



THE SURVIVOR'S GUIDE



A practical guide for survivors of rape and other forms of sexual violence

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OPEN SOCIETY
Initiative for West Africa

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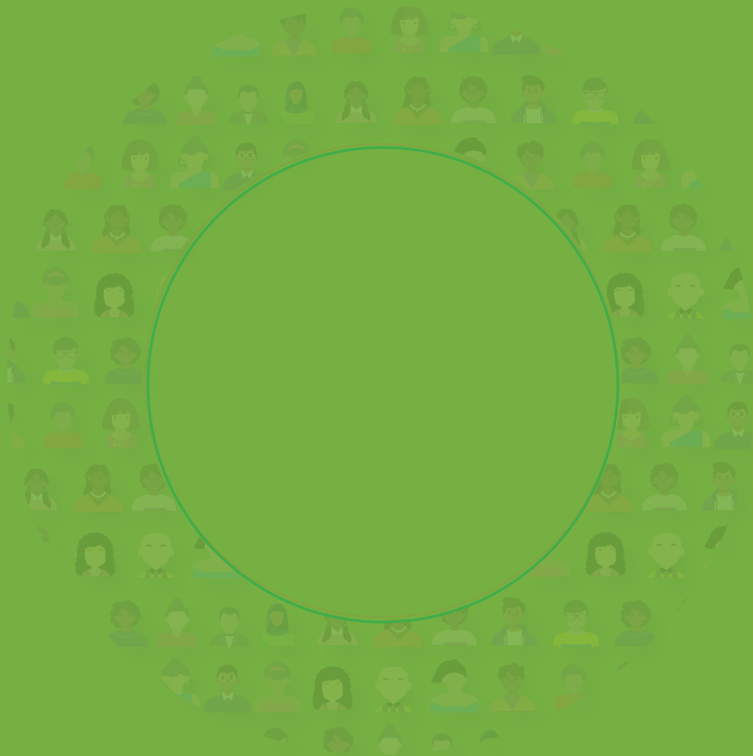
The content of The Survivor's Guide is based on the practical experiences and expertise of the writers and contributors, while also drawing from desk research and related literature. The content, therefore, is not exhaustive and will be updated from time to time.

WHY WE DEVELOPED THIS GUIDE

The rate of sexual violence is increasing and troubling. As the simple rule of consent is overlooked, someone is raped or sexually assaulted every minute. Sadly, while some of these cases are publicized, many go unreported.

For a crime so pervasive, anyone can be affected at any time. It leaves scars on survivors, and those scars look different and are expressed differently. So, we thought it necessary to develop this simple and practical guide to help you understand sexual violence and its variants, how it affects survivors, your rights as a survivor, things you must do and not do if raped, and how you can get help.

This guide is for you! Everyone! It is for survivors, and those who want to help or support them.



KNOW

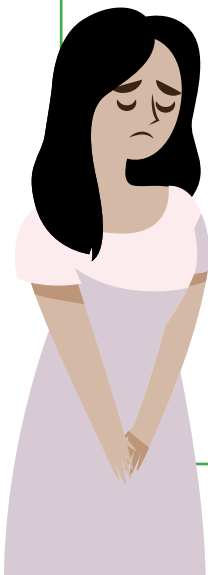
THE TERMS

KNOW THE TERMS



What is sexual violence?

In this guide, we refer to sexual violence as all attempted or actual unwanted or unconsented sexual activities that deny a person of his/her dignity, freedom, and self-worth. Such sexual acts, as will be separately explained below, include, but not limited to rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and defilement.



What is rape?

Rape occurs when a person intentionally penetrates (no matter how slight) the vagina, anus, or mouth of another person with any other part of his or her body or anything else without consent. It is rape if consent is obtained by force, threat, intimidation, fear of harm, false pretense, or fraudulent representation as to the nature of the act. It is also rape if consent is obtained by using any substance or additive capable of taking away the will of such person or, in the case of a married person, by impersonating his or her spouse. (Adapted from Section 1, Violence Against Persons Prohibitions Act, 2015).

KNOW THE TERMS



What is sexual assault?

Sexual assault, which also includes rape, is any sexual act that a person did not consent to or is forced into against their will. This includes unwanted sexual acts such as forceful kissing, groping, unwanted touching, forcing the non-consenting party to touch the perpetrator in a sexual manner, or using sexual acts to torture a person.

