

INFORMATION BOOKLET



KERRY RAPE &
SEXUAL ABUSE CENTRE

FOR FRIENDS & FAMILY OF VICTIMS OF RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

Kerry Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre Ltd.,
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The National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence
An Oifig Náisiúnta um Fhoréigean Baile, Gnéasach agus Inscnebhualthe a Chosc

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The Kerry Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre was established in 1992 to provide a free and confidential counselling and support service to victims of rape and sexual abuse. Centre staff chose to change the name to the **Kerry Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre** in February 2000. We feel this reflects more accurately the nature of our work in the centre.

We believe that survivors of sexual violence and abuse have the right to be treated with respect and sensitivity.

We aim to provide a place of help and healing for survivors of rape and sexual abuse by offering care and support in a confidential environment.

WE OFFER;

- One to one counselling
- Telephone counselling
- Support with medical and legal procedures
- Court accompaniment
- A 24 hr emergency service and on-call service to the Sexual Assault Treatment Unit at Kerry General Hospital
- Education and Research Programmes and Information

SUPPLEMENTARY SERVICES

We also offer support to family and friends and partners

The SAYIT programme (Safety Awareness Youth Information Training) to schools and interested groups in Kerry.

OUTREACH SERVICES

Our main centre is Tralee but our outreach endeavours to meet the needs of victims and their families throughout the county by having our offices available that meet our criterion for privacy and confidentiality in Killarney, Dingle and Listowel.

*You are not alone,
many others have similar experiences.
Although it is often difficult to talk,
we promise to listen.*

FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Sexual assault can have a significant impact on those who are in any type of close relationship with a survivor, producing confusion and many emotions for significant others. It is painful to think about someone we love being harmed in this way.

If someone you love has been the victim of sexual violence, there are a number of things you can do to help with the healing process. Although you may naturally tend to focus on the survivor, it is also important that you deal with your own thoughts and feelings about sexual violence so that you can be most supportive. You may experience intense reactions due to your caring for the survivor. Just as the survivor's greatest task is self-care at this time, you will also need to find ways to take care of yourself. Your feelings may differ significantly from those of the victim.

To be truly supportive to the survivor, you will need to respond to the feelings that the assault raises for you. It is important to be willing to face your own fears and prejudices about sexual violence and to have accurate information. Our culture holds a lot of myths about sexual assault that can greatly impede the healing and recovery of both the survivor and their loved ones. Reading this booklet may help.

HOW TO BE HELPFUL

Sometimes people believe that the best way to deal with crisis is to deny it. You may find yourself saying, "don't worry/.don't cry/don't think about it". Such reactions can make the survivor feel unheard, and denial is not a helpful response for many reasons. Sexual violence is significantly stressful and to imply that it is ok is disrespectful and discounting to the survivor. This attitude can create more problems than it resolves. Allow your loved one to have their emotional reactions.

Sometimes the most supportive thing you can do is to simply LISTEN. You do not have to (and probably cannot) "fix it". This can be difficult as it is never easy to witness the pain of a loved one. Yet often being a supportive witness to their pain can help empower the survivor because you demonstrate that regardless of what happened,

SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN SEXUALLY ASSAULTED HAS EXPERIENCED THE ULTIMATE LOSS OF POWER.

Helping your loved one to regain a sense of control over their lives can be very important. It is not unusual for survivors to struggle with making even small decisions after an assault. Give your ideas but allow them to make their own decisions even if they struggle. It is an important step towards healing from violence. It also is important that the survivor believes that you trust him or her to make his or her own decisions.

It is especially important that the survivor makes her or his own decision around whether or not to report the assault to the Gardai. You can provide your thoughts about this and then let her or him choose the path. Going through the Garda investigation and the Criminal Justice System can take a long time, be very stressful and may not result in a conviction. The system is not perfect. The survivor must be the one to decide what is right for him or her.

NO MATTER WHAT, IT WASN'T THEIR FAULT.

Sexual assaults can occur under circumstances where the survivor may have been involved in activities or behaviours that others may question or even disapprove of (use of alcohol or drugs, going to unknown places, not locking the doors, fighting back, not fighting back, etc.). Please remember that a decision to participate in any of these behaviours is never the "cause" of a sexual assault. Violent abusive behaviour is always the responsibility of the perpetrator.

Poor judgement or risky behaviour does not warrant becoming a victim of violence, or give someone else the right to rape. Remember that breaking rules and testing boundaries are common behaviours, especially for teenagers. Often, trying to place the "cause" of the assault on something the victim did or didn't do is our attempt to maintain the illusion that we can be in total control over our life. We like to believe that as long as we never make a poor judgement, we will always be safe.

you still accept and love them even with their reactions. If you can bear it, i.e. hearing about what happened and being with them and their reactions, maybe they can also.

Do recognise your own limitations, and if it is too much for you, seek help from someone trained in counselling survivors of sexual violence. This is not a failure on your part.

If the survivor becomes actively suicidal or physically self-destructive, seek professional help immediately to keep them safe.

WE ALL REACT DIFFERENTLY

Men and women often react differently to the assault of a loved one. Husbands, fathers, brothers, boyfriends may react initially with anger and a desire for revenge. They may blame themselves, out of the desire to have been a "better protector", and to defend against their own feelings of helplessness. Acting on these reactions may not be helpful to the survivor. The survivor needs you to be safe, reasonable, and supportive, in order to assist them to take the steps necessary to heal and recover.

