

Common Reactions

While each person responds differently, below are some common reactions after sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual abuse or exploitation.

Physical

Nausea/vomiting
Tremors/shakiness
Loss of coordination
Sleep disturbances
Easily startled/jumpy
Chills
Diarrhea
Chest pains
Rapid heart rate
Stomach pain
Headaches
Muscle aches
Difficulty breathing
Fatigue
Appetite changes
Crying
Tension
Changes in sexual libido

Emotional

Anxiety/worry
Feeling overwhelmed
Guilt/shame
Sadness/depression
Feeling lost/abandoned
Fear/panic
Anger/outrage/fury
Feeling helpless/powerless
Numbness
Shock
Irritability
Self blame
Grief
Negative body image
Sudden mood changes
Disgust

Spiritual

Change in sense of connection with university or community
Loss of sense of safety
Loss of sense of justice
Change in worldview
Doubts about beliefs
Loss of trust in others
Changes in spiritual or religious practices
Sense of relating to other survivors
Awareness of violence, privilege, and oppression
Sense of shame

Cognitive

Delayed processing
Difficulty making decisions
Flashbacks
Nightmares
Confusion
Disorientation
Difficulty with calculations
Difficulty concentrating
Memory problems
Decreased attention span
Racing thoughts
Self-consciousness
Suicidal thoughts
Homicidal thoughts
Trying not to think about it
Thinking about it constantly

Behavioral

Withdrawal/isolation
Avoiding specific situations, people, or places
Suspiciousness
Increased nicotine use
Increased alcohol/drug use
Unusual behavior
Overly vigilant in the environment
Excessive humor
Emotional outbursts
Missing classes
Changes in appearance
Changes in usual activities
Act like nothing has changed
Changes in sexual behavior
Self-injury

CENTER FOR
Survivors

24-Hour Crisis Line: (517) 372-6666

Office: (517) 355-3551

Crisis Chat 10am-10pm: centerforsurvivors.msu.edu

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Coping with Common Reactions

Everyone reacts to trauma differently, which includes coping with and healing from the trauma. It's important to know healing is possible. If you are struggling, it may help to try some of the coping strategies below. It can also help to reach out to a therapist in order to process your reactions and identify additional effective coping strategies.

Relaxation and Grounding

- Talk to a friend
- Watch a show
- Do a puzzle
- Practice deep breathing
- Download a mindfulness app or learn about meditation
- Notice sounds of nature
- Eat mindfully
- Engage your five senses
- Remind yourself where you are in the present moment
- Take a hot bath or shower
- Light a candle

Spiritual Coping

- Surround yourself with nature
- Practice acceptance
- Practice gratitude
- Use affirmations
- Pray or practice your religion
- Connect with others
- Volunteer for a good cause

Emotional Release and Regulation

- Remind yourself that emotions are okay
- Yell or scream
- Punch a pillow
- Cry
- Watch something funny
- Tell someone how you feel
- Identify feelings
- Journal
- Listen to music
- Draw a picture
- Rip up paper
- Squeeze a stress ball
- Observe without judgement
- Remind yourself it was not your fault

Coping through Movement

- Clean or tidy your space
- Do yoga, tai chi, or gentle stretching etc.
- Walk or run
- Dance
- Workout/exercise
- Throw or kick a ball
- Practice a sport
- Stretch

Thought Challenging

- Ask yourself: Is this a fact or a thought?
- Learn more about thinking patterns and habits
- Examine pros and cons of situations
- Try to come up with information to challenge negative thoughts
- Think about what you would tell a loved one if they were having negative thoughts
- Identify your triggers: Notice what is happening in your world before you have negative thoughts
- Notice the feelings that go with the thought.