March 2014 Newsletter

Monthly theme, "Re-Victimization"

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Our featured volunteer victim advocate, Dawn Tabor (center).

Crisis Hotline:
580 649-0656

Our March monthly theme is "Re-victimization," what are the psychological responses to trauma? Article taken on 12/24/2013 from: http://www.stars-elpaso.org/get/effects-of-sexual-assault

Effects of Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is a personal and destructive crime. Its effects on you and your loved ones can be psychological, emotional, and/or physical. They can be brief in duration or last a very long time. It is important to remember that there is not one "normal" reaction to sexual assault. Therefore your individual response will be different depending on your personal circumstances. In this section, we explain some of the more common effects that sexual assault victims may experience.

Depression: There are many emotional and psychological reactions that victims of rape and sexual assault can experience. One of the most common of these is depression. The term "depression" can be confusing since many of the symptoms are experienced by people as normal reactions to events. At some point or another, everyone feels sad or "blue." This also means that recognizing depression can be difficult since the symptoms can easily be attributed to other causes. These feelings are perfectly normal, especially during difficult times.

Depression becomes something more than just normal feelings of sadness when the symptoms last for more than two weeks. Therefore, if you experience five or more of the symptoms of depression over the course of two weeks you should consider talking to your doctor about what you are experiencing. The symptoms of depression may include:

- Prolonged sadness or unexplained crying spells
- Significant change in weight or appetite
- Loss of energy or persistent fatigue
- Significant change in sleep patterns (insomnia, sleeping too much, fitful sleep, etc.)
- Loss of interest and pleasure in activities previously enjoyed; social withdrawal
- Feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness or guilt
- Pessimism or indifference
- Unexplained aches and pains (headaches, stomachaches)
- Inability to concentrate, indecisiveness
- Irritability, worry, anger, agitation, or anxiety
- Thoughts of death or suicide

RESOURCES

SAPR Office
580 481-7835

SARC
580 481-7428

SAPR Hotline
580 649-0656

Family Advocacy
580 481-5376

ACMI House
580 482-3800

Chaplain
580 481-7485

OKC Rape Crisis Center
800 522-7233

National Sexual Assault Hotline 800 656-HOPE

Visit us @ https://97amw.portal.altus.af.mil/sites/AMW/sarc/default.aspx

Continued:

Depression can affect people of any age, gender, race, ethnicity, or religion. Depression is not a sign of weakness, and it is not something that someone can make him/herself "snap out of."

Flashbacks: when memories of past traumas feel as if they are taking place in the current moment. These memories can take many forms: dreams, sounds, smells, images, body sensations, or overwhelming emotions. This re-experience of the trauma often seems to come from nowhere, and therefore blurs the lines between past and present, leaving the individual feeling anxious, scared, and/or powerless. It can also trigger any other emotions that were felt at the time of the trauma.

Some flashbacks are mild and brief, a passing moment, while others may be powerful and last a long time. Many times you may not even realize that you are having a flashback and may feel faint and/or dissociate (a mental process in which your thoughts and feelings may be separated from your immediate reality). If you realize you are in the middle of a flashback:

- **First, Get Grounded:** The first thing to do is sit up straight and put both feet on the floor. This will help you to feel grounded.
- **Be In the Present:** It can be helpful to remind yourself that the event you are reliving happened in the past and you are now in the present. The actual event is over, and you survived.
- **Breathing:** Try focusing on your breathing. One way to do that is to count to four as you breathe in. Count to four as you hold that breath and then count to four as you exhale. If you do this and keep repeating it, you may find that you can become calmer and can be in the present.
- **Pay Attention to Surroundings**: Another way to help yourself feel like you are in the present is to pay attention to your surroundings. What is the light in the room like right now? Touch something around you that is grounded like a table or a chair. What does it feel like? Can you smell anything? Do you hear any sounds?
- **Self-Soothing:** Are there things that normally make you feel safe and secure like wrapping a blanket around yourself or making some tea?
- **Normal:** Also, remember that it can take time to recover. You are not crazy. This is a normal reaction.
- **Take care of yourself:** Give yourself time to recover after a flashback. Reach out to loved ones or counselors who will be supportive.

Rape Trauma: a common reaction to rape or sexual assault. It is a normal human reaction to an unnatural or extreme event. There are three phases to rape trauma:

- **Acute Phase:** occurs immediately after the assault and usually lasts a few days to several weeks. In this phase, you can have many reactions but they typically fall into three different categories:
  - Expressed: when you are openly emotional
  - Controlled: when you appear to be without emotion, and act as if "nothing happened" and "everything is fine"
  - Shocked disbelief: when you react with a strong sense of disorientation
- **Outward Adjustment Phase:** resume what appears to be your "normal" life, but inside you are still suffering from considerable turmoil. This phase has five primary coping techniques:
  - Minimization: pretending that everything is fine or convincing yourself that "it could have been worse"
  - Dramatization: you cannot stop talking about the assault and it dominates your life and identity
  - Suppression: you refuse to discuss the event and act as if it did not happen
  - Explanation: you analyze what happened, what you did and what the rapist was thinking/feeling
  - Flight: you try to escape the pain (moving, changing jobs, changing appearance, changing relationships, etc.)
- **Resolution Phase:** the assault is no longer the central focus of your life. While you may recognize that you will never forget the assault, the pain and negative outcomes lessen over time. Often you will begin to accept the rape as part of your life and choose to move on.

NOTE: This model assumes that you will take steps forward and backwards in your healing process and that while there are phases it is not a linear progression and will be different for every person.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: a normal human reaction to an extreme or abnormal situation. Each person has a different threshold for what is perceived as a traumatic event. PTSD is not a rare or unusual occurrence, in fact, many people experience PTSD as a result of a traumatic experience such as rape or sexual assault. You may be experiencing PTSD if you have experienced the following symptoms for at least a month:

- Shown symptoms of intense horror, helplessness, or fear
- Experienced distressing memories of the event
- Regularly avoided things or triggers that remind you of the event
- Shown significant impairment or distress due to the event
- Shown at least two symptoms of increased arousal (sleep difficulties, difficulty concentrating, hyper vigilance, an exaggerated startle response, or irritability or outbursts of anger/rage)