safety Plan you can fill out to help you think about your different safety needs.

"Have a list so that you can refer to it if you are in a panic or just can't think. It's good for friends and family to know it too." Glenda

## Managing fear, anxiety and panic

*“...I’d been going OK and then out of the blue I started to get all panicky again, especially at night when it got dark. I felt I should be over this stuff by now... and that made me feel even more of a failure. I finally rang up the counsellor I’d seen after it happened, and she said it was pretty normal for those feelings to come back, especially on the anniversary of the assault, or when something is going on in your life now that makes you feel unsafe or trigger off a memory. I realised that the panic started again when my sister’s new boyfriend started coming over and hanging around. I don’t trust that guy.... It helped to know that’s what it was so I could work out how to deal with it...” Stef*

It is normal to experience strong and even overwhelming emotions following sexual assault. Sometimes the feelings appear suddenly with no apparent reason. At other times they may be more predictable, for example around the same time of day the sexual assault occurred.

You may experience these as powerful physical sensations like; a racing or pounding heart, feeling sick or a sense of dread, breathing problems, dizziness, sweating and shakiness.

Many women experience sudden intrusive memories where they feel as though they are re-living some aspect of the sexual assault. You may re-experience pictures, sounds or smells from when the assault occurred. These are sometimes known as flashbacks. They can be quite paralysing and intrusive but usually lessen over time.

Survivors have found the following things helpful in dealing with anxiety, panic or flashbacks.

- Breathe slowly and regularly
- Stay in the present by noticing your surroundings, walk around, drink some water, recall your safe place, hold something comforting
- Use self talk – remind yourself these are feelings and you are not in danger, these are normal reactions to stress
- Talk to someone supportive
- Learn relaxation exercises
- Notice if there is a pattern – have a plan in your mind or write down some steps to follow next time it happens

## Dealing with nightmares and sleep disturbance

In the days and weeks following the assault, many survivors report having nightmares and disrupted sleep patterns. Your body often stays on 'active alert' for some time after the assault. You may need to change your normal pattern to deal with these effects.

Strategies some women have found helpful are:

- Having a calming routine before sleep. For example, drinking warm milk, doing a relaxation exercise, leaving a light on, listening to soothing music, reading a boring book or magazine, taking a warm shower or bath and checking that your room is safe and comfortable.
- Using writing to record your fears and details of the nightmare. Some people have found changing the ending of the nightmare to something that empowers them can help.

**"Just getting out of bed and going for a walk instead of sitting in front of the TV in your PJ's and eating chocolate was helpful." Heather**

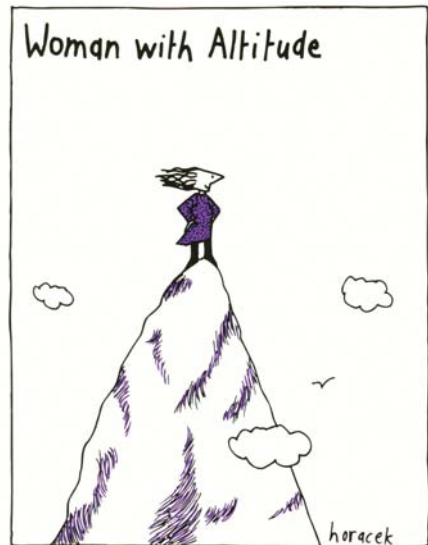


- Telling someone about it.
- Doing physical exercise in the day may also assist, as exercise has been shown to have a significant impact on reducing stress in the body.
- Avoid having drinks with alcohol or caffeine, taking drugs, watching a lot of television, and sleeping in the day instead of at night. These are things you may do which are helpful at the time but can have negative longer term effects.

If you have tried a number of strategies, including those suggested above, and are still experiencing sleep problems, discuss this with your doctor or the Sexual Assault Service.

## Expressing strong feelings

It is common to experience strong feelings, particularly of anger and frustration. These emotions can become directed inwards to yourself. You may have thoughts like: “Why did I trust him?” or “I should be over this”. You may also direct your strong feelings towards other people who are close to you, thinking “They don’t want to know, they blame me”. You could be experiencing anger at agencies, thinking “The police have done nothing” or “The courts make it hard for me but not him”.



You have a right to be angry about what has happened to you. Following numbness, the dominant emotions immediately after the assault are often fear and confusion. Anger may emerge sometime later. It is often difficult to find ways to constructively express your anger, as the offender does not usually take responsibility for the crime.

It can be helpful to talk about your anger with a friend or counsellor to develop a better understanding of it, so you are not directing it inappropriately at yourself or others. You can think together about how you can use the energy to bring about change. For example report to police, express your hurt in writing, make a complaint about poor agency or professional responses.

Notice when your anger is rising and find healthy ways of expressing it, such as:

- Physical activity such as punching a pillow or kicking a ball
- Taking some time out
- Going for a walk

You may also feel a sense of hopelessness and despair, where you want to withdraw from the world and the people around you. It can be difficult to take care of yourself when you feel like this, and difficult to maintain close relationships. These too are normal feelings. Give yourself time and permission to have bad days and to grieve.

## Giving words to your experience

It is important in recovery from sexual assault to find ways to express what happened to you. Talking about it to a friend, police or a counsellor can help with this. Many people find writing, artwork or keeping a journal during this time very helpful.

**"Acknowledge that you have good days and you have bad days." Tanya**

## Keeping a journal

- Write at the end of each day about what has happened or what you think and feel
- Write down everything you can remember about the assault
- Record your achievements and what helped you get through the day
- Write down quotes or things people have said that were helpful
- Look back over what you have written to reflect on your journey

## Regaining control of your life

*“The sexual assault may have taken many things, I just don’t know if they’ll ever return. I will not let violence take any more from me, not my friends, my family, and my ability to hold on to life, to hope and to speak out for other survivors.” Glenda*

Women who have experienced sexual assault do recover. They learn how to cope and feel OK again. Survivors of sexual assault have told us there are two things that need to happen to regain control of their life:

1. Acknowledge the impact on your life and give yourself permission to grieve and take the time to heal.



- Take care of yourself. Comforting that part of yourself that is grieving or hurting is difficult when you feel overwhelmed or depressed.

