

Manchester  
Rape  
Crisis



LISTENING • BELIEVING • SUPPORTING

## Supporting Survivors of Sexual Violence



## Information for Supporters

We have produced this guide for those of you supporting a friend, partner or family member who has survived rape or other forms of sexual violence. Whilst we do not claim to have all the answers we can help you to find the best way you can offer your support and the information in this leaflet provides some important ways that you can do this.

As each woman is an individual she will react differently to her trauma and will therefore need different kinds of support. It is likely that you too will have strong feelings about what has happened. You may feel angry, bewildered or that in some way you should have been able to prevent the attack and these feelings are natural and normal.

Manchester Rape Crisis can provide face-to-face support through counselling or telephone support to women survivors of sexual violence. We are able to offer you practical help, information and support via our helpline service.

### **Believe her**

It is vital that you show her that you care for her and believe her. She will be feeling very vulnerable and will be faced with people questioning her honesty and credibility. As someone close to her, your belief and support is necessary for her to begin to come to terms with the attack, so never at any time voice any doubts you might feel.

### **Give Her Control**

During the attack, she was overpowered and helpless to her attacker. She needs to feel that she has control over her life again and you can help her to begin to achieve this by letting her make decisions. Give her options about what you can do together, but let the final decision be hers. Do not force her to do anything she is unsure of or does not want to do.

### **Listen to her**

Listening to a survivor can be the key to helping her through her trauma. Never force her to talk when she isn't willing and don't try to offer advice. Just listen and follow her lead. Knowing that you are there if she needs you is really important. Be honest with her about how much support you can realistically give her.

### **Don't Blame Her**

Sadly, there are many myths around rape and sexual assault which can lead women to place blame on themselves. She may feel that she caused the rape by wearing 'provocative' clothing or that she should have been able to stop the attack. People she encounters may try to discredit her so let her know she is not to blame.

Never say, 'you should have done...' or, 'if only you had...' The attack was no fault of hers and by making such remarks you are blaming her for provoking the attack. No woman wants or asks to be raped and responding in this way will make it harder for her to put the blame where it belongs – with the attacker.

You may be the first person she has ever spoken to about the attack, even if it happened a long time ago. Your reaction is really important and may determine whether she ever speaks to anyone else about what has happened to her.

### **Let Her Feelings Show**

Each woman will have different thoughts and feelings about the attack. She may feel guilty, shameful or dirty or she may be angry, tearful or dismissive of the attack. Let her show how she is feeling by allowing her to cry, shout or to be quiet. Never say, 'don't cry' or 'forget it'. Such suggestions are asking the impossible of her.

### **Flashbacks**

Many women who survive sexual violence, experience flashbacks at one time or another. These are very vivid memories that feel as if they are actually happening in the present and can last for a few seconds to a few hours. Please see our grounding information for details about how to support a woman through flashbacks.

### **Support Her**

Try to support her in the decisions that she makes and be as clear as possible about what support you can or cannot offer. If she decides to report the attack to the police, offer to go with her if you can as she may find it difficult and distressing. If the report leads to a prosecution, it may be many months before the case comes before the court. She will be anxious and worried about giving evidence and may want someone to support her through this process.

She may also want help in other areas of her life, like someone to accompany her on the journey to work, or to stay with her in the house.

Do not take on more than you are able to do as it is important that you are consistent in what you can offer. Where you cannot provide what she needs, help her to find out what other options are available to her and if you are unsure contact us. If we can't provide the type of support you or the woman needs, we will work with you to locate a service or organisation who hopefully can.

### **Sexuality**

After an attack, her sexual needs and desires may have changed and she may not want the intimacy of cuddling or holding hands and sex may bring back painful memories. Be patient. Try to talk about both of your needs and feelings, but remember that she may need time to rebuild this side of her life.

## Support Yourself

You too are faced with a difficult experience and will feel many emotions, from hurt and protectiveness to anger and guilt. Find ways of getting support for you, whether through counselling, taking 'time out' calling our helpline or (with her permission) talking to a friend.

What survivors have said they want

*To convey to us that we are not to blame*

*To understand that we have mixed feelings*

*To be listened to*

*Patience – not rushing and taking things in our own time*

*To be believed, not doubted*

*Not to be asked too many questions*

*It is important that we have control over when, where and who we tell.*



## Takes women out of...

Abuse shatters lives, while living in secrecy, as a person you feel so exposed but also extremely isolated, all pride and dignity is removed whilst you are left trapped in a situation shrouded by lies. I had lost all sense of my being; I had conformed into what my abusers required me to be.

Fortunately, during counselling I was able to build and maintain a relationship, where all discussions were non-judgmental and allowed me to look inside and find myself again... the woman that I wanted to be.

**...the dark.**

Annual Report 2002

**Helpline: 0161 273 4500**

Monday – Friday: 10am – 4pm

Wednesday, Thursday: 6 – 9pm

[mrcrasacs@btconnect.com](mailto:mrcrasacs@btconnect.com)

[www.manchesterrapecrisis.co.uk](http://www.manchesterrapecrisis.co.uk)