



## Emotional Healing Following Sexual Assault

### The Emotional Healing Process

Recovery from sexual assault or harassment takes time and effort. To help the recovery process, you should find safety, take good care of yourself, and seek support.

### Emotional Stages of Recovery

Everyone reacts differently to sexual assault and harassment. But there are five stages of recovery that nearly all victims experience. It is not important to pass through each stage in order; recovery is not a linear process. Survivors may pass through each stage in a different order and at different times.

#### Stage 1: Initial Shock

Immediately after the trauma, survivors may experience emotional and physical shock. Survivors may express their shock in different ways. They may act very controlled, become quiet and withdrawn, or they may cry, scream, and shake.

#### Stage 2: Denial

In denial, survivors attempt to go back to their normal routine. They avoid thinking about the assault, or they deny its impact.

#### Stage 3: Reactivation

Survivors experience the intense feelings related to the sexual trauma all over again, usually because of reminders or memories of the assault. Depression, anxiety and shame may increase during reactivation. Survivors may also have nightmares, flashbacks, feelings of mistrust and vulnerability, and physical pain. Survivors may feel consumed by thoughts and feelings about the trauma. The reactivation stage is often when survivors reach out for help.

#### Stage 4: Healing

Survivors begin to process their anger, grief, fear, and emotional turmoil. Survivors may address the anger they feel toward themselves, friends, significant others, society, or the legal system. They may also have to deal with their grief over the ways life has changed since the trauma. They may come to terms with their loss of relationships, betrayed trust, or lost innocence. During this stage, survivors begin to reclaim their lives.

#### Stage 5: Integration

With support, hard work, and time, many survivors integrate the trauma into their larger life story. Survivors may continue to see the world somewhat differently. They may feel less innocent or naïve. They may be a bit more guarded or cautious. But they may also feel stronger, with different priorities or a different sense of purpose. Their recovery can be a source of insight and personal growth.



#### EMOTIONAL STAGES OF RECOVERY

- Initial Shock
- Denial
- Reactivation
- Healing
- Integration



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### Common experiences following sexual violence:

The following symptoms often are experienced following sexual assault and usually decrease after a few weeks. If they continue or get worse, professional help may be needed.

- Feel disoriented or out of touch with reality.
- Experience hallucinations.
- Shake uncontrollably.
- Experience intense, persistent, new or unexplained pain
- Suffer blackouts or can't remember certain periods of time.
- Hyperventilate.
- Abuse alcohol, prescription medication, or other drugs

### When to get help:

It's important to seek professional help immediately if you experience any of the following:

- Suicidal thoughts
- Homicidal thoughts
- Self-cutting, self-mutilation or other self-destructive behavior
- Irregular heartbeat
- Extreme nausea or persistent vomiting
- Bleeding

**Call 9-1-1 if you need immediate medical help.**

**Call the Safe Helpline for confidential support at (877) 995-5247**