**Common Reactions to Sexual Assault**

**Acute Phase**

(May last for a few days to several weeks following a sexual assault. Survivors may exhibit controlled or expressed emotions.)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Controlled** |  | | **Expressed** |
| Withdrawn |  | | Crying/sobbing |
| Numb |  | | Shouting |
| Distracted |  | | Tenseness |
| Disconnected from feelings | |  | Restlessness |

**Outward Adjustment Phase**

(Initial shock wears off – can continue for months or years)

Continuing anxiety \* Severe mood swings \* Sense of helplessness

Fears/phobias \* Depression \* Rage \* Nightmares \* Insomnia \* Eating

difficulties \* Denial \* Withdrawal \* Hypervigilance \* Sexual problems

Difficulty concentrating \* Flashbacks \* Suicidal

Self-mutilation \* Dissociation \* Drugs/alcohol abuse

**Resolution Phase**

(Wants to heal, seeks help or counseling, tells a support person)

\*Confrontation (court, stop offender) \* Increased self-worth \* Gain control

\*Education \* Support \* Counseling \* Group Therapy

\* Learns to overcome stereotypes \* Learns to recognize triggers \* Release of shame and guilt

Blames offender \* Learns to empower self

**Self-Care and Coping**

Self-care is about taking steps to feel healthy and comfortable. Whether it happened recently or years ago, self-care can help you cope with the short- and long-term effects of a trauma like sexual assault.

**Physical self-care**

After a trauma, it’s important to keep your body healthy and strong. You may be healing from injuries or feeling emotionally drained. Good physical health can support you through this time. Think about a time when you felt physically healthy, and consider asking yourself the following questions:

* How were you **sleeping**? Did you have a sleep ritual or nap pattern that made you feel more rested?
* What types of **food** were you eating? What meals made you feel healthy and strong?
* What types of **exercise** did you enjoy? Were there any particular activities that made you feel more energized?
* Did you perform certain **routines**? Were there activities you did to start the day off right or wind down at the end of the day?

**Emotional self-care**

Emotional self-care means different things to different people. The key to emotional self-care is being in tune with yourself. Think about a time when you felt balanced and grounded, and consider asking yourself the following questions:

* What **fun or leisure** activities did you enjoy? Were there events or outings that you looked forward to?
* Did you **write down your thoughts** in a journal or personal notebook?
* Were **meditation or relaxation** activities a part of your regular schedule?
* What **inspirational words** were you reading? Did you have a particular author or favorite website to go to for inspiration?
* **Who did you spend time with?** Was there someone, or a group of people, that you felt safe and supported around?
* **Where did you spend your time?** Was there a special place, maybe outdoors or at a friend’s house, where you felt comfortable and grounded?