



## Thirty-three Days

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Over the years I have watched many survivors of sexual violence struggle with trying to figure what they need to do to heal. For many it can take years to just tell another person that they had been victimized, let alone to make a police report or even enter into counseling. There are many different factors that one has to consider when trying to understand how and why a survivor will or might respond to a particular situation.

Each survivor has to decide for themselves what is best for them. No one can decide for them. And yet it is vitally important for each individual who has been sexually victimized to know that they have choices and what those choices are. By being provided with accurate information, the survivor (and or their family members in cases of child sexual abuse) will be able to make an educated decision.

Both adults and children who are survivors need people in their lives who are unbiased, without an agenda, and who are not connected to their personal lives, community or that of their offender(s) -- and who can provide them with a safe place to open up and share their experience, thoughts and feelings so that they are able to come to a place where they can choose for themselves what to do next. This is especially true since the ability to make choices was taken away from them by their offender during the time that they were being victimized. A survivor needs to take back the control and the ability of deciding for themselves.

We all need to realize that when a boy or girl, man or woman are sexually harassed, abused, assaulted or

violated in any other way; their lives are forever changed on many different levels.

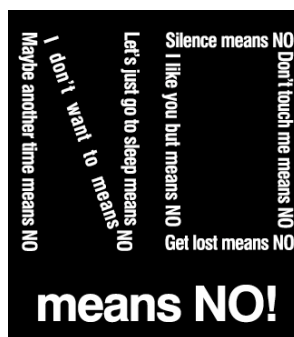
The victimized individual will have to deal with issues pertaining to their ability to trust, to feel a sense of safety and security. The sad reality is that once a survivor start talking about what happened to them, there is a strong possibility that they will also lose friendships, sometimes their employment, connections with their synagogue, community and in some cases -- connection with family members.

No one is immunized to being sexually victimized, no matter what their life experiences is, who they are related to, their age and or social economical status, or even what they do for a living. Not even me.

I have to admit that I am still in a state of shock and have not spoken out publicly before about the fact that this past summer (July 2009) I was assaulted.

Due to the fact my case is currently in litigation I am not at liberty to go into some of the details of the assault. The reason I am speaking out now is because I feel it is important to share the fact that it took me thirty-three days to make a police report. ME, Vicki Polin, who is the founder and executive director of The Awareness Center; a licensed mental health professional who has been advocating for survivors of sexual violence for the last twenty-five years!

I was in a state of shock following the assault. The offender was a relative of dear and trusted friend, a relative of someone whom I looked up to and respected and someone who has been like a father to

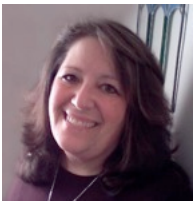


me. I don't know what I was thinking, yet I didn't do what I would have expected of me... I was confused by my own hesitation to make an immediate call to the police. Instead I found myself care taking the family of the offender instead of taking care of my own personal needs.

Finally I consulted with several different professionals who are also victim advocates, none of whom had a connection to my personal life nor my community. It took thirty-three days before I found the strength to make a police report. I was fortunate to have a friend with me when I did this. The offender was charged with second degree assault and fourth degree sexual assault. I was fortunate to have had a group of friends with me the day that the case went to trial, as their presence gave me the strength to do what I needed to do. The man who assaulted me was found guilty on both charges.

The reason I am making this public at this time is because I want others to realize that if it took someone who has been advocating for survivors for a quarter of a century thirty-three days to make a police report, it makes perfect sense that it could, and often would take others much longer.

If you have been a victim of a sex crime--you are not alone. You are not a bad person, and you deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. The shame and blame belong totally to the individual(s) who assaulted you and also with anyone who attempted to cover up the crime(s). I want to encourage everyone who has been sexually victimized to make police reports, even if it takes you much more than thirty-three days to do so.



*Vicki Polin, MA, LCPC is the founder and director of The Awareness Center, which is the international Jewish Coalition Against Sexual Assault. She is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor with over twenty-five years of experience working in the sexual trauma field. For more information about The Awareness Center go to: [www.theawarenesscenter.org](http://www.theawarenesscenter.org)*