Caring for yourself is a very important part of healing. Give some thought to what would be helpful to you. Some women have found the following helpful:

- Curling up with a blanket and pillow and soothing music
- Hugs with a friend, your pet, a teddy bear
- Crying, praying, singing, or yelling
- Getting in touch with nature
- Art or craft work

## Maintaining Good Relationships

### Finding support

*“Mum blamed me for the assault. She said what were you doing letting him in your bedroom anyway, and stuff like that. I could have just kept away from her, but she’s my Mum, so I told her that I didn’t want to hear her judgements, I needed her support. I got my counsellor to speak to her too. After that she was heaps better.” Jessica*

You may find it difficult to talk to the people closest to you. Often you may feel that people around you want to help, but they just don’t know how. If you can, try to let the people closest to you know what you would find helpful.

**“The responsibility had to fall back on me ... to let others know what I need ... people can’t read your mind.” Glenda**

Sometimes the people who care about you also express anger about what happened to you. While you may be glad of the shared anger, it can also evoke fear of more violence. If the police are already involved you could encourage the person to talk with them, or a counsellor, about their feelings.

## Intimacy

Establishing or re-establishing intimacy after a sexual assault can take time and patience. Any kind of touch can evoke strong memories of the assault, but part of you may also yearn to be held in a safe way. The important principle is for you to feel in control.

The following ideas may help you in thinking about and asking for what you need:

- What kind of touch am I comfortable with at the moment?
- What kind of closeness or touch triggers off fear or memories?
- Can I tell my partner/friend what I need?
- Would my partner respect what I want to do and stop any time if I asked?

## What can I do differently?

It may take time for you to be comfortable with, and feel safe again, during intimacy and sex. If you do have a flashback to the assault whilst being intimate, stop the intimacy or sex until you feel safe. It can help you to focus on getting back into the 'here and now'. You could try paying attention to breathing, remembering you are safe, and when you are ready, trying to talk about it.

You can also try:

- Getting your partner to ask you before initiating any touch, or ask them to let you initiate the intimacy until you feel safe again
- Starting with a relaxing shower or bath
- Having sex at a different time
- Choosing not to be intimate for a while

## Making Meaning out of your Experience

The trauma of sexual assault can throw into question the beliefs you hold about living in a safe world, with people who are safe. It is a major task of recovery to find a way to re-establish these beliefs in the light of what has happened to you. Rebuilding safety and developing trust and connection with people who do not hurt us is an essential part of the healing process.

Soon after the assault your beliefs might be influenced by some of the myths you have heard about sexual assault. These myths can influence you, to blame yourself for the assault and avoid placing responsibility on the offender. They tend to lead to self-doubt and discounting of your experience and knowledge of the crime. Meaning based on such myths can lead to long-term shame and self

"I'm worth it to take the time out to rebuild myself after this. I do something every single day, or one or two big things a week that make me feel good about myself." Melinda

blame for the survivor. By placing responsibility where it belongs you honour your survival.\*

For some women directing energy toward social change can assist in meeting other people wanting to take a stand against sexual assault. Women have taken action through forums such as:

- Reclaim the Night
- White Ribbon Day
- Contributing to Survivor websites
- Attending Sexual Assault Survivor groups

Every survivor navigates her own journey as she heals. External factors can influence this journey. Internal factors are crucial. Trusting in your own knowledge of the experience, challenging and exploring your self doubt, expressing your feelings and acknowledging the strength and resilience of your survival can help you navigate your journey.



"The strength of victims to survive sexual assault is inspiring. We must find courage in the support of each other, strength in our unity, our passion for change and speak out to make a difference, to create a safer place for women."

Courage Website

\* See also Clark & Quadara (2010) ref.

## Chitra's Story

*Chitra has been married for 10 years and has two young boys. She and her husband moved to Australia from Sri Lanka 2 years ago. For the last six months, Chitra's husband had become increasingly moody and he has accused her of having affairs. Recently he forced Chitra to have sex with him and also threatened to hit her if she refused. Chitra thought about telling someone but found it difficult to explain in English. She also feared that if she told someone in her own community it would bring dishonour to her and her family. Most of all Chitra did not feel safe in her own house and was worried for her children.*

*Following another assault, Chitra told a mother she had met at her sons' school. The mother told her she too had experienced violence from her husband in the past and that she didn't have to put up with it – that there were laws to protect her.*

*She took Chitra to the police station where she was able to talk to a police officer with the assistance of an interpreter. The police officer also gave her contacts of services that could help her with housing and finances.*

*Chitra didn't want to take any action as she was still fearful of her husband's reaction, but some months later when he raped her again she went back to the police and her husband was charged with sexual assault.*

*The interpreter told Chitra about a women's group at the local migrant resource centre. Many of the women had also experienced violence. Chitra really liked how the group talked about the shame, guilt, anger and many other feelings they had following abuse. It also gave her an opportunity to communicate with women in her own language about what had happened to her and to hear their stories.*



## If you have been sexually assaulted by your husband or partner...

- Every woman who has been sexually assaulted, no matter who the offender is, has the right to health and legal support. Remember, the majority of women who are sexually assaulted know the offender.
- You have a right to be safe from sexual assault in your own home.
- Talk to a worker at a Women's Health Centre or Domestic Violence Legal Advice Line. They will help you think and plan all the things you need to consider such as, where you will live, your safety, money, how you will cope, your family's reactions. Knowing your rights and options can help you feel in more control of your situation and safety.
- Consider speaking to the police. Their role is to assist you to explore criminal justice options. This could mean, laying criminal charges, or assisting you to get an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO) or an Apprehended Personal Violence Order (APVO) or finding protection in other ways.
- If you decide to leave it can be difficult, but you can rebuild your life. There may be hurdles like finding a new place to live, school for your children, finances and legal proceedings, he may make promises about changing his behaviour and even be loving and kind at times. It can take time to leave a relationship and slowly rebuild your sense of self.

## If your first language is not English...

- You can use a professional interpreter to tell you about services or come along with you to interviews or appointments. Professional interpreters must abide by a code of ethics that mean they cannot tell anyone of your personal details or circumstances. Phone numbers are in Section 5 (page 53).
- Finding a trusted friend to talk with about what has happened.
- Migrant Resource Centres can provide information on services available to you.

