



# New Pathways

Life beyond sexual violence

## Self-Help Booklet

For Survivors of Sexual Abuse





This booklet is primarily aimed at adult survivors of sexual abuse. However, it may be useful for anyone who wants to know more about the effects sexual abuse or rape might have on people's lives.

**DISCLAIMER:** Some of the content in this booklet might be distressing to read. Therefore, be mindful of your self-care when reading this. The reader must take responsibility for looking after their own wellbeing. You may want to read this in small sections rather than all at once.

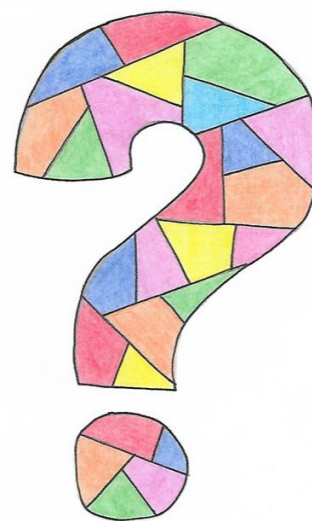
## What is sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse is any form of sexual activity in which someone (the perpetrator) imposes themselves sexually on someone else (the victim), who has not given consent and does not want sexual activity to take place. Sometimes the perpetrator may be in a position of authority or power, and may take advantage of this power/authority to fulfil his/her own sexual desires.

When a child is under the age of 16 (the legal age of consent in the UK) no consent can be given. This means that any sexual behaviour by any adult involving any child or young person under 16 is an illegal act of child sexual abuse for which the offending adult is solely responsible. Any child under the age of 13 is not Gillick competent. This means they do not have capacity to consent. No child who is 13 or under is able to consent to any sexual activity.

Adults are, by definition, more empowered than children. Perpetrators may abuse this natural discrepancy in order to coerce (control) or force child victims to comply with their demands. Older children are also capable of sexual abuse and, just like the perpetrators mentioned above, they are responsible if they force another child to engage in any sexual activity.

Sexual abuse can take many forms, including: penetrative sex, (oral, anal, vaginal); masturbation; kissing; fondling/intimate touching; indecent exposure (showing of genitals); exposing a child to pornography; taking indecent photographs of a child (involving nudity and/or sexualised situations and/or poses); talking to a child in a sexually suggestive and/or lewd manner; pressuring a child to engage in sexual activity; sending explicit unwanted images to a child.





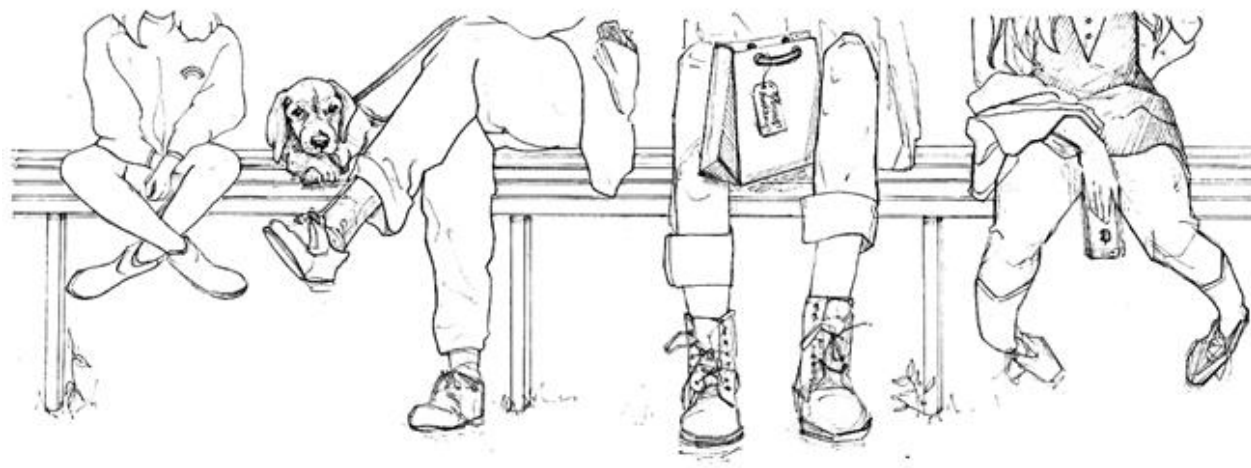
## What is grooming?

Many perpetrators prepare a victim for sexual abuse by a process known as grooming. The grooming process can be used with children or adult victims. It is typically a process involving the building of trust through friendship, gifts and positive attention. The grooming process may make the person feel special and/or wanted.

Grooming can take place in person but can also happen online as preparators may use a variety of online platforms such as social media platforms, dating sites, gaming or other online platforms as this can be a way of accessing vulnerable people. Grooming can take place over a long period of time – sometimes even years before the perpetrator actually makes sexually motivated advances. The perpetrator might manipulate other people who are around the victim such as their family, friends neighbours or even a community in order to gain access to the victim.

The trust built through the grooming of a child can cause significant confusion. The child may not have been aware they were being groomed and trust may have been subtly developed over an extended period of time. At the moment a person realises something is wrong they may, mistakenly, believe that they are the perpetrator of some of these actions because they have been programmed to act out certain things without realising it.

The victim of grooming may also feel guilt and/or shame for having trusted the person because they cannot help but think of the situation with hindsight. This sometimes also helps the perpetrator keep the victim silent because they may also be afraid to speak up because they had been friends with, or known the perpetrator for a while.





