

## Books for Supporters

### Understanding Rape & Child Sexual Abuse

#### **The Courage To Heal**

by E Bass & L Davies

Written by survivors and those who have supported them, this book explores the impact of child sexual abuse and the stages involved in healing from it.

#### **Hurting And Healing: How To Overcome The Trauma Of Sexual Abuse And Rape**

by G Wade

A self help book which explores the similarities and differences between child sexual abuse and rape, and offers suggestions on how to cope with both.

#### **Quest For Respect**

by L Brasswell

The aftermath of rape, and the stages of recovery.

### For Partners, Family, Friends & Workers

#### **Allies In Healing - When The Person You Love Was Sexually Abused As A Child**

by L Davies

#### **Partners In Healing: A Handbook For Partners Of Rape Survivors**

by T Platt

Written for partners, but of help to family and friends too, this book answers many commonly asked questions and suggests ways in which you can support both the Survivor and yourself.

#### **Family Fallout: A Handbook For Families Of Adult Sexual Abuse Survivors**

by D Landry

#### **Surviving Child Sexual Abuse - A Handbook For Helping Women To Challenge Their Past**

by L Hall & S Lloyd

Suitable for all, but of particular use for workers.

Some of the above can be ordered from your local library or bookshop: alternatively contact DABS, a confidential mail order book service which specialises in sexual abuse, on 01709 860023.

## BARNSELY SEXUAL ABUSE & RAPE CRISIS HELPLINE

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Information for Relatives,  
Friends & Workers

Our project is supported by  
money from the Big Lottery  
Fund, BMBC, the Home Office  
Victims' Fund, various other  
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If you wish to make a donation, call for details.

Supported by



Supporting women survivors  
of child sexual abuse & rape

☎ Helpline  
**01226 298560**

[www.bsarch.org](http://www.bsarch.org)

Registered Charity Number 1001452

☎ Helpline  
**01226 298560**

Our experience of counselling women who have been sexually abused and/or raped, has shown us how important the support of those closest to a woman can be in helping her to rebuild her life. At the same time we recognise that supporting someone you care for through the aftermath of abuse is a challenging and emotional experience for the 'helper' too and that it can often be difficult for partners, family, friends and workers to know where to start. We hope that the following ideas will help you to support her and to take care of yourself too.

## Believe her

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Survivors are often afraid to tell because they fear that they won't be believed or will be blamed for the abuse. When she speaks to you, she may be confused about what happened, or unable to recall parts of the abuse, but this doesn't mean that she is lying; this is just one of the ways in which her mind protects her from trauma. Your belief in her is crucial - women don't make up stories about abuse.

## Listen to her

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Listening is a powerful tool in helping survivors to heal. Reassure her that you are there to listen to her and give her your support, now and in the future. Recognise that there may be aspects of the abuse which she doesn't want to talk about, and that the things that you might want to hear may be different from what she needs to share. Try to get rid of your own agenda and don't pressure her into talking. Instead explain to her that sharing things might slowly help her to feel better and reassure her that you won't push her into exploring things which she doesn't feel ready for.

## Validate her feelings

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Every woman who has been raped or sexually abused will respond in a unique way. She is likely to experience a whole range of emotions, such as distress, humiliation, confusion, numbness, anger, guilt and fear: her feelings may vary greatly from day to day and month to month. Reassure her that her feelings are all natural responses to the abuse that she has suffered, and encourage her to feel and express them.

## Help her to understand that it wasn't her fault

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Sexual abuse is about power and is an act of force, whereby the attacker deliberately takes away the woman or child's control over her own body and in doing so violates her.

However, because of the myths about women 'asking for it', many survivors continue to blame themselves for their abuse and talk about what they should have done or shouldn't have done to stop it from happening. Some women automatically freeze through fear or some distance themselves from the abuse even as it is happening, others take the conscious decision not to struggle, for fear of being hurt even further. Abusers are very clever in that they often manipulate the child or woman to get them into the position where they can abuse them and add to their feelings of guilt by telling them that they deserved it. Help her to understand that no child or woman ever deserves to be sexually abused, irrespective of how they behaved, or what they wore. Help her to realise that however she reacted at the time, she did what she needed to survive. Help her to place the blame where it belongs - with the abuser.

## Support her to make her own decisions

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You may be tempted to step in and make decisions for her, or speak for her when other people ask her what happened or how she feels, because you want to protect her from any further distress. While this is understandable, our experience shows us that treating her differently can often add to her feelings of frustration. Instead, ask her what she wants and how you can help, support her to explore her options and respect the choices that she makes, even if you may not agree with them. It is crucial that she is allowed to make her own decisions and control what happens to her, if she is to begin to rebuild her life.

## Express your compassion

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Supporting a survivor will inevitably stir up some powerful emotions in you. Sharing some of these with her can be helpful for both of you, as it may comfort her to see how much you care about what has happened to her and help her to get in touch with feelings that she might not be aware of. However, be careful not to overwhelm her with your feelings or direct the anger you may feel towards the abuser at her.

## Don't seek revenge

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Going after her abuser may make you feel better but it won't help her: instead it is likely to make her feel even more unsafe and out of control. Find other ways of dealing with your anger.

## Understand that touch may be difficult for her

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She may be uncomfortable with you touching her, not because she fears that you might harm her, but because it recalls memories of the abuse and the feelings of violation around it. Ask her if it is OK to touch her and if so, explore with her what kind of touch feels safe and comforting to her. Remember to check this out again and again, because what she feels OK with on one day, may not feel OK the next.

## Find out about sexual abuse and the healing process

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Reading books written by survivors will give you a clearer idea of what she is going through and will help you to be supportive.

## Respect that it may take a long time for her to heal

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Don't rush her into 'getting better' or tell her that it is time to 'forget about it'. Being sexually abused can have a profound impact on a woman and it will take time for her to feel in control of her life and to regain her sense of self worth and trust in the world.

## Remember to support yourself

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Don't give yourself a hard time for hurting too. Instead, find someone you can talk to in confidence about your feelings (whilst respecting her confidentiality), and remember to look after yourself by taking breaks and doing things that you enjoy. You'll be no good to her or yourself if you get swallowed up by her abuse.

## Remember you can make a difference

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You can't change what happened to her, or make everything magically better straight away. However, showing that you believe her, that you care for her, and are willing to listen to her will all be great help.