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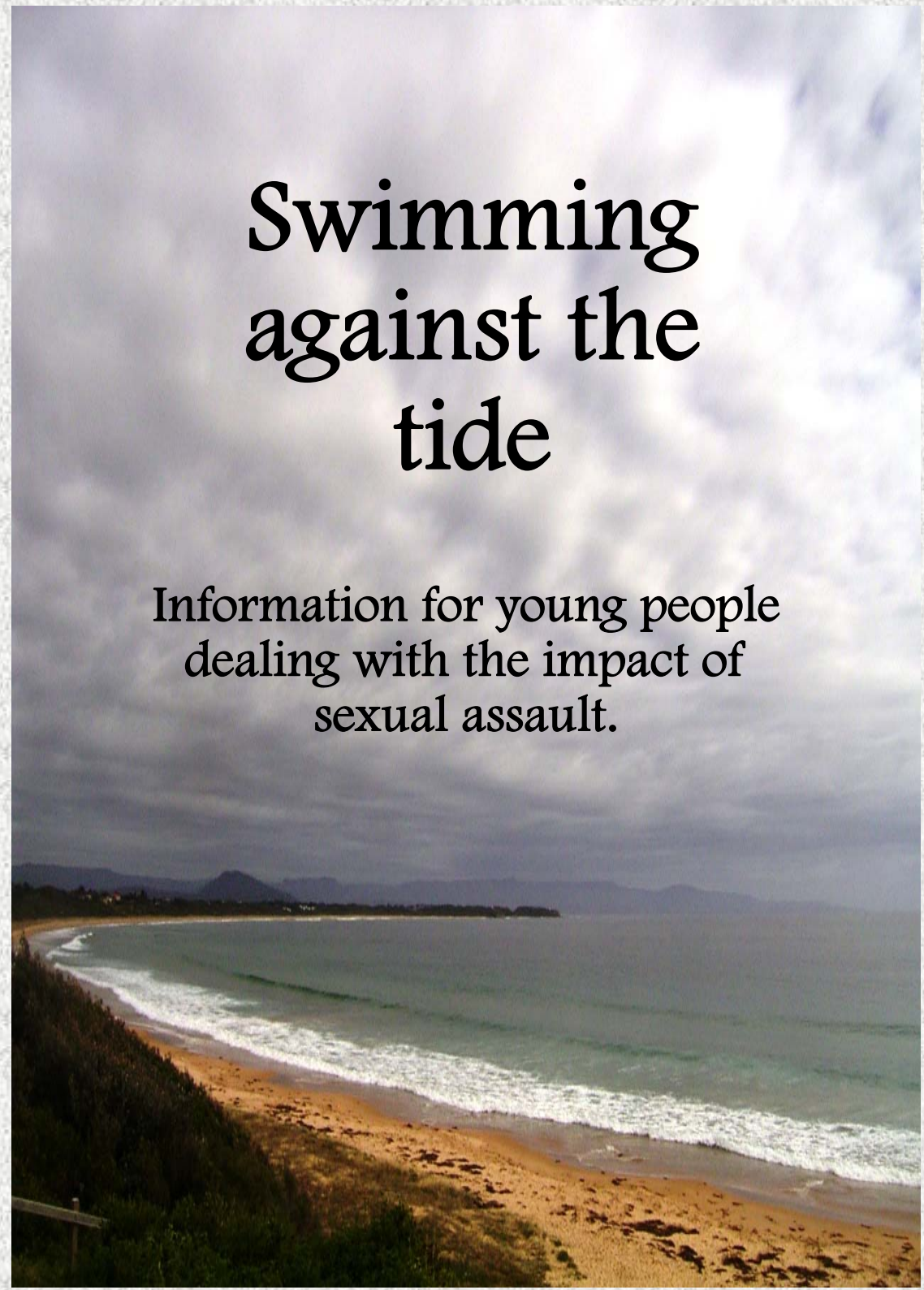
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Swimming against the tide

Information for young people
dealing with the impact of
sexual assault.



About this booklet.

This booklet has been written for young people in the hope that it may be able to provide some information which can offer support when dealing with the trauma of sexual assault.

The title, *Swimming Against the Tide*, aims to capture the different struggles most young people face as they deal with the impact of the abuse they experienced. The pull of that tide can at times be overwhelming, bewildering, frightening and exhausting.

But time and time again we have witnessed and heard stories of the many ways young people use all that is around them and all that is within them to swim against that cruel current and stay afloat.


If you are a young person who has been sexually assaulted, as a child or perhaps older, it is hoped that what is written will be useful and helpful to you. However not everything will be relevant and will not fit for your experience.


When reading the booklet use what you can, and leave what doesn't fit.

Blank pages have been purposely added to the booklet so that you may use your own words or images to write about your own story.

Most importantly, it is hoped that this booklet may in some way let you know that you are not alone, and that what you are going through is shared by many young people...too many young people. And all you can do is to keep on swimming.

MY SPACE





MY SPACE

I Speak in their name.