# 4

## For partners, families and friends



"Finally after six weeks I told a friend. That was the beginning of breaking the cycle and getting my life back on track." Meg

*This section focuses on how you as a partner, family member or friend can support a woman who has been sexually assaulted. Sexual assault is a crisis not only for the woman who has experienced sexual violence, but also for the people closest to her. Understanding your own reactions is an important first step to providing support for the woman you care about.*

## Common Feelings

Sexual assault generates a lot of strong feelings for family members and friends. These feelings may include: anger, protectiveness, helplessness, distress and guilt. You will be coping with your own feelings and the impact the assault has had on you, and you may also be concerned about the impact of the assault on your relationship. One of the most common responses for the woman who has experienced sexual assault is to stay away from people. Closeness or intimacy may bring powerful feelings of vulnerability and the fear of being hurt again. Survivors of sexual assault can benefit greatly from the protection and care of the people supporting her.

Communicating your care and concern can be very significant. Strong expressions of revenge or anger, or taking things into your own hands, are not usually helpful. It is important to be as attentive as possible to her needs. At the same time being aware of your own feelings and clear about what you can or cannot offer in terms of assistance. You may find it helpful to talk with someone about these feelings. You could talk with someone close who also knows about the assault or to a counsellor.

## Questions and Concerns

The following questions are commonly asked by people placed in this difficult situation and may assist you to understand both your own reactions and those of the survivor.

### Why didn't she tell me?

You may feel hurt that your friend or relative did not tell you or that she told others before she told you. Remember, *'people close to you are the hardest to tell'<sup>5</sup>*. Many survivors do not want those nearest to them to be hurt too. They may feel ashamed, fear you will be angry with them, or they may blame themselves. Feelings can be overwhelming and confusing for survivors after an assault. It is important that you do not underestimate how valuable your care and support is.

### Why won't she tell me what actually happened?

It is often very difficult for the woman who has been sexually assaulted to describe her experience. The trauma of sexual assault robs her of a language to describe what has happened and its impact. She may fear being judged, criticized and blamed for the assault. She may need time to trust again. Try to accept what she has told you and be as patient as you can. Avoid asking her a lot of 'why' questions as it might feel like an interrogation.

### What should I tell others?

The survivor needs to have control over who knows what happened, what they know, and who tells them. Respecting her privacy and confidentiality is a very important part of the survivor's journey of regaining control of her life.

If you are not sure what the survivor wants others to know, then it is a good idea to check with her first before you say anything to another person. The only occasion when you might tell someone else would be if you held serious concerns for her safety.

---

5. Lievore, D.(2005) p.71 **No Longer Silent: A study of women's help-seeking decisions and service responses to sexual assault** Australian Institute of Criminology for the Australian Governments's Office for Women, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra

## Why is she angry with me?

Anger is part of the roller coaster of emotions survivors may experience after an assault. However, the anger about the assault can be displaced onto the people supporting her. Although it might be difficult to bear the brunt of the anger, remember that this is a common reaction. It can be easier and safer for the survivor to be angry at those closest to her, rather than the offender. Recognising this reaction and being patient, may help. You can support her by encouraging her to find alternative outlets for her anger such as exercise, writing, yelling into or punching a pillow. You could talk to her about other options too, such as reporting the crime.

## Why can't she just put it behind her?

Survivors of sexual assault also ask themselves this question. They often feel a sense of failure that they are not able to move on more quickly with their lives.

*'The essential element of rape is the physical, psychological and moral violation of the person (and)...it is intentionally designed... (by the rapist) to produce psychological trauma<sup>6</sup>.*

Rebuilding her life after such a violation takes great courage, time, energy and support.



6. Herman, J.(1992): p.159 **Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror**, Basic Books. USA

## Paula's Story

*When Jessica rang me from Sydney to tell me she had been raped, it really rocked me. I never imagined something like that happening to her. Like she was always the strong one. It scared me.*

*I was really worried I would say the wrong thing, so I didn't say much. I thought I'd just give her some space. I think that really hurt her. It took me a while to realise she was still the same Jessica, and that it was OK just to treat her as normal. So I came down to Sydney and we hung out, went and got DVDs, ate junk food... stuff like that. It meant a lot to her. After I went back home we emailed each other, it was easier to talk about it that way than over the phone. When I offered to come down for the court case she was really shocked I'd do that. That's just stuff you do for a friend...*

It may also help if you understand some of the essential elements of recovery facing survivors of sexual assault. The following can help you understand the facts and impact of sexual assault.

## What can I do to Help?

Survivors take a journey and navigate a path to recovery. They need to re-establish safety, to rebuild a positive view of themselves, to grieve for what is lost, and find hope and courage to move forward. You can help them with their journey.

In a follow-up study of sexual assault survivors, it was found that the quality of their close relationships had the most influence on their recovery and the time it took to heal.<sup>7</sup>

The kind of support and care that family and friends offer after a sexual assault can have a positive impact on the survivor's willingness to access services and professional supports. It may influence her willingness to proceed with legal action and to seek medical and

counselling services. It is very helpful for family and friends to focus on the survivor's emotional and physical needs, to listen to her wants and actively support her to 'work out the next steps in her own recovery process'<sup>8</sup>.

## Attending to safety

One of the first major tasks facing survivors of sexual assault is re-establishing safety. This is not easily and quickly achieved.

As a trusted family member or friend you can offer very practical support such as:

- Ensuring she has a safe place to stay
- Offering to accompany her to appointments such as police, medical, or just to the shops
- Helping to collect information she may need – for example providing emergency contact numbers, or finding out about the legal options
- Ensuring she has people to be with her at more vulnerable times, such as at night
- Respecting her level of comfort around touch and physical intimacy

---

7. Burgess, A & Holmstrom, L (Adaptive Strategies) in Herman, J. (1992) p.63 **Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror**, Basic Books. USA

8. Lievore, D, (2005) p.71 **No Longer Silent: A study of women's help-seeking decisions and service responses to sexual assault** Australian Institute of Criminology for the Australian Governments's Office for Women, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra

## Helping to rebuild self-esteem

Another essential task is the restoration of self-belief and self-worth. This means being able to re-establish autonomy and control. The survivor may need your assistance to do this. Although you may be tempted to take over when she is distressed and unable to make decisions, it is actually important to encourage her to make her own decisions.

