



Common Reactions to Trauma

Each person's experience is unique; however, there are some common reactions among people who have experienced a traumatic event. It can be reassuring to know that these reactions are not unusual. Recognizing "normal" reactions and emotions that may occur following an "abnormal" event can help with the recovery process. Some common reactions and feelings with regards to a traumatic event may include:

- Shock/Disbelief
- Fear/Vulnerability
- Anger/Rage
- Helplessness
- Sadness/Crying Episodes
- Shame/Self-Blame
- Behavior Changes
- Sleep Disturbances
- Nightmares/Dreams
- Flashbacks
- Irritability
- Depression
- Social Withdrawal
- Disturbance in Appetite



Important Numbers

STAR Central (Mon – Fri, 8 am – 5 pm)	575-7252 575-7722
CAPS 24 hr Hotline (Counseling & Psychological Services)	575-5276
UA Women's Clinic	575-4478
UA Pat Walker Health Center	575-4451
University Police	575-2222
Police/Ambulance	911
Washington Regional Medical Center	442-1000
Northwest Medical Center	751-5711
Sexual Assault Recovery and Prevention Agency	927-1020
Project for Victims of Family Violence	442-9811
The Crisis Center	756-2337



For more information, contact

STAR Central

**Office of Support, Training, Advocacy,
& Resources on Sexual Assault and
Relationship Violence**

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Rape Trauma Syndrome



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While rape survivors will react in different ways, a pattern of response has been identified. Similar to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Rape Trauma Syndrome is a common response pattern of rape survivors. Rape Trauma Syndrome is not a mental disorder, but is merely based on descriptions of common experiences of rape victims.

Rape Trauma Syndrome presents as three phases: Impact Phase, Acute Phase, and Integration Phase. Although each phase is distinctive by responses experienced during the recovery process following a sexual assault, there is not a definitive time period for each phase. The amount of time that each phase lasts is dependent upon the individual, whether help has been sought or not, available support systems, and other variables that may aid in or detract from the recovery process.

Often people suffering from Rape Trauma Syndrome benefit from professional counseling. When choosing a professional counselor, it's important to consider the type of counseling or therapy that the counselor, social worker, or psychologist focuses on and has experience with. Professionals with experience in helping people who have suffered trauma are recommended.

First: The Impact Phase

During the hours and days following rape, victims may respond with shock, disbelief, confusion, agitation, crying, anger, fear, and even laughing. Some victims appear to be very controlled and calm. Victims may also experience the physical symptoms of pain, soreness, bruising, vaginal or rectal bleeding, and headaches. Victims may have difficulty resuming their everyday routines. These are natural responses to a life-threatening trauma and having someone to provide support for and care for the victim will help the victim through these difficult days.

Second: The Acute Phase

After the initial shock has passed, victims often experience a variety of symptoms: nightmares, flashbacks, insomnia, loss of appetite, mood swings, depression, anxiety, phobias, humiliation, and self-blame. This can be a very painful time for both the victim and the victim's loved ones. These responses are common to victims of rape and are part of working through the trauma.

Another reaction for some victims may be denial. Victims often try to forget about the rape and "move on with their lives." Although this may appear to be a resolution to the crisis, it typically is not. The victim may

continue to be experiencing the difficulties mentioned earlier, despite a normal outward appearance. When the victim breaks through this denial, the victim may actually appear to be backsliding in the healing process. This reaction is actually a sign that the feelings brought on by the rape are beginning to be confronted. During these difficult times and range of emotions, it is important that others provide support for the victim.

Third: The Integration Phase

In this final phase of healing, the victim comes to integrate the overall effects that the victimization has had. During this phase, the victim truly becomes the survivor of sexual assault. The survivor may come through this process with a new self-concept and will probably feel stronger as an individual with greater self-knowledge and awareness. Furthermore, relationships with those who provided support, patience, and care during the healing process are often strengthened.

For more information or available helping resources, contact

STAR Central

U of A Pat Walker Health Center
575-7252 or 575-7722