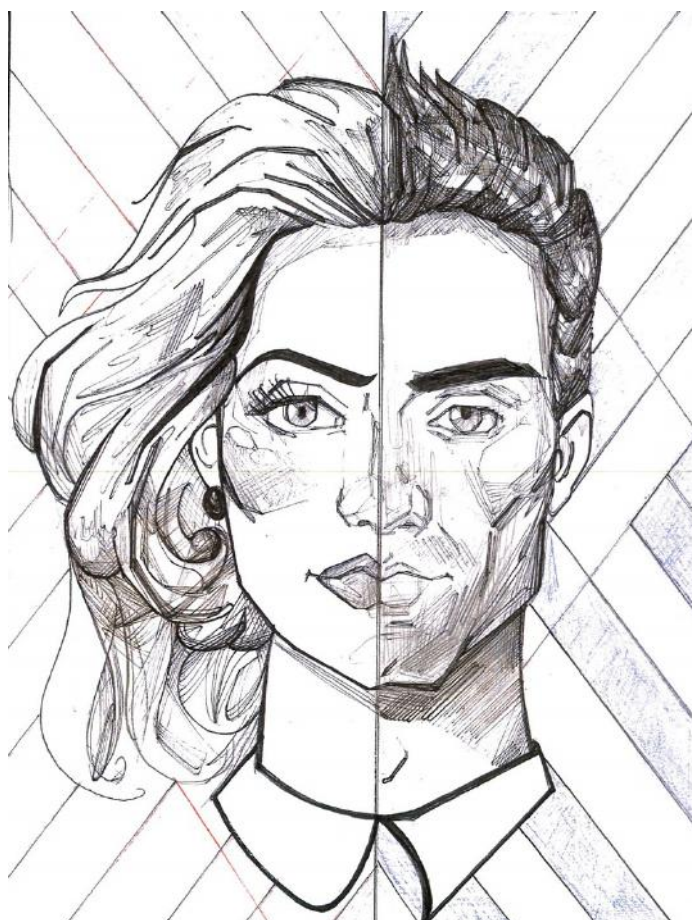
## Who are the perpetrators?

Perpetrators can be male or female, any sexual orientation, of any ethnicity and/or cultural background, and also of any age. Although the majority are adult males, female and child perpetrators do exist.

Perpetrators may seem normal, even likeable. It is important to remember that they do not conform to any stereotype and are, to all intents and purposes, indistinguishable from anybody else.

Sometimes perpetrators are strangers but in most cases the perpetrator is someone that the victim knows and trusts. This might be a family member; close friend or neighbour; or someone in a position of authority or power– for example teachers, doctors, religious leaders, carers etc.

In the case of children, the perpetrator is usually in a position of trust whereby they can easily access their intended victim without arousing suspicion. This may be an older sibling, another family member, someone babysitting for the family or any other person close to the child.





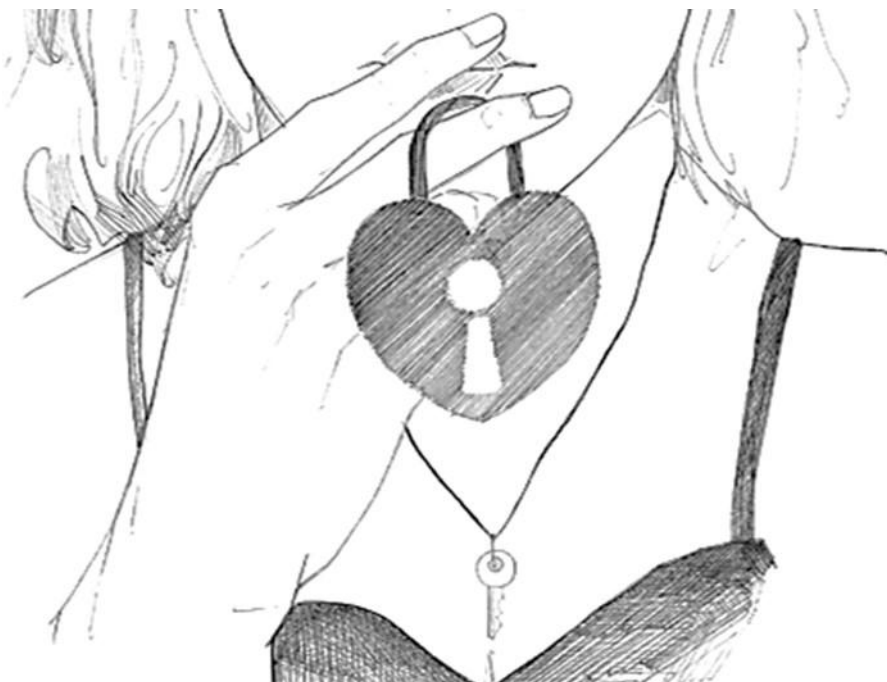
## Who are the victims?

Any child, young person or adult can potentially become a victim of sexual abuse. Children are dependent on adults for guidance and safety and this may expose them to the possibility of exploitation by perpetrators. Young people below the age of consent are making the transition between childhood and adulthood, part of which can involve becoming aware of their own sexual identity. This natural process is also open to deliberate manipulation and exploitation by adults and other children, through no fault of the victim.

Other vulnerable groups include adults/children with learning disabilities, adults/children with debilitating physical and/or mental health illness and/or elderly people. Each of these groups of people experience powerlessness compared to those charged with their care. Sometimes victims may be vulnerable to perpetrators due to past experiences, trauma, neglect, or emotional neglect and this has therefore not necessarily equipped them emotionally or physically with the tools they might need to protect themselves.