You can assist your family member or friend to rebuild a positive view of herself in a number of ways:

- Offering her small choices. Try to **offer options** to increase her sense of control
- Be prepared for mood swings - try to remain consistent and **patient in your support**
- **Respect her feelings** even if you don't understand them
- **Listen** without judging or asking her about her behaviour
- Let her know you **believe and support** her
- Encourage her to discuss, when ready, her beliefs and self-judgements. Help her to put the **blame where it belongs – with the offender**
- Don't assume you understand – **ask** her how she is and what you can do to help
- **Don't minimise** her experience by saying things like 'you've got to move on... it could have been worse...'
- **Encourage** counselling or medical attention if necessary



## George's Story

*'My girlfriend Jen was at her soccer team's end of season party at a club, and this guy offered her a lift home. When they reached her place he tried to heavy her into having sex and when she refused he was really rough with her. I was so angry. I just wanted to belt him. I couldn't believe that he could do this to her? I was also really angry with Jen. She's too trusting and doesn't see danger coming. It made it worse that she didn't tell me for weeks.*

*Even after she told me, Jen really withdrew and was uncomfortable to be around me. We seemed to have lost our closeness and I blamed Jen for that.*

*Months later, Jen got really distressed and said that I didn't care and that all I thought about was myself. She had lost a lot of weight and had not been sleeping for weeks. I didn't realise that the assault was having such a terrible effect on her. I didn't understand and underneath my frustration I think I was angry with myself for not protecting her.*

*We've talked a lot since then. I didn't realise how much my support meant to her. I took her away for a weekend. It was so good to see her relax. I never understood how much she was going through and how long it takes to get over.'*

## Looking after yourself

It is important that you look after your own needs when you are providing support and care for a family member or a friend who has been sexually assaulted. You may need to be very clear about what you can do and how much time you have available. It will help if you are able to communicate these limitations.

Many friends and family members are deeply affected by what the woman they love or care about has been through. It is not uncommon to experience some of the same symptoms as the survivor, such as

sleep disturbance, mood swings, fear about your safety, anxiety, anger, distress, and over protectiveness of children. Attending to your feelings is essential for your well being. It can also help the survivor. It will enable you to have more strength and energy to offer the support she will need.

Many friends and family members find it helpful to talk to someone who can support them or they may seek professional assistance such as from a sexual assault counsellor at this time.

## Susan's Story

*Susan has been supporting her sister Leah who was recently indecently assaulted at a work function by another employee. As Leah was leaving the function, an acquaintance roughly pushed her up against the wall and put his hands up her shirt. He grabbed her breasts and tried to kiss her saying; "you dykes don't know what you're missing". Leah was so shocked she said nothing. The assault stopped when another man called him from the other side of the room.*

*Susan knew something was wrong when she rang Leah later that night and Leah was withdrawn and uncommunicative. Susan was concerned that Leah might be heading into a depressive episode as Leah had been diagnosed with bi polar disorder a few years earlier.*

*Susan decided to drop in to Leah's house to check that she was OK. At first Leah*



*didn't want to talk but finally she opened up and told Susan what had happened. Leah was particularly distraught that the offender had targeted her because of her sexuality. She was also ashamed and angry at the fact that she had frozen and not defended herself. Though Susan was angry and upset about what happened to her sister, she tried to keep her own reactions to herself so she could listen to Leah's story.*

*Susan had been identified as Leah's primary support person by the mental health team. She was worried that the assault might trigger the depression again but she didn't want to make any decisions that Leah was not comfortable about. She also understood that there were many issues that Leah needed to consider such as her physical safety and whether she should inform her employer of what had happened. Susan suggested to Leah that they needed support to work through these issues and that she was willing to accompany her to see a counsellor to get further advice.*

## **Women who have a mental illness or a disability...**

- You are entitled to the same support and services as anyone else who has been sexually assaulted, including an advocate to support you in accessing these services.
- It is often not the mental illness or disability that is the biggest challenge but rather the attitudes or prejudices that people hold in responding to someone who is different from themselves.

## **Lesbian women**

- Can find personal support through talking with a partner or close friends who do not judge your sexuality.
- You may find professional support through services such as lesbian counselling or gay and lesbian liaison officers in the NSW Police Force.

# 5

## Finding information, help and support



Finding the resources to suit your needs will help navigate your journey.

## Services for all Women

### Websites

#### Courage Website

*Set up by a woman survivor in rural NSW.*

[www.courageforwomen.com](http://www.courageforwomen.com)

#### NSW Rape Crisis Centre

*Rape crisis website and on line service for information, support and on line counselling.*

[www.nswrapecrisis.com.au](http://www.nswrapecrisis.com.au)

#### Pandora's Aquarium

*USA based message board and on line support group for survivors of sexual violence. Links to other websites.*

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

#### Amnesty International

*A range of international campaigns against sexual violence.*

[www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)

#### UN Women (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women)

*Organises the annual white ribbon campaign against sexual violence.*

[www.unwomen.org.au](http://www.unwomen.org.au)

## Counselling Services

### NSW Health Sexual Assault Services (SAS)

These services provide specialist sexual assault medical and counselling services across NSW.

- **Albury SAS**  
(02) 6058 1800 (02) 6058 4584 (24 hrs)
- **Armidale Community Health Centre**  
(02) 6776 9600 (02) 6776 9622 (24 hrs)
- **Bankstown SAS**  
Bankstown Community Health Centre  
(02) 9780 2777 (02) 9828 3000 (24 hrs)

- **Bathurst SAS**  
(02) 6330 5677  
(02) 6330 5217 (24 hrs)
- **Bega Valley SAS**  
(02) 6492 9620  
(02) 6492 4416 (24 hrs)
- **Blacktown/Mt Druiitt SAS**  
(02) 9881 8700  
(02) 9845 5555 (24 hrs)
- **Bourke SAS**  
(02) 6870 8883  
(02) 6870 8888 (24 hrs)
- **Broken Hill SAS**  
(08) 8080 1554  
(08) 8080 1333 (24 hrs)
- **Central Coast SAS**  
(02) 4320 3175  
(02) 4320 2111 (24 hrs)
- **Clarence Valley SAS**  
(02) 6640 2402  
(02) 6640 2222 (24 hrs)
- **Coffs Harbour SAS**  
(02) 6656 7200  
(02) 6656 7000 (24 hrs)
- **Cooma**  
**Community Health Centre**  
(02) 6455 3201  
(02) 6455 3222 (24 hrs)
- **Coonabarabran**  
**Community Health Centre**  
(02) 6826 6133  
(02) 6842 6404 (24 hrs)
- **Coonamble SAS**  
(02) 6827 1100
- **Cowra SAS**  
(02) 6340 2356  
(02) 6393 3000 (24 hrs)
- **Deniliquin**  
**Community Health Centre**  
(03) 5882 2900  
(03) 5882 2913 (24 hrs)
- **Dubbo SAS**  
**Dubbo Community Health Centre**  
(02) 6885 8999  
(02) 6885 8666 (24 hrs)
- **Eastern & Central SAS**  
**Royal Prince Alfred Hospital**  
(02) 9515 9040  
(02) 9515 6111 (24 hrs)
- **Eurobodalla SAS**  
(02) 4474 1561 and 1300 139 887  
(02) 6492 4416 (24 hrs)
- **Forbes SAS**  
(02) 6850 2233  
(02) 6850 2000 (24 hrs)
- **Glen Innes**  
**Community Health Centre**  
(02) 6739 0100  
(02) 6721 9500 (24 hrs)
- **Goulburn SAS**  
(02) 4827 3913  
(02) 4827 3111 (24 hrs)
- **Griffith SAS**  
(02) 6966 9900  
(02) 6938 6666 (24 hrs)