Sexual assault can be perpetrated by anyone – relative, colleague, ex-spouse, partner, friend, etc; and it can happen anywhere, including the non-consenting party's or perpetrator's home, worship centres, workplaces, markets, schools, or clubs, provided consent was not willfully given. Survivors of sexual assault need not have physical injuries or scars to show they have been sexually assaulted. That sexual assault happened within the domain of the perpetrator does not make it any less of an assault or a crime.

What is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment occurs when a perpetrator requests sexual activities in exchange for a reward or favor, leaving the other party feeling degraded, intimidated, or humiliated. Although it can happen anywhere, sexual harassment mostly happens in work environments, and can include comments or jokes of a sexual nature, unwanted sexual advances, catcalling, unwelcome sexual touches, displaying or circulation of images of a sexual nature, or sharing offensive sexual messages or contents through any means, including emails or social media.



KNOW THE TERMS



What is sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse can be described in one way as the sexual assault of children, considering that children (aged 18 years and under) are incapable of giving informed consent to any sexual act. Such sexual acts against children include asking or forcing a child to touch the perpetrator in a sexual manner, making a child look at sexual body parts, making a child watch sexual activities, or asking a child to carry out sexual activities (child pornography).

What is defilement?

What rape is to an adult, defilement is to a child. Defilement is any sexual intercourse with a child who is under 18 years of age. Such a child is incapable of giving consent; hence, a perpetrator cannot claim that a child under 18 of age gave consent for a sexual activity.

Who is a survivor?

One definition describes a survivor as “a person, who continues to function or prosper in spite of opposition, hardship, or setbacks.” Others have defined a survivor as: “a person... who remained alive after an event in which others have died;” or “someone... with a successful life despite bad experiences.” All these definitions apply to why we call those who experience sexual violence “survivors” and not “victims;” and this is because survivors, over time, remain strong, resilient, and courageous in overcoming the negative impacts of a sexual violence experience.

KNOW THE

LIES



KNOW THE

LIES

Lies you have been told about sexual violence?

If you sit in a room with four women, the data tells us that 1 in 4 of them would certainly have been sexually abused. If you are in a room with six men, chances are 1 in 6 of them have been sexually abused. When you consider the reality that most survivors of rape do not report the abuse, you come to the chilling reality that the numbers may be even higher than statistics show. So, why is rape and sexual assault largely unreported? Why would survivors of rape or sexual assault prefer to keep quiet about their experience? The answers to these questions are hinged on the many lies survivors and active bystanders have been told. You should know these lies so you, or any survivor you want to help, are not also silenced.



KNOW THE

LIES

Lie 1: It is your fault!

When a person is raped or sexually assaulted, people ask questions such as who did it, where s/he was, or whether anyone witnessed it. Some ask unnecessary questions such as what she was wearing; or whether she was with the perpetrator in an ungodly place at an ungodly hour. They want to know if you said 'no,' whether you fought hard, whether you tried to at least run, whether you shouted loud enough, or whether you told anyone immediately it happened. Questions like this make survivors doubt or underplay their experiences, while they feel guilty for not doing enough to prevent the violent act. But, know this, a sexual predator is a sexual predator, and you need not affirmatively tick these boxes for your experience to be valid. What you did or did not do does not justify the crime that was committed against you. It also does not make it your fault.



KNOW THE

LIES



Lie 2: **No one will believe you**

Rapists and sexual assaulters are experts at wielding this lie. They tell you not to bother telling anyone about what happened to you because nobody will believe you. They attempt to pass their burden of shame onto you and do this so skillfully that you might not even notice what is happening. Often, they use information they have about you as weapons in their armory: “you know you’re always going around with short skirts, so definitely everyone will say you asked for it;” “everyone in this place likes me, so no one will believe you;” “people always wondered why you have so many male friends anyway, so if you tell them about this, they will only blame you.” Other times, the people you love are what they attempt to use against you: “you know I am your mother’s favorite brother; do you want to break her heart and destroy our relationship? What perpetrators conveniently neglect to add is that they are the ones responsible for breaking trust; and any destruction of relationship is on them. It is not your responsibility to bear that burden for them and there are people who will believe and support you, no matter what.

