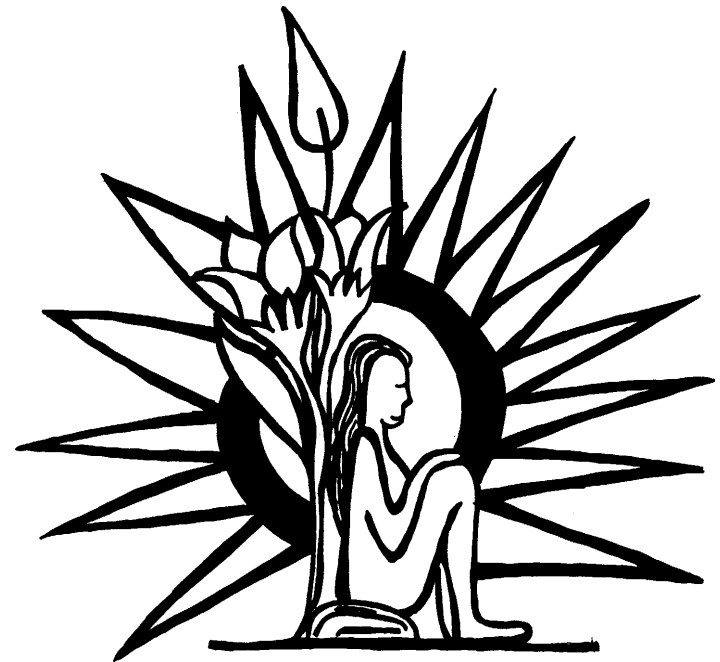


*HEALING
IS POSSIBLE*



Zig Zag - Sexual Assault Service
Introductory Counselling Booklet

First published in 1997
by Zig Zag
Young Women's Resource Centre
575 Old Cleveland Road
CAMP HILL Q 4152

© 1997 Zig Zag

Art Work by Sarah Dennis
Compiled by Cheryl Parsons, Betti Chapelle and Shirley Pyatt
Printed by Allstate Printers



children, the abuse continued for more than one year.

(Unmasking Young Women's Lives, Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre, 1993)

84% of women not married who experienced assault in the 12 month period covered by the 1991 QLD Crime Victims Survey were between 15 and 24 years.

(Unmasking Young Women's Lives, Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre, 1993)

53% of assaults on women were carried out by offenders aged 15 - 24 according to QLD Women's Policy Unit 1991.

(Unmasking Young Women's Issues, Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre, 1993)

The 1991 QLD Victims of Crime Survey revealed that in 31% of the assaults on women, the offender was a current or former partner.

(Unmasking Young Women's Issues, Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre, 1993)





Over 90% of sexual assault victims are female. (Boney, 1988)

Studies have shown that a large proportion of rapes (about 70%) are premeditated and planned.

(Adult Sexual Assault, NSW Dept. of Health, 1988)

Almost half the reported rapes (42%) occur in the victims or the offenders home with less than 3% in ill-lit streets.

(Adult Sexual Assault, NSW Dept. of Health, 1988)

Approximately 72% of rapists are know to their victims, 28% are total strangers.

(Adult Sexual Assault, NSW Dept. of Health, 1988)

71% of incest offenders are younger than 35 years old.

(Adult Sexual Assault, NSW Dept. of Health, 1988)

28% of incest offenders are aged between 35 - 55 years old.

(Adult Sexual Assault, NSW Dept. of Health, 1988)

By the age of 18 years...1 in 3 or 4 girls and 1 in 8 or 9 boys will have experienced some form of sexual assault. Risk to persons with a developmental disability of being abused increases eightfold.

