

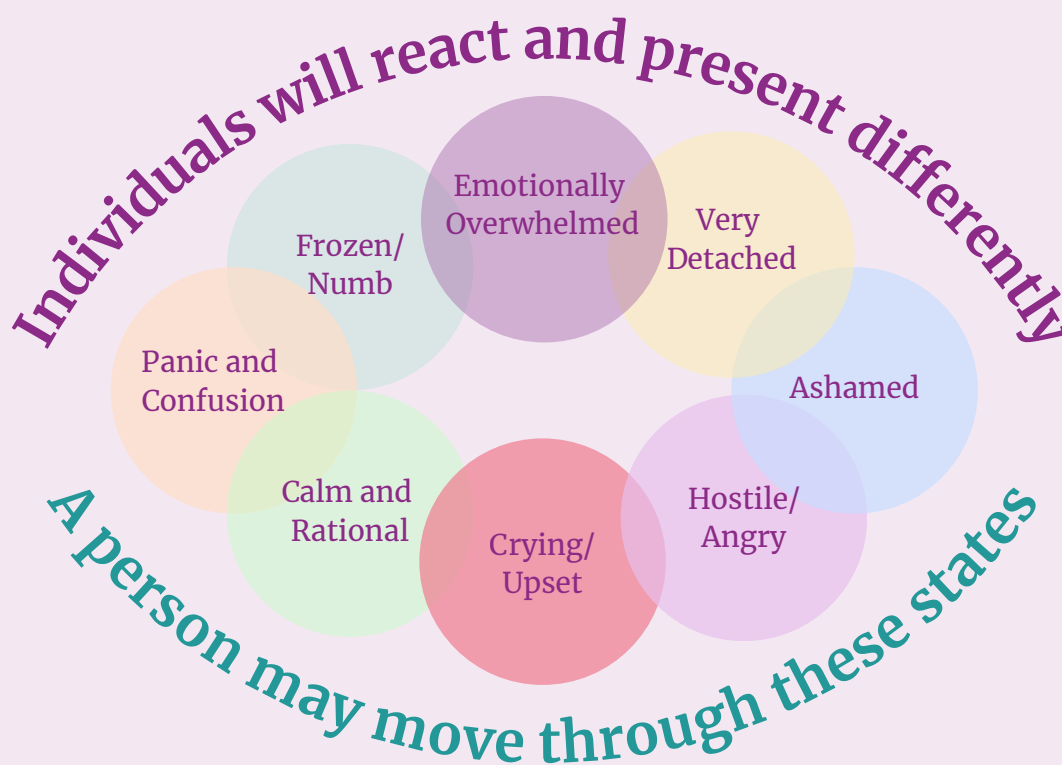
What are the Impacts of Rape & Sexual Assault?

People have very individual responses to the trauma of rape and sexual assault and the long-term effects also vary widely. Because of this, it is important to respect each person's way of coping. These impacts may occur many years after a rape or assault as well as in the immediate aftermath.

Immediate Impacts of Rape and Sexual Assault

A person's behaviour in the aftermath of an assault can range from frozen to panicked, numb to angry, laughter to tears. Some people can appear calm and rational. Others may:

- feel hyper-alert or vigilant
- be unable to eat or sleep
- blame themselves for the attack
- have flashbacks to the attack
- experience confusion or helplessness
- feel a sense of shame or violation or degradation
- feel a compulsion to wash
- obsess on details of the rape or assault
- become suicidal or self-harm



Behaviour following an experience of rape or sexual violence

Everyone's reaction to experiencing sexual violence is different: a victim/survivor may want to talk or be completely silent. They might be blaming themselves or feeling angry, upset or numb.

It is important to note that a range of reactions to sexual violence and rape are possible, and there is no "right" or "normal" way to react.

If you are supporting someone following an experience of sexual violence or rape, one of the most important things you can do for a victim or survivor of sexual violence is to tell them that you believe them and you are there for them.

Long-Term Impacts of Rape and Sexual Assault

In the long term, the effects of trauma like rape and sexual assault can appear across different categories. These can include:

- **Physical**, such as self-neglect, eating disorders, digestive problems, sleep disruption and stress-related health issues.
- **Emotional**, such as overreactions to any stimulus, a need to tightly control their environment, mood swings, anxiety, depression, substance abuse or suicidal thinking.
- **Cognitive**, such as difficulty handling everyday tasks, or having impaired memory or concentration that can lead to losing a job or leaving education.
- **Interpersonal**. They may lose the capacity to trust, feel too ashamed or self-blame too much to sustain a relationship, or feel unable to be in social situations.

These impacts can collide and compound, and interact with each other in different ways. While a person's life is changed by trauma, in DRCC we know that people can – and do – heal following an experience of rape or sexual assault.

Remember: You can call the 24-hour National Freephone Helpline at 1800 77 8888 at any time to receive free, confidential support.