Perpetrators can take advantage of this powerlessness, not only in committing sexual abuse but also in keeping the victim silent; keeping it a 'secret'. Children and vulnerable adults are comparatively easy to intimidate into silence, or may not be capable of telling anyone what is happening to them.

Additionally, some people can become vulnerable to sexual abuse through circumstances or their situation in life. Being in prison, addicted to drugs, victimised by a violent partner or working as a sex worker—all are examples whereby the situation can make them vulnerable. People in these, and similar, situations often feel powerless, trapped, helpless and without choice. Perpetrators exploit these feelings in order to maintain the victim's belief in his/her helplessness.



This makes them easier for the perpetrator to abuse.





## Why does this happen?

Sexual abuse and incest (sex between family members) occurs throughout all races, classes, cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. There is no particular kind of person who is more or less likely to experience sexual abuse than others. Victims of sexual abuse often report feeling as though what happened was in some way their fault or that there must be something which attracted the perpetrator to them.

In fact, perpetrators are most likely to be encouraged to act by whatever combination of circumstances seems to best assure their victim's compliance. For example, a child who has been emotionally neglected or otherwise deprived is in a vulnerable situation, through no fault of their own. A perpetrator will use their vulnerability, pretending to offer what the child needs in order to sexually abuse them. The child may then grow up believing they must have somehow invited or encouraged the abuse. This kind of mistaken belief can be very damaging to a victim's self-esteem and is often a major factor in the development of stress disorders and other distressing symptoms.



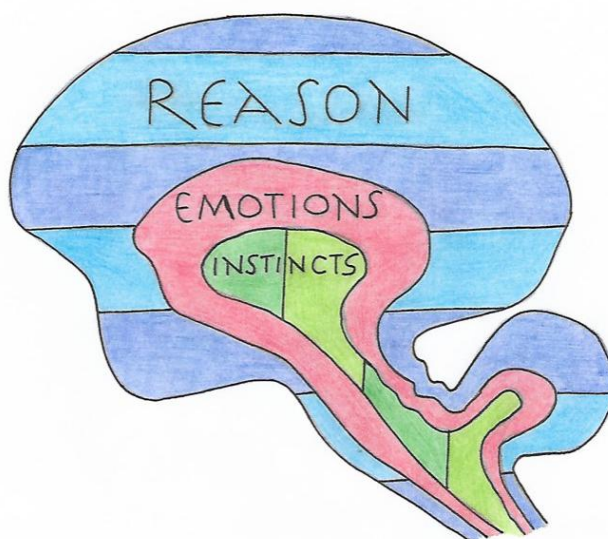


## Trauma and the brain

There are three main levels in the brain and these have different functions. Our base level (reptilian part) is the part that controls our basic functions such as breathing, hunger etc. The middle part of our brain (limbic system) is the part that monitors danger and is also the part that governs all our emotions. The top part (cortex/neo-cortex) is the thinking part. This part is the rational thinking part of our brain where we can think imaginatively with the whole picture in view– seeing the bigger picture.

When we are overwhelmed, and acutely stressed in terms of danger/trauma, our thinking part of the brain goes offline in order for the middle section to act in the fastest possible way.

When acting in the fastest way possible the middle part of the brain sends out signals through a system like a smoke alarm (the amygdala). This floods the body with hormones and chemicals (such as adrenalin and cortisol) and cause us to have a whole body response .





## Understanding trauma and the brain

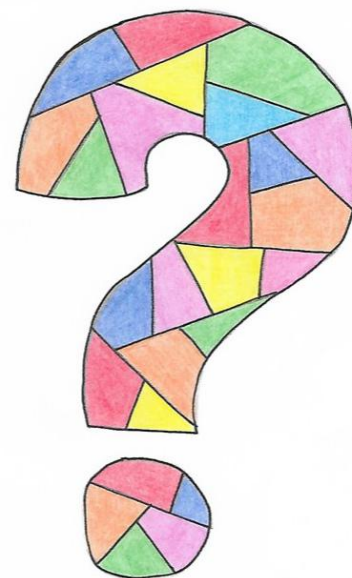
### What does this mean then?

When our middle part of the brain (limbic system ) detects danger it will flood the body and send the body into a fight, flight, freeze, flop or friend response. This is completely automatic. For example, an animal might completely freeze or flop (appear dead) when being attacked by another animal. This might enable the animal to survive because the attacker loses interest in killing it because it appears dead. Our bodies react in the way that is most likely to help us to survive.

The problem with this is that when our body is going into this automatic reaction, and cortisol is being pumped throughout the body, it makes us go numb. This overwhelms and confuses another part of the brain (within the middle section) which is the part that puts our memories into date and time order (the hippocampus) and gives them a start, middle and ending. Therefore, some of the trauma memories might still be floating around without having been categorised into our past. This can then feel like the trauma is being re-lived via flashbacks or memories. Triggers can cause the smoke alarm system to go off again and a person might go into the fight, flight, freeze, flop friend reaction automatically.

It might also feel in the body like the trauma is still happening. The body may still feel on high alert and the smoke alarm system is now very sensitive because it thinks there is constant danger because it does not realise the danger is over. This might feel like you are constantly on edge and like something bad is about to happen all the time.

This reaction of the brain is completely normal, it is doing its job to keep you safe. However, it is important to help the brain and body calm back down and be able to recognise when the trauma is over.





## Some effects of sexual abuse



There are many different effects of sexual abuse which vary from person to person. Different people process trauma in different ways. If you, or someone you know, has been a victim of sexual abuse, even if this happened a long time ago, you may have experienced one or more of these symptoms. If you have it does not mean that you are weak or otherwise a bad person. All the symptoms are normal responses and reactions to stress and trauma and are evidence that your mind and body are trying to recover and heal.