*You have to have it within you.
There is a choice-to do nothing or to try and do something.*

*You have to do the right thing for yourself
But when doing that right thing there are others who you
may also be doing the right thing for.*

*You have brothers, sisters, cousins, best friends.
He may never touch them but what if he did?
What would then be the right thing to have done?
If someone else ever touches them and you said nothing
what then would be the right thing to have done?*

*You have to stand up to the abuse and to abusers
otherwise they will try and own you forever.
Just keep the truth with you and let it have a voice.*

From: Writings on the Wall. Rosie's Place Publications

The most abominable violation I have experienced.

This doesn't make any sense.

I need an explanation.

I need something.

Anything.

But there's nothing.

Anything?

But there's nothing.

No answer to this.

The ultimate violation.

No one should ever have to experience that.

It should never have happened.

It should not happen.

It should not be allowed to happen.

From : Writings on the Wall. Rosie's Place Publications

Apprehended Violence Orders.

You can still gain protection by getting an AVO (Apprehended Violence Order).

At times the police may take an AVO out on your behalf or you can make a time to see a Chamber Magistrate at your nearest court.

An AVO is a court order which stops a person from doing things such as ringing you or coming to your house or school or work. The magistrate will decide how long the AVO will last. If a person has an AVO against him it is not a criminal conviction but breaking the conditions of the AVO is a criminal offence.

Victims Compensation.

If you are a victim of a serious crime in NSW you can apply for financial compensation. To do this you must have reported it to the police or another authority Community Services.

The offender does not have to be found guilty to apply for compensation and you do not have to attend to give evidence.

The Tribunal has to believe it is highly probable that you are the victim of sexual assault.

A lawyer can assist you to put an application together and then pass it on to the Victims Compensation Tribunal.

Charter of Victim's Rights. (Victims Rights Act 1996).

You have the right to:

- Have access to information about the legal process
- Be treated with courtesy, compassion and respect.
- Have your identity protected.
- Be protected from contact with the accused.
- Having access to services.

The legal side of sexual assault.

Sexual assault is a criminal offence.

The police are often the first point of official contact when someone has disclosed that they have been sexually assaulted. This may occur at a police station or special unit for children and young people that is both the police and Community Services. This is known as the Joint Investigation and Response Team (JIRT).

To make a complaint to the police about the crime of sexual assault victims need to make a statement to them, to tell what happened and to have that written down formally. This statement is often the first time someone's experience is defined as sexual assault, the first time that words spoken are listened to and given meaning.

This statement is the record of truth that will be used if legal avenues proceed and as such is highly important. This statement is what the police rely on to further investigate, be that through medical records, statement forms other witnesses and other evidence. If they decide there is enough evidence they will charge the accused person. They decide on what offences to charge him with based on the evidence they have gathered.

If the police do not think there is enough evidence to be able to charge the offender this doesn't mean they do not believe you. The legal system requires very particular evidence for an offender to go to court. Even if he is not charged with the crime the information about what he did

What is sexual assault?

Sexual assault is a crime.

Sexual assault is any behaviour of a sexual nature that is unwanted or forced without a person's consent.

It is an abuse of **power and control** by one person over another person and usually involves tactics of coercion or force.

Approximately one in three females and one in five males have experienced some form of sexual assault. Although most offenders are male it has also been recorded that for male victims approximately 20% of offenders are female.

Sexual assault offences include:

- ◆ Indecent assault which is unwanted touching such as kissing, fondling, touching someone's breast, bottom or genitals or being exposed to sexual acts.
- ◆ Forcing someone under 18 years of age to watch pornographic materials, including magazines, films and internet downloads.
- ◆ Rape or sexual intercourse without consent which means penetration of any part of a person's body by another person's body or by an object. This includes vaginal, anal, digital or oral penetration.

Although sexual assault can be committed by strangers, most incidents of sexual assault are committed by someone known to the victim. This can include extended family members, friends, neighbours, or people who have the care of the child for a consistent period of time such as a sports coach, teacher, or babysitter. What is known however is that when the offender is a close family member the sexual assault is usually more severe and occurs over a longer period of time.

Child sexual assault.

Child sexual assault is when an adult or someone who is usually older and bigger than a child or young person involves them in sexual activity that is not of their choosing. This may happen because of the power held over them or by taking advantage of their trust and vulnerability.

- Sexual assault of a child or young person is a crime.
- It is never the fault of the child or young person.
- It is usually planned and purposely carried out by an offender. It is not something that happens accidentally or is misread by a child or young person.
- Most incidents of child sexual assault are committed by someone a child or young person knows and usually trusts.
- Children and young people are tricked, bribed or threatened physically and emotionally into the sexual assault by the actions of the person abusing them.

“Grooming” describes the different ways offenders trap children and young people into the abuse, usually by building their trust and making them believe they would never hurt them. This can often happen long before the sexual behaviour starts.

Such tactics may include:

- Giving special attention.
- Sharing secrets with them.
- Giving money or gifts.
- Playing games and then changing the games so that the child, now confused, doesn't know what to do.
- Telling the child or young person that if they say something then they or someone they care about will be in trouble or hurt, they will lose their family or be taken away.

What is known is that children rarely lie about sexual assault or are mistaken in what they believe happened to them.

How to create a safe spot.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- ◆ Where do I feel most safe
- ◆ Where do I feel most unsafe (places, times of day/ night)
- ◆ How can I change things to try and feel as safe as possible

The best place to feel safe might be somewhere in your house. This is a place where you can go when you feel scared or anxious.