(Unmasking Young Women's Issues, Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre, 1993)

Incest is usually not a one- off occurrence. For two out of three children, the abuse occurred more than once. For 30% of these

Index

- Believing It Happened 1
- Myths about Sexual Abuse 13
- Sexual Assault by a Friend/Acquaintance 15
- Medical/Health Information 17
- The Effects of Abuse 20
- Counselling 24
- Support Groups 27
- Definitions 28
- Statistics 30

Sexual assault is when someone forces you to have sex when you don't want to, or touches you in a way you don't like

(Taking Care of Yourself, About Sexual Assault, Brisbane Women's Health Centre, 1996)

Sexual abuse constitutes a range of unwanted behaviours that are not expressions of sexuality. The person is unable to give legitimate consent to acts of sexual violence because of the unequal power base in the relationship.

(Young Women's Community Action Research Project, Zig Zag, 1996)

It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear.

(Brownmiller, S., Against Our Will, Men, Women and Rape)



Definitions

Incest includes any unwanted sexual violation or violence (i.e. unwanted touching or sexual behaviours) perpetrated on a child or young person by a person who is a position of trust in relation to the child or young person. In this definition, incest is rape.

(BRICC, 1996)

Sexual Violence is any contact (physical, emotional, verbal) that is faced, and is directed specifically because of ones gender. This includes behaviours such as harassment, verbal abuse, incest, pornography, rape and domestic violence.

(Zig Zag, 1993)

A definition of violence by young women:

'I'm always waiting for something to happen'. *(Research Project, 1997)*

Violence involves the violation of your rights as a human being. In violence, your right to your space; your right to your body; your right to be who you are; is violated.

Incest is too gentle a word for a crime which is better described as RAPE. 75% of all child sexual abuse occurs within the family. Instead of being taught an amorphous fear about strangers girls should be given real information about sex. All this century professional helpers have tended to dismiss girl's complaints of family rape as sexual fantasies. It is the dominance of men within the family that makes it so very easy for them to sexually exploit the girls. The need to change family relationships is totally apparent.

Believing It Happened

If you have been sexually abused, you are not alone. One out of three girls and one out of seven boys are abused by the time they reach eighteen.

(Bass & Davis, 1994, p.3)

If you were abused as a child or young person, you are probably still dealing with the effects in your life today. You may be having trouble at school, on your job, with relationships and sex, or in your family. You may feel bad about yourself or think something is wrong with you, if you had these experiences while you were growing up.

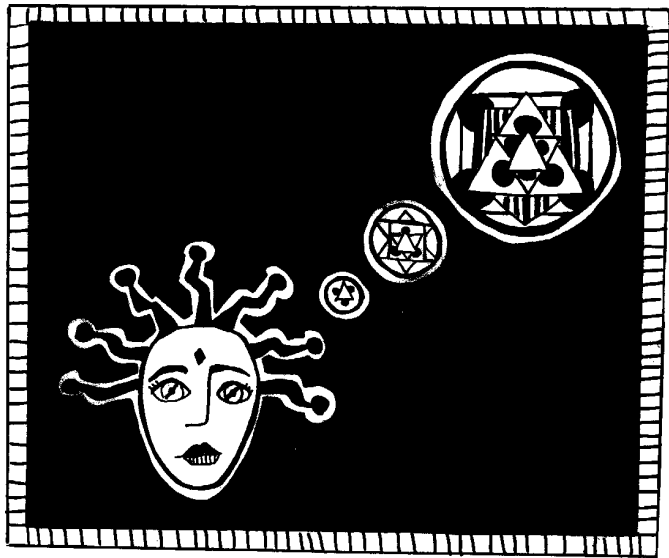
The most important thing for you to know is that it is possible to heal from child sexual abuse. You don't have to live with the effects of abuse for the rest of your life. If you are willing to work hard and find good support, you can not only heal but thrive. *(ibid, p.3f)*

Memories

Some people remember their experiences clearly, however for others their memories are fuzzy or unclear. Memories can also be blocked out completely as a way of coping with the pain. What matters is how you felt at the time. An abuser had the power to manipulate and control you. Your trust was shattered and the world stopped being safe. You felt terrified, hurt, ashamed, or confused. Even abuse that isn't physical can leave deep scars. It doesn't matter how often you were abused - even after some-one sexually abuses you for thirty seconds the world is not the same.

