



Birchall Self Care Booklet

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Who are Birchall?

Sexual abuse and rape inflict deep trauma - the effects of which can last a lifetime if left untreated. Birchall understand complex trauma, we have specialist training on how the body and brain responds when someone feels like they're under significant threat. We understand the impact that sexual violence has on everyone who experiences it, be that as a one-off incident or years of grooming and abuse.

We offer advice and information, practical support to deal with things such as; flashbacks, sleep patterns, improving mental wellbeing. In the longer-term we offer counselling and play therapy where we start to really help people recover from their trauma and to put their emotional and psychological safety as a key priority.

Sharing our Vision

Here at Birchall we believe that we should be able to live in a society that is free of sexual abuse, rape, exploitation and sexualised violence.

On a Mission

We empower people affected by these issues to recover from trauma so they can lead safe and fulfilling lives. As soon as someone contacts us, we ensure they know they have been heard and believed and that we can support them in their next steps, whatever they are.



Rape and Sexual Abuse

Sexual Assault

Intentional touching of another person of a sexual nature where the other person does not consent to the touching and the individual does not reasonably believe that they consent.

Sexual Harassment

Any unwelcome or unwanted sexual behaviour that makes the individual feel offended, humiliated or intimidated. This includes unwelcome sexual advances, unwelcome requests for sexual conduct (including staring, leering, and suggestive comments/jokes).

Sexual Incidents

Any behaviour of a sexual nature that is unwanted, or makes another person feel uncomfortable or afraid. It also extends to being spoken to using sexualised language or observing other people behaving in a sexually disinhibited manner, including nakedness and exposure.

Consent

If you say yes, you have given your consent. If you haven't given your consent to have sex, it is rape.

How it can affect you

Rape and sexual abuse can have psychological, emotional, and physical effects on you. These effects aren't always easy to deal with, but with the right help and support they can be managed. Learning more can help you find the best form of care to begin the healing process.

Depression

Depression is a mood disorder that occurs when feelings associated with sadness and hopelessness continue for long periods of time and interrupt regular thought patterns. It can affect your behavior and your relationship with other people. Depression doesn't discriminate—It can affect anyone of any age, gender, race, ethnicity, or religion.

What is Depression?

It's normal for you to have feelings of sadness, unhappiness, and hopelessness. If these feelings persist for an extended period of time, it may be an indicator of depression. Depression is not a sign of weakness and it's not something you should be expected to "snap out of." It's a serious mental health condition and you can often benefit from the help of a professional.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

It's normal for a survivor of rape and sexual abuse to experience feelings of anxiety, stress, or fear. If these feelings become severe, last more than a few weeks, or interrupt your day-to-day life, it might be a condition known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

What is PTSD?

Post-traumatic stress disorder is an anxiety disorder that can result from a traumatic event. It can apply to any type of trauma, including rape and sexual abuse. You might experience uncharacteristic feelings of stress, fear, anxiety, and nervousness—and of this is perfectly normal.

With PTSD, these feelings are extreme, and can cause you to feel constantly in danger, and make it difficult to function in everyday life.

Everyone reacts differently, but there are three main symptoms of PTSD:

1. Re-experiencing: feeling like you are reliving the event through flashbacks, dreams, or intrusive thoughts
2. Avoidance: intentionally or subconsciously changing your behavior to avoid scenarios associated with the event or losing interest in activities you used to enjoy
3. Hyper-arousal: feeling "on edge" all of the time, having difficulty sleeping, being easily startled, or prone to sudden outbursts

Flashbacks

A flashback is when memories of a past trauma feel as if they are taking place in the current moment. That means it's possible to feel like the experience of rape and sexual abuse is happening all over again. During a flashback it can be difficult to connect with reality. It may even feel like the perpetrator is physically present. Flashbacks may seem random at first. They can be triggered by fairly ordinary experiences connected with the senses, like the smell of someone or a particular tone of voice. It's a normal response to this kind of trauma.

What can help during a Flashback?

If you realise that you are in the middle of a flashback, consider the following tips:

- Tell yourself that you are having a flashback. Remind yourself that the actual event is over and that you survived.
- Breathe. Take slow, deep breaths by placing your hand on your stomach and taking deep breaths. You should see your hand move out with the inhalations, and watch it fall in with the exhalations. When we panic, our body begins to take short, shallow breaths, and the decrease in oxygen can make you feel more panicked. Deep breathing is important because it increases the oxygen in your system and helps you move out of anxious state faster.



Looking after yourself

Self care is about taking steps to feel healthy and comfortable. Whether it happened recently or years ago, self care can help you cope with the short- and long-term effects of rape and sexual abuse.

Physical Self Care

It's important to keep your body healthy and strong. You may be healing from injuries or feeling emotionally drained. Good physical health can support you through this time. Think about a time when you felt physically healthy, and consider asking yourself the following questions:

- **How were you sleeping?** Did you have a sleep or nap pattern that made you feel more rested?
- **What types of food were you eating?** What meals made you feel healthy and strong?
- **What types of exercise did you enjoy?** Were there any particular activities that made you feel more energised?
- **Did you perform certain routines?** Were there activities you did to start the day off right, or wind down at the end of the day?

Emotional Self Care

Emotional self care means different things to different people. The key to emotional self care is being in tune with yourself. Think about a time when you felt balanced and grounded, and consider asking yourself the following questions:

- **What fun or leisure activities did you enjoy?** Were there events or outings that you looked forward to?
- **Did you write down your thoughts** in a journal or personal notebook?
- **Were meditation or relaxation activities** a part of your regular schedule?
- **What inspirational words were you reading?** Did you have a particular author or favourite website to go to for inspiration?
- **Who did you spend time with?** Was there someone, or a group of people, that you felt safe and supported around?
- **Where did you spend your time?** Was there a special place, maybe outdoors or at a friend's house, where you felt comfortable and grounded?

“I feel continuously strengthened and valued in a way where sexual abuse doesn't become the defining subject.”

Survivor of Sexual Assault



Contact us

Our office hours are Monday-Friday, 9:00am-5:00pm. We do offer some evening appointments, please contact our office for more information.

Please contact us by whatever means is most convenient for you. All contact with our office is treated with kindness, respect and in confidence.

We welcome contact by telephone, text and email.

Telephone: **01229 820828**

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