



Life after sexual trauma

Sexual abuse and sexual assault affects many young people of all genders. The experiences may have happened during your childhood, or when you were older, or both. It can be a heavy burden for you to carry alone. There are some important things for you to know.



Important

The experience was not your fault.

People can be affected by trauma in different ways. These impacts are all normal and you are not crazy or broken.

You don't have to go through this alone, there are people who can help.

It is possible for you to recover from your trauma experiences, to feel good, and to lead a happy life. This is what you deserve.

Common impacts of sexual trauma can include things like:



It may feel like you will never recover and feel 'normal' again. Many people who have been through a trauma feel this way. We want you to know that you are important and worthwhile, and that you can recover.

- ▶ headaches
- ▶ nightmares
- ▶ confusion
- ▶ flashbacks
- ▶ loss of confidence
- ▶ difficulty concentrating
- ▶ avoiding people
- ▶ easily startled
- ▶ withdrawal
- ▶ loss of interest in things
- ▶ feeling angry
- ▶ self-harming
- ▶ feeling ashamed
- ▶ anxiety
- ▶ depression
- ▶ feeling worthless
- ▶ afraid to form relationships.

Talking to someone supportive is important for healing

- ▶ It can be difficult to talk about such personal things to someone else, but talking is important for healing.
- ▶ Consider telling a trusted friend who will be supportive and understanding.
- ▶ You don't need to talk about details, only what you feel safe talking about.
- ▶ Writing in a diary can help you to let go of some of your heaviest thoughts and feelings. Keep it somewhere safe.
- ▶ An experienced counsellor is often the best way for you to change the way you think about the trauma and to cope better. Some counselling options are listed at the end of this handout.
- ▶ You can explain the situation to your doctor and ask for a referral to a counsellor and a 'Mental Health Care Plan' which will allow you to access counselling for free or at a discounted rate.
- ▶ If you just can't bring yourself to speak to someone face-to-face, you might like to start by calling a telephone support service. We have listed some services at the end of the handout.

If you have feelings of shame, talk to someone supportive. This will help you to let go of the shame. It doesn't need to stay with you.

The hardest part is often taking the first step



Tips for coping

- ▶ Be kind to yourself. Allow your feelings and reactions without being angry or upset at yourself.
- ▶ Avoid using drugs or alcohol to numb your feelings. These can make the situation worse.
- ▶ Aim for a healthy lifestyle including exercise, rest, good sleep and healthy food.
- ▶ Notice the messages you tell yourself. Stop yourself from thinking negative thoughts and start to say positive statements to yourself such as “I can do this, I’m a survivor” and “I deserve good things”.
- ▶ Practice calming each day when you feel stressed or anxious. Start by taking slow, deep breaths, focussing on relaxing your body and saying soothing things in your mind, such as “Everything is okay”.
- ▶ Focus on using your senses often. Look at the sky, notice how the water in the shower feels, taste the different flavours of your food and listen to the sounds around you.
- ▶ Do something you enjoy each day. It’s a good idea to make a list of activities for ideas.
- ▶ Do creative things such as play an instrument, draw, cook, write poetry or make something.
- ▶ Stay in touch with supportive friends and family members. Even if they don’t know about your trauma, connection with others is very important.

It is OKAY

To take time for yourself.

To have bad days.

To make mistakes.

To say “no”.

To forgive yourself.

To be kind to yourself.

If you need help

It’s a good idea to save these numbers in your phone in advance.

Resources and services in WA

A **Care Package** with lots of information and tips about coping and recovery can be viewed or downloaded from the SARC website: www.kemh.health.wa.gov.au/Our-services/Statewide-Services/SARC

A **Supporters’ Guide** providing information to parents, family and friends on how to support someone who is recovering from sexual trauma can also be viewed or downloaded from the SARC website.

The **Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC)** is a free 24-hour emergency service providing medical and counselling services for people who have experienced a recent (within 14 days) sexual assault. Counselling for any sexual assault/abuse experienced recently or in the past is also available to people of all genders aged 13 years and above. Call SARC on **(08) 6458 1828** or Freecall **1800 199 888**.

Other counselling options are available online. Search ‘youth counselling’. There is also a list of Western Australia support services on the SARC website.

Telephone support services:

Lifeline Australia
13 11 14

1800RESPECT
Freecall 1800 737 732

Kids Helpline
Freecall 1800 551 800

ehespace
Freecall 1800 650 890

Youthbeyondblue
1300 224 636

Urgent mental health support line
Freecall 1800 048 636

The Samaritans
08 9388 2500
Freecall 1800 198 313
(country callers)

The Samaritans Youthline
Freecall 1800 198 313

Police assistance and reporting (not emergencies)

Call 131 444

Emergency Call 000 Police, Fire, Ambulance