Female friends and family members may have their own strong reactions of fear and vulnerability to hearing about the violence and may consciously send the survivor the message to "not talk about it". It is important to be aware of your own reactions. It is also important that the survivor, as much as possible, has the power to make his or her own decisions in the aftermath of the assault.

The survivor may react towards you in confusing ways. They may seem very "unlike" themselves for awhile. Know that the individual you love has been deeply affected by this experience, and it will take a while for them to sort through their thoughts and emotions.

Being a victim of sexual violence can lead us to have many questions about our ability to trust others and ourselves. This struggle with being able to trust can impact on many of our relationships. Reading this booklet may help you to better understand the trauma and aftermath of sexual victimisation; and be more helpful to your loved one.

Certainly, trying to be aware and careful goes a long way towards safety, but sexual violence is never an appropriate consequence for making a mistake. The perpetrator chose to commit an act of great physical and psychological harm towards another human being in the most violating and degrading way possible. That is the responsibility of the perpetrator, and they need to be held accountable.

IT MAY TAKE A WHILE.

Being the victim of or witness to violence is a significant life stressor. All significant stressors require that people change and adapt towards regaining life balance. The changes you see in your loved one and in your relationship may be difficult. It may seem that it takes a long time for the survivor and the relationship to find a new, comfortable balance. Have patience and know that you and your loved one do not have to do this without some guidance. You are not alone. Thousands of survivors and their families heal and recover from sexual violence, and there are skilled supportive services available.

ABOUT SEXUAL INTIMACY

Being a victim of sexual violence may affect feelings about sexual intimacy for some time after the incident. Sexual contact can stir up feelings and reactions for victims, which are related to the violence.

If you are the sexual partner of the survivor try to have patience. The survivor may desire little or no physical contact for a while or may wish to limit contact strictly to demonstrations of affection. Remember, the survivor lost the power to control what happened to them during the sexual violence. They need to regain their confidence in the ability to have physical control over their body.

It is important to recognise the possibility of temporary change in an intimate relationship, due to effects of the assault. It is often a part of the healing path following a sexual assault. Remember that although some survivors recover from the trauma of sexual violence and re-establish loving intimate relationship.

WHAT IS COUNSELLING?

Counselling can be described as a process which provides help, support and an understanding listener. Counselling helps clients to gain clearer insight into themselves and their situation so that they are better able to draw on their own resources to help themselves, by creating a place of acceptance.

The main focus of the counselling provided by the Kerry Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre is non-directive - this means that the counsellor will not offer advice on what you should do. Often people come to counselling wanting someone to take control of the situation but in reality you as the client, already have the answers, you might just need to talk it through in an environment where you feel accepted and respected.

COUNSELLING AND CONFIDENTIALITY.

Everything that is said between the client and the counsellor is treated in total confidence. Confidentiality will only be limited in exceptional circumstances, i.e. confidentiality will be limited if there is a concern regarding the sexual abuse of a minor (under 18 years). If confidentiality is to be limited it will be talked through with the client in advance.

SOME IMPORTANT THINGS YOU CAN DO.

- Believe him or her
- Be yourself - treat the survivor just as you normally do. Try not to be overly protective.
- Express your caring and concern for the survivor.
- Allow the survivor to have her or his feelings.
- Reassure the survivor that confusing and painful feelings are to be expected.
- Let the survivor know that the assault was not her or his fault. Do not judge or blame the survivor for his/her actions.
- Remember that the powerlessness is a big issue. You may guide the survivor. But let the survivor have control of her or his own life and make her or his own decisions about how to proceed.
- Encourage, but do not force the survivor to talk. Listen in a caring way, but don't try to "fix".
- Help the survivor understand the importance of getting medical attention, gently encourage seeking help from those with expertise in sexual violence.
- Find healthy ways to deal with your anger, rage, and fears without further traumatising the survivor.
- Respect the confidentiality of the survivor.
- **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.** Make sure YOU have emotional support, if necessary.

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5, Greenview Terrace, Princes Quay, Tralee

Freephone 1800 633 333

email: krcc@eircom.net

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9am-5pm Monday - Friday

Athlone Rape Crisis Centre	1800 306600
Carlow & South Leinster Rape Crisis & Counselling Centre	1800 727727
Sexual Violence Centre Cork	1800 496496
Donegal Sexual Abuse & Rape Crisis Centre	1800 448844
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre.....	1800 778888
Galway Rape Crisis Centre	1850 355355
Kerry Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre	1800 633333
Kilkenny Rape Crisis & Counselling Centre	1800 478478
Limerick Rape Crisis Centre	1800 311511
Mayo Rape Crisis Centre	1800 234900
Rape Crisis & Sexual Abuse Centre (N.E.) (Dundalk)	1800 212122
Rape Crisis & Sexual Abuse Centre (NI) (Belfast).....	04890 329002
Rape & Sexual Abuse Support Service (Wexford).....	1800 330033
Sligo Rape Crisis Centre	1800 750780
Tipperary Rape Crisis Centre	1800 340340
Tullamore Sexual Abuse & Rape Crisis Counselling Service	1800 323232
Waterford Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre.....	1800 296296