KNOW THE

LIES

Lie 3: You can pretend it didn't happen

So many survivors of rape and other forms of sexual violence are told to “just get over it” and “move on.” You cannot simply push yourself to move on from rape or sexual assault. Maybe you can tuck that memory into a deep place in your mind that you don’t go to; but what happens when, one day, something triggers you? Maybe it’s a song that was playing at the time of the assault, or the smell of the perfume on your assaulter, a color, or even seeing a couch like the one on which you were raped. What happens then? You cannot just pretend that a rape or sexual assault incident did not happen just because you want to forget about it.

Lie 4: It is “just sex”

No, it is not. There is a fundamental difference between sex and rape: CONSENT. Sex is shared between parties who give permission or consent to it. Rape is without consent. Rape is a crime of power. Perpetrators sometimes tell survivors to take the incident as just sex; sometimes adding: “after all, you enjoyed it.” This is particularly the case when the survivor is/was in a relationship, including a marital relationship, with the perpetrator when it happened. Passing the sexual assault as ‘just sex’ is a perpetrator’s attempt at making you think it’d be easier to accept and bear with it despite the damaging, long-term effects of the sexual assault.

KNOW THE

LIES

Lie 5: You will die if you tell anyone

Sexual perpetrators use threat to (try to) silence survivors. In fact, fear is also a big part of why survivors don't speak up about the abuse. They are afraid that they will be blamed for what happened, they are afraid that the stigma will follow them for the rest of their lives, and they are afraid that they will never get the support that they need. Sometimes, survivors are afraid for their lives, especially in cases where the assaulter possess some level of power, wealth, and influence. Know this, if you, your relatives, or friends are being threatened by a rapist or sexual assaulter, report immediately!

Lie 6: You want to destroy reputation

Rapists and sexual assaulters, including some of their families, friends, and even the public often place a burden – of guilt, shame, anxiety, and the fear of what people will think or say – on survivors who choose to speak up or testify against an assaulter that speaking up at such time (whether immediately or long after the sexual violence) is for selfish reasons, for clout chasing, to gain popularity or public sympathy, or to destroy relationships. This is especially the narrative if the assaulter is well known or respected. Statistics show that about 70% of rapists or sexual assaulters are persons known to the survivors. As a survivor, you can take back your power and determine how and when you want to speak up, regardless of what anyone would think or say. It is your experience, not theirs. Own your story. Own your life.

KNOW THE

LIES

Lie 7: Men cannot be raped

Consent is not gendered. This means that women are not the only ones who can, and should, consent to sexual relations. It is a lie that men cannot be raped, or that men want to have sex every single time. Touching men inappropriately on their chest, face, penis, or other private parts of their body without their consent is sexual assault. Even if a man gets an erection or ejaculates, it doesn't lessen the impact of the abuse as these are biological functions that are not within his control. Sex is not a favor done to a man; it is supposed to be an activity between consenting parties. Anything outside of that is rape, sexual assault, or sexual violence. This lie is why there continue to be a big stigma associated with men admitting sexual abuse; and why many men who suffer such indignity never report it.





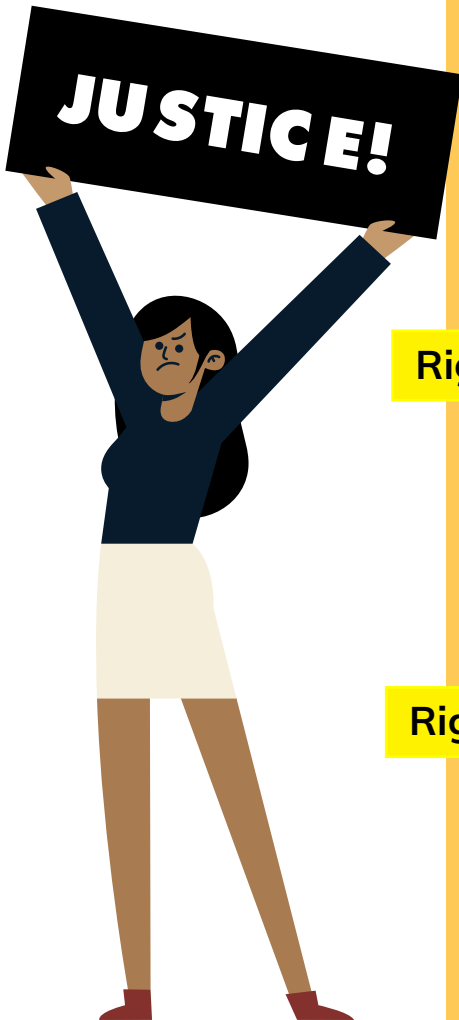
**KNOW YOUR RIGHTS AS A
SURVIVOR**



Your rights as a survivor

As a survivor of sexual violence, you have certain rights. These rights are mainly covered in the Constitution of the

Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (As Amended), the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) Act, 2015, and the Administration of Criminal Justice Act, 2015. To demand that these rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled, you must first know them. It should be noted that the version of the VAPP Act used here is the one passed at the Federal level in 2015; hence, relevant sections are based on their corresponding sections in the ones passed by relevant States, and the provisions are only applicable in States that have adopted the VAPP Act.



Right to Rights

As a survivor of sexual violence, you are entitled to all the fundamental rights enshrined in Chapter IV of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution. This includes your right to life, right to dignity, right to personal liberty, right to fair hearing, right to privacy, right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, right to freedom of expression, right to freedom of assembly and association, right to freedom of movement, right to freedom of discrimination, and right to own property.

Right to Know

You have the right to be informed of your rights as a survivor under any governing law or policy applicable in the environment where the sexual violence occurred, in such language and medium that is most favorable to you. In addition, you have the right to be informed of and have access to any available legal, health, social services, and other relevant information and assistance.

Right to Justice

You have the right to seek and get justice after a sexual crime has been perpetrated against you. This includes your right to being treated with fairness, dignity, respect, and without any form of harassment, intimidation, or discrimination.

A stylized illustration of a hand holding a pen, rendered in shades of orange and yellow. The hand is positioned on the left side of the page, with the pen pointing upwards towards the 'Right to protection' header.

Right to protection

As a citizen of Nigeria, you have a right to enjoy the primary responsibility of government, which, according to Section 14(2) of the 1999 Constitution, is your security and welfare. Hence, should you experience any threat, undue coercion, or intimidation by the perpetrator or his/her friend, family, or colleague, you have a right to seek protection from the law enforcement agency: the police force. In addition, you have the right not to be expelled, disengaged, suspended, or punished in any form whatsoever because you reported a sexual violence incidence. Most importantly, if you are at risk of further violence or imminent harm, you have the right to apply for a Protection Order through a High Court, and which, if granted, is applicable throughout Nigeria with no time limit or prescription, and it is accompanied by a warrant to arrest the perpetrator. Witnesses are also protected.

Right to help

You have the right to receive comprehensive medical, psychological, material, social, and legal support through any government agency or non-governmental organization providing such assistance. In addition, you are entitled to any rehabilitation and reintegration service provided by the State government in order to enable you acquire relevant and preferred vocational skills, formal education, and micro credit facilities.




Right to be heard

Howsoever you choose to share your experience, you have a right to be heard and not silenced. Hence, any rule or regulation by an institution or organization that prevents or restrains you from reporting the sexual violence is prohibited. In the same vein, you have the right to speak up or seek help when you feel ready for it; not when you are forced, coerced, or intimidated to do so.

Right to adequate compensation

Rape or sexual abuse leaves survivors with costs, arising from the cost of medicals, psychosocial help, repairs to physical damage, or even loss of income or revenue. Thus, you have a right to seek and get appropriate compensation. This should be awarded by a court as it deems fit and can be enforced following a favorable judgement. This right is guaranteed under section 1(3) and 2(5) of the VAPP Act.

KNOW WHAT TO DO AND **NOT** DO



As a survivor of rape or sexual assault, there are things you must do, and not do, after the sexual violence incident.

1. Get a safe space



While some perpetrators of rape and sexual assault are strangers, most are known to the survivor; as they are sometimes friends, colleagues, uncles, aunts, parents, teachers, spouses, religious leaders, among others. This means that rape or sexual assault can happen in just any place: at home, school, workplace, market, or religious houses. Wherever rape or sexual assault happens, getting to a safe place might mean getting home; but if the act happened in your home, you'd need to find safety somewhere else, such as the home of a trusted friend, family member, worship centre, a safe house or shelter, or a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC).