The decision to heal from sexual abuse is a powerful, positive choice

Once you decide to face your abuse, you probably want to get it over with as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, lasting change takes time. It can be hard work and you may find it hard to study, work, take care of your children or even make dinner. You may be unable to sleep, eat or simply stop crying. It is scary to face the unknown. But it is also a tremendous relief to stop running away from the pain. It is important to find someone you can trust to tell them about your experiences. Hopefully, in time you will have many people to support you.



Support Groups

Zig Zag also offers support groups. The types of groups offered may include: information groups or therapeutic support groups.

What are Support groups?

- A time for connection and mutual support with other young women.
- The chance to 'break the silence' by sharing your experience of abuse, in a safe setting with the support of the group.
- The opportunity to understand the impact of abuse by listening to others in the group.
- Support and encouragement from your peers to recognise your strengths and ability to move on from the abuse.
- A place to exchange information about services, things to do and places to go that reduce isolation and loneliness.

- loneliness

What are your rights when receiving counselling?

- confidentiality
- privacy
- to have your complaints or feedback listened and responded to with respect
- to choose your counsellor

Evaluating the Counselling

It is important for us to hear from you on how you feel about the counselling service we offer. We would appreciate your feedback on what you did and didn't like and what we could have done differently. One way you can give us your feedback is by answering an anonymous questionnaire after you have decided to stop seeing your counsellor. You can send this back to us later on, if you choose to. Another way to give us your feedback is by talking to your counsellor.

The First Appointment

During the first session we talk generally about goals, expectations and directions the counselling could take. What do you hope counselling will achieve? If you decide to return and wish to begin counselling, the next session will involve the counsellor briefly repeating the things said and heard in the first session.



What you can do to get through the hard bits

Sometimes it gets worse before it gets better. There are things you can do to look after yourself during this time. Remember there is light at the end of the tunnel and things will change for the better.

- Don't try to hurt or kill yourself.
- Remind yourself that you're not going crazy.
- Find people you can talk to (support workers, counsellors, friends, youth workers, other survivors...).
- Allow yourself time to think about the abuse as much as you need to.
- Drop any responsibilities that aren't essential.
- Avoid addictions to drugs or alcohol to stop the pain. Numbing your feelings will only make the crisis last longer.
- Get out of dangerous or abusive situations. You deserve to be safe and to live free from violence. Ring a service who can help you - Domestic Violence line, a sexual assault service, police, Department of Families Youth and Community Care.
- Sit tight and ride out the storm. Your thinking isn't clear right now. Unless you're in danger, this is not usually a good time for major life changes.
- Develop a belief in something greater than yourself.
- Talk to people who are farther along in their healing and can give you hope and inspiration.
- Do as many nice things for yourself as possible.

(*ibid*)

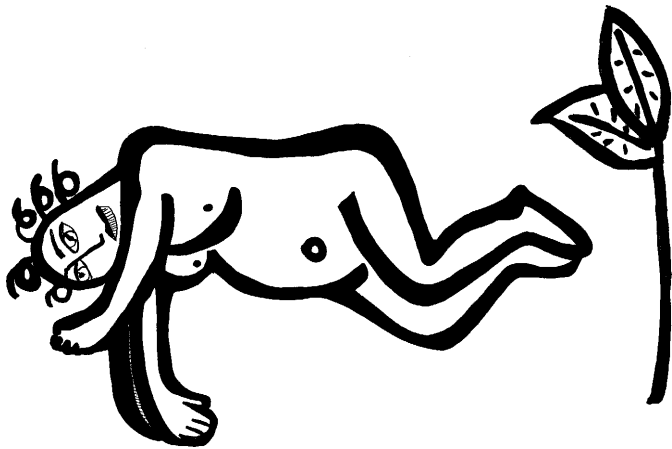
Tips for dealing with panic

Panic is what you feel when your feelings seem out of control. You're scared. Your heart is pounding. You can't catch your breath. The fear keeps getting stronger. You want to run away.