### Intrusive memories/flashbacks

Flashbacks and intrusive thoughts can make you feel as if past events are happening again in the present. They can be frightening and confusing, bringing up intensely unpleasant feelings, memories and body sensations. They are often, but not always, triggered by external events, places, objects or situations that remind you of something bad that happened in the past. These triggers can include sounds, smells, and tactile sensations (touch) as well as visual images. They can also affect you when you are asleep or trying to sleep, resulting in a broken sleeping pattern, and / or distressing dreams or nightmares (see 'sleep skills' section for help with this).

Although, if you suffer from flashbacks, you may feel as if you're going mad, this is not the case. Our mind puts up barriers to protect us from extreme pain and suffering, sometimes by blocking out traumatic events in our lives or by diminishing what has happened to us.



A flashback, an 'involuntary reflection', is a healthy sign that healing is ready to take place. Your mind is preparing you to begin to deal with these bad memories. However, at the time they can be very scary and difficult to live with - See suggestions for how to manage flashbacks.



## Fear and anxiety

You may find some situations difficult to handle, particularly if they remind you of some aspect of the abuse. For example, certain people or locations might resemble others you knew in the past which recall disturbing memories for you. You may fear loss of control in these, or similar, situations as you struggle to remain calm. You may fear what others think of you or suffer feelings of paranoia and/or persecution. The tension between feeling the fear and trying to control it can lead to an anxiety attack (shaking, increased heart rate, panic, disorientation etc). Fear of anxiety attacks makes them more likely to happen, which can feel like a vicious cycle. See 'What I can do?' For some suggestions.

## Painful feelings

You may find it difficult to dismiss thoughts and images of sexual abuse from your mind.

These thoughts evoke painful feelings which can seem inescapable, forcing you to seek refuge in coping strategies designed to minimise distress and reassert control over your life. Feelings of powerlessness ("its too late, nothing can change what has happened to me") worthlessness ("I hate myself"), degradation ("I'm dirty"), shame ("how could I let him/her do that to me?"), anger towards self, the abuser and/or significant others ("how could they let that happen to me?") and guilt ("It's my fault") are common feelings amongst survivors of sexual abuse.



Coping strategies vary from person to person and can sometimes include self-medication with alcohol/drugs, obsessive compulsive routines/behaviours and / or self-harm, cutting, burning or otherwise purposely inflicting injury on yourself. Although such strategies may help you cope in the short term they can easily become part of the problem.



## Relationship difficulties

Sexual abuse can affect your attitude to relationships. You may find yourself withdrawing from relationships that were previously important to you, feeling that no-one can understand what you've been through. You may have difficulty in forming new relationships, or become overly dependent on existing ones, fearing abandonment or betrayal.

You may struggle to express your emotions, preferring to avoid people or situations that make you feel emotional, or you may find your emotions overflow and are impossible to contain. Sometimes it might feel safer or easier to isolate yourself from people or social routines which you once enjoyed. It is quite normal to experience these emotional extremes as your mind attempts to repair the emotional damage caused by sexual abuse.



## Sexual difficulties

Sexual abuse impacts on people in different ways. Not every survivor experiences sexual problems as a result, but many do. You may feel disgusted or frightened by the idea of sex and wish to avoid any sexual encounter, even with a trusted partner. Even if you are happy to engage in sexual activity you may experience discomforting sensations and/or flashbacks during intimacy which remind you of things that happened during the abuse.

This can result in physical reactions to mental/emotional stress which make it difficult for you to relax and enjoy sex. Many survivors feel that the abuse has affected their sexual identity and functioning to an extent whereby the free expression of their natural sexuality is impossible.

Some survivors may also engage in risky sexual experiences as form of choice and control. Sometimes survivors use sexual experiences in a more compulsive or self-sabotaging way as a coping and feeling more in control.



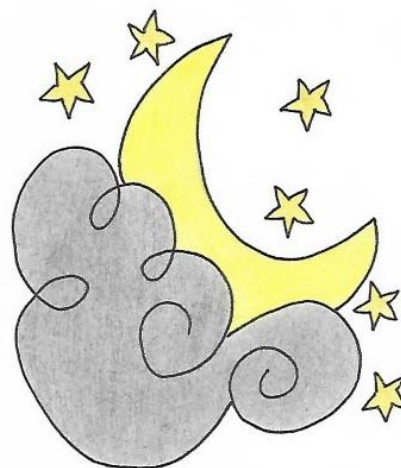
## Difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep

It is also common for survivors to experience either trouble getting to sleep or broken/disturbed sleep. It is often difficult to get to sleep as this is a time where there is no distraction and thoughts and worries might surface more because the distractions of a busy daily life are no longer there.

Another common experience is waking up in panic or waking in sweats from night terrors or night-mares. This is another common and a normal reaction, but it can add to frustration and difficulty concentrating during the day because the person is so exhausted.

### Some tips for helping with sleep:

1. Start to wind down
2. Focus on your breathing
3. Write down a list of worries and a 'to-do' list
4. Keep your self-talk kind and your thinking in your head kind.
5. Be kind to yourself.
6. Practise a guided visualization - letting go of the day's worries



### Some simple sleep strategies:

1. Set a schedule. Set a regular sleep routine. Even on your day off, don't sleep in too long.
2. Don't force yourself to sleep. If you haven't fallen asleep after 20 minutes in bed, get up and do something calming— drawing, reading etc, avoid bright lights and screens (phones, tablets etc)
3. Avoid tea, coffee, alcohol and smoking before bed
4. Avoid napping. Naps that last for more than an hour, or ones later in the day, are particularly harmful to sleep routine.
5. Only use bed for sleeping. Using bed for doing work, watching TV or other activities will mean your brain associates bed with these activities instead of sleep. Use bed only for sleeping.
6. Exercise and eat well. Avoid strenuous exercise and any big meals for 2 hours before sleep.
7. Sleep in a comfortable space. Make sure where you sleep feels comfortable for you.