Your safe spot might be in your room or on the lounge or even the back step of your house. It might be place in your backyard or the kitchen where you decide on those “bad days” to sort out the cupboards or sit at the kitchen table and do some craft.

If you can't feel safe at home then have a pre-arranged place in mind and go there when you need to. It might be a friend's house, neighbour, library or family.

Wherever you feel safe find that place and stay there until the feeling passes. If it's not working then go to your list and follow it through. It might be important to have someone with you, so call a friend or chat with them on the internet.

It's important that you feel as safe as you can, so avoid going to the shops or walking around the streets if that feels too unsafe.

Having a Safety Plan.

Everyone has the right to feel safe and to get help when they need it. A safety plan is a way to get out of an unsafe place or feeling of being unsafe. Creating a safety plan can help you figure out what you can do and where you can get help.

Your safety plan can include the following questions but you may like to add more of your own ideas:

- ◆ What am I like when things are going well?
- ◆ When I do the following things or have the following thoughts these are my “warning signs”.
- ◆ When I have any of the above “warning signs” I want the following people to help me do the things I write in my plan.
- ◆ I do not want the following people to be involved in my support network.
- ◆ What I want my supporters to do for me when I am experiencing these problems.
- ◆ This can include things such as: *to make sure someone is with me, do not leave me alone, let me express my emotions, don't let me hurt myself, cook my favourite dish for me, get me my favourite take-away food, give me things so I can draw, feed the pets, arrange an appointment to see a counsellor or doctor*
- ◆ What I don't want from my supporters when I am experiencing these problems
- ◆ This can include things such as: *don't yell at me, tell me to get over it, make me eat or go to school or work, force me to do something I don't want to do.*

Sexual assault of young people.

Sexual assault of young people by their peers or in social situations is often less visible than when the offender is seen to be someone older or holding a position of power and authority.

Sexual violence that occurs when dating, being with a group of people, going out to parties or between students is still something not easily acknowledged.

With the advent of the technology through mobile phones, digital imaging and the internet there are now new age forms of sexual assault which are invading the lives of young people.

Young people's experience of sexual violence and unwanted sexual behaviours can include:

- ◆ Sexual harassment
- ◆ Sexualised bullying
- ◆ Unwanted kissing and sexual touching
- ◆ Sexual pressure and coercion; and
- ◆ Sexual assault, including rape.

False ideas about how young men and women should behave toward each other in relationships can make it hard to know if an experience is sexual activity or sexual assault. Sexual coercion or being pressured to engage in unwanted sexual behaviour is often minimised by young people or there is confusion about consent and what it means. If an experience is named by the young person as assault, they can be blamed for it occurring, be accused of false allegations or become the centre of gossip amongst their peers. They risk not being believed, not being supported and being more alone than when the assault occurred.

Any type of unwanted sexual behaviour is a form of abuse and can never be justified or excused as a mistake, misunderstanding or the fault of the person who was abused.

Sexual assault of males.

There has always been an under reporting of the sexual assault of males and because of this there is a false belief is that it rarely occurs. It has been estimated that approximately one third of all victims of child sexual assault are boys.

In terms of being an abuse of power and trust the sexual assault of males has the same traits as the sexual assault of females. It is never the child's fault and the child can never be said to have consented. But because of both the relationship the offender creates with the child, and their use of tactics to keep the child silent, the victim is left with a bag of emotions and thoughts, including fear, guilt, shame, loneliness and confusion.

For male victims of sexual assault there are also some different issues they face from female victims:

- ◆ Many males find it hard to name their experience as sexual assault as society has hard expectations on males in terms of them being seen as independent, self reliant, not vulnerable and certainly not victims. There may be deep shame that, as a male, they were unable to protect themselves and therefore see themselves as "less than a male". This makes it very hard for young men to acknowledge their abuse to themselves, let alone to tell someone else.
- ◆ What boys and young men face when they have been sexually abused is what this means for them in terms of their masculinity. No matter who the offender is, male or female, boys and young men may feel confused about their sexuality.
- ◆ ***When the offender is a male there may be thoughts the abuse is a homosexual act and therefore means that not only the offender is "gay" but the child may also be gay or become a homosexual as they mature.***

- ◆ Get a journal and start writing. Don't think about what you want to write. Just let the words come out. Write about a page and start again. Write until there is nothing left to say.
- ◆ Do drawings or art to express your thoughts. Grab some clay, even plasticine, and use it to express your emotions, to make something creative or to pull it apart, re-mould it and start over again.
- ◆ Watch an old movie or DVD's of your favourite show.
- ◆ Focus on a simple reflective activity such as counting backwards from 100.
- ◆ Find things in a really busy picture, unwrap and re-wrap something from the pantry or solve puzzles.
- ◆ Plan your week's activities or write a list of things you would like to do if you had the chance.
- ◆ Smell oils, bath gels or hand lotions to allow other senses to emerge.
- ◆ Burn off the energy by dancing or grounding your feet by stomping around your backyard.
- ◆ Trust yourself and don't let feelings of blame or failure take you over and make you forget all the strengths you do have and that you matter.

Reaffirm that you are in the present and that the as-

Let your thoughts and feelings be your guide.

This is an example of some of the things already mentioned in this booklet that could be put in safety plan when you need help dealing with the abuse. But remember, it's important to make your own list that is about you and what works for you.