2. Do **not** take a bath or wash your cloth



We know how difficult this can be because after an experience of rape, you'd have the urge to quickly wash yourself and cleanse the perpetrator off you. You want to erase any physical trace of what happened, so you are not reminded of the incident. We get it. But we ask that you don't do it. If you shower after being raped, or wash the clothes you were wearing, all forms of evidence – semen, saliva, blood, hair, scratches – may be lost. This means that when you're feeling stronger and maybe ready to pursue a legal case, there may not be much in terms of evidence to back proof your case beyond reasonable doubt.



3. Contact a rape or sexual assault responder or service provider

You should contact an organization or individual who is trained in responding to incidents of rape and sexual assaults, and who provide relevant professional support services to survivors. There are shelters and Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) which are safe spaces where survivors can go to for care and support, including medical care, psychosocial help, emotional support, and referrals for legal services. Accessing such support is important because not only can rape or sexual assault result in physical wounds, the aftermath can also leave you with mental injuries, unwanted pregnancy, and/or sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

At an SARC, for instance, a medical officer will check your body and genital area for wounds, as well as take samples for evidence and necessary medical tests. They can also help you keep the evidence until you are ready to use them as evidence in a court of law, if you wish to. This would be the first phase, as there may be follow-up visits for other checks that cannot be done immediately after the incident, such as pregnancy tests and STIs checks. Most SARCs also work with trained trauma counselors who will listen to you and provide mental health counseling, including helping you know what signs to watch out for and how you can overcome them.

4. Report at the nearest police station



Rape is a crime; hence, as a survivor, you should report to the police if you want to. Nowadays, there are police stations in Nigeria with dedicated gender desks that are managed by officers who are specifically trained to respond to cases of rape and sexual assault, as well as support survivors through the law enforcement process. If for any reason you choose not to report at a police station, be assured it is well within your right to make this decision and no one can/should force you to do so. In this case, speak with a counsellor or responder on what you can do. Such professional can be your sounding board, and can help you see all the sides of this decision in a way that makes you feel empowered to do what's best for you.

5. Consider seeking legal redress

Going to court to seek legal remedy for the crime of rape or sexual assault that has been committed against you is not a must. It is your choice. However, while this legal process may sometimes be long and daunting, know that if the eventual court decision is favorable, it'd help to set legal precedent and will serve as deterrent to those contemplating such crimes. Besides, favorable court decisions will also embolden other survivors to speak up and seek justice; as well as help in finding healing. Even if the decision is not favorable, you'd feel powerful that you, at least, tried. And, if you decide not to, it'd be understandable knowing that people find healing and closure in different ways, depending on what works for them. But should you wish to tow the legal path, you can access pro bono legal advice and assistance, including available legal protection for any witness and family members.



