

Lee:

Right on !!!!! in fact your posting leads me right into my next post that I might as well just add onto here:

THE RECOVERY PROCESS:

Can a survivor truly heal after being sexually assaulted? The answer depends on your interpretation of the word heal. Webster's defines heal as "to make or become healthy, sound, or whole, to cure." If you break a bone, you go to a doctor and have it fixed. Over time, your bone is made whole and healthy and the injury often cannot be seen or felt. I do not believe that a survivor of a sexual assault can really heal from the experience in this fashion. I do however, believe that a woman can recover from it. The recovery process is more like a cut that leaves a scar or it may fade over time, but it is always the survivor to some degree. The use of the word heal presents the survivor with the misleading belief that she will someday be able to put what happened totally behind her. A more realistic recovery process is one in which the survivor understands that she has had a traumatic experience what will stay with her for the rest of her life, but one which need not control her for the rest of her life.

As a survivor, it is important that you take steps towards regaining control of your life. At first, picking up the pieces of your life may seem more difficult that you can handle. Even though you may want to forget that this horrible experience ever took place, it has now become a part of you. Yet, how you deal with the aftermath of the assault will have a direct impact on your future well-being as a survivor, not a victim. You will need support, understanding, and love from family and close friends, and may benefit from professional counseling.

RAPE TRAUMA SYNDROME:

As a survivor of a sexual assault, you may experience strong physical, emotional, and cognitive reactions to the trauma. The Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS) is identified by similar symptoms and behaviours exhibited by many survivors of sexual assault. Although some survivors may not experience this Syndrome, an awareness of its symptoms may help those women who do. Your reactions may be different from those I am about to list, or you may experience one or two and not all of them. Also, the intensity and duration of RTS will vary from person to person, but may last for months or even years

Generally, the symptoms of RTS occur in three phases, although some symptoms may overlap or reoccur. The time span for each phase varies widely, depending on the person, although the first phase often characterizes the first day or so after the assault.

PHASE ONE: CONFUSION

- Confusion, shock
- Disbelief or denial that assault happened
- Intense mood swings
- Fear of what others will think
- Fear of the attacker
- Shaking, cold sweats, nausea
- Overreaction to noise
- Loss of appetite
- Sleeplessness
- Nightmares
- Loss of normal energy level
- Loss of short term memory
- Sense of loss, violation
- Feelings of shame or humiliation
- Self-blame

PHASE TWO: TRYING TO REORGANIZE

In this phase, many survivors will reorganize their daily routines in an attempt to regain control of their situation. Some common behaviours and symptoms at this time include:

- Fear of the environment or of people who remind the survivor of the assault
- Changing daily routines or moving from a residence if the assault took place there
- Ending relationships with boyfriends, husband, girlfriend, family members
- Immediately beginning a new relationship
- Distrust of others
- Change in sleep patterns
- Continued loss of normal energy levels
- Weight loss or gain
- Feelings of intense anger and rage
- Depression
- Withdrawal from sexual activity
- Wanting to change personal appearance
- Continued mood swings
- Continued self-blame

- Self-medication with alcohol and/or drugs

PHASE THREE: INTEGRATION

At this point, the survivor has integrated her feelings and reactions to the assault while taking control of her daily life. Some of the above-noted reactions may still remain, but if the survivor has received proper counseling, the assault is no longer the only thing on her mind. In this last phase of recovery, the trauma no longer dominates her life and things return to a reasonable state of normalcy. The survivor is able to express and resolve her feelings of fear and rage about the assault, and be able to blame the person who attacked her instead of blaming herself. To get to this final phase of recovery is not easy, and will be reached at varying times by different people. To help speed this process, I strongly recommend that all survivors of sexual assault seek professional guidance.

GETTING PROFESSIONAL HELP:

Will every survivor of a sexual assault need professional counseling? Not necessarily. However, a good sexual assault counselor will help a survivor to understand what they are going through during the recovery process, and that what they are experiencing during this recovery process is normal. The guidance of a skilled counselor will be especially needed for those whose family, close friends, and lovers are unable to come to terms with the sexual assault and emotional distress.

Sexual assault crisis counselors have a unique understanding of the physical and emotional reactions that you will be experiencing and will help guide you through the recovery process. The goal of a rape crisis counselor is to help the survivor learn to take positive control over her life once again.

The best way to find a person who specializes in counseling sexual assault survivors is to ask for information at your local sexual assault center. You may also wish to ask your family doctor for referrals. If you are at all uncomfortable with your counselor, go elsewhere. This person will have a direct effect on your recovery process.

Remember:

- It is natural for you to feel upset during the recovery process
- Try not to feel guilty or blame yourself for the assault. Guilt lies with the attacker and not you
- It is important to share your feelings with a professional counselor or someone you trust
- Be patient with yourself; the recovery process will take time

Strength and Honor

Darren Laur