- ◆ Get to know your body signs as emotions build up and your thoughts start to unravel. Do something before they take over and the pain takes over.
- ◆ Get some space for yourself, even for a short time. Go to a safe place. If that's not possible, find a place that feels safe.
- ◆ Change your space. Make over your room, throw out things you don't need and change something, no matter small. Buy something to bring a new colour into your space or some oil for a new smell.
- ◆ Find support and don't stay alone. Visit a friend or relative or a neighbour. Use the phone and call a friend or get on your email.
- ◆ If it feels too hard to have people with you, then have something to keep you company like a pet, a cuddly blanket or bear, or music.
- ◆ Breathe.

- ◆ When the offender is female the feelings are confused by the belief that women are usually victims and nurturing of children rather than offenders, and therefore what happened what not sexual assault. This causes tremendous mixes of guilt, shame and also anger which are usually resolved by males denying what happened. A Most damaging myth is that boys who are sexually assaulted will progress to becoming a sexual offender themselves. However there is no evidence to indicate that an earlier experience of abuse leads to being sexually abusive toward others.

For young men in particular the difficulty disclosing their abuse usually means their struggles come through other ways such as drug and alcohol abuse, self destructive behaviours, suicidality and problems with ongoing relationships.

Overall the reaction to sexual assault for both males and females are similar. What is most important is that all victims of sexual assault are able to talk to someone about what happened and not hold the secret to themselves.

Power Rangers.

Finding your sense of power is difficult but you need to find it and hold onto it.

Even in small ways, even very tiny ways.

Pretend looking at yourself through a microscope.

Can you see it there?

Waving back at you?

Power is not about being strong or brave,

Having a loud voice or being angry at the world.

Power is knowing yourself and even,

In not knowing for sure,

Being interested in finding out about yourself

And who you can be

Your power carrying you.

Acquaintance Rape .

Acquaintance rape is any sexual assault that happens when someone a person knows or meets in a social situation, forces or manipulates them into having sex or into doing something sexual when they don't want to.

It could happen with someone they have just met or someone known such as a workmate, an ex-boyfriend or a boyfriend who they love and trust.

This person may use physical and verbal threats, emotional blackmail, mind games or alcohol and drugs to force or trick someone into having sex.

While mainly women are assaulted, acquaintance rape can also happen to men, most often by other men.

Acquaintance rape is not about love or about someone who can't control their sexual urges. Knowing the person doesn't mean that what happened wasn't really rape. It is a crime.

The person who perpetrates acquaintance rape is always responsible.

The person who is sexually assaulted is never to blame.

No one asks to be sexually assaulted.

No one deserves to be sexually assaulted.

Knowing Thoughts.

I know how you must be feeling.

I know you must be worried.

I know this must be hard for you

I know you must be scared about what is going to happen.

I know you must be in a great deal of pain.

Well you don't really know.

No one knows how you are really feeling because how can you explain this.

No one knows the weight of worries you carry because where do you begin.

No one knows how hard this is for you because things being easy are something you barely remember.

No one knows the fear that creeps around with you because you are never free of it to talk about it.

No one knows the depth of your pain because that black hole is infinite.

But you will know these things if you have been assaulted.

You will carry the feelings.

You will carry the worries.

You will carry how hard this is.

You will carry the fear.

You will carry the pain.

You need to know that whatever this load, you do not have to be alone. There are so many others who have carried so many similar loads and because of that, know something about the journey you need to make.

So find a travelling companion, find several, find a bus load and start.

From Writings on the Wall. A Rosie's Place Publication.

FINDING SUPPORT

Support for being able to talk about the impact of the assault is most important and this may come from people close to you or perfect strangers. What is most important is that you do not have to go through this alone.

Talking to people can help you believe:

- ◆ You are not alone.
- ◆ It is not your fault
- ◆ There is someone who understands and can help
- ◆ That things are less out of control
- ◆ It is easier to sort out what you want to do.

Talk to someone you can trust:

- ◆ Someone you feel safe with
- ◆ Someone who will believe
- ◆ Someone who will be able to listen
- ◆ Someone who you think respects you

That person might be:

- ◆ A member of your family
- ◆ A close friend
- ◆ A counsellor
- ◆ Sometimes even a phone call, text or sending an email to someone is a place to start

If people don't need to know what happened to you don't tell them if you don't want to. If they already know ask them what they want to ask you and then ask them to let go of it. Tell them what you need as they may not know what to do or say.

Sexual Harassment.

Sexual harassment is defined as unwanted and unwelcome physical actions, verbal demands and put-downs based on the sex or sexuality of a person that makes them feel uncomfortable, intimidated, hurt or vulnerable.

It can include:

- ◆ Unwelcome comments about someone's sexuality.
- ◆ Wolf whistling.
- ◆ Telling a dirty or sexist joke.
- ◆ Showing pornographic pictures.
- ◆ Using phrases that put people down i.e. 'dog' or 'slut'.
- ◆ Making comments about the size of someone's breasts or genitals.
- ◆ Pinching, grabbing or touching parts of people's bodies.
- ◆ Touching someone in a sexual way without making sure it is wanted.
- ◆ Flicking of bra straps, lifting of shirts or skirts, pulling down of trousers.
- ◆ Graffiti which says a girl is a slut.
- ◆ Spreading sexual rumours.

