



Trauma

Trauma is an injury caused by an outside, usually violent event or experience. This can be experienced mentally, emotionally, psychologically, and/or spiritually. Traumas disrupt one's sense of safety, security, and wellbeing. Some traumas distort one's belief and reality. Such distortions can lead to dysfunctional behaviors, which may produce unwanted consequences. It's also important to remember that everyone perceives an experience differently, for example one person might experience an event and perceive it as traumatizing, but another may experience something similar, but they don't perceive it to be traumatizing.

Help is available for people who have been injured and their loved ones. This includes free mental health counseling, emergency medical care, possible recouping of lost wages, and a safe and confidential shelter that removes you from imminent harm or danger if you need to get out of your house.

You don't have to go it alone. NCSF trains local victim services on BDSM vs. abuse. Call your local rape crisis hotline or contact NCSF's Incident Reporting & Response for help for you or a friend at Incident@ncsfreedom.org or 917-848-6544.

Short-term Reactions and Ongoing Challenges

It's important to not judge someone's response when they have been violated or assaulted. One person may appear to be emotional while another may seem unaffected or calm. Others can have abrupt mood changes. No matter how someone reacts, their emotions are appropriate and valid. The following are some of the frequently experienced immediate reactions to being violated:

Shock

Denial such as "It never happened." "I am overreacting."

Self-blame or guilt such as "If I had not____, they would not have ____"

Fear of judgment or retaliation or reoccurrence

Avoidance

Laughing

Numbness

Freezing
Doubt
Memory loss
Shaking
Anger
Fear
Revenge
Shame or embarrassment or humiliation
Crying or yelling or screaming
Feelings of unreality or detachment from your feelings

These immediate reactions may fade, but other mental, emotional, and physical difficulties can happen over time, such as:

Not feeling safe, even when with friends or at home
Isolation or withdrawal from friends, families, work, public
Decreased concentration
Increased or decreased sleep
Nightmares or terrors (not always about the incident)
Anxiety or panic attacks (increased startled response)
Feelings of helplessness
Engaging in self harm
Irritability
Feelings of detachment or isolation
Physiological stress responses when confronted with reminders of the trauma
Loss of appetite or over/binge eating
Exhaustion or sickness
Fear of the dark
Fear of being alone
Changes in sexual behaviors
Difficulty with trust or uncharacteristically over trustful with others
Flashbacks of the traumatic event
Engaging in high risk behaviors
Increased desire for alcohol or drugs or other escapes and distractions
Suicidal thoughts or self-harm behaviors
Increased volatile and aggressive verbal or physical behavior
Decreased confidence with decision making, self-worth, and hope

Recovery: Self Compassion

Self-compassion has three components: self-kindness, mindfulness, and empathy. Being kind to one's self allows for decreased self-blame and minimizing the impact of the traumatic event on yourself. Mindfulness allows one to stay out of the negative thoughts of "Why did this

happen?” or “How could I allow this to happen?” These questions suggest that you are responsible for another’s violent behavior and you could have prevented the violation. Empathy allows for normalizing the emotional and mental reactions. You allow yourself to slowly believe that: “This makes sense that I feel hurt or sad because what happened to me was wrong.” These skills come over time and with practice.

After the immediate reaction, people might try to make sense of the violation or betrayal. This can include thinking:

- What just happened?
- How and why did it happen?
- What could I have done to prevent this from happening?
- Why do I feel the way I do?
- Does it reflect on what kind of person I am?
- How has the experience changed my view on life?

There are a number of things you can do (and friends and loved ones can do) to help you ease the pain and transition to healing:

- Acknowledge that you feel traumatized (i.e. raped, violated, robbed, physically assaulted) and name what has happened to you verbally. Allow yourself to honor your pain. This allows for movement into recovery.
- Gradually confront what has happened – don’t try to block it out. Journaling is safe and allows for the privacy of a cathartic purging of emotions.
- Talk to someone who can support and understand you. Support or survivor’s group are a great resource.
- Tell your family and friends what you need. Allow others to help you.
- Be as deliberate as you can about what you want to talk about and who you want to talk with.