## Things to remember

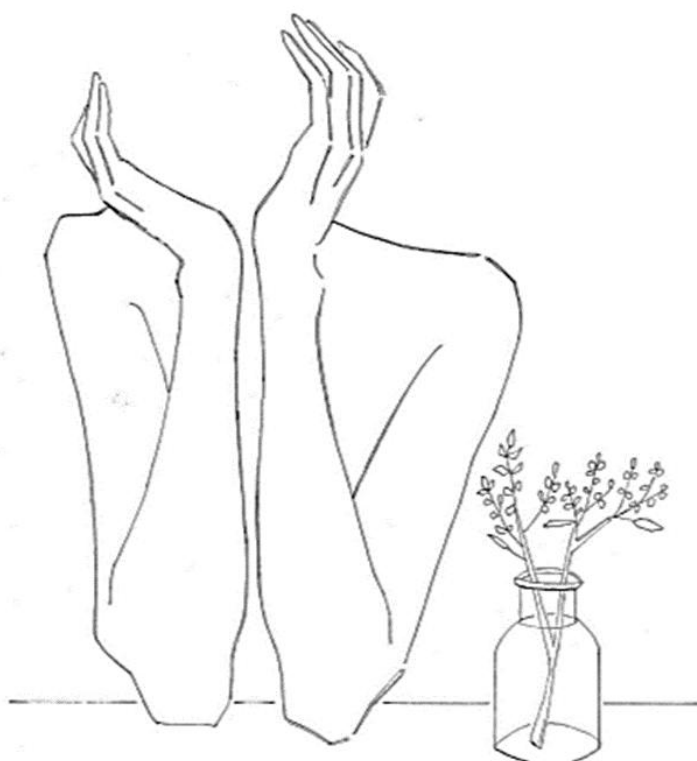
Whatever happened, it wasn't your fault! You are in no way to blame for having been sexually abused, no matter what the circumstances. You didn't ask for it, you didn't deserve it— regardless of whatever else you may have been led to believe.

Also, many survivors of sexual abuse are confused because the perpetrator is often someone they loved or even still love. It is absolutely ok to have those feelings. You can still love the person but be angry about what they did to you.

Recovery is possible. You may believe differently right now, but in fact many people who have undergone abuse are able to make the important transition...

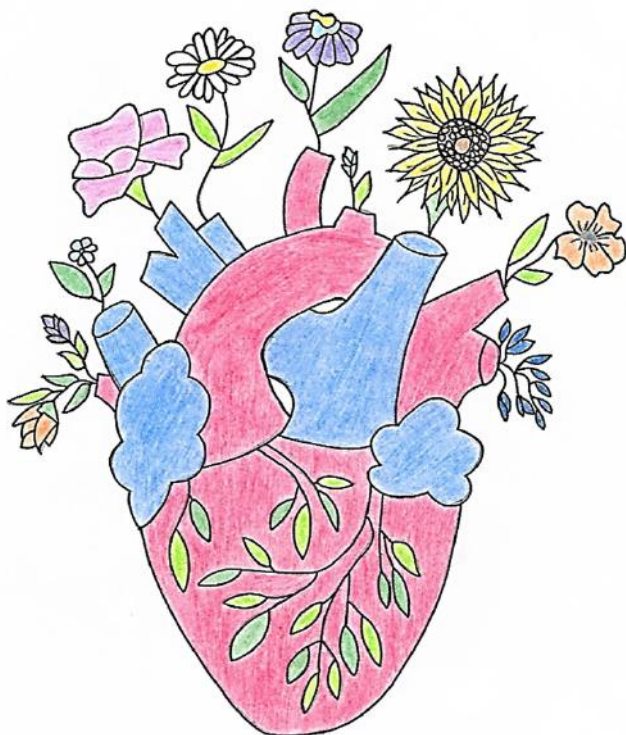
### **....from victim to survivor**

In this journey, people often access inner resources of courage, strength and tenacity that they may not have realised they had. Although what happened cannot be changed, the effect it has on your future and the meaning you take from it are yours to define. One step at a time, healing can, and does, happen.





## Things to remember



Be kind to yourself!

*You've got to nourish to flourish...*

Having experienced a severe trauma and its associated after-effects it is not surprising if you feel scared, hopeless and/or unable to deal with life. If you feel these things, that's ok. It doesn't mean you're a bad person or that you will always feel this way. Try not to beat yourself up and/or blame yourself for the symptoms you may be experiencing. Doing so only makes you feel worse and slows down your natural process of recovery.

Remember your brain is trying to keep you safe. That is why it is reacting in the way it is. Through the right support, and by feeling more in control of the symptoms, your brain may be able to calm itself down better and this will allow you to feel more present in the here and now.





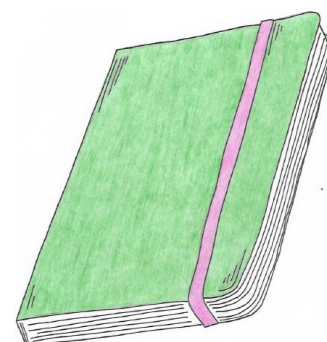
## Consider your self-care

When we feel low or down sometimes we forget the things that help us feel better. You might want to consider some of these ideas for reminding yourself of your own personal resources—the tools for helping you feel good or supportive factors.

