



SÖDERSJUKHUSET

## Common reactions after a rape or an attempted rape

### *There is no wrong reaction*

We are all different and can react to violence and threatening behaviour in a variety of ways. Some people react immediately, while others may experience a delayed reaction.

**For the first few days** you may feel disconnected; the event may seem unreal, as if you have been in a film. One minute you may not feel anything, the next there may be mixed emotions, including sorrow, anger, fear and resignation. You may be confused by your reactions and not really recognise yourself.

Physical reactions may include headaches, shivering, nausea, palpitations and muscle tension. Your sleep may be affected and you may have nightmares. It is important that you eat even if you have no appetite.

You may want to try to find an explanation for what happened, which can lead to a risk of you blaming yourself instead of the person who attacked you.

### **A little while later**

You may become depressed, anxious, forgetful or restless, and when you leave the house you may be more wary and easily frightened.

Difficulty concentrating is a common reaction, so it helps to find a balance in terms of what you can and can't manage. You may swing between periods of feeling quite good and periods when the feelings that you had immediately after the event return. Try to express what kind of support you need from those around you. Tell people if you are unable to explain what happened to you and ask them to respect your boundaries.

Irrespective of whether or not you have told someone close to you, it can be helpful and important to continue processing your experiences with a professional counsellor. Either here or with another therapist who you trust.

### **Comments from people we have helped**

“I feel dirty and disgusting. I can hardly eat. I can't sleep, thoughts keep going round and round in my head, and I have nightmares.”

#### **Södersjukhuset AB**

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“I feel like it is stamped on my forehead, as if anyone who looks at me knows what I’ve been through.”

“It feels as though there is danger everywhere; I hardly dare to go out and jump if someone stands near me on the underground.”

“Why did it happen? Why me? Was it something I said or did?”

“Most of the people around me seem furious. Why don’t I feel that way? It just feels as though everything is my fault; I must be abnormal.”

“I would prefer not to think about it but suddenly the memories come flooding back.”

“I had thought that I would put up more of a fight – I didn’t expect to be so scared and powerless to act. I was also afraid that he would do something worse.”

“I hate it when people put their head on one side and look pityingly at me. I would prefer that no one knew about it; I don’t want my friends and family to think differently about me.”

“Sometimes I just cry and sometimes everything and everyone irritates me.”

“I’m not the same as I was; I can’t concentrate or think clearly.”

“I think I see him everywhere when I’m out.”

“How will I ever be able to trust anyone again? And will I ever be able to trust myself?”

“I avoid anything that reminds me of what happened, but I’m beginning to feel that it mustn’t be allowed to hold me back!”

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