



Empowering survivors of

Gender-Based Violence

A SURVIVORS GUIDE TO THE FIRST 72 HOURS

What to Expect & How to Care for Yourself

First, Take a Breath

There is no "correct" way to feel after abuse or assault.

You may feel:

- Numb
- Angry
- Afraid
- Confused
- Calm
- Detached
- Overwhelmed

These are common trauma responses.

First 24 Hours: Survival Mode

What You May Experience

- Shock or disbelief
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling disconnected from reality
- Crying unexpectedly
- Memory gaps
- Difficulty sleeping

What To Do

- Focus only on immediate needs:
 - Safety
 - Food and water
 - Rest
 - Medical care
- Stay connected to someone you trust.
- Avoid making major life decisions if possible.
- Be gentle with yourself.

Your brain and body are responding to trauma.

24–48 Hours: The Reality Starts to Set In

What You May Experience

- Increased anxiety
- Intrusive thoughts
- Flashbacks or unwanted memories
- Feeling "on edge"
- Anger or guilt
- Difficulty working or studying

What To Do

- Limit exposure to people who are judgmental or unsupportive.
- Write down what happened if you feel comfortable doing so. This can help preserve details should you choose to report later.
- Eat regular meals, even if you don't feel hungry.
- Try to maintain a simple routine.
- Reach out to a counsellor or support service.

Remember

You do not need to explain or justify your response to anyone.

48–72 Hours: Recovery Begins

What You May Experience

- Emotional exhaustion
- Feeling overwhelmed by practical decisions
- Difficulty trusting others
- Mood swings
- Sleep disturbances
- Questioning whether to report the incident

What To Do

- Consider your reporting options when you feel ready.
- Continue seeking support from trusted people.
- Schedule follow-up medical care if needed.
- Start creating a support plan for the coming weeks.
- Allow yourself to rest.

Things Survivors Commonly Worry About

"Why didn't I fight back?"

Trauma can cause people to freeze, comply, or become unable to react.

"Why can't I remember everything?"

Memory gaps are a common response to trauma.

"Why do I feel numb?"

Not everyone experiences intense emotions immediately.

"Am I overreacting?"

No. Your experience and feelings are valid.

Seek Urgent Professional Support If You Experience

- Thoughts of self-harm
- Thoughts of suicide
- Panic attacks that feel unmanageable
- Complete inability to sleep for several days
- Severe emotional distress that feels overwhelming
- You do not have to manage these feelings alone.

Most Important Things To Remember

- What happened was not your fault.
- Healing is not linear.
- You do not need to make every decision today.
- Support is available.
- You deserve safety, dignity, and care.