

Common Reactions to Trauma

Each person's experience is unique; however, there are some common reactions among people who have experienced a traumatic event. It can be reassuring to know that these reactions are not unusual. Recognizing "normal" reactions and emotions that may occur following an "abnormal" event can help with the recovery process. Some common reactions and feelings with regards to a traumatic event may include:

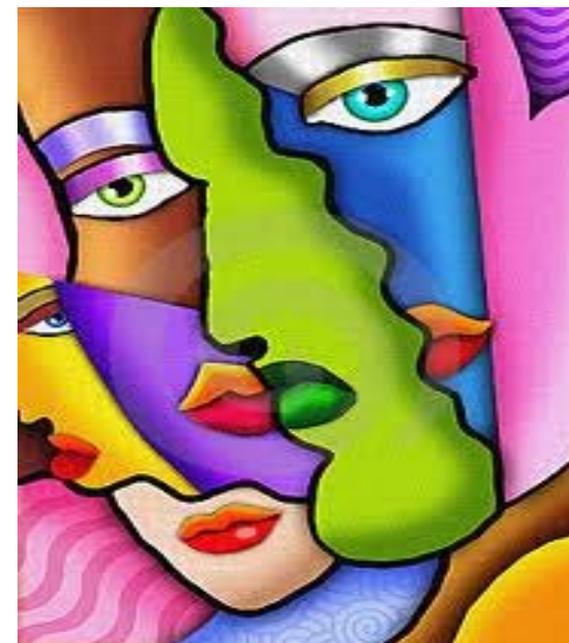
- Shock/Disbelief
- Fear/Vulnerability
- Anger/Rage
- Helplessness
- Sadness/Crying Episodes
- Shame/Self-Blame
- Behavior Changes
- Sleep Disturbances
- Nightmares/Dreams
- Flashbacks
- Irritability
- Disturbance of Appetite
- Social Withdrawal
- Depression
- Thoughts of Self-harm or Suicide

Resources

STAR Central (Mon – Fri, 8 am – 5 pm)	575-7252
SARPA (24 hour response line)	927-1020
CAPS 24 hr Emergency Line (Counseling & Psychological Services)	575-5276
UA Women's Clinic	575-4478
Pat Walker Health Center (University Health Services)	575-4451
University Police	575-2222
Police/Ambulance	911
Washington Regional Medical Center	442-1000
Northwest Medical Center	751-5711
Peace at Home Family Shelter	442-9811
The Crisis Center	756-2337

STAR Central of the Pat Walker Health Center's Health Promotion Department is the Office of Support, Training, Advocacy, and Resources on Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence. Confidential advocacy services and campus training programs are available. Visit <http://health.uark.edu> for more information or to learn about STAR Central's peer education program, RESPECT, visit <http://respect.uark.edu>

Rape Trauma Syndrome



STAR Central

Office of Support, Training, Advocacy, and Resources on Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence



**Pat Walker Health Center
Office 277
(479) 575-7252
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While rape survivors will react in different ways, a pattern of response has been identified. Similar to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Rape Trauma Syndrome is a common response pattern of rape survivors. Rape Trauma Syndrome is not a mental disorder, but is merely based on descriptions of common experiences of those who have been raped.

Rape Trauma Syndrome presents as three phases: Impact Phase, Acute Phase, and Integration Phase. Although each phase is distinctive by responses experienced during the recovery process following a sexual assault, there is not a definitive time period for each phase. The amount of time that each phase lasts is dependent upon the individual, whether help has been sought or not, available support systems, and other variables that may aid in or detract from the recovery process.

Often people suffering from Rape Trauma Syndrome benefit from professional counseling. When choosing a professional counselor, it's important to consider the type of counseling or therapy that the counselor, social worker, or psychologist focuses on and has experience with. Professionals with experience in helping people who have suffered trauma are recommended.

First: The Impact Phase

During the hours and days following rape, individuals may respond with shock, disbelief, confusion, agitation, crying, anger, fear, and even laughing. Some appear to be very controlled and calm. Some may also experience the physical symptoms of pain, soreness, bruising, vaginal or rectal bleeding, and headaches. Difficulty resuming everyday routines may occur. All of these are natural responses to a life-threatening trauma and having someone to provide support for and care for the one who has been raped will help with these difficult days.

Second: The Acute Phase

After the initial shock has passed, a variety of symptoms are often experienced, such as: nightmares, flashbacks, insomnia, loss of appetite, mood swings, depression, anxiety, phobias, humiliation, and self-blame. This can be a very painful time for both the victim and the victim's loved ones. These responses are common to those who have been raped and are part of working through the trauma.

Another reaction for some may be denial. Victims often try to forget about the rape and "move on with their lives." Although this may appear to be a resolution to the crisis, it typically is not. The individual

may continue to experience the difficulties mentioned earlier, despite a normal outward appearance. When this denial is broken through, the individual may actually appear to be backsliding in the healing process. This reaction is actually a sign that the feelings brought on by the rape are beginning to be confronted. During these difficult times and range of emotions, it is important that others provide support.

Third: The Integration Phase

In this final phase of healing, the victim comes to integrate the overall effects that the victimization has had. During this phase, the victim truly becomes the survivor of sexual assault. The survivor may come through this process with a new self-concept and will probably feel stronger as an individual with greater self-knowledge and awareness. Furthermore, relationships with those who provided support, patience, and care during the healing process are often strengthened.

For more information or available help and resources, contact
STAR Central
Pat Walker Health Center
University Health Services
(479) 575-7252