Sexual harassment is a form of abuse and is never OK, whether it be happening at school, the work place, in your family or with your friends.

It is hard to stand up to it on your own so talking to someone about it is the first thing you need to do.

Abuse in relationships

Sexual assault can often be part of ongoing abuse in relationships. This abuse is when one partner tries to control or hurt the other person. It's not like a one off fight or even ongoing fights which feel equal in intensity. It is a pattern of control and usually gets worse over time.

Warning signs of relationship abuse:

Possessiveness and Jealousy:

- ◆ Manipulates and controls them through jealousy.
- ◆ Abuses them for talking to other males or females.
- ◆ Wants to know their every move.
- ◆ Constantly checks up on their whereabouts
- ◆ Is suspicious of their explanations and wants proof.
- ◆ Cuts them off from friends and does not allow their independence.
- ◆ Repeated phone calls, text messages or emails.

Aggression:

- ◆ Physically aggressive such as hitting, punching, pushing, pulling hair or threatening to harm them or someone close to them
- ◆ Smashing things, driving dangerously to scare them.
- ◆ Physical assault is a crime.

MYSPACE



MY SPACE

Verbally demeaning:

- ◆ Puts them down and calls them names. E.g. stupid, slut, ugly, weak etc.
- ◆ Ignores or deliberately humiliates them
- ◆ Uses personal information to shame them.

Controlling and manipulative

- ◆ Refuses to allow her to make her own decisions.
- ◆ Threatens or forces her to do things against her will.
- ◆ Stops her from seeing friends, checks what she's doing all the time.

Sexually abusive.

- ◆ Forces or pressures her to do sexual things she doesn't want to do.
- ◆ Engages in sex which is hurtful, unpleasant or forced.

The Right to a Respectful Relationship

Being treated with respect means you are:

- ◇ Free to say “no” to things you don’t want to do.
- ◇ Safe and never scared.
- ◇ Free to see family and friends when you want.
- ◇ Free to express your opinions and beliefs.
- ◇ Free to change your mind.
- ◇ Supported to make your own decisions.
- ◇ Free to end the relationship if you want.
- ◇ Feeling good about yourself in the relationship.

(From www.aboutdaterape.nsw.gov.au)

How do we then define consent?

- Consent is when two people agree freely to have sex.
- Consent is something that must be present for sexual activity to take place. Sex without consent is sexual assault.
- Consent is invalid if given because of any form of coercion, or pressure, such as physical force or using manipulative statements or threats to harm them or others.
- In NSW consent is also invalid if the person is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs or they cannot understand what they are consenting to.
- Generally young people under the legal age of consent can have sex with people their own age without legal prosecution if force and abusive behaviour was not used.

The law states that consent cannot be given when someone is:

- Asleep, unconscious or significantly affected by alcohol or other drugs.
- Unable to understand what they are consenting to.

Drugs and alcohol.

Adolescence is a time when young people experiment with drugs and alcohol but they can also be abused to try and deal with the impact of the sexual assault. Drugs and alcohol take away memories and feelings and give you, for a small amount of time, an escape from the pain.

Becoming dependent can quickly occur, with drugs and alcohol being used more and more to cope. Other coping strategies become less and less used and are also less effective when drugs and alcohol are used. Alcohol and drugs can make anxiety, depression, panic and other problems worse. Eventually they will hurt you, make you sick and even kill you.

Feeling alone.

Sexual assault can make you feel totally alone, with no one who can understand what you are going through. You may feel ashamed and believe that no one would want anything to do with you if they knew what had happened. You may feel different to everyone else and so you keep to yourself or try hard to be someone else so they will never guess that you have been hurt in this way.

The crime of sexual assault has already made you feel isolated and alone so it’s important not to let it continue to do that to you. Shutting yourself away from people may make you feel safer for a while but it also keeps you alone and having to deal with things on your own.

Eating patterns.

You may find that you can't eat and the thought or look of food makes you feel sick. When you try to eat you feel full after a few mouthfuls or you feel as though you are going to throw up.

Or you may overeat, finding that food gives you comfort and, for a while, makes you feel better.

Sometimes these patterns can become more serious and develop into disorders known as anorexia (which is under-eating to the point of starvation) or bulimia (overeating and then forcing yourself to vomit). Both anorexia and bulimia have to do with control.

A person who has been sexually assaulted often feels they have no control over their life or their body so one thing that can be controlled is the amount of food you eat.

But both conditions are serious and you need advice and support from other people.

Food, like sleep, is an important part of staying healthy and keeping up your energy. If you are struggling with eating then you need to talk to someone about it and get some advice and help.