You may consider writing down a list of the things that help you. Think of it perhaps as an emotional first aid kit. When we think of a first aid kit we might think of some practical things we need in there such as plasters, bandages or TCP. You might have some comforting objects in your first aid kit. Things that smell reassuring, feel good to touch, or items you know make you feel good. Perhaps you might put a notebook in there, or you know of an app that helps you when you feel anxious. You might remind yourself of this by putting the name of the app in your kit or on your list of personal resources.

You might think of activities you know help you, such as drawing, painting, knitting, sewing, or maybe more outdoors activities such as walking the dog, going for a walk in nature, going to the cinema.

- [List of your personal- self-care activities \(resources\)](#)
- [You might grade the list into things that are more possible when you have low energy, like sitting and having some mindful time or meditation, or having a bath or shower, and then list some other activities you can do if/when you feel up to it.](#)
- [You may add to your list some of the people you can contact if you are feeling low. These might be friends, work friends or family. Or you might include telephone numbers for support if you are in crisis.](#)
- [Consider how much time you spend on your self-care each day and each week. Do you need to increase certain areas of self-care or find more space for yourself? You may log this in a journal, notebook or app to keep a record of how much time you invest in yourself.](#)





## What can I do?

Here are some suggested ideas for skills and strategies that might be useful to try out to help you gain more control of symptoms you might be experiencing or the effects of trauma. These are only suggestions. Some of these ideas might not work for you or you may find some less useful than others. You might adapt or alter these to make them work better for you. You are the expert on your own experience. You will know what you find useful or what feel most comfortable for you.

### Suggestions for help with flashbacks:

Flashbacks can come in different forms. It can feel as if you are re-experiencing what originally happened.

- The 'librarian' part of the brain, the part that stores memories into date and time order, (hippocampus) continues to feel overwhelmed.
- This can feel never ending, in a cycle of repetition.
- Interrupting this cycle may help the hippocampus (librarian) to function properly again and be able to separate out the past from present.
- Using corrective language can help.
- Simple adjustment of language to one which accurately describes trauma as PAST tense.
- Rothschild (2010) asserts that even changing the word 'flashback' to 'memory' can be helpful.

### Exercise 1.:

Practise this now. What do you see around you, and try out quickly spotting different things, colours number of things within the room/space you are in. **Count 5 objects, 4 colours, 3 shapes, listen to 2 sounds and touch 1 thing around you.**

Then say...

*"I am remembering"*

- It sounds simple, and obviously it might take sometime, but recognition that a flashback is a memory will change your relationship to the past.





## What can I do?

### To help manage flashbacks:

Flashback protocol:

1. Pay attention to your internal senses, naming one or more of your sensations, such as heart rate, changes in breathing, dizziness, sweaty palms, butterflies in stomach.
2. Identify what you feel emotionally– e.g. I am afraid
3. State clearly to yourself that these symptoms are in reaction to a memory. You might give the flashback a title if you want, but make sure the title is no more than three words: “I am having these symptoms because I am remembering The Assault”.
4. Shift attention to your external senses and name at least three things you can see, hear smell.
5. Affirm today’s date. Include the year, month, and day.
6. Based on the information from the last two steps, evaluate if the situation you are in now is safe or dangerous.
7. If you are actually safe, in spite of having a flashback, you can tell yourself, “I am having a flashback and I am not in any danger” or “[the title of the trauma} is not happening now (or anymore)”.
8. If you are not in safe circumstances, seek safety.

(Rothschild, p.71, 2010)

### Making a flashback protocol card

You can make a card which prompts and reminds you of how to manage your flashbacks or anxiety feeling. These are the main points to remember. You can write these out on a card or store prompts on your phone. You could combine creating a sensory touch on a piece of card such as a soothing piece of fabric or a smell sprayed onto a card.

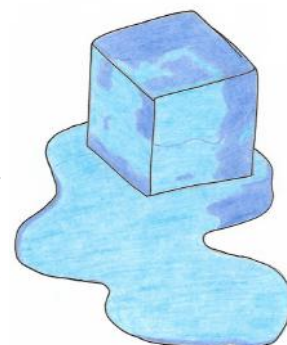
1. Attention
2. Identify
3. State clearly
4. Shift attention
5. Affirm the present date



## Flashback management

### Quick exercises for managing flashbacks

1. Look around yourself– focus on things around you and pull your attention to your environment.
2. Remind yourself that the worst is over. The feeling and sensations you are experiencing are memories of the past. The actual event took place in the past. You survived.
3. Get grounded. Feel your feet on the floor. Check you can feel them by stomping them slightly on the ground.
4. Breathe. When we get scared we stop breathing normally. As a result our body begins to panic from the lack of oxygen. A lack of oxygen, in itself, causes a great deal of panic feelings. These include pounding in the head, tightness across the chest, sweating, feeling faint, shakiness and dizziness. When we breathe deeply enough, a lot of the panic feelings can decrease. Breathing deeply means putting your hand on your diaphragm (tummy) and breathing deeply enough so that your diaphragm pushes against your hand and then exhaling so that the diaphragm goes in.
5. Recognise your need for boundaries. Sometimes when we are having a flashback we lose the sense of where we physically end and the world begins, as if we do not have skin. Wrap yourself in a blanket, hold something that comforts you. Or try out tension and release in your muscles. You can hold a bit of tension in your muscle, for example your calves. You might hold some tension and then slowly release it. This will make you more aware of your body in space .
6. Get support. Depending on your situation, you may feel like you need to be alone or you may want someone nearby. In either case, it is important that those close to you know about flashbacks or zoning out so they can help with the process, whether that means giving you some space or being there for you.
7. Take time to recover. Sometimes flashbacks are very powerful. Give yourself the time to make the transition back from this powerful experience. Don't expect yourself to start back into your usual routine right away. Have a rest and some quiet time, if needed.
8. Try splashing very cold water on your face. The water should be cold enough to give you a shock. Alternatively, put ice on the side of your neck. This can help to shock the system and enable the body to feel more in the present moment very quickly. This can help to bring you back to the here and now.





