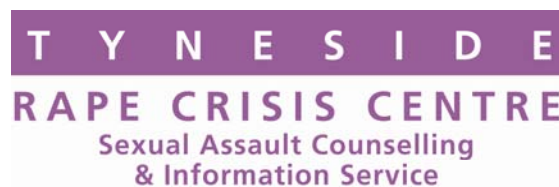


# Supporting Survivors of Sexual Violence



**Helpline:** 0800 035 2794 (Tues, Wed & Thurs 6pm-8.30pm)

**Admin:** 0191 222 0272 (Office hours – for information & referrals)

**Email:** [enquiries@tynesidercc.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@tynesidercc.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.tynesidercc.org.uk](http://www.tynesidercc.org.uk)

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This leaflet has been produced to guide and support you, the carer of a survivor of rape and other forms of sexual violence. This leaflet does not claim to have all the answers to dealing with such a situation, it can only guide and provide a basis for your own methods of support.

Each woman is an individual, and therefore will react differently to her trauma, and will need different kinds of support. It is inevitable that you too will have many strong feelings about what has happened. You may feel angry or that in some way you may have been able to prevent the attack. Feelings like this are natural and normal.

Tyneside Rape Crisis Centre can offer face-to-face support to women survivors of sexual violence. We are able to offer you, the supporter, support, practical help and reassurance over the telephone. We can also offer information on other useful services.

### **Belief**

It is vitally important that you show the woman you care for her and that you believe her story. She will be feeling very insecure and will be faced with many people who are going to question her honesty and credibility. As someone close to her, your belief and support is necessary for her to begin to come to terms with the attack. Never at any time voice any doubts you might feel. Women do not lie about rape and other forms of sexual violence.

### **Control**

Give her back the control. During the attack, she was overpowered and helpless to her attacker. She needs to feel that she has control over her life again. You can begin to help her achieve this by letting her make the decisions. Give her options about what you can do together but let the final decision be hers. Do not force her to do anything she is unsure of or does not want to do.

### **Listen**

Let your friend / lover / relation know that you are there if she needs to talk. Just listening to a survivor can be the key to helping her through her trauma. Never force her to talk when she is not willing to. Do not try to offer advice, just listen and follow her lead. Knowing that you are there if she needs you is very important.

## **Dispel the Myths**

There are many myths around rape and sexual assault. She may feel that she provoked the rape through wearing “provocative” clothing or that she should have ‘known better’. She is not at fault; it is the attacker who should be blamed. Let her know that you know she is not to blame, many people she encounters will try to discredit her and she will need your support and belief

## **Don't blame her**

Never say, “you should have done...” or, “if only you had...” The attack was no fault of hers and by making such remarks; you are blaming her for instigating or provoking the attack. No woman wants or asks to be raped and by making such remarks you will make it harder for her to put the blame where it belongs – with the attacker.

You may be the first person she has told even if the attack happened a long time ago. Your reaction is so important and may determine if she ever speaks to anyone else about what has happened to her.

## **Let her feelings show**

Each woman will have individual feelings, attitudes and emotions about the attack. She may feel guilty, shameful or dirty. She may be angry, tearful or dismissive of the attack. Let her show how she is feeling, allow her to cry, shout or be quiet. Never say, “don't cry” or “forget it”, such suggestions are asking the impossible of her.

## **Flashbacks**

Many women who are survivors of any form of sexual violence experience flashbacks at one time or another. Flashbacks are temporary states of remembering something painful or traumatic which has been hidden for quite some time in the subconscious mind. During a flashback a survivor of sexual violence may feel as though aspects of the rape or sexual assault are actually happening in the present. The duration of a flashback differs and could last from a few seconds to a few hours.

For further information on flashbacks and how to support someone who is experiencing them contact Tyneside Rape Crisis Centre direct or go to the publications section on our website.

## **Support her**

Try to support her in the decisions that she makes but be as clear as possible about what you can or cannot do. If she wants to report the attack to the police, offer to go with her if you can, she may find it difficult and distressing. If the report leads to a prosecution it may be many months before the case comes before the court. She will be anxious and worried about giving evidence and may want someone to go through the process with her.

She may want help with other things, like someone to accompany her on the journey to work, or someone to stay with her in the house.

Do not take on more than you are able to do, it is important that you are consistent in what you can offer. Where you cannot provide what she needs, help her to find out what other options are available to her. If you are unsure contact us, Tyneside Rape Crisis Centre. If we are unable to provide the type of support you or the woman needs we will work with you to locate the right service or organisation.

## **Sexuality**

After an attack, her needs and desires may have changed. She may not want the intimacy of cuddling, holding hands etc. and she may feel that sex brings back painful memories. Be patient. Try to talk about both of your feelings and needs, but remember she may need time. On the other hand, she may be able to carry on with her life.

## **Support yourself**

You too are faced with a difficult experience and will feel many emotions, from hurt and protectiveness to anger and guilt. Find ways of getting support for you, whether through counselling, taking “time out” or (with her permission) talking to a friend.

## **What survivors have said they want**

*To convey to us that we are not to blame.*

*To understand that we have mixed feelings.*

*To be listened to.*

*Patience – not rushing and taking things in our own time.*

*To be believed, not doubted.*

*Not to ask too many questions.*

*It is important that we have control over when, where and who we tell.*

*Updated: 01/02/12*

*With thanks to Nottingham Rape Crisis Centre*