



CENTRAL ALBERTA SEXUAL ASSAULT
SUPPORT CENTRE

**INFORMATION ON RECOVERY
FOR
VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT**

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This booklet is designed with information which you, the survivor of sexual assault, may find useful on your road to recovery. Please read the information only when you feel ready to. Do not feel that you have to read all the information in one sitting; read as little or as much at a time as you feel will be helpful. If you do not feel ready right away, that is okay. Put the information away until the time is right for you. If you feel comfortable doing so, you may also share this information with a friend or family member, as it can also help them to support you.

INTRODUCTION

It is common for a survivor of sexual assault, particularly when they know the attacker, to question whether their experience was a true case of sexual assault. Some victims delay days, months or years before seeking help and a better understanding of the effect of the assault. Regardless of the length of time since the assault, all victims have the right to legal, health and support services.

Sexual assault can be committed in a variety of ways and in different degrees. The act can include any non-consensual sexual contact ranging from touching and fondling to oral, anal, and/or vaginal intercourse. These are crimes of violence, which may or may not be acted out in an aggressive sexual way.

Sexual assault is **not** about sex, it is about power. When an individual has been sexually assaulted, it violates not only the individual's body, but also their sense of safety and control over their life.

This package was designed to offer you insight and information on the crime which has been committed against you. This package offers you the means to begin recovery and take back control.

DO NOT blame yourself for any circumstances surrounding the attack.

DO contact our agency; we are willing and able to help you.

MYTHS AND FACTS

There are many misconceptions regarding the crime of sexual assault. For instance, victims are often blamed or blame themselves for causing the sexual assault to occur. The following myths and facts will give you a greater understanding of sexual assault.

MYTH: Sexual assault is a “crime of passion”.

FACTS: Sexual assault is a crime of violent intent. Often the offenders view the assault as a way to gain power and control in their lives.

MYTH: Sexual assault always occurs in isolated areas.

FACTS: An offender needs two things to carry out an attack: Opportunity and a Victim. The offender has to get you to a place where there will be no interference or interruptions.

MYTH: Sexual assault happens only to sexually attractive young girls. If they wear provocative clothing, they are “asking for it”.

FACTS: Reports of sexual assault include victims of both sexes, anyone of any age, can be a victim.

MYTH: When a victim says **no**, s/he really means, “pursue me”.

FACTS: This implies that at some level the victim wants to have sexual contact and that the attacker is expected to overcome his/her initial refusal. He may believe that victims need to be “roughed up” a bit to be turned on.

MYTH: It could never happen to me.

FACTS: Women from ages 14-24 are the biggest “target group”. Victims from the ages of 6 months to 96 years have been assaulted, regardless of race, religion, occupation or physical appearance.

MYTH: Rapists are creepy looking men who hang out in dark alleys.

FACTS: In 90% of sexual assaults, the attacker is an acquaintance.

MYTH: The rapist is a sexually unfulfilled man carried away by a sudden, uncontrollable urge.

FACTS: Sexual assault is a question of power, not passion, and men can control themselves.

MYTH: Sexual abuse of children seldom happens.

FACTS: One in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually assaulted by the time they are 18 years old.

MYTH: Rapists rarely repeat their crime.

FACTS: Most often offenders do repeat the crime.

MYTH: A person cannot charge his/her spouse.

FACTS: It is no longer legal for a person to force sexual acts on his/her spouse.

MYTH: Males who are sexually assaulted do not suffer to the same extent.

FACTS: Sexual assault is a crime of violence and ALL victims suffer.

MYTH: Males assaulted by another male become homosexual.

FACTS: The sexual assault does not “create” a homosexual.

MYTH: Boys and men who have been sexually assaulted can never be normal again.

FACTS: Although sexual assault is a very traumatic experience, with help, victims do recover.

SEXUAL ASSAULT TRAUMA

Emotional and Physical Response

The physical and emotional trauma of sexual assault does not end with the assault. Survivors experience a variety of emotions immediately following the assault; these feelings may last a short or a long period of time. Not all survivors experience these emotions in exactly the same way as the effects can be more or less intense, depending on the individual.

Common Emotions and Reactions

Shock	I feel so numbed. Why am I so calm? Why can't I cry?
Disbelief	Did it really happen to me?
Embarrassment	What will people think? I can't tell my family
Shame	I feel so dirty, like there is something wrong with me. I want to wash my hands all day long.
Guilt	I feel as if I did something to make this happen to me. If only I had...
Depression	How am I going to go on? I feel so tired and hopeless.
Powerlessness	Will I ever feel in control again?
Disorientation	I can't sit still. I'm having trouble getting through the day. I am just overwhelmed!
Retriggering	I keep having flashbacks. I wish they would stop.
Fear	I am so afraid of so many things. Will I get pregnant or catch an STI? Can people tell what's happened to me? Will I ever want to intimate again? Will I ever get over this? I am going crazy. I have nightmares that terrify me.
Anxiety	I am a nervous wreck! I have trouble breathing. (Anxiety is often expressed in physical symptoms).
Anger	I want to kill him!

Common Physical Reaction

During the first few weeks following the attack, acute physical symptoms are often experienced.

- . Physical symptoms specific to the area of the body that was the focus of the attack (e.g. sore throat if oral sex took place).
- . Gynaecological symptoms such as vaginal discharge, itching, burning sensation on urination and generalized pain.
- . Sleep disturbances such as insomnia or nightmares; also crying out in sleep.
- . Tension headaches, fatigue, nausea, loss of appetite and stomach pain.
- . Nausea may be related to emotional reaction or reaction from an anti-pregnancy pill.