- **Gunnedah SAS, Gunnedah Community Health Centre**  
(02) 6741 8000 (24 hrs)
- **Inverell SAS**  
**Inverell Health Service**  
(02) 6721 9600  
(02) 6721 9500 (24 hrs)
- **Kempsey**  
**Community Health Centre**  
(02) 6562 6066  
(02) 6562 6155 (24 hrs)
- **Lismore SAS**  
(02) 6620 2970  
(02) 6621 8000 (24 hrs)
- **Liverpool/Fairfield SAS**  
(02) 9828 4844  
(02) 9828 3000 (After hrs)
- **Lower Hunter SAS**  
(02) 4931 2000  
(02) 4921 3000 (24 hrs)
- **Macarthur SAS**  
(02) 4633 4100  
(02) 9828 3000 (24 hrs)
- **Moree**  
**Community Health Centre**  
(02) 6757 0200  
(02) 6757 0000 (24 hrs)
- **Mudgee SAS, Mudgee Community Health Centre**  
(02) 6372 6455  
(02) 6885 8632 (24 hrs)
- **Narrabri**  
**Community Health Centre**  
(02) 6757 0200  
(02) 6757 0000 (24 hrs)
- **Nepean SAS Springfield**  
(02) 4734 2512  
(02) 4734 2000 (24 hrs)
- **Newcastle SAS**  
(02) 4924 6333  
(02) 4921 3000 (24 hrs)
- **Northern Sydney**  
**Child Protection Service**  
(02) 9926 6060  
**RNS** (02) 9926 7111 (24 hrs)
- **Northern Sydney SAS**  
(02) 9926 7580  
**RNS** (02) 9926 7111 (24 hrs)
- **Nowra SAS**  
(02) 4423 9211 (24 hrs)
- **Orange SAS**  
(02) 6393 3300  
(02) 6393 3000 (24 hrs)
- **Parkes SAS**  
(02) 6861 2500  
(02) 6861 2400 (24 hrs)
- **Port Macquarie**  
**Community Health Centre**  
(02) 6588 2762  
(02) 6581 2000 (24 hrs)
- **Port Macquarie SAS**  
(02) 6588 2762  
(02) 6581 2000 (24 hrs)
- **Queanbeyan**  
**Community Health Centre**  
(02) 6298 9233  
(02) 6247 2525 (24 hrs)

- **Moruya SAS**  
Moruya Community Health  
(02) 4474 1561  
Bega (02) 6492 4416 (24 hrs)
- **Southern Sydney SAS**  
St George Hospital  
(02) 9113 2492  
(02) 9113 1111 (After hrs)
- **Sydney Childrens Hospital**  
(02) 9382 1111
- **Tamworth**  
Community Health Centre  
(02) 6767 8100  
(02) 6767 7000 (24 hrs)
- **Taree**  
Community Health Centre  
(02) 6592 9315  
(02) 6592 9111 (After hrs)
- **Tweed Valley SAS**  
Tweed Heads  
Community Health Centre  
(07) 5506 7540  
(07) 5536 1133 (After hrs)
- **Wagga Wagga SAS,**  
Wagga Wagga  
Community Health Centre  
(02) 6938 6411  
(02) 6938 6666 (24 hrs)
- **Westmead SAS**  
(02) 9845 7940  
(02) 9845 5555 (After hrs)

## **24 Hour Crisis Telephone Counselling**

### **Victims Services (NSW Attorney General Justice)**

Sydney (02) 8688 5511  
Freecall 1800 633 063  
[www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs)

### **NSW Rape Crisis Centre**

Sydney (02) 9819 6565  
Freecall 1800 424 017  
[www.nswrapecrisis.com.au](http://www.nswrapecrisis.com.au)

### **Lifeline**

13 11 14

### **Kids Helpline**

1800 551 800

### **Salvation Army Youthline**

1300 363 622 and  
(02) 8736 3293

- **Wingecarribee SAS**  
Community Health Centre  
(02) 4861 8000  
(02) 9828 3000 (24 hrs)
- **Wollongong SAS**  
(02) 4222 5408 and  
(02) 4222 5407  
(02) 4222 5000 (24 hrs)
- **Young**  
Community Health Centre  
(02) 6382 8729  
(02) 4827 3111 (24 hrs)



## Other Counselling Services

### Relationships Australia

1300 364 277  
(02) 9806 3299

*Provides relationship support and counselling.*

*A small fee may be charged.*

[www.relationships.org.au](http://www.relationships.org.au)

### Sydney Sexual Health Centre

*Information and advice about, and treatment of sexual health problems. Provides contacts for other sexual health clinics in NSW.*

(02) 9382 7440

Freecall 1800 451 624

## Women's Health Centres (WHC)

*The following centres provide free or low fee counselling and other health services.*