Panic attacks can be caused by triggers - things in the present that remind you of times you were terrified in the past.

Here are some things you can do if you have a panic attack:

- Don't rush into action. Don't drive. Don't drink or abuse drugs. Don't hurt yourself or someone else. Acting out of panic leads to poor choices.
- Do whatever works for you to calm yourself down. It helps if you can make up a list of these things when you are not feeling scared.
- Your list may include people you can contact or be around who will help, comforting things you can do for yourself and things you can say to yourself which help you get through it.



What does a Counsellor do?

- Listens to your story and believes you
- Provides you with information about what counselling is so you will know what to expect
- Provides choices about ways to explore thoughts and feelings such as through art, writing, talking, support groups
- Helps you find supports in your community
- Helps you to rediscover your own inner strengths
- Is a safe person to be with
- Encourages you to make choices about your life and respects your needs and decisions
- Is a companion in your journey to better self knowledge
- Builds a relationship with you based on honesty and openness
- Provides information and choice
- Provides a confidential service

Issues that might come up in Counselling

- memories and feelings about your experience of abuse
- anger
- relationships
- trust
- self esteem
- confidence
- being assertive
- protective behaviours
- sexuality
- body image

Counselling

Practical Issues

Zig Zag provides initial contact sessions to explore support needs and ongoing counselling options. Medium to long term counselling is offered with regular opportunities to review the counselling sessions, to determine whether they continue to meet your needs.

It is important for you to make an appointment to see the counsellor to make sure that when you arrive she is here and has the time to see you. Anytime you are unable to make it to an appointment, ring and we'll make another time. Counselling support may also be provided over the phone.

What is Counselling?

- A time for you to tell your story and explore thoughts and feelings when you are ready
- A safe place where you can be yourself and not be judged or blamed
- An opportunity to gather information about issues that are important to you.
- Support with decision making and choices
- A time to explore solutions you haven't tried
- Support to find your own answers and to change and grow in your own time

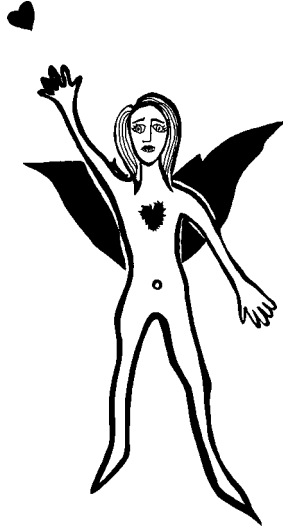
Your list may look something like this:

1. Breathe.
2. Get my teddy bear.
3. Call a friend (name).
4. Call another friend if the first isn't home.
5. Stroke the cat.
6. Take a hot bath.
7. Write a hundred times, "I'm safe. They can't hurt me anymore."
8. Go for a walk or run.
9. Listen to soothing music.
10. Pray.
11. Write in my diary for fifteen minutes without stopping.
12. Watch an old movie on TV.
13. Eat Campbell's tomato soup.
14. Start again at the top.

Remember that the period of panic will pass. Many women have found that a special friend or a counsellor and their own inner strength have given them the hope to go on. You survived the abuse by drawing on your inner resources. You can survive the memories and in time they won't take up so much of your thoughts.

Believing it happened

Sometimes it is hard to believe that the abuse really happened. It may be too horrible to accept what happened so we pretend it didn't. If the adults around you told you that your experiences didn't happen, you probably became confused and unsure about what was real. Now that you are older, it's important for you to recognise that someone did those things to you. They did happen. Denying that things have happened or telling yourself that they weren't that bad is a normal way of dealing with things that are very traumatic. To get on with our lives it is important that we trust our own experiences - it can take time but believing it happened is an important part of the process of healing.



