

INFORMATION ABOUT RITUAL ABUSE FOR SURVIVORS AND SUPPORTERS.

Most abuse is ritualised in some way and generally people accept that children can be subjected to a range of terrifying and repetitive abusive experiences. One definition of ritual abuse is when one or more children are abused in a highly organised way, by a group of people who have come together for that purpose, and who subscribe to a belief system that, for them, justifies their actions towards the child/children. This usually extends into family involvement and may have been practised as a religion or a way of life for years. Although survivors speak of differing experiences, many elements are common:

Elements of ritual abuse

- Elaborate rituals, 'games', set-ups and 'ceremonies'
- Systematic emotional, physical and sexual abuse
- Being used in child pornography and prostitution
- Being forced to take drugs and alcohol
- Being tortured almost to the point of death
- Being forced to participate in the abuse of others

If you are a survivor of ritual abuse you may feel

Trapped - you may feel that you cannot escape. Although it can be difficult to get away from such abuse, it can be done. Many survivors have successfully escaped and lead normal lives.

Fear - that you or someone else may be killed, that you may be re-involved, fear of talking, of reprisals, fear that they have power over you, loneliness, disbelief, etc. These fears are understandable and are based on past or present experiences. It is possible to overcome this, though it takes time and courage.

Distrust - You may feel that you can trust no one at all. This is completely reasonable given that you may never have had someone trustworthy in your life. Trust has to be earned by people, and in time you may feel that someone has earned it enough to be trusted a little.

However, support is available. Our service offers support to survivors of all forms of sexual abuse, including ritual abuse. If you would like to talk to someone, please contact the Centre.

If you are supporting a survivor of ritual abuse

Believe - Why would she lie? Only two parties know what happened, the abusers and the survivors. Survivors must be allowed to tell and be believed. Believe what she is saying, even though you may find it difficult, especially as the memories she is telling may at first be fragmented and confusing.

Listen - To what she has to say and let her take her time. It will not be easy for her to start talking about events that she has kept silent about for a long time. It may be difficult for her to begin to feel trust in you or safe enough to talk to you.

Respect - Her feelings and decisions. Remember that she has her own coping mechanisms that have helped her survive the abuse. She may still need these.

Remember - It is not her fault. No one asks to be abused and she cannot be blamed for any part of it. She cannot be blamed for participating in an act that she did not understand, was forced into, or in which she had no choices that weren't abusive. The blame lies only with the abusers.

Recognise - The courage it takes for a survivor to speak out. It takes a great deal of courage to face fears and also to talk about the abuse, particularly in a climate of disbelief. You must recognise that this abuse really does happen.

What about my feelings?

You may feel shocked, horrified, upset, sickened, etc. by what you are hearing. The feelings you are experiencing are justified, but may add to the upset for the survivor. She may feel responsible for upsetting you, and you must remember that you are hearing this but she has actually lived through it and survived. It is important to seek support for yourself, and further support for the survivor if required.

HELPLINE SUPPORT

You can telephone our helpline for support or information on 01738 630965. We also have a 24 hour answering machine, so that at any other time messages can be left and will be returned discreetly, as soon as possible.

Write to: WRASAC P & K, P.O. Box 7570, Perth, PH2 1BY

Email: info@perthshirerapecrisis.org

USEFUL CONTACTS

Samaritans	(01738) 626 666
Genito-Urinary Clinic	(01738) 473 220
Police Family Protection Unit	(01738) 892 911
Perthshire Women's Aid	(01738) 639 043
Victim Support	(01738) 567 171
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board	(0141) 331 2726
Citizens Advice Bureau	(01738) 624 301
Bristol Crisis Service for Women	(0117) 925 1119
Childline	(0800 1111)