



Sexual Assault Response Services *of Southern Maine*

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WOMEN, ANGER & SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Anger is one of the most appropriate responses to sexual abuse/assault. Sexual abuse of any type, whether it is perpetrated against an adult or a child, is a physical, emotional, and often spiritual violation and deserves our full-blown anger. Survivors have the right to be angry and to stay angry for as long as we need to; at the rapist, at our families who didn't support or believe us, at the world which no longer feels safe, or at many other people or situations who have hurt us.

The concept of anger as a positive, healing force may contradict what many of us have been socialized to believe about anger. As women, many of us have been taught that anger is unnecessary, unproductive, or just unacceptable. Many of us have been denied our anger by friends and family members who mistakenly thought that urging us to ignore and thus forget our feelings would fix everything. Others may be terrified of anger, particularly if we grew up in households in which anger was repressed or expressed inappropriately or perhaps even violently.

Many survivors have been identified anger as one of the most basic and vital elements of the healing process. Anger, when focused appropriately (in many cases, on the abuser/rapist, the situation, or people who did not support or protect us during and directly after the incident/s), can give us energy to continue when everything feels too overwhelming. Anger can inspire us to heal; anger can be an effective antidote to despair and hopelessness; anger is often the emotion that most fully motivates us to make deep and lasting changes in our lives.

One of the first things many survivors must learn is to recognize, control, and focus their anger outside themselves. The following questions have helped many survivors become comfortable with their anger, and transform it from a frightening, unproductive, unspeakable emotion into a vital and effective healing tool. Try to answer them for yourself:

1. What did I learn about anger while I was a child?
2. When you feel angry now, how does it feel?
3. When you feel angry now, what do you do?
4. When someone gets angry with you, what do you feel?
5. When someone gets angry with you, what do you do?
6. Sometimes I feel angry with myself about...
7. Sometimes I feel angry with other people about...
8. I express my anger effectively when I...
9. How can I use my anger to empower me?

For more information, or if you just want to talk, please call 1-800-313-9900.

Help, Hope, and Healing