

Rape Trauma: Phases

- **The Emergency Phase**
 - It begins when the rape is in progress, and may last for minutes, hours or months.
 - Repressed memories are recalled and will often plunge the survivor directly back into the trauma, years or even decades later.
 - Intense feelings are typical, including terror, shock, exhaustion, outrage, depression, nausea, irritability, and anxiety. These feelings may make the simplest routine feel impossible to follow.
 - The survivor may be immobilized by fear or depression or may go into hiding to prevent further attacks.
 - Eating and sleeping may be difficult.
 - The survivor may not be able to think about anything but the assault.
- **Outward Adjustment**
 - The survivor tries to return to “normal,” to re-construct a life that is not reminiscent of the rape. This superficial adjustment can covers up feelings.
 - Signs of a problem include irritability, jumpiness, and avoidance of certain people or topics.
 - It is common to undergo an identity change as a way of moving away from the assault: a flashy dresser tones down their style, a loner becomes a party animal.
 - These measures are temporary and often lead to next stage.
- **Re-Activation of the Trauma**
 - Feelings and problems stemming from the rape can no longer be ignored.
 - Old coping strategies beak down because of contact with the rapist or other unrelated, difficult situations.
 - The illusion of outward adjustment begins to wear thin to reveal pain inside.
- **Integration**
 - The survivor begins to more fully face the feelings and effects of the assault.
 - S/he mourns what there is to mourn, releases self-blame, and begins to come to terms with the crime.
 - The survivor begins to integrate the former self with the current self.
- **NOTE:** The human mind is an untidy place, and these phases of self-repair do not usually happen in a neat sequence. The phases may mix and overlap, or they may repeat again and again until all the issues are worked through. There is no timetable. Patience and compassion are needed.



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