



Vanessa McNeal

# A PATH OF HEALING

The intersection between mental illness and sexual assault is widely documented. The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network reports that “Victims of sexual assault are three times more likely to suffer from depression and six times more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder” than the general population.

Vanessa McNeal is an expert on the links between mental health and sexual trauma. The filmmaker and national public speaker was molested throughout childhood by two family members and raped as a teen by a peer at a college prep camp.

“That completely changed my high school experience. I didn’t want to go anywhere. I was afraid of men, afraid of people.” She was diagnosed with PTSD and depression.

She cites “trauma informed staff” as the reason she is a Planned Parenthood patient. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration criteria for “trauma informed” include: Realizes the impact of trauma, recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma, responds by fully integrating trauma knowledge into practices, and resists re-traumatization.

## “You know it’s a safe place,”

McNeal says of Planned Parenthood. “From the people who check you in who are so confidential, to the nurses who always tell me what they’re going to do before they do it.”

PPHeartland also is a leading provider of rape trauma care. Jason Burkhiser-Reynolds, Planned Parenthood of the Heartland center manager, explains, “We have a sexual assault response room. We provide a comfortable couch, shower, exam room, medications if needed – and the compassionate care that is so important in this situation. We do not doubt, question, or judge.”

That level of care helps survivors like Vanessa thrive. “When you’re sexually assaulted your power of choice is taken away – and every single aspect of your life will be impacted until you find your healing. Planned Parenthood helps keep me on that path of healing.”

 **Planned Parenthood**<sup>®</sup>  
Planned Parenthood of the Heartland

**Care.** No Matter What. | [www.ppheartland.org](http://www.ppheartland.org)