Albury/Wodonga WHC (02) 6041 1977

Bankstown WHC (02) 9790 1378

Bathurst – Central West WHC (02) 6331 4133

Sydney Women's Counselling  
Centre – Campsie (02) 9718 1955

Blacktown – Womens and Girls HC (02) 9831 2070

Campbelltown WHC (W.I.L.M.A.) (02) 4627 2955

Caringbah WHC (02) 9525 2058

Central Coast Community WHC  
(Wyoming) (02) 4324 2533

Cumberland WHC (02) 9689 3044

Hunter WHC (02) 4968 2511

Illawarra WHC (Warrilla) (02) 4255 6800



## **Women's Health Centres (WHC) *continued***

Blue Mountains WHC	(02) 4782 5133
Leichhardt WHC	(02) 9560 3011
Liverpool WHC	(02) 9601 3555
Waminda South Coast WHC Aboriginal Corporation (Nowra)	(02) 4421 7400
Penrith WHC	(02) 4721 8749
Wagga WHC	(02) 6921 3333

## **Legal Information and Resources**

### **NSW Police Customer Assistance Unit**

Freecall	1800 622 571
TTY	(02) 9211 3776
<i>Non Emergency/General Enquiries</i>	13 14 44

### **Victims Services** (24 hrs) (02) 8688 5511

Freecall	1800 633 063
----------	--------------

### **Victims Compensation Tribunal** (02) 8688 5511

Freecall	1800 633 063
----------	--------------

### **Women's Legal Services NSW** (02) 8754 6988

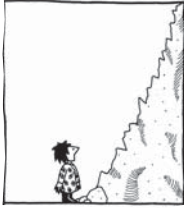
Freecall	1800 801 501
TTY	1800 674 333

### **Domestic Violence Legal Advice Line** (02) 8745 6999

Freecall	1800 810 784
----------	--------------

### **Witness Assistance Service** (02) 9285 2502

Freecall	1800 814 534
----------	--------------



## **IDRS (Intellectual Disability Rights Service)**

*Community legal centre assisting people with disabilities to ensure their rights.* (02) 9318 0144

Freecall 1800 666 611

[info@idsr.org.au](mailto:info@idsr.org.au)

*Free legal information by email*

[www.lawstuff.org.au](http://www.lawstuff.org.au)

*E-mail a question about the law and a lawyer will email information back to you.*

## **Court Preparation and Support**

### **Victims Services – including Victim Access Line (VAL) and Victims Compensation Tribunal**

*Provides a range of information, counselling, compensation and support services to victims of crime.*

(02) 8688 5511

[www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs)

### **Justice Journey**

*Information for victims of crime about going to court in NSW.*

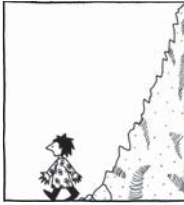
(02) 8688 8194

[www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs)

### **Victims Register**

*Gives eligible victims of sexual assault information about convicted offenders in custody.*

(02) 8346 1374



### **Witness Assistance Service (WAS)**

*Provides information, support and court preparation to victims of crime going through the court system. It has branches across NSW.*

(02) 9285 2502

Freecall 1800 814 534

TTY (02) 9285 8646

**WAS@odpp.nsw.gov.au**

### **NSW Health Sexual Assault Services**

*Provides advice for women going to court to give evidence as a witness. See under Sexual Assault Services for local contact details.*

## **Complaints about Service Providers**

### **NSW Ombudsman's Office**

*Provides assistance for making complaints about NSW government services.*

(02) 9286 1000

Freecall 1800 451 524

TTY (02) 9264 8050

### **NSW Police Customer Assistance Unit**

*For complaints or problems about police.*

Freecall 1800 622 571

TTY (02) 9211 3776

### **Health Care Complaints Commission**

*For complaints about health care providers.*

(02) 9219 7444

TTY (02) 9219 7555

Freecall 1800 043 159



### **Judicial Commission of NSW**

*For complaints about judges and magistrates.*

(02) 9299 4421

### **Office of the Legal Services Commissioner**

*For complaints about lawyer's behaviour in court.*

(02) 9377 1800

TTY (02) 9377 1855

Freecall 1800 242 958

## **Specialist Services and Resources**

### **Drugs and Sexual Assault**

#### **Eastern and Central Sydney Sexual Assault Service**

*Provides information booklet for people who have been drugged and sexually assaulted.*

(02) 9515 9040 (business hours)

(02) 9515 6111 (after hours and public holidays crisis service – ask for the on-call Sexual Assault Counsellor)

#### **Drug Information Clearinghouse Australian Drug Foundation**

*Information about drink spiking.*

[www.druginfo.adf.org.au](http://www.druginfo.adf.org.au)

#### **Alcohol and Drug Information Service**

*Provides information about a wide range of drugs including alcohol.*

(02) 9361 8000

Freecall 1800 422 599



## Resources and Services for Young Women

### Rosies Place, Rooty Hill

*Provides sexual assault counselling service for children and young people. Publications are also available.*

(02) 9625 2599

### Rosemount Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services, Marrickville

*Provides information and assistance to young people.*

(02) 8571 7800

### Stepping Out Housing Program, Leichhardt

*Provides housing assistance for young people who are victims of Child Sexual Assault.*

(02) 9550 9398

## Websites for Young Women

[www.aboutdaterape.nsw.gov.au](http://www.aboutdaterape.nsw.gov.au)

*Information about date and acquaintance rape.*

[www.lovegoodbadugly.com](http://www.lovegoodbadugly.com)

*Love: the good, the bad and the ugly. A guide for girls on love, respect, and abuse in relationships.*

[www.burstingthebubble.com](http://www.burstingthebubble.com)

*A guide to identifying whether abuse is occurring in the home and how to deal with it.*



## **Services for Lesbian Women**

### **Gay & Lesbian Counselling Service** **5:30pm–9:30pm**

General (02) 8594 9596      Freecall 1800 184 527  
Lesbian Only (02) 8594 9595

### **NSW Police Gay & Lesbian Liaison Officers (GLLO)**

Contact through Police switchboard on 13 14 44

### **Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project**

(02) 9206 2000      Freecall 1800 063 060

*Publication:* Booklet titled 'Another Closet'  
Domestic Violence in Same Sex Relationships'  
ACON (02) 9206 2000 or [www.acon.org.au](http://www.acon.org.au)

## **Services for Aboriginal Women**

### **Indigenous Women's Legal Contact Line**

Freecall 1800 639 784

### **Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre**

(02) 9569 3847      Freecall 1800 686 587

### **Mudgin-Gal Aboriginal Corporation**

*Support for Aboriginal Women and Children.*  
(02) 9319 6053

### **Witness Assistance Service (WAS)**

*The Service operates from within the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and also has Aboriginal Workers in some areas.*

