Rape survivor needs help with intimate relationships

Alice,

I was raped by my best friend a few years ago. I was a virgin then, and still, years later, I can't seem to "go all the way" with anyone. How can I stop freaking out and messing up relationships?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Before being too hard on yourself for "messing up relationships," try to remember that being raped may make it hard for anyone to have an emotionally or sexually intimate relationship. Since it was your best friend, someone you trusted, who assaulted you, you may feel betrayed. Some rape survivors who were virgins at the time of the assault also confuse being raped with having had sex. Rape uses sex as a vehicle for gaining power and control, however mutually consensual sex is different from rape. Rape is non-consensual sexual intercourse with force, fear, or violence, or when the survivor is so intoxicated, high, or unconscious that s/he cannot give consent and/or is fearful for her/his safety or life.

Keep in mind that you don't need to approach relationships or sexual activity the same way that your friends or peers do (this, of course, is true for anyone, whether they are a survivor of sexual assault or not). If you feel pressure to move faster than you're comfortable with, consider cutting yourself some slack and allowing things to progress as slowly as feels natural for you. Healthy sexual relations rely on clear and assertive communication and respect. You may need more time, understanding, the right partner, or even counseling before you feel more comfortable and ready to take this step. You can contact your health care provider for a referral. Or, you can try one of the following organizations for more information, assistance, support, and referrals. It may be just what you need.

Barnard-Columbia Rape Crisis/Anti-Violence Support Center (For Columbia and Barnard students only)
Peer Counselor Hotline: x4-HELP (-4357) [7pm - 11pm, 7-days-a-week]
Peer Advocacy Line: x4-WALK (-9255) (On-call 24 hours everyday)

New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project
24-hour, Bilingual Hotline: 212.714.1141

National Domestic Violence Hotline
24-hour, Bilingual Hotline: 1.800.799.SAFE (-7233)
Allowing yourself to be intimate with someone emotionally or sexually may take time, and that's okay. If you've found someone who you feel comfortable with and would like to be close or have sex with, and you feel like having been raped is negatively impacting your ability to be in the relationship, talking with a trusted friend, advocate, or counselor could help you begin to chart a path for successful, and consensual, intimacy. Take care of yourself,

Alice!

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Published date:
Oct 31, 1997

Last reviewed on:
Apr 04, 2008
If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

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