

**HI CALLUM,**

I am so sorry to hear about what happened to you. Here are all the things you need to consider after being the victim of sexual assault – and yes, what happened to you is rape.

**IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT**

The way you ask this question makes me think you might be blaming yourself – which many people do after being raped. You say, "I know I shouldn't have gone home with that guy in the first place..." and while that may be true it is a separate issue from having been forced to be sexual against your will. You did not cause this man to be sexually aggressive toward you. The guilt and shame you're feeling comes from both having gone home with another guy in addition to the fact this man violated you.

**GUILT VERSUS SHAME**

There is a difference between guilt and shame. Guilt comes from having engaged in behaviours you regret; shame is the feeling that you are bad. It is okay to feel guilty for having gone home with another guy. It is not healthy to feel shame over what happened however, because the shame belongs to your perpetrator and not you!

**PRETENDING NOTHING IS WRONG**

It's normal to pretend nothing happened after something like this. It is so horrible to have someone violate you that your mind just wants to bury it to avoid the pain. However, the pain will come out sideways in other ways – it will deal with you if you don't deal with it.

**POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER**

You want to ensure that your reaction doesn't develop into Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from having been raped. Any sexual activity that is forced upon another person without consent is rape. So it makes sense that you are experiencing anxiety which is part of what occurs with PTSD. Not everyone who is sexually assaulted experiences it as a trauma and develops PTSD but it is important not to rule it out.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder occurs from not being allowed to express what happened to you. Trauma is defined as having something emotionally charged happen to you and not being able to express it. Lets face it: growing up gay emotionally overloads and burdens us

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by forcing us to keep a secret of who we are. As gay children and gay teenagers we are often unable to talk about it to anyone, and now you are living with another secret from having been sexually violated.

**SYMPTOMS OF PTSD THAT YOU SHOULD LOOK OUT FOR ARE:**

- Flashbacks of the traumatic incident
- Severe Anxiety
- Feelings of intense stress
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Irritability or outbursts of anger
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hypervigilance (being on constant 'red alert')

**SEEK A THERAPIST**

I advise you to only tell your boyfriend after you have told a therapist. I recommend you seek counselling to deal with this and understand what has happened to you. The odds are that once you tell your boyfriend, you will be dealing with not just what happened to you but his reaction as well. He may not be able to get past the betrayal of you going home with another guy, but at this point that's not the most pressing issue. The most pressing issue is for you to avoid snowballing into a deep depression and/or anxiety disorder that is hard to come out of.

What you can tell your boyfriend is that you are experiencing some anxiety issues and that you are going to see a therapist. This way you'll be validating his concerns that something is wrong with your mood and can reassure him that you are doing something about it.

**FEAR OF TELLING**

Most male survivors fear being disbelieved, shamed, accused of weakness, or ignored. Do you fear being blamed for your own attack because you think you deserved it? Many male sexual assault survivors endure traumatic experience silently and alone. Don't be one of them.

**TELLING YOUR BOYFRIEND**

After you have seen a therapist for a while and gain some understanding of what happened to you, you have to decide whether or not to tell your boyfriend – and if so, how much information is enough. You need to prepare for the fact that your boyfriend's initial reaction could be anger and blame. This is a normal reaction to infidelity and often doesn't last. Whatever his reaction, you should have a support system in place in the form of a therapist or possibly a sexual assault support group so that if he abandons you – even for a little bit – you have people there to support you. Couples do work this out and while it may interrupt your relationship it doesn't have to be a deal-breaker.

Please don't wait too long to get help for yourself. Make sure you recognise that you did not deserve to be sexually assaulted and that the shame belongs on your perpetrator and not you!

*If you have been the victim of sexual assault call the Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre National Helpline on 0808 802 9999. For a list of other helplines see page 34*



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## I DON'T KNOW HOW TO TELL MY BOYFRIEND I WAS SEXUALLY ASSAULTED.

### ▶ DEAR JOE ▶

I've been with my boyfriend for just over a year now and I love him to bits, but on a night out a few weeks ago we ended up having a stupid drink-fuelled fight. He left and in my drunken state I ended up going home with someone else I met at the club. I'd made out with him already but by the time I got back to his place I'd come to my senses and tried to leave. He got aggressive and forced himself on me. Afterwards I

tried to pretend it never happened, but I feel sick whenever I think about it. I've been suffering from anxiety ever since and my boyfriend knows something is wrong but I don't know what to tell him. I know I shouldn't have gone home with that guy in the first place and after all that's happened I don't want to lose my boyfriend too. Should I tell him the truth?

CALLUM, MANCHESTER ▶