(02) 9285 2502      Freecall 1800 814 534

*Publication:* 'Little Black Book for Strong Aboriginal Women' (a resource diary for Aboriginal women with information about abuse issues) 2007

## Services for Women from Differing Cultural Groups

### Health Care Interpreter Service

Northern Sydney and Sydney West (02) 9912 3800

Sydney South West and Sydney South East (02) 9828 6088

### Telephone Interpreter Service (24 hrs)

13 14 50

### Immigrant Women's Speakout

(02) 9635 8022

### Immigrant Women's Health Service

Fairfield (02) 9726 4044

Cabramatta (02) 9726 1016

### Transcultural Mental Health

(02) 9912 3851 Freecall 1800 648 911

### Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW

(02) 8255 6767 TTY (02) 8255 6758

### Services for Treatment & Rehabilitation of Torture & Trauma Survivors (STARTTS)

(02) 9794 1900

### Publications

*NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence publishes information booklets on sexual assault in the following community languages: Arabic; Chinese; Hindi; Italian; Khmer; Korean; Punjabi; Spanish; Turkish; Vietnamese.*

[www.ecav.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ecav.health.nsw.gov.au)



## Resources and Services for Women with a Mental Illness

### Consumer Activity Network (Mental Health) Inc

*Support and empowerment of mental health consumers.*

(02) 9114 8150    1300 135 846

### Mental Health Information Service

1300 794 991

The Mental Health Line 1800 011 511

Is a 24 hour line that provides:

Intake and triage for anyone who feels mentally unwell.

Staff will make an assessment and refer to either an emergency service, or if less urgent, another service within the local area.

Provide information on referral services in another health district.

### Websites that provide information about mental illness

Petrea King's Quest for Life Centre (02) 4883 6599

[www.questforlife.com.au](http://www.questforlife.com.au)

*This centre, based at Bundanoon in the Southern Highlands, provides retreats, courses and a range of tapes and books for coping with a wide variety of traumas, physical & mental health issues in life.*

[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

*Information and research about depression.*

[www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org)

*Information on a range of mental illnesses.*

[www.depressionet.com.au](http://www.depressionet.com.au)

*Information about support groups, personal stories. Links to other sites.*

## Resources and Services for Women with a Disability

### Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS)

*Community legal centre assisting people with disabilities to ensure their rights.*

(02) 9318 0144    Freecall 1800 666 611

[info@idrs.org.au](mailto:info@idrs.org.au)

## Criminal Justice Support Network

*Provides support and information for people with an intellectual disability who are in contact with the criminal justice system.*

(02) 9318 0144

1300 665 908 (after hours)

## People With Disabilities (PWD)

*Provides advocacy for people with disabilities.*

(02) 9370 3100

Freecall 1800 422 015

TTY (02) 9318 2138

## National Disability Service Abuse & Neglect Hotline

*Advice, advocacy and investigation guided by caller request.*

Freecall 1800 880 052

TTY: 1800 301 130

[www.disabilityhotline.org](http://www.disabilityhotline.org)

## Other resources

### **So you have to go to court!**

*A 25 minute video for people with cognitive disabilities who have to go to court. Available from the Attorney General's Department of NSW:*

Visit this website – [www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au)

*Select Department of Attorney General and Justice*

*Select Publications*

*Select So you have to go to court – resource kit*

(02) 8688 7777

Freecall 1800 684 449

### **Myalla: Responding to People with a Disability who have been Sexually Assaulted.**

*A resource developed by the Northern Sydney Sexual Assault Service.*

(02) 9926 7580

## Services for Deaf/Hearing Impaired Women

### Deaf Society of NSW

(02) 8833 3600

Freecall 1800 893 855

TTY (02) 8833 3691

Freecall TTY 1800 893 885

### National Relay Service

13 36 77

## Domestic Violence Support Services

### Domestic Violence Crisis Line

Freecall 1800 656 463

### Domestic Violence Legal Advice Line

*Free Legal Advisory Telephone Service.*

(02) 8745 6999

Freecall 1800 810 784

## Further Reading

Herman, J., (1992) *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, Basic Books, USA

NSW Rape Crisis Centre (2002) *Surviving Rape* 4th Edition Redfern Legal Centre Publishing

Williams, M & Poijula, S, (2002) *The PTSD Handbook* New Harbinger Publications

Weisz, C & Boyd, A *Hearing Their Voices: Guide for Parents & Caregivers of Adolescents who have been Sexually Assaulted* Rosemount Good Shepherd Youth & Family Services

Allen, J, (2005) *Coping with Trauma: Hope Through Understanding*, Psychiatric Publishing Inc, USA

Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault [www.aifs.gov.au/acssa](http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa)

# 6

## Appendices



"Have a list so that you can refer to it if you are in a panic or just can't think. It's good for friends and family to know it too." Glenda

## Appendix 1:

### Do you know or think you may have been Drugged and Sexually Assaulted?

Although drink spiking is not a new phenomenon, it is a growing problem worldwide. Up to a quarter of victims of sexual assault in Australia report they fear they may have been drugged.

Drug-facilitated sexual assault occurs where drugs are consumed involuntarily or in a situation when the woman did not know the drugs were being given. It can also occur when a woman voluntarily consumes drugs and alcohol, and the offender takes advantage of her to commit sexual assault. This is sometimes called 'date rape'. In a drug-facilitated sexual assault, the offender uses alcohol or drugs as a method to decrease resistance from the victim.

#### What drugs are used?

Alcohol is the most commonly used drug in drug-facilitated sexual assault. However, there are many other drugs used in sexual assault and these include sleeping pills, and anti-anxiety drugs such as valium, serapax and rohypnol. Another sedative, GHB, also known as 'grievous bodily harm' and fantasy, has also been identified in 'date rape' as they can be added to drinks with no visible trace. More recently, ketamine (Special K), and Midazolam (widely used in hospitals) have been used. When these drugs are mixed with alcohol harmful effects are increased.

#### What are the effects of these drugs and alcohol?

Every woman will respond differently to the effects of drugs and alcohol in her system. It depends on the amount, combined effects of mixing drugs and your size. You may just look like you are drunk.

Alcohol slows the activity of the central nervous system, lowers inhibitions and disturbs motor skills or control or physical movement.

Other drugs such as opiates and benzodiazepines cause people to behave in unfamiliar ways. For example, a woman might leave her friends to go with a stranger and have unsafe sex.