Talking about it

It takes a lot of courage to tell someone what happened to you. You may have tried to tell people before and they didn't believe you or they blamed you. Telling someone may have led to all sorts of changes in your life - like talking to police, going to court and having to live away from your family. You may have never felt safe to tell anyone. When you first tell someone you may feel both terrified and relieved. It's a big secret to carry around all by yourself. Your abuser probably wanted you to keep it a secret because he knew it was wrong. You may be afraid about what he or others will do now that you've broken the silence. It is the silence that keeps us isolated and abused. It is a bad secret - one that serves the purpose of keeping you hurt, vulnerable and at risk of further abuse. You deserve better.

Telling someone about the abuse has many benefits:

- You face the truth about your abuse.
- You can get help.
- You get more in touch with your feelings.

- find it hard to show affection appropriately

What Services Does Zig Zag offer?

Zig Zag - Young Women's Resource Centre, is an organisation that provides support and counselling services in the area of sexual abuse. Zig Zag works with women from the ages of 12 to 25 years. The organisation recognises that young women face unique issues, different from their older counterparts. Young women are less likely to be believed or supported. They often do not have the resources to access support and services. Young women are often more vulnerable to abuse from both men and institutions. Yet these are the women who will shape the future for the following generations.

Zig Zag focuses on the issues of accommodation and sexual abuse. The centre offers information, support, celebration, advocacy and referral. Individual counselling is available for sexual abuse. Limited generalist counselling is also available. Other services include support groups, medium-term supported accommodation and long-term community housing project, a library, worker training, the development of resources and worker consultation in relation to issues of

- abuse alcohol, drugs or food

Sexuality

A child who has been sexually abused has had an adult's sexual knowledge and needs imposed upon her. She has been denied the opportunity to develop and explore her own sexuality. Sexual behaviour becomes linked with powerlessness and confusion. It may also be the only source of affection and approval the child experiences.

As an adult you may

- go numb during sex
- avoid sex
- seek sex to meet other emotional needs
- be vulnerable to sexual exploitation

Parenting

A child who is abused may have no experience of appropriate parenting or healthy family life.

As an adult you may

- find it hard to balance your needs with those of your children
- be over protective

- You see your experience through the eyes of a person who cares.
- You create deeper, more honest relationships.
- You join a courageous group of survivors who refuse to suffer in silence.
- You help end abuse by breaking the silence in which it thrives.
- You are a model for other survivors.
- You (eventually) feel proud and strong.

(ibid, p.30)

When you tell someone and they listen with respect and caring, your life changes dramatically

If you're thinking of telling someone, ask yourself:

- Does this person love and respect me?
- Have we been able to talk about personal things before?
- Does this person care about how I feel?
- Do I trust this person? Do I feel safe with this person?

(ibid, p.31)

If you can say yes to these questions, you're choosing someone who's likely to support you. Remember not to give up though - sometimes it takes time to find someone who will listen. You can also talk to one of the sexual assault counsellors at Zig Zag. Often it can help to talk to someone who isn't part of your social circle. Someone who will understand what you are talking about, who won't judge you and who can help you make sense of your experience.

It wasn't your fault

Most children blame themselves for being sexually abused. As young woman or adults many of us continue to blame ourselves. But sexual abuse is *never* the fault of the child. (ibid, p.35)

There are lots of reasons why women blame themselves. The abuser may have told you that it was your fault. You may have been

punished if you told. As a child it is scary to believe that the adults on whom you depend are out of control. It is simpler to believe that you are responsible. Some young women blame themselves because they took gifts or money from the abuser or because there were parts of the relationship or the touch that they enjoyed. This is very confusing but it doesn't mean you are to blame. The abuser used these things to put the blame on you and away from him. If you were able to get some small thing back from the experience, give yourself credit. That was how you survived.

Keep it a secret

There are lots of ways that someone can make you do sexual things when you don't want to. They could:

- be older or bigger than you
- be someone you've been taught to obey
- make you feel scared
- be someone you trust
- make you feel special or important
- make you feel like you've got no choice

He knew he was doing something wrong. That's why he made you keep it a secret.

You might feel

Confused

- you might hate the abuser now, when they were someone you used to trust
- you might still like or love them, but hate what they did to you

Sexual abuse betrays a child's trust, and denies her the experience of loving intimacy.

