

# WHY GET HELP

SEXUAL ASSAULT COUNSELLING INFORMATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE





# CONTENTS

Am I going crazy? .....	1
Trauma Reactions .....	2
Why do the feelings and memories keep coming back? .....	3
Why should I have sexual assault counselling? .....	4
What will I do in sexual assault counselling? .....	5
How do I know if the counsellor will be able to help me? .....	6
How do I know if the sexual assault counselling is working? .....	7
Who can I contact? .....	8



*Dear Diary,*

*Today was another day that really **sucked**. I got that funny feeling in my stomach in class and I couldn't breathe properly so I got sent to the Doctor. He said **there was nothing wrong** with me and suggested I should go see a counsellor. Why? I'm not crazy! Besides, what good is that going to do? I mean all that stuff stopped long ago right? I'm nearly 16 and I don't see how talking is going to help anyway. You agree with me diary don't you? Good, so I won't go... **I feel terrible**. I just want to cry. No one understands and I have **no one to talk to** but you diary.*

### **Am I going crazy?**

When you have been sexually assaulted it can have an effect on your life. It affects your feelings and thoughts. It can make you feel, shame, sad, numb, angry, betrayed and powerless.



*Sam was with her first ever boyfriend and everything was perfect. He hugged her and they kissed for the first time but instead of it feeling wonderful, it made her **feel sick**.*

*When he whispered in her ear she jumped up and all but ran home. Now **she felt like an idiot** and never wanted to see him again.*

*How was she going to face everyone at school tomorrow because everyone would **think she was weird** for acting like that?*

## Trauma Reactions

It is normal for your body and mind to react to certain ways when you have been hurt. If these feelings continue for a while the medical name is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The way people respond when you are hurt falls into three categories:

- emotional: you may have a reaction like anger, betrayal, shame, lose trust in others
- physical: you may feel physically ill, shake, scared, have cold sweats and nightmares
- social/behavioural: you may isolate yourself and have unsafe behaviour

## Why do the feelings and memories keep coming back?

As human beings, when we sense danger our immediate reaction is to run away. Images, smells and feelings about the sexual assault are stored in our brains and can be triggered when we experience something similar. These reactions can vary from person to person. You may freeze in some situations or shut down or some people may want to fight or run away from the situation.

Some young people talk about triggers which may be:

- seeing somebody who reminds you of the person who sexually assaulted you
- a sound or smell that reminds you of that person
- someone touching you
- hearing about sexual assault on the TV and internet and in the papers

If you'd like to read some more about a person who understands, read Babette Rothschild.

*Katie had met a boy she really liked. Normally she would get **drunk** and sleep with him straight away, but that always ended up making her **feel bad about herself** and about him. She knew from the moment she woke up it was over with him. Her counsellor suggested she **try something different** this time. Instead of going to a party for their first date, they went to see a movie with some friends. With everyone there it was easy to **talk and have fun**. The next day Katie **felt good** about herself and was looking forward to seeing him again.*

*That funny feeling was back again. Jerry was having trouble breathing and his skin was tingling. When his girlfriend asked him if he was OK, instead of saying yes and pretending he was fine, he said he was having a panic attack and needed to stop for a little while. She got him a drink of water as he did his deep breathing exercises and told himself over and over he was safe and that it was over. After a little while he **began to feel better**. When his girlfriend gave him that understanding smile his heart felt like it would burst with joy. He was filled with relief that he wasn't on his own any more and that no one thought he was weird.*



### **Why should I have sexual assault counselling?**

It may give you useful techniques and skills that you can use now. It might help you think about your current behaviours and feelings in a different way. It might stop stress and triggers before they affect your whole life.

## What will I do in sexual assault counselling?

Most young people don't want to talk about the past. Counselling will look at what is happening for you now and help you deal with it. With the counsellor you will explore your feelings and ways of feeling safe when you go out to parties or are with your friends.

If the sexual assault was recent you might talk to the counsellor about practical stuff, as, who to tell, who to talk to and who to trust. Your counsellor may also talk to you about your legal options



*Shakira was really tearing it up on the packed dance floor. The music was loud and she was having a great time twirling and jumping to the beat. She paused to catch her breath but everyone else was still jumping around her and brushing against her. She began to feel **tightness** in her chest and wanted to get outside. In the cool of the night air she began to feel better and decided to go home. That's when she realised she was locked out of the club and her bag with her money and phone were inside. She felt like an idiot for **reacting like that to nothing**. Deep down she wondered if she was crazy. It wasn't fair. It wasn't her fault. No one understood. The anger welled up inside so big that she grabbed a rock and hurled it through a window with all her might. The **glass smashed** and she stood trembling. A noise made her suddenly afraid. Turning away, she ran as fast as she could.*

*Juan got off the bus. Eyes down and straight ahead, no looking anyone in the eye. Everyone **knew he was different**. That was why he was going to see a counsellor. A special counsellor his mother had said, a sexual assault counsellor. Juan's mother thought Juan was gay. But **he wasn't gay**. He liked girls only... The man who'd molested him must've thought he was gay or else why'd he want to have sex with Juan? And if he didn't think Juan was gay then why.... And if he did get a girlfriend what would she do if she found out? And what would his mates say?*

*He pulled his jacket closer and walked more quickly.*

*Questions, questions, so many questions with no answers. So Juan kept to himself, played his music loud and kept his door SHUT. He'd told no one because.... Juan felt the shame well up inside him. Shame and anger and guilt and **such a deep, deep despair** that it felt like it would eat him up. He'd reached the clinic. Should he keep walking or go in? What do you think he should do?*



### **How do I know if the counsellor will be able to help me?**

You need to be able to talk openly with your counsellor. If you don't think you're getting anywhere, you can ask the agency for a different counsellor. That's a part of the process - to be able to speak and tell the counsellor what's working and what's not.

### **How do I know if the sexual assault counselling is working?**

You will feel a change. You will feel different, more able to cope, more confident and more hopeful. You will feel like you have a changed view, and have more energy. Counselling might be hard at the start but you should feel things becoming easier over time.



### **Who can I contact?**

If you are a victim/survivor of sexual assault or family violence you can contact your nearest Centre Against Sexual Assault by calling the Sexual Assault Crisis Line on 1800 806 292.

You can contact the South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault on 03 9594 2289 or via our MySpace page at [www.myspace.com/secasa](http://www.myspace.com/secasa).

**For more information about Sexual Assault try the following websites**

[www.secasakids.com.au](http://www.secasakids.com.au)

[www.secasa.com.au](http://www.secasa.com.au)