Dealing with rape

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DEAR Aunty Harriet, Please, what happens to people who are raped? I am a 14- year old girl who was raped by my 54-year old uncle. He threatened to kill me, if I told my parents. Now, I just discovered that I am pregnant. The sad thing is that I am afraid to tell my parents. What if they don’t believe me. My only consolation is that I still keep the dress I wore on the day it happened. It has blood stains.  
  
Ayo, Lagos.  
  
Your story is one that must be treated properly with all the necessary steps followed seriously. We commend you for sharing your story; it takes courage to speak out because most victims are too afraid or ashamed to tell anyone. Others feel no one will believe their stories. They will rather keep the whole issue of rape to themselves. They try to deal with it on their own without involving anyone. Silence does not heal such wounds. Instead, it makes it worse because rape can destroy someone if not tackled properly. It can affect other aspects of the victim’s life. The offender must be exposed so that first he can face the law for his wicked act. It is aIso to put an end to it because if not reported the offender will seize the opportunity to keep sexually abusing the victim or might rape someone else and in most cases they go as far as threatening his victim. Some even tell them that no one will believe their stories. This is mainly common with offenders that are well known to the family, for example, relatives and close family friends. Our hearts go to you for the bad thing your trusted uncle did to you, but the only way you can feel better, even in the middle of the whole situation, is to tell your parents. You might want to tell your mother because he is her brother, but make sure your daddy is home when you do so. Don’t hide any information from them. Yes, I know you are afraid with thoughts going through your head. Trust me, they will not react the way you think. At least, one or both will believe you, however, in some cases, you find the woman defending or covering her brother. Others might accuse their children of telling lies against their brothers, instead of taking action and showing sympathy to the innocent child that has being defiled and traumatized. Ayo, the rape is not your fault; it is your uncle’s fault.  
  
Nobody has the right to rape you. You did not ask to be raped, and you did not want to be raped. There is no moral justification for his action because, in most cases, victims blame themselves for the act, so for healing to take place after you have reported the issue, let your parents know how you feel about the whole thing. Open up to them so that they can help you heal. Parents in situation like this should listen to their children; provide all the necessary help that they need. Encourage and protect them; keep assuring them and don’t be too harsh on yourself as well. This is not a time for blame. Instead, it is a time for you to walk with your child through the stages of grief and other emotions and reactions. Help her confront, express and resolve all feelings. Accept them with understanding and comfort. Rape, as we know, is an unspeakably tragic and traumatic experience for most victims, especially when the offender is a close relative. Next is to seek medical care for the victim. This is actually the first thing to do once it is reported immediately. On such occasion, the victim might still be in shock. Some might not be aware of the physical injuries they suffered. Seek the help of a doctor for a check-up. Follow these steps: Don’t change clothes worn during rape. Don’t shower after the rape. This includes douching or washing because valuable evidence for identifying the offender may be lost. Also test for sexually transmitted diseases. As for Ayo’s case, it is not too late. The fact that you did not follow the above steps initially is because you were scared. You still have the dress that was stained with blood on the day your uncle raped you. If he denies it, which he will, kindly show the dress to your parents. The dress can be of help for medical investigation to who the real offender is. Furthermore, because rape isn’t just physically damaging, it can be emotionally damaging as well. A person who has been raped and pregnant may have mixed emotions. They can be angry, scared, or embarrassed, among other feelings. These mixed emotions can manifest themselves in many ways, such as sleeping , eating and withdrawal from everyday activities, mistrust towards others, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and extreme fear or paranoia. The best way to deal with the emotional trauma of rape is to seek professional help from a therapist or counsellor. A professional will take the victim through all the necessary healing process which is very vital. Rape must not be ignored. The fact about healing is that the situation might get worse before it gets better. At the end of the day, as you go through the stages with activities, you will be fine. Above all, God will definitely see you through and you will smile again.  
  
Take care of yourself.  
  
Harriet ogbobine is a counselor and a motivational speaker. Send your questions and suggestions to her on [email protected] or txt message only 08023058805. You can also follow her on twitter: @bineharrietj