



### Common Reactions to Sexual Violence

Each survivor of sexual violence responds uniquely to an assault and the recovery process is different for each person. While there are differences to survivors’ experiences of sexual violence, there are common reactions to trauma recovery. The following are common reactions to sexual violence; all of these reactions are **normal** responses to the traumatic event. This is not a comprehensive list, but rather a sampling of common post-assault responses; these reactions can be experienced individually, simultaneously, and with different levels of intensity.



#### Fear

The most common reaction is fear. It can be associated with objects, people, places, etc.

*Anxiety: It’s usually vaguer, it can take the form of uneasiness, worry, distress, etc. Fear and anxiety may occur separately, but often they occur at the same time.*



#### Loss of Control

Many survivors experience fear of losing control over their lives, some have trouble concentrating on things, this can add to the sense of losing control.



#### Eating Disorders

Sexual violence can have an effect on the survivor's perceived body image and affect their eating habits. Some survivors may use food in an attempt cope with the trauma, feel in control, or compensate for feelings and emotions that may otherwise seem overwhelming.



#### Anger

Many survivors experience anger and even rage toward their abuser and sometimes toward the people that surround them.



#### Flashbacks

Many survivors may experience the assault over and over again in their thoughts or dreams. When this is happening, it’s almost as though the assault is occurring again.



#### Negative Self-Image

Some survivors begin to have negative views of themselves, some can develop eating disorders, feeling dirty, feeling damaged.



Some of these reactions are connected with each other. People react to fearful situation with a physical reaction, a mental reaction, and a behavioral reaction.



### Guilt

Feelings of guilt and self-blame are common responses. Survivors might also feel guilt about what they had to do in order to survive the assault.

*Survivor's Guilt: In some cases, feelings of guilt are a result from others being harmed more than the survivor.*



### Substance Use

Many survivors turn to using substances like alcohol and drugs for a number of reasons:

- Wanting to feel better
- Trying to numb or escape the pain
- Fear that family or friends won't understand
- Confusion or self-consciousness about the experience
- Lacking an effective support system or care



### Social Effects

Survivors might feel of embarrassed and ashamed. They may also experience loss of interest in sex, changes in lifestyle, difficulty getting things accomplished, difficulty with intimate relationships, discomfort around people, loss of trust in self and others, withdrawal from people, relationships, and activities.



### Depression

Survivors may experience a sense of sadness or depression. There may also be feelings of despair, hopelessness, helplessness, and denial.



### Change in Sexual Behaviors

Survivors may have changes in their sex life, such as lack of interest, promiscuity, or engaging in risky sexual behaviors.