Trust Deserves

*It's there one day and gone the next.
It's something like you are born with because you
Need it and then someone takes it away.
People say to you, "you can trust me"
But if you trust and then hurt your trust is taken from you.*

*So don't trust anyone. Don't be hurt.
So you decide not to trust and you stay alone.
If trust doesn't matter then how do you ever
Feel connected to anyone ever again?
How do you feel safe?
So now, even when around others, you still feel alone and unsafe.*

*Trust only a few and see if they will break that trust.
Be cautious and careful while waiting for them to
Break the rules of trust.
So don't be lonely but then don't be yourself
Because you are always on guard.*

*So reinvent this thing that trust is suppose to be
What is it anyway?
It's really a feeling of safety...of finding peace.
It's something between people.
It connects them to you and you to them.*

*It's precious and choosy who it connects with.
There are people who will never break the trust
You place in them.
So perhaps trust is never broken.
What is broken was someone's abuse of it.
So return to trust...believe in it..trust yourself to trust others.
You deserve trust just like trust deserves you.*

Holding onto the truth

There are many ideas that people hold about why sexual assault happens and who it most often happens to. Many ideas also have come from what the person who sexually assaulted you told you. It's hard to hold onto the truth of what happened with these different ideas swimming around you.

◆ **Sexual assault is about sex.**

Sexual assault uses sex as a means for being powerful over someone, humiliating them and making them feel powerless.

◆ **Sexual assault is most often committed by strangers.**

80-90% of victims know the offender, including close relatives, friends of the family or acquaintances. It is common that sexual assault may occur in your home or the home of the offender.

◆ **Most children and young people who experience sexual assault are female.**

On average 30% of all women and 16% of all men have experienced some form of sexual abuse as a child.

◆ **If you are sexually assaulted you were encouraging it.**

Drinking, flirting or dressing in a sexy way is not an invitation for sex. No one can ever be held responsible for being abused by someone who knows what they are doing is wrong, and who exploits the trust held by their victim toward them.

But hurting yourself by hurting your body is not the way you deserve to be treated. You never deserved the pain the person who sexually assaulted you gave you and you don't deserve the pain you are giving to yourself.

When the feelings of hurting yourself come you need to do something else to try and release those feelings quickly. Rubbing ice or slapping a rubber band on your wrists, having a really hot or cold shower, getting distracted with chores like scrubbing pots, digging in the garden, painting a wall with lots of colours are some ways to try and release the build up of feelings.

Work out what might work for you and have everything available to you for when you might need it. Move your body and don't let the feeling take over you. Have someone come over or stay with you.

When you feel calmer you also need to try and find ways to feel differently about your body. Try to write down one thing about your body, even a small part, that you feel OK about. Try to add a sentence every day and increase the parts of your body that you feel are OK.

Look after your body, even in small ways. Massage safe parts of your body such as your hands or neck with lotions or oils, cuddle someone or something, soak your feet or have a bubble bath, touch something soothing and comfortable.

Self harm.

Often the impact of the sexual assault hits your body. The assault happened through your body and may cause you to feel differently about it. You may hate it, blame it for what happened, be embarrassed by it or want to ignore that it exists and so numb out from it.

At times those feelings can cause you to self harm which can include cutting, hitting, pinching, scratching and biting yourself. Or you can become reckless about things you do such as driving or getting in fast cars, staying in unsafe places or getting involved in highly risky or even criminal activities.

There are different reasons why people self harm.

- ◆ Shutting down emotions is often a way of dealing with the sexual assault and hurting yourself may be the only way of trying to feel something...to feel pain.
- ◆ Sometimes the anger about what has happened becomes so great that you have to find a way to explode and this can mean you turn the anger on yourself.
- ◆ You may feel disgusted or ashamed of your body and therefore want to punish it.
- ◆ Sometimes hurting your body can make you feel safer by making yourself feel less attractive.
- ◆ Sometimes hurting yourself is a way of pleading for help, even of keeping yourself alive.

◆ Most adults who assault children were sexually assaulted as children.

There is no evidence to support this view with between 20-30% of offenders disclosing their own sexual abuse during their childhood.

◆ I didn't scream or fight back so I didn't say no.

Victims may be paralysed with fear and unable to speak or move. There are also many ways people say no without using the word "no". (e.g: I'm not sure...I've got a boyfriend...You've been drinking...I've been drinking...I want to be alone...Don't touch me).

◆ Children and young people make up stories about being sexually assaulted.

Research shows that very few disclosures of sexual assault are false. In fact most sexual assaults are under-reported - only about one third are ever reported to police.

◆ People close to a child or young person should know that sexual abuse is happening.

Sexual assault occurs because the offender works hard to keep it a secret. Their grooming of the child or young person extends to others in the child's network to ensure that people don't suspect the abuse.

◆ If a child or young person doesn't tell about being sexually assaulted it is because they have had a bad relationship with their parents or others and have no one who can support them.

Sexual assault has often been called the "silent crime" because most often the hardest thing for anyone who has been assaulted is to tell someone.

How hard it is to tell

Offenders work hard to keep the abuse a secret and keep a child silent. Their key message to the child is that things will get worse if they expose what has happened.

Children are often made to feel alone - that no one will believe them if they tell and that they may lose their family or be taken away.

Most children do not readily tell someone that they have been sexually assaulted and often delay telling. There are very strong reasons why it is so hard to tell someone about being sexually assaulted:

- ◆ The relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. Knowing the perpetrator well makes it all the more difficult to disclose, especially when that person is a close family member.
- ◆ Fear of not being believed or being blamed for the abuse.
- ◆ Fear of the reaction of the offender and therefore their ongoing safety and the safety of others.
- ◆ Worries about how telling may impact on other people, especially other members of the family.