## Flashback management

### Wall spotting (for use with flashbacks)

This technique has been reported to work particularly well with flashbacks that have a largely visual element. The technique involves selecting 4 or 5 brightly coloured items in the room (or place if you are outside) that are easily within vision and moving your focus between them. Make sure to vary the order and allow yourself to lock onto the items briefly before shifting to the next item. Keep this up throughout the flashbacks and continue for a short time afterwards.

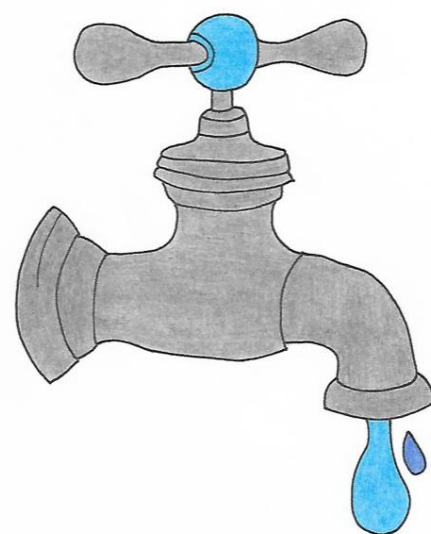
Following the same pattern can actually cause you to become more involved in the flashback because your mind becomes used to the pattern and builds on it. By varying the pattern, you disrupt the thought processes involved in the flashback. Continue the eye movements for a while after the flashbacks ends to allow yourself to get more focused on the present moment.

### Cold Water on the face to help with flashbacks

This one is very simple and can help quickly with any type of flashback. This idea is one of the first ones that many flashback sufferers find helpful. Splash your face with water cold enough to give yourself a shock. There is further evidence to explain why this works. It is called the Mammalian Diving Reflex or simply the “Diving Reflex” and relies on the fact that our bodies want to survive.

It is well documented that any sudden immersion in very cold water (below 70 degrees) triggers the Diving Reflex. The body reacts by lowering the heart rate, increasing blood pressure, and shutting down circulation to all but the body’s core. The result is lowered metabolism that conserves energy, which helps cold-water survival. This is also why near-drowning victims in cold water have much higher survival rate.

The effect of cold water on a flashback are fairly drastic. In short, the brain is shocked by the cold water and this interrupts the flashback in order to allow for survival in what may be a life threatening immersion in freezing water. For this reason, make sure you use the coldest water available and use a good amount of it.



**Disclaimer: It is vitally important, for safety reasons, that you do not immerse yourself in water. However, splashing the face with water can be done safely.**



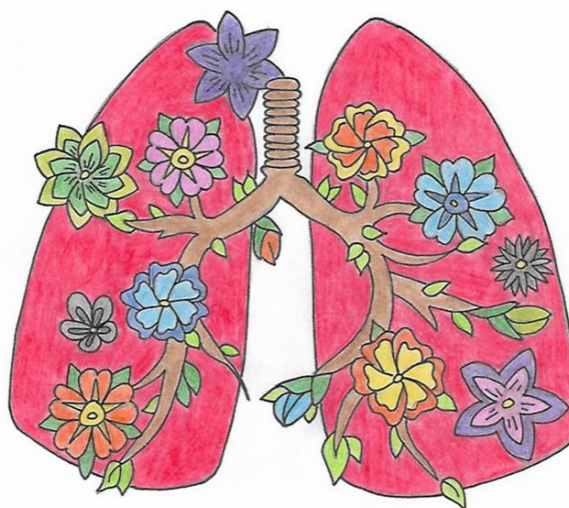
## What can I do?

### Skills for managing panic attacks and anxiety

The 'Sigh Breath' is a very simple breathing method for releasing tension in your chest, diaphragm and neck areas. It can be an excellent way of managing the symptoms of anxiety or panic.

It is moderate (rather than very deep) inhale through the nose followed by a fairly prolonged and slow exhale through the nose or mouth— as a prelude to allowing your breathing to become slower and shallower.

1. Mentally think or say to yourself, 'Stop!'
2. Now breath in through your nose slowly and evenly— pausing for just a second let the air out quite slowly, through your nose. Remember that the inhale is a moderate rather than very deep inward breath. The out breath is the key to the method . Be sure to prolong it. L-E-N-G-T-H-E-N your exhale, (this helps retain carbon dioxide your natural tranquiliser).
3. As you let the air out— let it go! Relax your muscles. Release as much tension as you can. Pay particular attention to the muscles in your face and jaw, shoulders and abdomen.
4. Pay attention to the natural pause that occurs at the end of the exhale. There is no need to think about breathing in, this will happen naturally after a second or two. Simply enjoy this moment of stillness between breathing cycles.
5. As the in-breath begins direct your attention outside yourself to what is happening in the outside world. 'See' clearly and 'Hear' clearly. Silently pay attention to what you can see and hear, without listening or naming them.



Although the method involves five steps, the whole cycle of 'in breath— brief pause— out breath' takes only a few seconds.