As an adult you may

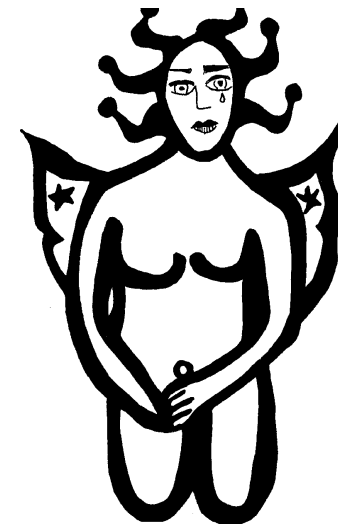
- avoid closeness to avoid betrayal
- become involved with abusive people
- cling to people for the approval you didn't get as a child
- put other people's needs first because you feel like you don't deserve to have your needs considered

Your Body

The experience of sexual abuse produces confusing, frightening and possibly painful bodily sensations in a child. One way that children cope with this is by learning to go numb or by detaching themselves from what is happening physically.

As an adult you may

- be disconnected from your bodily sensations
- feel bad about your body
- inflict pain or injury on yourself



The Effects of Abuse

Self Esteem

Being sexually abused gave you the message that what you wanted or how you felt didn't matter. The abuser may have blamed you for his behaviour, or you may have felt responsible, even though you were powerless to stop the abuse.

As an adult you may feel that

- you have no rights
- you have no control over your life
- you're a bad person

Feelings

Sexual abuse can produce a range of emotional reactions, including confusion, fear, betrayal, guilt, anger and grief. Because these feelings are difficult for a child to deal with, they are often blocked out.

As an adult you may

- have difficulty identifying or expressing feelings
- not trust your feelings
- feel like your emotions are out of control

Relationships

Guilty

- because you feel like it's your fault it happened, or you should have been able to stop it

Ashamed

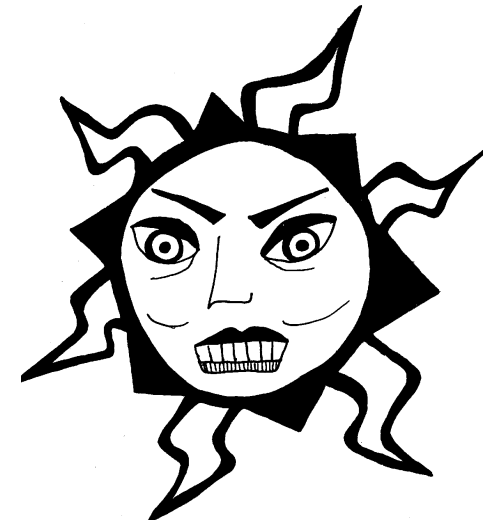
- because of the things the abuser did
- because of what other people might think

Alone

- because you think it doesn't happen to anyone else
- because it was a secret

Angry

- at the abuser
- at other people for not helping you
- at yourself for not being able to stop it happening

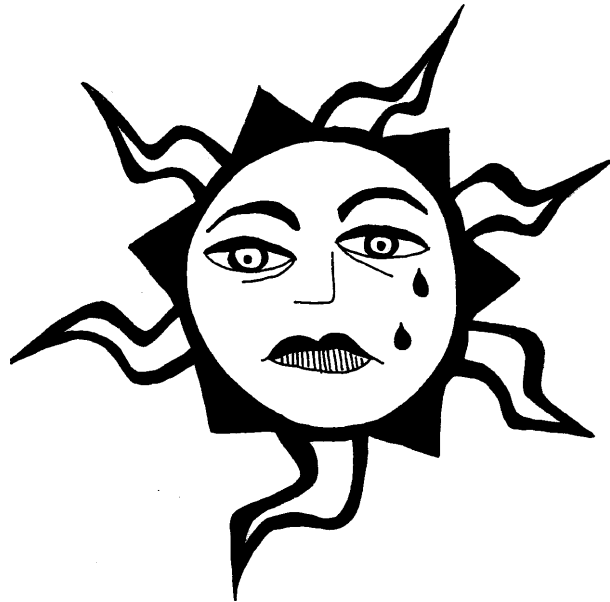


Scared

- because you don't want it to happen any more
- because of what they said will happen if you tell anyone

Sad

- because your life isn't the way you want it to be
- because your family isn't the way you want it to be



trust to involve you in any sexual activity?