What is known is that children rarely lie about sexual assault and are not mistaken in what they believe happened to them.

What is most important if children or young people do tell someone about being sexually assaulted is that they are believed and kept safe.

Constant Companion

Being awake

Being asleep

Being inside

Being outside

Being with friends

Being alone.

Fear is your constant companion.

Someone looks like him, speaks like him, smells like him.

Someone walks up behind you and says your name.

Someone brushes your arm, bumps into you.

Someone smiles at you, says hello to you, asks you a question

Fear can be exhausting. It makes you tired, makes you feel sick, makes you want to run and hide.

Fear can be greedy. It takes over your life and doesn't want to share you with anyone else.

Fear can be ruthless. It doesn't care how you feel and it's not interested enough in your wellbeing to leave you alone.

Fear can be stubborn. It never gives up and never gives in.

Fear can be dishonest. It tells you that no one can be trusted or that anyone is safe.

But fear can be shift like sand.

It can have days when it feels quite weak.

It may forget to bother you

It may get tired of giving you a hard time and sleep

And one day it may leave you altogether.

Sleeplessness

Your sleeping patterns will be mixed up. You may find it hard to sleep at night and then you find it almost impossible to get out of bed in the morning. You may be having nightmares or sleepwalking. Nightmares, which may be memories of the sexual assault or scenes where you or people close to you are being hurt. Or you may find the opposite which is wanting to sleep all the time so that you are even fighting sleep in class, watching TV, being out.

Help to sleep:

- ◆ Try to organise your day with regular times for eating and doing things. This can keep your body clock running smoothly.
- ◆ Try some exercise during the day such as walking or even some gym work at home.
- ◆ Try to avoid naps during the day even if you feel really tired.
- ◆ At night get into a routine of "winding down" with at least half an hour of quiet activity such as reading. Listen to music or try a relaxation technique. TV is not the greatest thing to rest your mind with.
- ◆ Avoid drinking coffee or alcohol and taking sleeping pills. Herbal teas can really help.
- ◆ Go to bed when you are feeling sleepy and not before.
- ◆ Try to relax, do everything you can to make your sleeping space feel as safe as possible.
- ◆ Tell yourself that sleep will come even if you don't fall asleep at first.
- ◆ If you wake up then don't lie awake for more than thirty minutes. Get up and do something distracting.
- ◆ Try a night light or something to comfort you when

Some would say.

Some would say that people often make up stories and lie about being sexually abused.

I would ask why would anyone want to or even know how to make up lies like this?

Some would say that people lie because they are angry or want to get back at the person they are accusing of assaulting them.

I would ask that if some of your biggest fears are not being believed or that the person who assaulted you may further hurt you then why would you take that risk if it wasn't true?

Some would say that people lie to cover up something they have done.

I would ask why would you say something that, if untrue, would only create more trouble for you?

Some would say that people must have had a dream but think it's real.

I would ask why would you have a dream about being sexually assaulted? Dreams are supposed to be about good things that you want to happen in your life. Even bad dreams are usually about monsters but not real people in your life hurting you. Unless of course the dreams are real.

How would you know what to dream about if it hadn't already happened to you?

Some would say that people misunderstood what happened-that it was harmless.

But I would ask how you can misunderstand a touching that makes you feel embarrassed, uncomfortable and unsafe?

Knowing that what was happening is wrong is sometimes hard to work out, especially when he is saying things that tell you it's OK,

But the feelings of it being wrong don't go away.

Sometimes it hurts and sometimes it doesn't.

But all the time it doesn't feel right.

MYSPACE

Depression.

Life really sucks sometimes.

Wouldn't you agree?

*For the times I wish
That it wasn't me.*

*Sometimes I don't want to get
Out of bed nor go to school*

*Not wanting to talk to people
Or wonder why life is cruel.*

*Endless days of feeling bad
On my bed curled up I cry
I sit up on my bed hoping to die.*

*The pain and lonely nights
The strain on families too*

*When all you really need is
Someone to comfort you.*

*So be glad if depression isn't
Affecting you.*

*Author: Crystal
From Writings on the Wall.*

Depression.

Depression is where everything feels too hard and there is just not enough strength inside you to keep you going. You feel as though you are getting through each day in a complete fog, not really connecting to the people or events around you.

You are having trouble remembering things and concentrating. You are staying away from friends and avoiding phone calls and emails.

Everything is an effort, including showering, doing your hair, even putting on clothes.

Depression is a constant feeling of hopelessness - that nothing will ever change and it is overwhelming.

Depression can make you feel helpless—that there is nothing you or anyone else can do to make things different.

Depression can't be minimised or ignored and it's important to not deal with it on your own.

You may need to see a doctor and get some prescribed medication for a while to support you. Alcohol and illicit drugs are not going to help you in the long run. In fact they can make the depression worse.

If you have suicidal thoughts you need to take them most seriously.

This may mean you think about killing yourself or even

MYSPACE

Dealing with what happened.

As someone who has been sexually assaulted you will have many different reactions to what has happened. This can depend on factors such as your relationship to the offender, the length of time the abuse occurred and the support by those around you.

Some of your reactions will seem confused, change all the time and even be in conflict with each other. For a time you may feel uncertain about what to feel, think or do about what has happened to you.

