



Self-Care

There are times when the emotions and pain associated with a rape or sexual assault can be overwhelming. These feelings can come immediately after the assault or many years later. The following are things that you can do to help take care of yourself as you recover from the assault that you experienced.

- Make yourself a cup of tea, or a soothing warm drink.
- If it is safe to do so, go for a walk.
- Spend time talking with a trusted friend or family member.
- Workout; exercise helps to increase your body's production of endorphins which help you feel better.
- Read a favorite book.
- Write in your journal.
- Find a creative outlet – music, painting, writing poems, etc.
- Sign up for a self-defense course – it may help you to feel more in control.
- Eat healthy food.
- Most importantly, remind yourself that it is alright for you to feel these emotions – they are normal reactions to an abnormal event.

There are also some things that victims of rape or sexual assault do to cope that are better to avoid:

- Relying on alcohol or drug use.
- Disclosing personal information in chat rooms or blogs.
- Seeking out situations in which you feel unsafe.
- Taking actions that undermine your self-worth.
- Using food and unhealthy eating as a way to control your body and emotional state.
- Inflicting harm on your body.
- Blaming yourself for what happened.



Flashbacks

What are Flashbacks?

Flashbacks are when memories of past traumas feel as if they are taking place in the current moment. These memories can take many forms: dreams, sounds, smells, images, body sensations, or overwhelming emotions. This re-experience of the trauma often seems to come from nowhere and, therefore, blurs the lines between past and present, leaving the individual feeling anxious, scared, powerless, or another emotion that they felt at the time of the trauma.

Some flashbacks are mild and brief, a passing moment, while others may be powerful and last a long time. Many times the individual does not even realize that he or she is having a flashback and may feel faint or dissociate.

What helps during a flashback?

If you realize that you are in the middle of a flashback:

- Tell yourself that you are having a flashback and remind yourself that it is not the actual event and that you survived.
- Breathe. Take slow, deep breaths by putting your hand on your stomach and taking deep enough breaths that your hands move out with the inhalations and in with exhalations. This is important because when we panic our body begins to take short, shallow breaths and the decrease in oxygen that accompanies this change increases our panicked state. By increasing the oxygen in your system, you can help to get out of the anxious state you are in.
- Return to the present. Take time to use your five senses to establish where you are in the present. Look around you and take note of the colors in the room. Listen to the sounds that are happening around you. Smell the smells that are in the room with you. Feel the clothes on your skin and take note of how different parts of your body feel (hands, feet. Etc.).
- Recognize what would make you feel more safe. Wrap yourself in a blanket, shut yourself in a room – whatever it takes to feel as if you are secure.
- Get the support of people you can trust. If you can, ask someone for help and support in this time of vulnerability.

- Take time to recover. Let yourself have the time to get back to feeling comfortable and in the present. This may take a while and that is ok. If you like, take a nap, some time for yourself, or whatever it is that would help you feel safe and more comfortable.
- Be good to yourself. Know that you are not crazy and are not doing anything wrong – it takes time to heal.

* Information provided by the Georgia Network to End Sexual Assault