

**SAAVI Office**

Sexual Assault and Anti Violence Information

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[www.usu.edu/saavi](http://www.usu.edu/saavi)

## **STAGES OF ADJUSTMENT AFTER RAPE**

Every person going through a crisis (regardless of the type of crisis) progresses through stages of emotional adjustment. The following information is a simple guideline for understanding what a rape survivor may experience during the period of adjustment after the rape.

There is no set time-line. Adjustment is an individual, personal process; it varies from person to person, and situation to situation. Some may spend a great deal of time in one stage and only touch lightly on another. The survivor may also encounter a spiraling effect while passing through a number of the stages over and over again, each time experiencing them with a different intensity.

Anyone close to the victim may also experience these stages as s/he, too, adjusts to the crisis of rape.

- **SHOCK—Numbness**  
Offering information to the survivor during this stage is not helpful, as s/he will likely remember very little, if anything, about what occurs during this time period.
- **DENIAL—“Not me, I’m fine.” “This can’t have happened!” “It’s not that bad.”**  
Not yet able to face the severity of the crisis, the survivor spends time gathering strength. The denial phase serves as a cushion for the more difficult stages of adjustment that follow.
- **ANGER—Rage, Resentment... “What did I do?” “Why me?”**  
A survivor’s anger may be the result of having experienced a loss of strength or loss of control over her/his life. The anger may be directed toward the rapist, a doctor, the police, or anyone else, including her/himself.
- **PLEA-BARGAINING—Rationalization... “Let’s go on as if it didn’t happen” “I should be finished with this by now”**  
This is another form of denial wherein the survivor sets up a bargain: s/he will not talk about the rape in exchange for not having to experience further pain. The other half of the bargain is that friends and relatives will also stop talking about it and pretend that it never happened. In so doing, s/he continues to deny the emotional impact the rape had on her/his life.
- **DEPRESSION—Denial not longer works... “I feel so dirty, so worthless”**  
If the survivor is warned of this stage ahead of time, s/he may not be so thrown by this experience. Though painful, this stage signifies s/he has begun to face the reality of the rape. As s/he allows the negative emotions to surface, s/he

should be reminded that these feelings are normal and will not last forever. S/he should, however, be aware of symptoms of severe depression during this stage, for example: drastic changes in sleeping or eating habits, compulsive rituals or generalized fears taking control of her/his life. Professional counseling may be advisable.

- **ACCEPTANCE—“Life can go on.”**

When enough of the anger and depression is released, the survivor enters acceptance. S/he may still spend time thinking and talking about the rape, but s/he understands and is in control of emotions; s/he can now accept what has happened.

- **ASSIMILATION—The rape is put into perspective**

By the time the survivor reaches this stage, s/he has realized her/his own self-worth and strength. S/he no longer needs to spend time dealing with the rape, as the total rape experience now meshes with other life experiences.