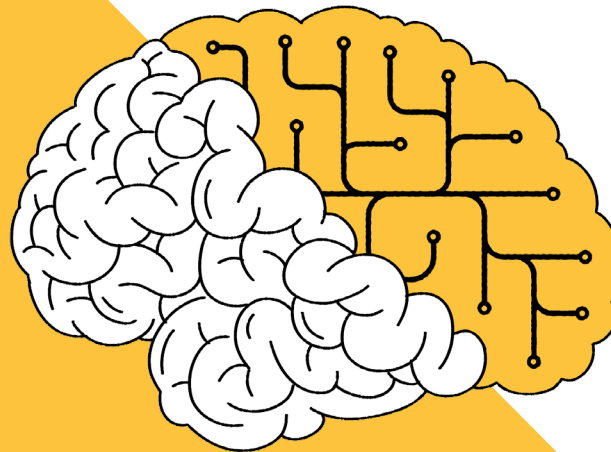


MYTHS ABOUT RAPE

Most of us think we know how someone would react if they were raped. We assume the natural response is to scream and fight back.

But the truth is, nobody knows how they or anyone else would react. In reality, reactions to rape can be quite different from what we might expect.

Many survivors of rape say the assault made them freeze. They couldn't move or cry out. This response is just as normal and natural as any other.



WHY? BRAIN CHEMISTRY

Rape is a devastating trauma.

The way people react to trauma is not controlled by the logical part of our brains: it's an instinctive response. The more primitive part of the brain takes over, and we automatically go into survival mode. Blood and oxygen are diverted to the muscles, and the body is flooded with adrenalin. It happens quickly. We don't have any control over it.

There are three different survival responses to trauma: fight, flight, and freeze.

To freeze is one of the most common reactions during a rape.

The brain's survival mode also interferes with processing memory. So a survivor may not be able to recall everything that happened, only fragments of their experience.

HOW DO WE KNOW?

Rape crisis services in Scotland have supported over 50,000 people who have been raped, sexually assaulted, and sexually abused. We listen in a non-judgemental and confidential way to survivors.

In our experience, there are many different responses to the trauma of rape. All of them are valid. But to freeze is more common than to fight back.

Not being able to recall all the details is a natural effect of the brain's response to trauma. It is in no way an indication that a survivor is not telling the truth.



TELLING SOMEONE ABOUT BEING RAPED

It is very common for survivors of rape not to be able to tell anyone about it. The trauma of rape can leave them feeling shame and humiliation.

Only half the survivors we see at Rape Crisis report to the Police.

It can take weeks, months, or even years before a survivor feels able to come forward and report a rape.



WHY DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

If a survivor couldn't fight back during a rape, they often fear being judged and not being believed. This can make them hesitate, delay or even prevent them altogether from reporting the assault to the Police, or to anyone who can support them.

These fears are a real barrier to survivors' chances of receiving support or justice after rape. So it's important that we do everything we can to help understand and overcome them.

The brain's natural response to an experience like rape can stop someone from fighting back, can affect their memory, and can delay reporting.

If someone you care about tells you they've been raped, or if you find yourself on a jury in a rape trial, remember this: the survivor's response can be different from what you expect – there is no *right* response.

TO FIND OUT MORE

www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk

FOR SUPPORT

Call the Rape Crisis Scotland helpline:

08088 01 03 02