Stages of Recovery

Recovery from sexual assault is very complex. You may have days when you feel you are coping well and other days you may feel you are starting at the beginning again. This backsliding is a common experience with sexual assault survivors, and it does not mean you are going crazy, even it feels that way! Most people who have been assaulted experience common stages following the assault. These stages are referred to as Sexual Assault Trauma Syndrome.

Acute Phase: This is a time of disorganization involving feelings of fear, humiliation, shock, self-blame, disbelief and revenge.

Phase of Outward Adjustment: Once the immediate anxiety subsides, you may return to normal pursuits and activities and you may seem to forget the attack for a while.

- There is often a great deal of denial, suppression or rationalization; anger and depression may lessen and you may not want to talk about the assault.

Long Term Process: This is when reorganization occurs. You will readjust to your previous level of functioning. During this time, you may not experience any symptoms, but you may experience one or more of the following reactions in varying degrees of severity:

1. Lifestyle changes
2. Dreams and nightmares
3. Phobias
4. Other problems (e.g. reactivating of previously existing problems, depression, may really want to talk)

This is just a brief overview of the stages you may be experiencing. For more information on these stages please contact the *Casasc* at 403-340-1124. All calls are strictly confidential.

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

You may be concerned about developing a sexually transmitted disease (STD) or becoming pregnant as a result of the assault. After an assault, it is important to be seen by a doctor so that you can alleviate any fears you may have and access the required treatment.

The following are some brief signs and symptoms of sexually transmitted diseases:

Gonorrhoea

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| Male | Symptoms within a week of contact, discharge of pus from the urethra and mild to severe burning with urination, up to 20% have no symptoms. |
| Female | Sometimes an unusual discharge and pain with urination, 80% have no symptoms. |

Chlamydia

- | | |
|--------|---|
| Male | 1-3 weeks before symptoms develop; there may be a clear mucous-like discharge from the urethra, usually during urination. |
| Female | Usually no outward signs may have unusual vaginal discharge or bleeding. |

Herpes

Male & Female Type 1 (cold sores), Type 2 (genital)

Can involve many parts of the body and if not treated can result in very serious long-term consequences such as blindness, paralysis, deafness and brain or heart disease.

Signs usually occur within a week, may begin with tingling or burning sensation in area of sex organ, fluid filled blisters appear and soon break to form painful ulcers on the skin.

HIV (AIDS)

Male & Female

HIV can survive in semen, blood, and vaginal fluids. The virus must enter your bloodstream to infect you (Central Alberta AIDS Network at 403-346-8858).

FRIENDS and FAMILY

As a friend or family member of someone who has been assaulted, you may be feeling uncomfortable and overwhelmed by the situation. The previous and following information can not only help the survivor, but can be useful to help you gain an understanding of what the individual is experiencing. Those who are closest to the survivor are very influential in how the individual is able to cope with the assault. Your support and reaction to the assault will have great effect on the individual's emotional recovery.

- The survivor has many decisions to make including medical care, police involvement and whether to tell friends and family this can leave the survivor feeling tense and exhausted – remember, there is no right or wrong way for the survivor to respond to the assault and there is not time period in which the survivor has to recover.
- A likely reaction to the assault will be feeling of fear, loss of control, helplessness, and shock. The survivor can experience many or all of the mentioned reactions.
- There may be visible reactions such as crying, shaking, sobbing, smiling, restlessness and tenseness; the survivor may also hide these feeling and appear calm and compose. There can be physical trauma such as bruising, headaches, fatigue and change in appetite.
- A survivor may experience an inability to concentrate and think clearly
- A loss of trust is common

You may find yourself experiencing identical reactions and you may be angry with yourself or at the survivor. Be sure your anger is directed at the right person, the offender.

These are a few ways you can provide support to the survivor:

- Listen without judgement, acknowledge feelings.
- Support all decisions made by survivor.
- Help the person find the necessary resources.
- Recognize your feeling as separate from the survivor's.
- Realize your own limitations; take time when you need it.
- Do not ask "why" questions, they imply doubt.
- Let the survivor experience the emotions and express them how and when they want to.
- Help the person reverse feelings of guilt, self-blame and minimizing what happened by placing responsibility on the offender.
- Be aware of the possibility of over-protection, the survivor needs to normalize their life.

REPORTING TO POLICE

You have no obligation to report that you have been a victim of sexual assault. Only about 1 in 10 women who have been assaulted do report to police. Unfortunately, because so few survivors do report there is a lack of statistics to support that sexual assault does occur and have it acknowledged as a serious crime. Because of this, there is a lack of awareness of the crime and acceptance for the survivor. As well, offenders are not caught and made to account for their actions.

- If reported, and there is enough evidence available, the decision to lay charges can be made by the police or crown prosecutor
- If you are not sure you want to report you should write down or tape what happened so it is clear if you do decide to make a report at a later date.

Your options:

1. Do not report; access community services.
2. Make a report, but choose not to proceed through an investigation.
3. Report and proceed with the legal process.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

The following services are available to you at any time while you are dealing with effects of the assault. Please do not hesitate to call someone and discuss your options.

24 HOUR SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS LINE

403-356-1099 (Red Deer Area)

1-866-956-1099 (Toll Free)

Red Deer City RCMP

EMERGENCY...911

COMPLAINTS
403-343-5575

VICTIM SERVICES
403-341-2041

HEALTH

Family Doctor
or
Sexual Health
Clinic
403-346-8336

CASASC - 403-340-1124

- Crisis, short-term and long-term counselling.
- Options counselling.
- Support and accompaniment at hospital and police, if desired.
- Preparation and accompaniment to court.
- Support groups.