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About Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is any form of sexual interaction without consent (or permission). Consent means that you want to be engaged in whatever sexual behavior is happening. If someone is feeling pressured, coerced, manipulated, or threatened, that is not consent. If someone is incapacitated due to drugs or alcohol, that is not consent. Ultimately, sexual violence is about an offender exerting power and control over someone else—and it is never a survivor's fault. Survivors need, and deserve, support.

Sexual violence affects people of all genders, ages, races, religions, incomes, abilities, ethnicities, and sexual orientations. Survivors often know the person who assaulted them. Sexual violence, which is significantly underreported, also takes many forms:

- Rape or sexual assault
- Childhood sexual abuse and incest
- Sexual harassment
- Sexual exploitation and trafficking
- Unwanted sexual contact/touching
- Exposing one's genitals to others without consent
- Masturbating in public

A few statistics

- In the United States, more than two in five women (43.6%) and almost one in four men (24.8%) have experienced some form of contact sexual violence during their lifetime. Approximately one in five women (21.3%) and one in 38 men (2.6%) in the United States have been raped (completed or attempted) at some time in their lives. ([Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey 2015 Data Brief](#))
- Almost one in two transgender people (47%) surveyed have been sexually assaulted at some point in their lifetime. ([U.S. Transgender Survey](#))
- One in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18 years old. ([National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#))
- People with a disability of any kind have an age-adjusted rate of rape or sexual assault that is more than twice the rate for people without disabilities. ([The National Crime Victimization Survey](#) and the 2010 [Massachusetts Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System](#))
- One in five women and one in 16 men are sexually assaulted while in college. ([National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#))

For more in-depth information and statistics on sexual violence, please visit the [National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#) website.

Common survivor reactions to sexual violence and assault

Each survivor copes with sexual violence differently. It is important to remember that there is no right way for a survivor to feel, and there is no set timeline for when a survivor should be feeling better. To heal, survivors need to draw on their individual strengths and skills and find what works best for them.

Many survivors do share several common reactions to sexual violence. The feelings may be intense at times. Sometimes they seem to go away for a while and then come back again. These reactions include:

- **Guilt:** Many survivors feel guilty. We live in a culture that tends to blame victims, but sexual assault is never the survivor's fault. No one deserves to have been raped, even if they drank to excess, dressed in revealing clothing, or consented to other sexual activity, like kissing.
- **Fear:** Sexual assault is traumatic, and it is normal to feel afraid after experiencing it. Some survivors find it hard to be alone at night or in a setting that reminds them of the one in which they were raped.

- **Avoidance:** It is common to avoid or want to avoid anything that is associated with the assault. Many survivors avoid getting assistance because it reminds them of the assault. Although avoidance can initially help in coping, most survivors find that it is not a viable long-term solution.
- **Anger:** Survivors may feel angry—at the offender, at the people they love, at the world, even at themselves. Feeling angry can be an important part of healing emotionally after sexual assault.
- **Mood swings:** Survivors' moods may change rapidly or dramatically. Coping with a sexual assault can be overwhelming, and intense emotional reactions are normal. Most survivors experience many ups and downs in their healing process.
- **Distrust:** It may take the survivor a while to feel like they can trust people again. If a survivor was assaulted by someone they knew, they may feel like they have lost confidence in their sense of judgment about other people. If they were assaulted by a stranger, they may feel that they can't trust people they don't know.
- **Loss of control:** Sexual assault robs people of control over their bodies, and many survivors often feel out of control or powerless as a result. One of the most important elements of healing is regaining control.
- **Numbness:** Sometimes it takes a while for survivors to feel anything at all. Going numb is one of the ways some people cope with crisis.
- **Reexperiencing.** Many survivors have nightmares, flashbacks, or intrusive thoughts about sexual assault. This reexperiencing can sometimes feel as difficult to cope with as the assault itself. These disruptions also may make it difficult to sleep or to concentrate.

It is important for survivors to remember, no matter how they are feeling, that they are not alone. If you or someone you care about is experiencing any of these feelings, [BARCC can help](#). Call our 24-7 hotline at 800-841-8371 or [request an appointment](#).



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