

Remember, involvement in a traumatic event can produce upsetting responses such as disturbed sleep, diminished appetite, and difficulty concentrating. These responses will likely subside with time. However, if reactions are especially long lasting or troubling, you may need to turn to a professional for assistance.

## Benefits of Counseling

Some of the benefits of seeking counseling are:

- Reviewing the incident and processing the event can help victims clarify what actually occurred.
- Legal and judicial decisions can be discussed and utilized as part of the promotion of healing and resolution.
- The disruption due to trauma can make daily functioning difficult. Counseling can help develop coping skills and strategies, allowing for the continuance of school, work or relationships.
- Establishment of a support network helps to decrease the negative physical, psychological and emotional effects that often result from the traumatic experience.

Survivors can utilize the experience as an opportunity to build and practice assertiveness, confidence, and protective instinct skills.

## Judicial System

For many, this may be their first involvement with law enforcement or the judicial system. It is very common for people to expect what they have seen on television or movies to apply to their current circumstances. Unfortunately, these expectations are, more than often, a distorted and unrealistic snapshot of how things truly operate.

Arizona has laws and regulations in place to protect victims. For cases involving prosecution, a court advocate can provide information, education, and support that will help reduce fears and uncertainties.

Another consideration that is often practiced is that of resolution by plea agreement. By negotiation and agreement, this approach to resolution can prevent the need for testifying in court.

As with any situation, education and information about how the judicial system operates, can assist the victim and their family in the reduction of trauma.

## Who can help?

The Mesa Police Department Victim Services Unit can assist with information regarding Victims' Rights, Victim Compensation, case status, navigation of the criminal justice system and referrals to other appropriate helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.

## Resources

### Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network

1-800-656-HOPE(4673)  
online.rainn.org

### Arizona Criminal Justice Commission

1110 W Washington Ste#230  
Phoenix, AZ 85007  
(602) 364-1146  
acjc@azcjc.gov

### National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS)

P.O. Box 6000  
Rockville, MD 20849-6000  
1-800-851-3420

### Office for Victims of Crime

U.S. Department of Justice  
810 Seventh Street NW., Eighth Floor  
Washington, DC 20531  
(202) 307-5983  
www.ovc.gov

### Women's Justice Center

PO Box 7510  
Santa Barbara, CA 95407  
(707) 575-3150  
www.justicewomen.com

### Community Information and Referral

(602) 263-8856

### EMPACT Crisis Hotline

(480) 784-1500

# Victim Services Unit

## Adult Reactions to Sexual Assault



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## This brochure provides information for you and your family on dealing with sexual assault.

### Types of Sexual Assault

Crimes that involve forced or unwanted sexual conduct are considered to be sexual assaults and can include:

- Acquaintance Rape/Non-Stranger Rape
- Date Rape or Stranger Rape
- Drug/Alcohol Facilitated Sexual Assault
- Indecent Exposure or “Flashing”
- Forced Sodomy (Oral or Anal)
- Gang Rape/Multiple Rape
- Marital Rape or Marital Sexual Assault
- Object Penetration (Foreign Object or Digital (Fingers))
- Same Sex Sexual Assault
- Sexual Battery
- Voyeurism or “Peeping Tom”

Keep in mind that it is not uncommon for the victim of a sexual assault to question whether or not they were victimized and/or whether or not they are responsible for the event or opportunity for its occurrence.

Because you may not have resisted physically, does not mean that you were not assaulted. Choosing not to respond with physical resistance is one of the choices that is often made as a means to avoid escalating the attacker’s violence.

A question that often surfaces for victims who know or are familiar with the attacker, is whether or not the event is considered to be a sexual assault. Sexual assault occurs any time the sexual event is nonconsensual.

Inability to remember the assault does not mean the assault did not occur. Although this may make the pursuit of prosecution difficult or not possible, reporting the incident to the police is welcomed and encouraged.

Being unconscious or asleep during the assault are other factors that may cause doubt about the event. The key is to consider the fact that in these states of mind providing consent is not possible and if you did not give consent, it is sexual assault.

Many times alcohol and drugs are used as an excuse or explanation for an assault occurring. Providing consent is key and, again, if you were not conscious, you could not consent.

Surviving the event may require a victim to refrain from saying “No”. A knife being held to your throat or a threat against your family could be reasons that make it unsafe to resist.

### Common Reactions

- Inability to concentrate or function at a usual level
- Overeating or appetite loss
- Nightmares
- Loss of self confidence
- Stress related illness
- Feelings of grief and despair
- Feelings helplessness
- Sleeplessness
- Fear of being alone, or with people, or in a specific setting, especially at night
- Anxiety and mood swings
- Feelings of guilt and shame
- Denial of the assault
- Flashbacks
- Embarrassment
- Distrust towards others

These emotions may occur immediately after the event or come to the surface at a later time.

### Time and Patience

Recognize that healing from sexual assault takes time. Give yourself the time you need. Many different reactions are understandable and do not mean that you are “going crazy.” You may also find yourself reliving the incident, trying to find an alternative response or different outcome. You may see these possibilities in retrospect (now that the immediate danger has passed), but do not forget the reality of what happened. During the assault you were powerless and in a state of fear. Always remember you are not to blame and that your actions were understandable given the potentially life-threatening circumstances of the assault.

Abrupt changes in mood are common. You may feel you are overreacting to normal everyday problems and then become angry with yourself. Remember your reactions are normal responses to a terrifying life-threatening experience. Some of the normal response you may experience include:

- **Anger:** I want to kill him/her.
- **Anxiety:** I’m having panic attacks. I can’t breathe. I just can’t stop shaking. I can’t sit still anymore. I feel overwhelmed.
- **Denial:** It wasn’t really a “rape”.
- **Depression:** How am I going to get through this semester? I’m so tired. I feel so helpless. Maybe I’d be better off dead.
- **Disbelief:** Did it really happen? Why Me? Maybe I just made it up.

- **Disorientation:** I don’t even know what day it is, or what class I’m supposed to be in. I keep forgetting things.
- **Embarrassment:** What will people think? I can’t tell my family or friends.
- **Emotional Shock:** I feel so numb. Why am I so calm? Why can’t I cry?
- **Fear:** I’m scared of everything. What if I am pregnant? Could I get an STD or even AIDS? How can I ever feel safe again? Do people know there is anything wrong? I can’t sleep because I know I’ll have nightmares. I am afraid I am going crazy.
- **Guilt:** I feel as if it’s my fault, or did something to make this happen. If only I had...
- **Powerlessness:** Will I ever feel in control again?
- **Sexual Relationship Suffers:** Many women find it difficult to feel sexual or have sexual relationships. This is especially true for women who have been sexually assaulted, since in addition to the lack of trust, sex itself is a reminder of the assault.
- **Shame:** I feel so dirty, like there is something wrong with me. I want to wash my hands or shower all the time.
- **Triggers:** I keep having flashbacks. I’m still re-living it. I see his face all the time.

Source: Foa, Edna. Treating the Trauma of Rape. The Guilford Press. 1998.

### Medical Attention

Medical attention is important for several reasons, such as collection of evidence, unnoticed injuries, possible internal injuries, risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease or becoming pregnant, and risk of infection are some of them.

Forensic exams are performed by specially trained nurses and generally should be performed within 120 hours. Examinations are done in the medical suite, here at the Center Against Family Violence.

As part of the exam, a detailed medical history is taken and used to aid in the collection of evidence and examination of injuries.

Evidence is collected from various parts of the body with the use of cotton swabs, injuries are documented and measured, blood is usually drawn for DNA and collection of clothing may be necessary. Usually an opportunity to shower and a change of clothing is provided.