



## EMOTIONAL FIRST-AID For Sexual Assault Survivors

There is no “right” or “wrong” way to react after a sexual assault. One survivor may react very emotionally; another may react with extreme calm. People are unique and there is no “one size fits all” when it comes to reactions after sexual assault. Everyone is different and we all heal in different ways. One thing that is common to most survivors is that **HEALING TAKES TIME**. Also, regardless of any decisions you made prior to the sexual assault, this is NOT YOUR FAULT. The responsibility for the assault lies with the person who sexually assaulted you.

After the assault, you may feel different emotions at different times. Please know that **you are not “going crazy.”** Allow yourself to express any emotions **where it is safe and private** enough to do so. You may feel like talking about what happened to you, however, it is best **not** to discuss details of your assault with others until you know you are in an emotionally safe place to handle their response. (Please note that you may be asked to give detailed information to the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner and/or Law Enforcement Personnel for the purpose of effective forensic evidence collection.)

After experiencing a trauma such as a sexual assault, your mind and body need time to heal. Your active participation in your healing process will help. You have already taken that first step by calling the DARCC hotline and/or coming to the hospital to address your physical needs. The following is a list of suggestions for ways to minimize the impact of your recent trauma on your brain and improve your recovery process:

- **Listen** to your body and pace yourself so that you do not overextend yourself.
- **Drink** lots of water to help your body get rid of the stress hormones flooding your body.
- **Eat** lots of fruits and vegetables. After a traumatic experience there is a tendency to seek comfort food (emotional eating). These types of foods are often unhealthy and increase the possibility of developing health problems, whereas a healthy diet helps speed up your physical recovery.
- **Stop** any internal/external conversation that feels critical or judgmental (“Why didn’t I/you...” or “What did I/you expect?” etc.).
- **Educate** yourself on issues about sexual assault. Learn about how it affects you, normal reactions to expect, and resources to help you. DARCC counselors can help.
- **Seek** support for yourself, but be careful to choose those friends and family members who have proven themselves to be helpful, trustworthy and have been accepting and non-judgmental in the past.
- **Engage** in activities that relieve stress (exercise, pray/meditate, cry, bathe, etc.).
- **Journal** – The practice of journaling activates memory consolidation and allows your brain to put the trauma in some kind of context.
- **Take care** of yourself first; otherwise you cannot be of much help to other loved ones.
- **Sleep** – Nothing is more important in your recovery than a **good night’s sleep**. If all else fails to help you sleep, then temporary use of sleep aids may be needed to help get you through the rough waters. Please consult your physician.
- **Regain** a sense of control – Starting to make simple decisions, such as what you would like to eat or when you would like to sleep, will help you get on the road to taking back your power and control.

These suggestions may help you to begin the healing process after sexual violence. However, many survivors need the support of a specially trained counselor in order to address the trauma impact and regain functioning. Please contact the **Dallas Area Rape Crisis Center (972-641-7273)** for counseling information and/or referral or contact Rape Abuse and Incest Network (800-656-4673) if you are outside of the Dallas area.