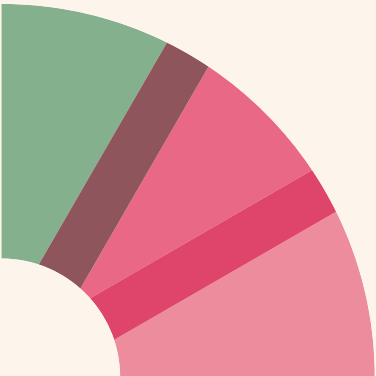


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Rape Crisis Scotland

# Information for survivors of sexual violence

# Trauma





# Trauma

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## What is trauma?

- » Trauma is an experience, such as sexual violence, which overwhelms you and involves a threat to your life or your safety
- » In everyday life, any of us can have an experience that is overwhelming, frightening, and beyond our control. We could find ourselves in a car crash, the victim of an assault, or see an accident. Most people, in time, get over experiences like this without needing help. But for some people, traumatic experiences set off a reaction that can last for many months or years. This is called post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD for short
- » Trauma is a mix of upsetting emotions, frightening memories and feeling vulnerable and in danger (even if the danger has passed)
- » Sexual violence often causes trauma
- » The effects of trauma can last for a long time; adults may still experience the effects from something that happened in childhood
- » The effects of trauma can fade away completely. But sometimes memories are triggered by a smell, sound, or an anniversary that reminds you of the traumatic experience

## How does trauma affect survivors of sexual violence?

- » Trauma can affect survivors in many different ways. These are all a natural response to what happened
- » Trauma can affect people emotionally. Common symptoms are:
  - › Shock, denial, disbelief
  - › Anger, irritability, mood swings
  - › Guilt, shame, self-blame
  - › Feeling sad or hopeless
  - › Confusion, difficulty concentrating
  - › Anxiety and fear
  - › Withdrawing from others
  - › Feeling disconnected or numb
  - › Avoiding people or places you associate with the trauma
- » Trauma can affect people physically. Common symptoms are:
  - › Not being able to sleep and/or nightmares
  - › Being startled easily

- › Racing heartbeat
  - › Aches and pains
  - › Fatigue
  - › Difficulty concentrating
  - › Edginess and agitation
  - › Muscle tension
  - › Flashbacks (reliving the experience)
  - › Intrusive thoughts or images
- » There are many things you can do to help yourself but you may find support helpful to recover from trauma if you are:
- › Having trouble functioning at home or work
  - › Suffering from severe fear, anxiety, or depression
  - › Unable to form close, satisfying relationships
  - › Experiencing terrifying memories, nightmares, or flashbacks
  - › Avoiding more and more things which remind you of the trauma
  - › Emotionally numb and disconnected from others

- › Using alcohol or drugs to feel better
- › Self-harming to feel better

It helps to remember that you can recover from trauma. Many survivors of sexual violence heal from their experience. It is not possible to say how long it takes to heal from sexual violence as each person is different, but gradually, with support, many survivors find that the bad days become further apart.

## What you can do: self-care tips for survivors

There are things you can do to help you manage the difficult feelings and reactions:

- » Avoid isolating yourself. It is natural to want to cut off but this can make things worse. Try to connect with people you trust and enjoy being with. Think about getting support from a service like rape crisis where you are safe to speak without fear of being judged or disbelieved. Support can be individual or in a group if you would like to meet other survivors with similar experiences
- » Keep yourself 'grounded'. It can help if you stick to a daily routine, with regular times for getting up, going to bed, eating and relaxing. Do things that make you feel better and keep your mind occupied (such as reading, sport, doing a class). This may help to distract you from focusing too much on the traumatic experience

- » Look after yourself physically. Try to get plenty of sleep. Have a routine. Exercise every day as this also helps you feel better and to sleep better. Eat a well-balanced diet. Eating little and often may help you to avoid over- or under-eating. Reduce or avoid using alcohol and drugs. They may help you feel better in the short-term but can lead to long-term problems
- » Be kind to yourself. Many survivors judge themselves for what happened or for how they are affected. For example, 'If only I hadn't done that' or 'Why am I not over it by now?' Remember your needs are important and how you speak to yourself can affect your recovery

**Remember: you are important.  
Your feelings matter. You do not have to  
cope on your own.**

## 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](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)**
- » **Email: [support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](mailto:support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)**

If you are feeling overwhelmed and you think this is having a serious effect on your health, speak to your GP or another professional. They may be able to refer you for talking or other therapies which can help you manage better.

The information in this leaflet draws on various sources including those below. **You can find more information online at:**

- » [www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)
- » Information after rape and sexual assault:  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/06/13141931/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/06/13141931/0)
- » [www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk)
- » [www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/Anger.asp](http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/Anger.asp)
- » [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)
- » [www.getselfhelp.co.uk](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk)

App: eCBT Trauma



## Local Rape Crisis Centres

Rape Crisis Centres are located in all local authorities in Scotland; for the most up to date contact information and referral criteria please go to: [www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/about-local-rapecrisis-centres/](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/about-local-rapecrisis-centres/)

### **Aberdeen**

Rape Crisis Grampian

### **Lanarkshire**

Lanarkshire Rape Crisis Centre

### **Argyll & Bute**

Argyll & Bute Rape Crisis Centre

### **Moray**

Moray Rape Crisis

### **Dumfries & Galloway**

Rape Crisis & Sexual  
Abuse Support Centre

### **Orkney**

Orkney Rape & Sexual  
Assault Service

### **Dundee**

Women's Rape & Sexual  
Abuse Centre

### **Perth**

Rape & Sexual Abuse  
Centre Perth & Kinross

### **East Ayrshire**

The STAR Centre

### **Highland**

Rape & Sexual Abuse  
Service Highland

### **Edinburgh**

Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre

### **Scottish Borders**

Scottish Borders Rape  
Crisis Centre

### **Fife**

Fife Rape & Sexual  
Assault Centre

### **Shetland**

Shetland Rape Crisis

### **Forth Valley**

Forth Valley Rape Crisis

### **Western Isles**

Western Isles Rape Crisis Centre

### **Glasgow & Clyde**

Glasgow & Clyde Rape  
Crisis Centre

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## Information for survivors of sexual violence in this series:

- Anger
- Coping after sexual violence
- Dissociation
- Flashbacks
- Healing from sexual violence
- Nightmares and sleeping problems
- Panic attacks
- Relationships
- Self-harm
- Sexual health
- Suicidal thoughts/feelings
- Trauma
- Information for Friends
- Information for Parents
- Information for Partners
- Information for Peers

To access the full range of resources in this series go to:

[www.rapecrisisScotland.org.uk/support-resource](http://www.rapecrisisScotland.org.uk/support-resource) or contact the

Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline to have copies posted or emailed to you.



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Helpline: **08088 01 03 02**

Email: **support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk**

For information on your local rape crisis centre visit  
our website: **www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk**

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