

# Common Reactions

*While each person responds differently, below are some common reactions after sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual abuse or exploitation.*

## Physical

Nausea/vomiting  
Tremors/shakiness  
Loss of coordination  
Sleep disturbances  
Easily startled/jumpy  
Chills  
Diarrhea  
Chest pains  
Rapid heart rate  
Stomach pain  
Headaches  
Muscle aches  
Difficulty breathing  
Fatigue  
Appetite changes  
Crying  
Tension  
Changes in sexual libido

## Emotional

Anxiety/worry  
Feeling overwhelmed  
Guilt/shame  
Sadness/depression  
Feeling lost/abandoned  
Fear/panic  
Anger/outrage/fury  
Feeling helpless/powerless  
Numbness  
Shock  
Irritability  
Self blame  
Grief  
Negative body image  
Sudden mood changes  
Disgust

## Spiritual

Change in sense of connection with university or community  
Loss of sense of safety  
Loss of sense of justice  
Change in worldview  
Doubts about beliefs  
Loss of trust in others  
Changes in spiritual or religious practices  
Sense of relating to other survivors  
Awareness of violence, privilege, and oppression  
Sense of shame

## Cognitive

Delayed processing  
Difficulty making decisions  
Flashbacks  
Nightmares  
Confusion  
Disorientation  
Difficulty with calculations  
Difficulty concentrating  
Memory problems  
Decreased attention span  
Racing thoughts  
Self-consciousness  
Suicidal thoughts  
Homicidal thoughts  
Trying not to think about it  
Thinking about it constantly

## Behavioral

Withdrawal/isolation  
Avoiding specific situations, people, or places  
Suspiciousness  
Increased nicotine use  
Increased alcohol/drug use  
Unusual behavior  
Overly vigilant in the environment  
Excessive humor  
Emotional outbursts  
Missing classes  
Changes in appearance  
Changes in usual activities  
Act like nothing has changed  
Changes in sexual behavior  
Self-injury

CENTER FOR  
*Survivors*

**24-Hour Crisis Line:** (517) 372-6666

Office: (517) 355-3551

**Crisis Chat 10am-10pm:** [centerforsurvivors.msu.edu](http://centerforsurvivors.msu.edu)

*Revised 9.14.20*

# Coping with Common Reactions

Everyone reacts to trauma differently, which includes coping with and healing from the trauma. It's important to know healing is possible. If you are struggling, it may help to try some of the coping strategies below. It can also help to reach out to a therapist in order to process your reactions and identify additional effective coping strategies.

## Relaxation and Grounding

- Talk to a friend
- Watch a show
- Do a puzzle
- Practice deep breathing
- Download a mindfulness app or learn about meditation
- Notice sounds of nature
- Eat mindfully
- Engage your five senses
- Remind yourself where you are in the present moment
- Take a hot bath or shower
- Light a candle

## Spiritual Coping

- Surround yourself with nature
- Practice acceptance
- Practice gratitude
- Use affirmations
- Pray or practice your religion
- Connect with others
- Volunteer for a good cause

## Emotional Release and Regulation

- Remind yourself that emotions are okay
- Yell or scream
- Punch a pillow
- Cry
- Watch something funny
- Tell someone how you feel
- Identify feelings
- Journal
- Listen to music
- Draw a picture
- Rip up paper
- Squeeze a stress ball
- Observe without judgement
- Remind yourself it was not your fault

## Coping through Movement

- Clean or tidy your space
- Do yoga, tai chi, or gentle stretching etc.
- Walk or run
- Dance
- Workout/exercise
- Throw or kick a ball
- Practice a sport
- Stretch

## Thought Challenging

- Ask yourself: Is this a fact or a thought?
- Learn more about thinking patterns and habits
- Examine pros and cons of situations
- Try to come up with information to challenge negative thoughts
- Think about what you would tell a loved one if they were having negative thoughts
- Identify your triggers: Notice what is happening in your world before you have negative thoughts
- Notice the feelings that go with the thought.