The abuser was probably someone you knew and trusted, and was probably male - he could have been your father, stepfather, grandfather, uncle, brother or other trusted adult. This package refers to the abuser as "he" because most are male, but the information is just as relevant to you if you were sexually abused by a woman.

Children are very trusting, and have a natural need for affection and approval. Children also have very little power over what happens in their lives - they are taught to obey adults and look to them for guidance.

Sexual Abuse:

- is a misuse of adult power
- is a betrayal of a child's trust and affection
- is a denial of a child's right to feel safe and valued
- is a violation of a child's personal boundaries and sense of self

An adult who sexually abuses a child knows that what he is doing is wrong - so he makes her keep his secret. He may keep her silent by making her feel responsible for what he is doing to her, or by making threats about what will happen if she tells anyone. She may think that she would be blamed, or that no one would believe her - and adults often don't want to hear when a child tries to tell them.

If you were sexually abused as a child, you have lived through a traumatic experience which can have lasting effects.

You are also a strong, resourceful and courageous person who has survived and coped in whatever ways have been available

the assault you may still be able to make a complaint and police will rely on other evidence. Medical evidence provides proof that a sexual act took place, however, which can be very important, particularly if the abuser is denying that anything happened.

The police arrange the examination - either through a Government Medical Officer whose job it is to take physical evidence for the courts, or through the Royal Women's Hospital where they have doctors trained to provide this service.

The medical examination can be a difficult experience as it requires you to be thoroughly examined, including internally (the doctor will examine your vagina or anus depending on the nature of the assault). The doctor will also take samples of your hair and any hair and semen from the abuser that may be left on your body. You are entitled to have a support person with you during this examination.

If you were abused in the past

You may still be experiencing some of the effects on your physical and emotional health and well being from an abuse that happened in the past. This may include physical problems such as internal injuries, problems with menstruation or other gynaecological problems. You may also have problems with relationships, eating, drugs and alcohol or sleeping. You may want some treatment or assistance from health professionals such as doctors, nurses, natural therapists, health workers or counsellors. Ask the Zig Zag counsellors for ideas or see the list of doctors and natural therapists in this kit.

If you were sexually abused as a child

When you were a child or a teenager, did an adult (or someone older or more powerful than you) use their position of authority or

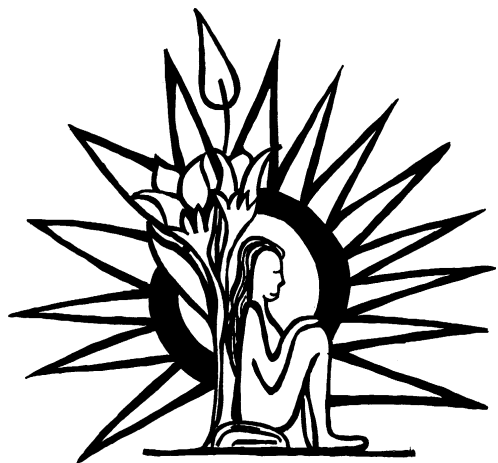
Some things that might be happening

crying
keeping to yourself
fighting
running away
stealing
hurting your body
getting drunk
taking drugs
having sex with lots of people
eating too much
not eating enough
having nightmares
not being able to sleep
body pains
tiredness
scared of having a boyfriend
not trusting people
doing badly at school

Support and Information

- you might be worried that your body has been damaged, that you're pregnant, or that you have a sexually transmitted disease - or what will happen when you go to the doctor
- you might want to know what will happen if you go to the police
- you might want to know where you can live if you leave home
- you might want to know how to help if it's happening to someone you know

If you would like some support and information about these or other issues, you can talk to one of the sexual assault workers at Zig Zag. There is also a list of other services in this kit and more information about your legal and medical options.