You struggle with lots of questions that seem to have no answers and that's because there just aren't answers in trying to understand why this has happened.

You struggle with the silence and the loneliness for you believe that you are indeed alone and this has happened to no one else.

You struggle in thinking that something is wrong with you because of what happened and you hold the weight of guilt and self blame.

Time and patience, understanding that what you are going through is normal, ongoing support and reassurance will help you through this turmoil.

Hyper vigilance

Feeling safe again is often most difficult, even if the offender doesn't know where you live or you have people around you caring for you.

Fear is something that seems to stay around no matter how much you tell yourself or others tell you that there is nothing to feel frightened about...that you are safe.

Hyper vigilance is usually driven by the fear that you are still unsafe and can make you do things to constantly check for your safety when at home or out.

You may look around you wherever you go with the fear that the person who assaulted you is nearby, you may check the doors and windows at night to ensure they are locked

You may be alert to faint noises you hear or believe you see something in the shadows.

Don't tell yourself that you are over-reacting but work out a plan to try and make you feel as safe as possible. If you have to check the doors and windows, then do it. Try to cut down the number of times you need to do this so you can keep some control over it.

If you don't feel safe going out then don't do it alone. Go with family or friends. If you don't feel safe staying over at someone's house then ask them to stay over at your house.

Have lights on, music playing and things around you that

Panic attacks

You may suffer panic attacks when you feel so scared by your own emotions that you can't calm yourself down. They can happen out of nowhere. Often it is because you have been trying to deal with all the feelings and keep them squashed and then suddenly they come out at such a rate that your body can't catch up with them.

There is usually a trigger (smell, noise, place, time of day,) that sets off the feeling of panic that may be related to the assault even if you aren't aware of it.

"Your heart is racing, your body feels as if it's going to explode, you want to run. Even your vision may change. You fear you're going crazy. And not understanding what is going on only makes things worse".

(The Courage to Heal. Ellen Bass & Laura Davis. 198.p201)

What you can do.

Try to catch it before it takes hold of you.

Breathe slowly and try to stay calm.

Have a list of things you can try and keep them nearby so you can read them and remember the steps you have in place for you.

When you breathe.

Don't take quick breaths or pant.

Breathe in (without taking a deep breath) and hold your breath for a count of 5.

When you get to 5, gently breathe out, saying to yourself "relax" or "calm".

Then just breathe in and out slowly through your nose, counting 3 with each breath in and 3 with each breath out.

Re-experiencing the trauma.

Flashbacks.

Flashbacks are intense memories of the sexual assault. They can seem so real it is like the abuse is happening all over again. Flashbacks can happen anywhere and any time of day. They can come without warning but sometimes there is a trigger (a place, a time, a smell) that can cause the flashbacks to happen. Sometimes you may think you see the person who assaulted you or see their car or even hear their name.

Flashbacks can take your mind back to the time you were assaulted or bring up an image of the person and strong feelings of fear. Sometimes flashbacks don't have an image but your body is remembering something and you may begin to tremble and lose control of your body. Flashbacks can take you so away from the present that you lose awareness of your surroundings, the people around you and what is happening. Some people have said that during a flashback they can keep on behaving as normal as possible to other people, even carrying on a conversation, driving, shopping or listening to the radio.

Flashbacks can't be avoided but usually over time, they become weaker and occur less often. The best thing to do is realise that what is happening is normal and that it will end.

Try not to panic but find a way that best suits how you can handle it. Finding a safe place to sit it through, working hard at doing something to keep busy, focusing on a pic-

Flooded with feelings.

You may experience overwhelming feelings that come and go in waves. You may feel one of these at one time or all of them in close timing with each other.

You may feel::

- ◆ Angry at the person who abused you.
- ◆ Angry at people you thought should have kept you safe.
- ◆ Angry at yourself for not being able to stop it.
- ◆ Confused that you may have positive feelings for the person who abused you.
- ◆ Fearful that people will be angry or disappointed in you.
- ◆ Fearful that the person who abused you will harm you or your family.
- ◆ Embarrassed that people will know what happened to you and think differently about you.
- ◆ Guilty because you think you did something wrong to cause the abuse to happen.

Face your feelings

Trust your feelings and don't try to ignore them. Keeping your feelings and thoughts a secret and pushing them

- ◆ Keep a record of your feelings: draw them, using colours, shapes and pictures. Write about them in a story or poem.
- ◆ Get in touch with other people's feelings and how they react to situations and learn from them. Watch movies or TV shows and study how young women look after themselves and their feelings.
- ◆ Read about what other young women who have been sexually assaulted have said about their feelings so you can see if what you are feeling is normal and fits.
- ◆ Talk to people, get support and share what you are feeling. Some of your ideas about how you should feel may change as you start to talk more about the impact of the abuse, and why you hold certain ideas about why it happened.
- ◆ Being lied to, being tricked and being isolated from other people during the abuse means that often you had to work things out on your own and couldn't check it out with others.
- ◆ With regard to anger, it's normal to feel this and it has a place in regard to your reaction to what has happened to you. Like all other feelings you can't ignore it, squash it down and hope it goes away.
- ◆ But anger does not give you the right to be violent to other people or things in your life. There are things you can do when you feel angry that don't let you hurt others or hurt yourself.
- ◆ If you are angry with someone leave the space and take