

My Journey: A Survivor's Guide



Sexual Assault Center
Department of Community and Human Services

703.683.7273

www.alexandriava.gov/DCHS

RESOURCES

Sexual Assault Center

421 King Street, Suite 400, Alexandria, VA 22314
SAC Hotline | 703.683.7273

Alexandria Police Department

3600 Wheeler Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22314
Non-emergency | 703.746.4444
Sheriff's Office | 703.746.4114

Court Services

520 King Street, First Floor, Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone | 703.746.4144

Victim Witness Assistance Program

520 King Street, Third Floor, Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone | 703.746.4100

Inova Fairfax Hospital

Physical | 3300 Gallows Road, Fairfax, VA 22042
Phone | 703.776.3116

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Common Reactions for Survivors

Having a reaction to trauma is completely normal. Some people have physical reactions but no emotional reactions, some people have mental reactions but no social reactions, and some people have no reactions at all. If you are concerned about anything you're experiencing after an assault, counseling may be useful in addressing coping skills.

Reactions

- **PHYSICAL** | After trauma, your body may have reactions such as nausea, headaches, trouble sleeping, menstrual cycle changes, fatigue or high levels of stress.
- **MENTAL** | After trauma, you may have difficulty concentrating and making decisions. You may experience flashbacks, memory loss, nightmares, racing thoughts, self-blame, confusion or thoughts of hurting yourself or someone else.
- **EMOTIONAL** | Experiencing trauma is likely to bring a wide range of emotional responses including depression, guilt, shame, anger, sadness, irritability, grief, fear, anxiety, mood swings, numbness, emptiness and feeling out of control.
- **SOCIAL** | Trauma can bring about changes in how you interact with those around you including isolation from friends and family, avoiding places and people, fear of being alone, change in sexual behavior or loss of interest in things you used to enjoy.

Safety

Safety is a priority for many people after an assault takes place, but sometimes it can be difficult to know where to begin. Typical safety plans focus on emotional and physical safety and aim to think ahead about concerns that may come up before they might arise.

- **PHYSICAL SAFETY** | Processing what to do to feel secure and supported in your surroundings.
- **EMOTIONAL SAFETY** | Brainstorming ways to get through some of the emotionally difficult times.
- **SAFETY WITHIN YOUR HOME** | Coming up with ways to increase feelings of safety at home.
- **MEMORIES OF THE ASSAULT** | Planning for what to do when memories of the assault affect your day-to-day living.
- **SAFETY IF THERE IS STILL CONTACT WITH THE OFFENDER** | Developing ways to ensure safety when you have to or choose to have contact with the offender.
- **LEGAL SAFETY** | Thinking of ways to increase your sense of safety and control throughout the criminal justice system process (if applicable).

Physical and emotional reactions to trauma are normal. Your concerns are valid. You are not alone.



Healing Process

Many people who experience trauma recover on their own. Healing is different for everyone. Some things you can do to assist in your healing process include:

- Express your feelings and thoughts.
- Honor your survival and try not to punish yourself with, "If only I had ..."
- Talk to people you trust when you're ready.
- Take care of yourself—get rest, plan comfortable activities and allow yourself time to heal.
- Ask for help from family, friends, police, nurses and counselors.

Remember, you are not alone. The City of Alexandria Sexual Assault Center is here to listen and support you. Call 703.683-7273 to speak to a trained advocate 24 hours a day.

Some signs you may need additional help include:

- Nightmares, inability to concentrate, feeling unsafe or not being able to relax.

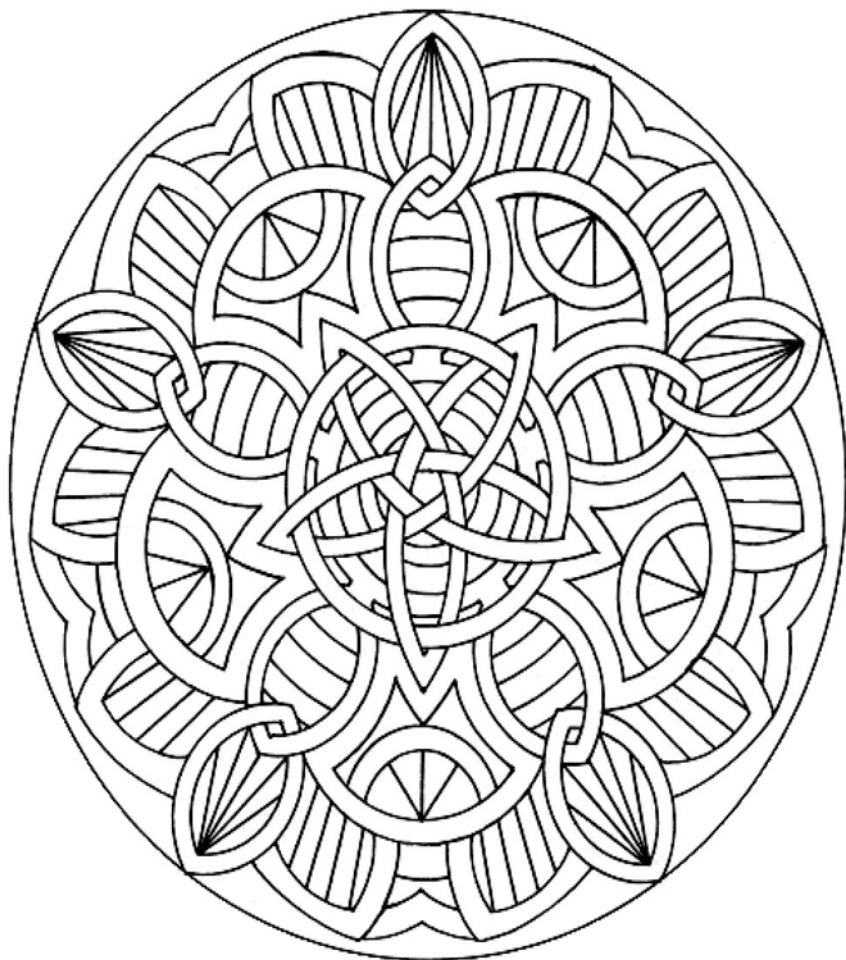
Self Care

In times of crisis, it can be challenging to find ways to take care of ourselves, but it is also very important. Self-care does not need to only include activities you do alone. If you feel more comfortable being around people, then include a friend or family member. If not, make sure that you are staying connected to yourself using the tips below—or get creative!

