

Self-care

Having experienced any kind of sexual violence can mean that we have trouble taking care of ourselves. We might not be in touch with what we need, we might not be used to listening to our bodies' need for rest and healthy food, or we might not feel that we deserve being looked after.

Deciding to seek support from Notts SVS Services and coming to the initial assessment is a huge step toward learning to care for yourself and getting the support you need. You may already be finding ways to care for yourself as you wait for counselling to begin.

Learning to find ways to look after yourself and your own needs will be an important part of your recovery while you wait for counselling and during and after counselling.

Recovering can be made up of lots of small steps to improve life and look after you.

Here are some ideas for looking after yourself – essentially it could be anything that is healthy and makes you feel good!

Expressing feelings with safe people

Socialising

Having a break from work

Attending counselling

Getting help with drink/drugs/
self-harm

Creative writing

Art

Walking

Running

Swimming

Playing with children

Enough sleep

Going to the GP when needed

Eating healthily

Having supportive relationships

Allowing feelings

Having fun

Self-blame

Sadly, many survivors of sexual violence blame themselves in some way for what happened. The shame and guilt for the attack often seem to go 'in the wrong place' and are experienced by the survivor instead of by the perpetrator who was responsible for the attack.

Some myths in our society and media around rape and sexual abuse can feed in to this self-blame, such as that rape is caused by how people dress or how they behave, or that the natural response is to fight off abuse or rape, when actually many men, women and children experience a 'freeze' response as the best way to keep themselves safe.

The way perpetrators of sexual violence behave or the things they say may also deliberately create these feelings of self-blame in order to add to their experience of power and control, and perhaps in order to try to avoid legal consequences. These messages can be very powerful and may take time to identify, understand and begin to dismantle.

At Notts SVS Services we know that you are not responsible in any way for the abuse or sexual violence you experienced. Your counsellor will have the knowledge and experience to know you are not to blame, while also being able to listen to and understand how you may have come to blame yourself.

One part of what counselling can offer is a chance to understand and begin to loosen the ideas and experiences which cause you to feel you are to blame. Caring for yourself and seeing yourself as a survivor of very difficult experiences can begin to change self-blame into self-care and self-worth.

This process may be made up of very small steps and may be a slow one. By deciding to begin counselling you have already been brave enough to take the first steps.