Some drugs cause amnesia or partial memory loss, impaired movement and speech. Others can cause confusion, pain, dizziness and fear. The effects of drugs can last briefly, or may be experienced after a few days.

### Can these drugs be detected?

A drug screen may show a particular drug was used, but if a drug is not detected, it does not prove you weren't drugged.

The sooner a urine or blood sample is taken after the assault, the more accurate will be the result.

Alcohol is detectable in a drug screen for some time after it is ingested. Many other drugs are difficult to detect because they pass out of the body very quickly, sometimes within hours of being used. Some are only needed and used in small doses, which are difficult to detect or, toxicology laboratories may not yet have the tests to detect all the 'tailor made' drugs being used.

### How would I know if I have been drugged and assaulted?

*I was at a birthday party at a girl's home. I can remember talking to some of her friends, then not a thing till I woke up the next morning in a bed without my jeans and undies. I don't drink, and I certainly wouldn't have casual sex with someone I don't even know. When I talked to the girl whose birthday it was, she said she saw me drinking beer and smoking dope with some guys from her soccer team.*

*I feel so dirty and disgusting, and I can't believe I'd do that! How will I know what happened in those missing hours? Trudy*

It may be difficult for a woman to know exactly what the circumstances were that led to a drug-facilitated sexual assault. Because Trudy did not remember what happened, it made her feel very anxious about what

happened. It was like putting pieces of a jigsaw together to recreate the picture. The pieces of the jigsaw were:

- Asking friends and people at the party what they saw
- Having a drug screen, which identifies the presence of alcohol and other drugs
- Recognising physical indicators such as soreness in the genital area, bruising on the inner thigh
- Having swabs taken to detect the presence of semen
- Reporting to police and allowing them to collect forensic evidence

For many women, acting out of character can be very traumatic. Women may feel shocked and embarrassed because they have acted against their beliefs or moral code.

Many women who are drugged and assaulted may never know exactly what happened. Living with 'not knowing' can be very difficult, and leave you feeling unable to trust yourself or others in social situations where this could recur.

### What helps after drug-facilitated sexual assault?

- **Safety** – make sure you are safe and not at risk from further drugging or assaults.
- **Health** – get a check up as soon as possible. A Sexual Assault Service or Sexual Health Clinic can provide this, as well as drug screens and advice about possible sexually transmitted infections.
- **Talk about it** – with people you trust. They may be able to help you put the pieces of what happened together and support you.
- **It's not your fault** – even if you acted out of character or took drugs voluntarily. You were not in a position to be able to give consent to what took place.
- **Know your rights** – it is a crime to drug someone without their knowledge, and it is a crime to sexually assault someone. You have a right to report it to the police.

## Appendix 2:

### Developing a Safety Plan

Developing a Safety Plan is a very important step in helping you feel safe. Work through these questions to develop a plan that will work for you.

Where do I feel safest?

---

---

---

When do I feel safest?

---

---

---

How safe are the environments I am in during the day?

---

---

---

How safe do I feel at night?

---

---

---

---



**Do I feel safe at home?**

.....

**If I do not feel safe, what could I do to change that?**

Think about short and longer term - what can I do today, this week, over the next month?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**Who do I feel safest being with?**

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**Who do I want to know about what happened to me?**

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Who will respect my privacy?

---

---

---

Who will listen and not blame me?

---

---

---

Who will support my decisions and not tell me what to do?

---

---

---

Who can I contact/ring when I am not feeling OK?

---

---

---

---

When is the hardest time of the day for me?

---

---

---

What do I feel then?

---

---

---

Do I understand why?

---

---

---

What can I do to address those feelings?

---

---

---

---

A list of strategies for me to try

Examples include calming music, imagine or go to safe place, contact a friend or crisis line, writing, distractions...

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Appendix 3: Checklists

## Medical checklist

Keeping a medical checklist can help you feel in control. It can also provide you with important legal information in the future, should you choose to use it.

Action	Details	Comments
Date of assault	.....	.....
Date of 1st medical examination/treatment	.....	.....
Name of treating doctor	.....	.....
<b>Names of:</b>		
Hospital	.....	.....
Sexual Assault Service	.....	.....
Medical Practice	.....	.....
Phone number/s of above	.....	.....
What treatment was given	.....	.....
Medication given	.....	.....
Date of follow-up medical appointments	.....	.....
Sexual Assault Service	.....	.....
Counsellor	.....	.....
Referral to any other services	.....	.....
Service provider's name	.....	.....
Phone number of service	.....	.....
Other contact details	.....	.....

## Police and legal checklist

This checklist is to help you keep track of the legal process and the people involved.

Action	Details	Comments
Date of assault	.....	.....
	.....	.....
Date of 1st contact with police	.....	.....
	.....	.....
Name of Officers involved	.....	.....
	.....	.....
Name of investigating detectives	.....	.....
	.....	.....
Police station	.....	.....
	.....	.....
Police station phone no.	.....	.....
COPS event no. (police number assigned to your case)	.....	.....
Date statement was made	.....	.....
Date and names of police officers spoken to re. investigation	.....	.....
Date of court hearing ( <i>if appropriate</i> )	.....	.....
Contact names and details for ODPP	.....	.....
Contact names and details for WAS	.....	.....

## Appendix 4:

### Relaxation Exercise

Some survivors have found relaxation exercises very helpful to ease anxiety or panic. This exercise can help to build a sense of calm throughout the day.

#### My Safe Place

*Close your eyes if you are comfortable to do so.*

*Think about a place where you could feel very safe (either real or imagined).*

*Look around you. What do you see? (Notice the details – colours, sounds, smells, objects around you, who else is there, etc).*

*What makes it feel safe ?*

*Concentrate on that feeling of safety and let it grow stronger.*

*Breathe slowly and deeply and let the feelings of calmness flow through you.*

*Continue to picture the scene, notice yourself in this place. See yourself calm and relaxed.*

*Open your eyes, and notice your present surroundings.*

*Try to hold on to the feelings of calm.*

*Find a word or some symbols to describe this place (eg tranquillity, rock pool, island, blanket, my safe haven).*

*Make a collage or drawing, or find an object to remind you of this place.*

*Go to your safe place in your mind for a few minutes or even seconds, whenever you feel distressed, overwhelmed or unsafe.*

*Hold a symbol or picture of your safe place to help you go there.*