6. Report obstructors

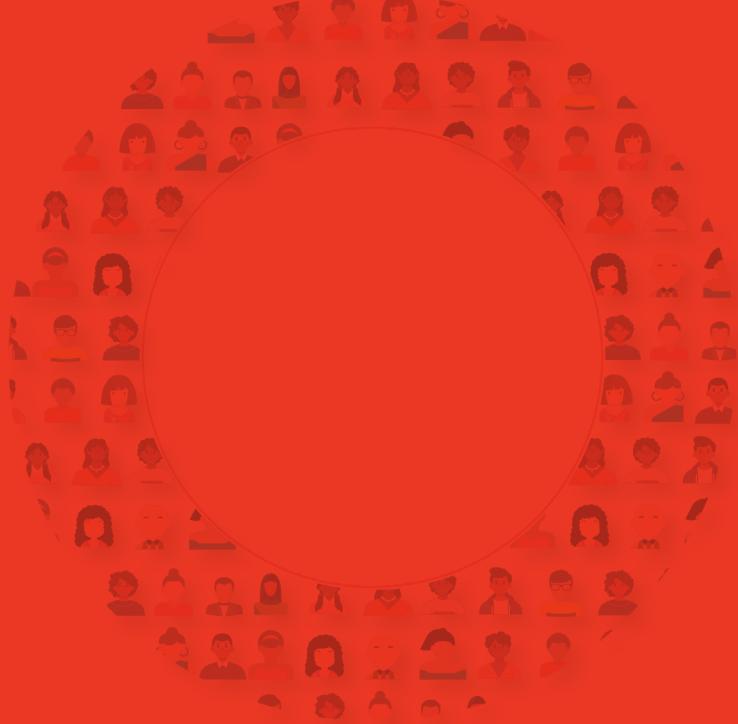


Whether you are seeking legal redress or not, there may be undue interference, coercion, threats, or intimidation by the perpetrator or their friend, family, colleagues, fans, religious leaders, or members of the same religious body, asking you to not speak up or to not go to court. Such requests or threats may also come from members of your own family, friends, colleagues, etc. Should this happen, report immediately as it is a crime and an obstruction in the course of justice or your preferred way of handling the incident. Don't forget to seek protection as earlier advised.



7. Face it

Most survivors tend to avoid processing the incident so as not to accept it ever happened. But avoiding or refusing to confront it will not bring the needed healing and wholeness. A professional once said that in situations of rape or sexual assault, “you can’t go around it, over it, or under it. You have to go through it.” Though difficult, you can do this through writing down what happened, sharing the incidence anonymously, speaking with a trusted friend, meditating, or any other therapeutic way that works for you. Whatever you do, please don’t shut it down. Face it. When you do that, you take away the power from your assaulter; you become the one in charge of your own peace, soundness of mind, wellbeing, and wholesome life. Try. You can.



Know
how &
where to get

help ■ ▸



How sexual violence may affect you

There is no uniform after-effect of rape because we are all different people who react in different ways to different situations. However, there are some common after-effects of rape or sexual assault, such as: being unable to sleep, sleeping too much, anxiety, depression, thoughts or attempts of suicide or self-harm, desire to have sex all the time, disinterest or unwillingness to have sex (even in marital relationships), recurring flashbacks about the abuse, dissociation from people, loss of appetite, eating all the time, drastic mood swings, constant tiredness, headache, feelings of rage and anger, hatred towards the gender of the perpetrator, sexually transmitted infections, risk of pregnancy, constantly being fearful, feeling of guilt and/or shame, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), drug and/or substance abuse, flashbacks and panic attacks, loss of confidence in self, disassociation from people, and the constant need to be alone.

This list is by no means exhaustive. If you are going through any of these after-effects, you are completely normal and there is nothing wrong with you. Please do not try to get through this by yourself. You need help, and that help is available.

Dealing with flashbacks



Some effects of rape or sexual assault last for years, and one of those is recurring flashbacks about the incident. Flashbacks are usually so vivid that you can feel like you're back at the place and time it happened, with all the emotions that come with it. Unfortunately, you cannot always predict when this will happen or what will trigger it – a smell, a sound, an image, a picture, a memory, or even a place. Flashbacks can be traumatizing, and this is why you have to know how to stay in the moment and process what you're feeling. Here are some tips to handle flashbacks

1. Remind yourself that you're *safe*.

————— You're now safe. You're not where the assault happened. You're not in danger. Remind yourself that the flashback is exactly what it is: a memory, and it is no longer your reality, neither does it have the active power to cause you harm or hold you back.

Dealing with flashbacks

2. Ground yourself in the **moment** you are in.

This will help you feel safe. Talk to yourself about what you're seeing and what you can touch. Are you in a room with your favorite yellow chair? Can you smell your favorite perfume? Affirm all of the things that give you joy.

3. Engage yourself in something you **love**.

This will help you feel safe. Talk to yourself about what you're seeing and what you can touch. Are you in a room with your favorite yellow chair? Can you smell your favorite perfume? Affirm all of the things that give you joy.

4. Recognize your **triggers**.

Over time, if these flashbacks persist, you might be able to draw some lines that help you better understand what triggers the flashbacks. Does it happen when a particular music comes on? Is there a smell that triggers it? Once you're able to identify your triggers, you can better manage them.

Dealing with flashbacks

5. Seek **help**, if necessary.

You may consider seeing a professional to help you handle the flashbacks. Remember, there are trained trauma counselors at SARCs and other institutions or organizations, including individuals, that can provide the right care and support. And it will not cost you any dime as these sessions are often completely free.

6. **Celebrate** little steps.