- Understand that for a while you won’t feel like your usual self, but it will pass.
- Try to keep to your usual routine.
- Remind yourself daily that you are managing even when it feels like you are not. Be your own personal cheerleader.
- Don’t overuse alcohol or drugs to help you cope.
- Be patient and slowly acclimate yourself. You may feel off balance for some time.
- Avoid making major decisions or big life changes until you feel better.

- Take time to rest your body while it deals with the emotional impact.
- Exercise regularly to help eliminate tension and stress.
- Use yoga or meditation or walking outdoors to relax and regain connection with yourself.

- When the trauma brings up memories or feelings, depending on where you are in recovery, manage them in the most appropriate way. Allow yourself to move, stopping the progression of the memory.
- If older memories of trauma surface, try to keep them separate from the current problem.

PTSD

Some people continue to have difficulties and emotional reactions that don't gradually subside. Severe, prolonged reactions may even affect your relationships and your ability to work. This kind of reaction could be post-traumatic stress disorder, in which the violation continues to cause high levels of stress in your life.

If you think you might be experiencing PTSD, please consider seeking help from a health professional. You can also consult with NCSF's Kink Aware Professionals or contact your local victim advocacy agency for free counseling.

Trauma Bond

A trauma bond is a complex attachment between people. Trauma bonds form in the presence of danger, shame or exploitation. Behaviors might include:

- Helping those who have hurt you
- Trusting those who have proven themselves untrustworthy
- Being unable to leave unhealthy relationships
- Maintaining contact with them
- Desiring to be understood by them
- Rationalizing the violation into something consensual

Trauma bonds often include self-destructive denial and being unable to get away from that person even if you want to. You may:

- Blame yourself instead of them
- Cover up their behavior
- Submit to extraordinary demands by them
- Obsess over them
- Stay in contact despite ongoing conflict

Trauma bonds disrupt our usual self-preservation behavior. There are clinical strategies for dealing with trauma bonds which include:

- Cutting off contact with them

Learning detachment strategies
Accessing support groups and counseling
Processing the emotions caused by the violation
Understanding trauma bonds to help get perspective

How to Be Supportive

You may want to help your friend or loved one who has been violated, but you don't know what to say or do. It's common to feel anger or rage, shock, a desire for revenge or to "fix it," a feeling of helplessness, wanting to move on, or rationalizing that "it wasn't that bad." Here are some things you can do that might help:

Safety First: make sure they are safe and feel secure – if they're in an unsafe environment, that's the first concern

Let them express themselves – whether they want to talk about it or be silent, you are there to listen and repeat back what they are saying so they know they've been heard

Remain calm – they don't need to hear your anger or rage because it can cause them more trauma

Be nonjudgmental and compassionate – it's not their fault their consent was violated

Validate their feelings - explain trauma reaction to them and assure them that what they feel is valid and there is a process to dealing with trauma

Give them control – their sense of control has been removed, so let them make decisions while you make suggestions and ask them what they need

Encourage them to get medical care – even if they don't want to report what happened, if there is injury then they need to be treated

Give them the hotline number for the nearest rape crisis hotline which help anyone who has been assaulted

Maintain confidentiality – it's not up to you to tell someone else's story

What to Say

You may not know what to say to someone who has been violated. Most of us want to help ease the pain and say things intended to bring comfort. Unfortunately we might say things that

cause additional trauma to the person who was violated. It may be helpful to consider the following statements.

Don't say:

Well at least it wasn't... because it trivializes and minimizes the violation.

You can be thankful that... because it's insensitive and makes people feel defensive.

You're lucky that... because there is no bright side to being violated.

You'll get over it... because being violated can be a life-changing event even if you come to terms with it.

Why did you... because it makes them feel like they're to blame.

I understand how you feel... because nobody fully understands what another person feels.

Stay strong... because nobody needs added pressure of how you expect them to react.

Do say:

You are safe here.

I believe you.

I'm glad you want to talk to me.

Your reactions are completely valid.

You're not to blame.

I can't imagine how you must feel.

I feel bad that this happened to you.

How can I help?

There are people out there who can help you.

You don't have to go it alone. NCSF trains local victim services on BDSM vs. abuse. Call the National Sexual Assault Hotline @ 800.656.HOPE (4673), or your local rape crisis hotline, or contact NCSF's Incident Reporting & Response for help for you or a friend at Incident@ncsfreedom.org or 917-848-6544.