**HANDOUT 15C.1 COMMON REACTIONS TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

**Survivors of sexual violence may have the following responses after an experience of sexual violence**:

* Shock, fear and feelings of helplessness and powerlessness
* Feelings of personal safety are shattered
* Physical symptoms (trembling, headaches, feeling very tired, not being able to eat or drink, not being able to sleep)
* Confusion, disorientation
* Feelings of detachment and being outside one’s body
* Sadness and crying
* Being withdrawn
* Not speaking at all
* Not being able to care for themselves or their children.

**It is important to consider that every person reacts differently to an experience such as sexual violence. Some factors that may influence how the person reacts are:**

* Their age (for example, children of different ages and levels of development will react differently)
* The nature and context of the violence (for example, was the perpetrator known and trusted, was the abuse ongoing, was violence used, were there multiple perpetrators, did the survivor fear for their life?)
* The level of social stigma or acceptance (for example, whether she was blamed for what happened)
* Whether the person is believed and taken seriously (for example, whether she was accused of lying)
* Whether she has support and resources to meet her needs (for example, if she needs medical care, is she able to access it?)
* If there is a safe environment in which she can recover
* Whether the person can exercise some control and choice in responding to the violence
* Whether the violence happened on top of previous abuse or trauma