Flashbacks happen. They are normal. As you surmount them, be kind to yourself and celebrate seemingly little wins, like the fact that you're sleeping better, that your eating habit is improving, and you no longer snap at every sound. It does not have to be a big change before it is remarkable.

7. **Determine to** succeed.

The crime that was committed against you was hurtful. But please determine that it will not take away your zeal for life and success. You do not deserve to be stuck in a vicious cycle of hurt and depression, while the criminal is going about their lives. Be determined to succeed, and let that be the fuel you need to get the help you need, when you need it.

Know that you have many years ahead of you after an incident of rape or sexual assault, and you absolutely deserve to live it free from trauma, depression, or any other effects. It is possible.





If you're reading or using this guide and you have not been a survivor of sexual violence, this guide will equip you with the knowledge you need to communicate with and help a survivor. As those supporting survivors, we must recognize that our opinions form cultures, shape narratives, and find their way off into people's lives to influence their decisions. We cannot be a society that blames survivors and then wonder why they don't speak up. We must not be a society that gives free pass to rapists and assaulters, and then wonder why the rate of sexual violence in our society is on an upward trend. So, if you are in a position to help a survivor, consider these:

Supporting survivors

listen

Whether the survivor chooses to talk or not, just listen to what is being said and their silence. Avoid talking too much. Avoid asking for too many details, except it is necessary to provide immediate help. Let the survivor talk and vent out what they are thinking or feeling. Speak only when it is necessary to dispel a wrong notion or to provide help. Pay attention to non-verbal communication and gestures.

empathize

Empathy and sympathy go hand in hand for a survivor of rape or sexual violence. Even if you have not experienced such before, show the survivor you understand and that what they are feeling is valid. Don't centre yourself by talking too much about your own stories or experiences.

Avoid unnecessary questions

"What were you doing there?" "Why did you go there?" "What were you wearing?" What were you doing there at that time of the night?" And such similar questions are not helpful questions for survivors. If you must ask questions, ask the ones that helps to understand how the survivor is feeling so you know how best to help.

Don't judge

Avoid passing comments or acting in ways that passes judgment or blame on the survivor. No matter the circumstance of the rape or sexual assault, it was never their fault. And you are in a position to keep emphasizing this.

Offer to help

After a sexual assault, survivors need all the help and support they can get. Offer to assist in any way you can, such as offering to follow them to a SARC, police station, hospital, or to help them get prescribed medications, food, or groceries.

Guide, don't insist

Don't impose anything on the survivor. Let the survivor decide on what they want to do, and respect it. While you can provide some guidance, don't insist on what they must do. The final decision has to be one they make for themselves.

Help is Here!



Help is available. Help is accessible.

Through the Orange Pages, you have access to a free Directory of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) Responders and Service Providers in Nigeria. The Orange Pages contain the contact information of 200+ organizations across the 36 States of Nigeria who respond to cases of sexual, domestic, and other forms of violence, free of charge. This includes the contact details of all Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) that are in Nigeria at the time of this publication.

While we also print and distribute the Orange Pages, you can download the digital version via: www.invictus.ng/orangepages.

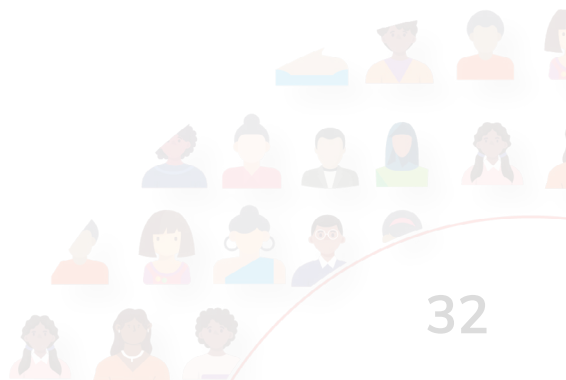
The digital version of this guide can be downloaded via www.invictus.ng/SurvivorsGuide.


An Unchanging Truth

You must always remember that regardless of where you experienced sexual violence, how it happened, who did it, or when it occurred – whether you are already an adult or when you were a child – the abuse was NEVER your fault. You must never carry the shame, guilt, and blame of the perpetrator. It is on them, and for them alone to carry. Not yours. Drop it. Live free. Live well. Live whole.

So: live, love, and thrive.

You're not alone!



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