- **PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES** | Go for a walk. Take a jog. Vacuum. Dance. Go hiking. Join an exercise class.
- **RELAXING ACTIVITIES** | Listen to music. Take a bath or shower. Take a nap. Read a book or magazine. Join a yoga class. Rock yourself gently. Watch a movie.
- **CREATIVE ACTIVITIES** | Draw. Paint. Write. Color. Cook or bake. Work a puzzle. Garden. Knit or crochet.
- **WAYS TO STAY CONNECTED TO YOUR BODY** | Take deep breaths. Stand up and walk around. Clench then relax your fists. Ask others to talk with you.

Coloring as a Coping Skill

Coloring has been shown to help us relax and reduce stress. When we focus on a particular activity, we tend not to focus on our worries. Although it won't eliminate our problems or worries, coloring can comfort and even temporarily free us from stress.



Medical Care

Medical care may be necessary after a sexual assault to address injuries, prevent disease and/or pregnancy and to collect evidence. The Sexual Assault Center will provide an advocate to support you during the exam at the hospital. Call 703.683.7273 for support.

What to Expect: Sexual Assault Exam

- If you give your consent for an exam, a trained SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) will administer it.
- The examination process may last several hours.
- The collection of forensic evidence is best performed within 48-72 hours of the assault. After this time, most DNA evidence is gone, but other portions of the exam may still be performed.
- Your clothing and accessories may be collected as evidence and you will NOT get these items back.
- You have the right to have a support person be present throughout the exam.
- If you choose to report the assault, a police officer may meet you at the hospital.
- The exam entails: An interview regarding details of assault, a complete head-to-toe examination to identify visible injuries, collection of forensic evidence, photographing injuries, detailed genital exam to identify injuries and collect evidence, offering medications to treat common sexually transmitted infections, offering HIV preventive medications if you qualify and offering Plan B (to prevent pregnancy).

REMEMBER: *You have the right to feel safe and comfortable. You can refuse any and all parts of the exam.*

If you decide not to obtain a SANE exam, you may seek medical care from your own provider or health clinic.

Follow Up Care

Please read the discharge follow-up instructions provided by the hospital. This will detail your medication regimen and specify any additional medical care required, including blood tests, testing for sexually transmitted infections, further medication, etc. Remember to attend follow-up appointments with the SANE nurse or your own physician.

Filing a Police Report

While some survivors find filing a police report an important part of their recovery process, only you can decide if it's the right choice for you. If you have questions about the process, call the Sexual Assault Center at 703.683.7273.

Reasons some survivors give for filing a police report include:

- Holding the perpetrator accountable.
- Regaining a sense of power and control.
- Documenting the crime.
- Preserving evidence of the assault.

Reasons some survivors give for not filing a police report include:

- Finding the process re-traumatizing.
- Encountering uninformed law enforcement officials.
- Knowledge that for every 100 sexual assaults committed, only 9 are prosecuted.
- Fear of testifying against the perpetrator if the case goes to trial.

If you choose to file a police report:

During the first interview, the police will ask very specific questions about the assault because it's important to fully document the crime. An advocate from the Sexual Assault Center can accompany you to provide emotional support during the interview, although they can't answer questions or talk for you. The officers will prepare a written report using the information you give them. Be sure to review the report before signing. You can request a copy for your own records. Although difficulty recalling details is distressing, it is a very common reaction to a traumatic experience. You can contact the police after the interview to provide them additional details.

Can I get services at the Sexual Assault Center even if I don't file a police report?

Absolutely. We provides services to sexual assault survivors regardless of their choice to file a police report or seek medical attention.



What is Human Trafficking?

Human trafficking is the denial of basic human rights to someone through forcing, tricking or manipulation—and it is against the law. Sometimes perpetrators manipulate victims to make them feel there is no way out. If you would like information about ways to leave a dangerous situation, please call Sexual Assault Center at 703.683.7273.



AM I AT RISK?

- ☐ Are you not free to leave your job or situation if you want?
- ☐ Are you not free to come and go as you please?
- ☐ Have you been threatened if you try to leave?
- ☐ Were you told you would have a legitimate job and then later found out you must do work in a job you do not feel is legitimate?
- ☐ Are you working off a debt that never seems to go away?
- ☐ Have you been threatened that you will be turned over to police or immigration officials?
- ☐ Has anyone threatened your family?
- ☐ Have you been abused physically or sexually?
- ☐ Does someone prohibit you from socializing or attending religious services?
- ☐ Are you working in the sex industry and feel trapped?

If you checked the box next to some of these questions, you may be experiencing or you may have experienced human trafficking. There are resources available to help you regardless of your language or immigration status.

Your Information

SAC Advocate Name _____

Advocate Contact Number _____

VWAP Advocate _____

Your Doctor/Nurse _____

Your Detective _____

Notes



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