Medical/ Health Information

If you have been recently sexually assaulted

Whether or not you want to report to police, there are lots of good reasons for you to see a doctor.

You need to care for your immediate physical needs. You might have been injured in ways that, as yet, you are not aware. Seeing a doctor may ease any fears you might have about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or unwanted pregnancy. Knowing what the possibilities are and having a supportive doctor with whom you can discuss ways of preventing or treating them will help you to feel you are regaining control of your life.

When physical violence or force is used, there is an increased chance of bodily fluids being transferred through damaged tissue. This can increase the chances of contracting an STD including HIV/AIDS. For your own peace of mind, it is best to have a check-up and not run the risk of leaving an STD untreated. The counsellors at Zig Zag can let you know about sympathetic doctors, sexual health clinics and services providing counselling and support regarding pregnancy options. They can also assist with alternative health practitioners.

If you decide to report

It is important for you to have a medical examination as soon as possible after the assault for the purpose of collecting evidence that an assault took place. If you don't report to police immediately after

- Anger - How dare he do this to me?
- Shame - Did I provoke it in some way?
- Guilt - If only I hadn't...
- Betrayed - But I trusted him.
- Numb - I feel so hollow.
- Worried about your future - Will my life ever be the same?

If you have survived a sexual assault you are a strong, resourceful person who has the right to be treated with respect. You may want to know what your options are in terms of medical, legal and safety concerns. There is information in this package about all of these.



Myths About Sexual Assault

Myths about sexual assault have served to protect offenders and to blame women. They influence court proceedings and confuse the reactions of family and friends who want to support the survivor of sexual assault.

(Read My Lips Community Education Campaign)

Myths about sexual assault help to disguise how often it occurs. Myths also try to shift the blame away from the person who committed the offence.

Some of the things people think that aren't true

Myth: Men get so horny that they can't control themselves.

Fact: Everyone has to take responsibility for what they do. His sexual behaviour **is** under his control.

Myth: I didn't struggle or scream, so it wasn't rape.

Fact: Women have been taught not to resist, especially someone they know. Being scared, or feeling like it won't make a difference can stop you from resisting.

Myth: Rapists are "sick" or mad.

Fact: Rapists are usually ordinary people. They are simply people who believe the myths about rape themselves, blame others for their

behaviour and have little respect for women.

Myth: Because he's my boyfriend I have to have sex with him.

Fact: No-one has the right to make you do something you don't want to. You don't have to have sex, even if:

- he spent money on you
- he says he'll drop you if you don't
- he tells you that you have to prove you love him

Myth: He didn't hurt me, so it wasn't rape.

Fact: Using threats or blackmail, or not listening when you say "no" are ways of making you have sex when you don't want to - it's still rape.

Myth: I must have been asking for it.

Fact: The places you go, or the clothes you wear don't give anyone the right to rape you

Myth: Girls only say it is rape if they feel guilty about having sex

Fact: There are no more false reports of rape to the police than any other crime. Most rapes go unreported because the rapist is known or even related to the victim, and she's too embarrassed or frightened to report him.

Sexual Assault by a Friend/Acquaintance

Rapists are usually male, and the people they assault are usually female. He is often someone you know and trust - he could be a friend, someone you work or study with, your boyfriend or someone you go out with. Sometimes it's someone you don't know or have only just met.

He might:

- use violence or force
- threaten you
- make you feel like you've got no choice
- make you feel like you owe him sex
- tell you that you led him on or teased him
- get you drunk or stoned
- not take "no" for an answer
- talk you into it

Most women are raped or sexually abused by someone they know. It is not your fault. You may find it helpful to speak with someone about your experience - there is a list of services at the back of this kit.

If you have been recently raped or sexually assaulted

You may be feeling:

- Shock/ Disbelief - I never thought this could happen to me?
- Fear - Will the rapist hurt me again?