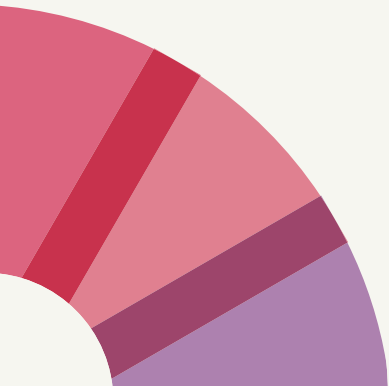

Rape Crisis Scotland

Information for survivors of sexual violence

Guilt, shame and blame



Guilt, shame and blame

Survivors of sexual violence often feel guilty or ashamed about what's happened. Sometimes, they blame themselves or feel responsible.

This is a natural response to the stress and trauma of sexual violence.

But although it's common to feel humiliated and embarrassed, and to think that what happened was somehow your fault, this can get in the way of asking for help.

These are strong feelings and they can make you feel bad about yourself. Shame, for example, can make you feel worthless and not worth helping.

Feeling bad about yourself in addition to the trauma you've experienced can make it even harder to cope with what's happened.

It can help to remember that:

- » No matter the circumstances, sexual violence is never the fault of the survivor
- » The person who did this to you is to blame. They are responsible for their actions. They made the choice to commit sexual violence
- » You deserve support

How do shame, guilt or self-blame affect survivors of sexual violence?

Although they are linked, shame, guilt and self-blame are different.

Shame tends to be about how we see ourselves and is hidden inside.

Guilt is linked to thinking we've done something wrong. For some survivors, although you are not guilty of anything, you can have the same feelings as if you were.

Most survivors have these sorts of thoughts and feelings at some point, and they can bubble up at different times.

Guilt and shame can have a purpose:

- » If you blame yourself, it can make you feel like you had some control over what happened and that can seem less frightening
- » It can be easier to blame yourself or how you reacted than to accept that someone you love or trust, for example a partner or family member, has violated you and broken your trust

But if the feelings are too strong or last for too long, they can overwhelm you and get in the way of being able to cope.

You might find yourself on a constant loop going over in your mind what happened, and asking yourself what you could have done to prevent it, or whether you could have reacted differently. Being on a negative loop like this can make you feel very low and be exhausting.

Feeling unable to talk about what happened because you feel ashamed, worthless, or at fault can:

- » Stop you asking for help
- » Mean that you bottle up your feelings or turn them in on yourself
- » Lead to anxiety, self-hatred, depression, anger and more
- » Lead to you isolating yourself from others
- » Stop you reporting to the police if you want to

It can be difficult if other people, including the perpetrator, say things to you that are not true but make you feel guilty or ashamed. Some of the things that are said and done to survivors in the media, in court, or by their own communities can make difficult feelings worse.

Over time, and with the right support, you can direct the focus of the blame to the person who is guilty and who should feel the shame: the perpetrator.

You don't have to protect them. You are not responsible for what happens to them if you tell someone else or if you report what happened to the police.

What you can do: self-care tips for survivors

Because of the way that guilt, shame and self-blame can make you feel, it can help to get support.

It helps to say what's happened to you and to name it for what it is: sexual violence.

There are people who want to listen to you and who know that survivors are never to blame.

A good place to start is with us at the Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline. We're open every evening to provide short term, introductory and crisis support to anyone affected by sexual violence.

We won't judge you. We will listen to what you say. And we'll give you the same message every time you speak to us: What happened was not your fault. You deserve support.

If you don't want to speak to us or anyone else for now, try saying these words to yourself:

- >> It's not my fault.
- >> The perpetrator had a choice about what they did to me.
- >> I deserve support.

Guilt and shame are very common. These feelings can underlie a lot of contacts to our helpline. It's a rational response to what's happened. You are not the only one feeling like this.

There are ways of managing these thoughts and feelings.

Coping with feelings of shame and guilt

Part of coping can be about accepting that you couldn't control what happened to you or how you reacted.

It is easy to be manipulated, for example by an adult if you were a child at the time, or by someone you trust.

You couldn't plan for what someone else did to you. And you can't change what has happened. You do have control over how you respond now.

There are some tips and techniques that some survivors can find helpful. These are listed on the following pages:

- » Work out a plan about what you'll do when your mind is working overtime, and if all feels like too much. You could include things like:
 - » Speak to someone you trust
 - » Connecting with others however is comfortable for you. You don't have to talk about or tell anyone what has happened if you don't want to – you can just be in company, or connect with people as part of an activity you enjoy
 - » Getting some exercise to let off steam or occupy your mind: walking, swimming, running, or just going outside – whatever you enjoy
 - » Relaxing: listening to music, reading a book, having a bath
 - » Doing something creative like drawing, or writing
- » Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings but remind yourself that the negative things you say to yourself are not true

- » Think about what you'd say to a friend in a similar position: you wouldn't be telling them that what happened was their fault. Try to treat yourself as you would treat them

- » Tell yourself that it's OK to be sad. Being sad and wishing that something hadn't happened doesn't mean it was your fault

- » When you are giving yourself a hard time, talk things over with a person you trust so that you can get another perspective

- » Try to work out what's making you hard on yourself. Do you tend to do this anyway? Do you tend to take too much responsibility for things in life? Are you frightened about what would happen if you say something? Would it make what happened seem more real? Does it come from outside – for example, is disapproval coming from your community, family or friends?

- » Speak to us at the Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline. It can help to ask for and accept help for coping with your intrusive thoughts, rather than letting them fester

Help and information

There are many people who want to help. You can contact the Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline for support and information. We can tell you about support in your area. You don't need to give your name. When you contact us by phone or text, we cannot see your phone number. You don't have to share anything you don't want to – we will take things at your pace. We're open every day from 5pm to midnight. When you're ready, we're here.

- » Phone: 08088 01 03 02 (calls are free and our number will not show on your itemised bill)
- » Text: 07537 410 027 (texts are charged at your normal network rate, texts to us will show on an itemised bill as texts to our mobile phone number)
- » Webchat: www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk
- » Email: support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk

If you're feeling overwhelmed and think that this is affecting your health, speak to your GP or another professional.

You can find more information and helpful resources below:

- » www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/help-support/
- » www.ercc.scot/information/little-green-book/
- » www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health/
- » www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/

Local Rape Crisis Centres

Rape Crisis Centres are located across Scotland; for the most up to date contact information and referral criteria please go to www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/help-local-rcc

Aberdeen

Rape Crisis Grampian

Argyll & Bute

Argyll & Bute Rape Crisis Centre

Dumfries & Galloway

Rape Crisis & Sexual Abuse Support Centre

Dundee

Women's Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre (WRASAC)

East Ayrshire

The STAR Centre

Edinburgh

Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre

Fife

Fife Rape & Sexual Assault Centre

Forth Valley

Forth Valley Rape Crisis

Glasgow & Clyde

Glasgow & Clyde Rape Crisis Centre

Lanarkshire

Lanarkshire Rape Crisis Centre

Moray

Moray Rape Crisis

Orkney

Orkney Rape & Sexual Assault Service

Perth

Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre Perth & Kinross

Highland

Rape & Sexual Abuse Service Highland (RASASH)

Scottish Borders

Scottish Borders Rape Crisis Centre

Shetland

The Compass Centre

Western Isles

Western Isles Rape Crisis

Information for survivors of sexual violence in this series

- » Anger
- » Coping after sexual violence
- » Dissociation
- » Flashbacks
- » Nightmares and sleeping problems
- » Panic attacks
- » Relationships
- » Self-harm
- » Sexual health
- » Suicidal thoughts/feelings
- » Trauma



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