Sigh breath is a way of interrupting the build up of physical stress and tension rather than being a breathing technique to do over and over. Initially, one or two sigh breaths every half hour or so may be appropriate. You may wish to repeat this exercise at times of increased stress or tension.





## What can I do?

### GROUNDING SKILLS for help with flashbacks

#### Grounding skills:

- ◆ 'Grounding' simply means using your senses to get you back in touch with the present time and place.
- ◆ Grounding can help you get back in touch with what is happening around you right now. You can gain control over your brain to stay in the present .
- ◆ Grounding can also help you to find a balance between feeling overwhelmed by your emotions and being out of touch with them.
- ◆ Our thoughts are often either in the past or the future. When we have experienced trauma the brain is often in the constant alarm system. This is influenced by the past and leads us to check continuously that we are safe. Sometimes these thoughts pull us away from the present.

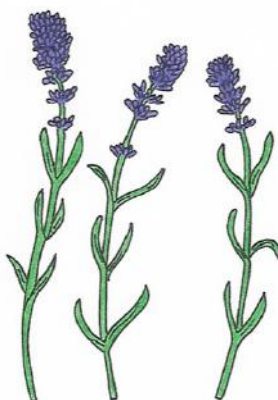
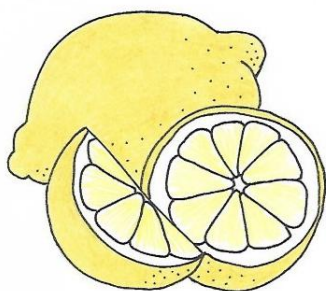
#### Sensory grounding

You can use your senses to 'anchor' you to the present moment.

You can create a set of touches, tastes, sights, sounds and smells which help you in either a comforting way to be in the present moment , or can pull you back quickly to the here and now.

You can make up a mini kit or basket full of the different sensory items which help you. These will be specific to you. They will be particular smells, objects, touches, tastes or photographs, music or sounds which help you.

These kits can be used when waking from nightmares or dreams, they can be kept in part or in full as a transportable kit in your bag or car. They can also be used for flashbacks.





## What can I do?

Skills for managing panic attacks and flashbacks

Quick grounding skills

- Notice
- Observe
- What now

**Notice**— Where my attention is.

**Observe**— What am I doing? Notice and state in your head what you are doing right now. Then notice the sensations in your body.

**What now**— Wise mind, how shall I continue? What do I need to do to help myself be back to the present moment.

Taken from: [getselfhelp.co.uk](http://getselfhelp.co.uk)

### Grounding objects

As well as your sensory grounding kit you can also have a single object which you find comforting, which carries a positive meaning for you and can distract you when needed.

When you start to feel your anxious thoughts or have butterflies in your tummy, or you feel on edge, you can hold your grounding object and really focus on its colour, weight, texture, temperature, smoothness etc.



Your grounding object needs to be something which you did not own when the trauma(s) happened. It needs to be small enough for you to be able to carry with you.

For example :

You might use a pebble from your favourite beach, or a stone/jewel/necklace/ring given to you by someone important to you, or it might be a small cloth or piece of material which holds important meaning to you.



## What can I do?

### Skills for managing panic attacks and anxiety

When we are really stressed and overwhelmed the thinking part of our brain goes offline in order to allow the automatic survival functions of the middle section of the brain to take over (our survival and emotional responses). This means that, in order to help calm our whole system and body back down we need to get the thinking and rational thought and logic back online. We can do this by pulling our attention to our thinking part of the brain. These are some skills that help to get the thinking part of the brain back online. You might use these after you have done some breathing skills, or grounding or sensory grounding skills first.

### Distraction /memory techniques

One way to get the brain thinking about something else is to try and think of a poem, song lyrics, a quote, saying or mantra. Say the words out loud and then try to say them backwards. This gets your brain to work in a different way. It makes it work harder, in a more cognitive and rational way, as it makes you concentrate on working something out.

Some people prefer to use counting. So, you may wish to count backwards from 100 for example, or to complete sums in your head. Other people may find that makes them feel more stressed. You need to find what works best for you.

This is where you are the expert of your experience— you will know what will work best for you. Try it out, think of either a sentence of some sort or counting and try saying or counting it backwards. Sometimes this can help with flashbacks or zoning out because it is redirecting the activity in your brain.





## Skills for managing panic attacks and anxiety

### Exercise for managing panic attacks

This is a simple breathing and grounding technique to help when individuals begin to panic and lose control of their breathing. It is also a very effective 'distraction' technique.

- ⇒ Firstly, take yourself off to a quiet place where you will not be disturbed.
- ⇒ Make sure you are 'grounded'. Sit in a chair or seat with a back rest and make sure you are sat upright with your feet firmly planted on the ground
- ⇒ Notice the feel of the chair at the points where it connects with your body. Notice also the floor beneath your feet.
- ⇒ Close your eyes (if you feel safe to do so).
- ⇒ Breathe in through your nose (or mouth if nose is too difficult) to the count of 5.
- ⇒ Hold your breath to the count of 5.
- ⇒ Breathe out (pushing your breath out) through your mouth for the count of 7.
- ⇒ Repeat this process 3/4 times until you notice that you are no longer feeling quite as anxious as you were.
- ⇒ You will notice that your shoulders have dropped (they are not so tensed up as they were, and that your breathing has become more regulated).
- ⇒ Also because you have been counting and breathing at the same time, you should find that you have not been able to think about whatever upset you in the first place.

**Please note** - Do not continue with this exercise if you feel faint or dizzy. Also, you need to practise this exercise often in order for it to be effective when you are having a panic attack. It is good to try and practise it when you don't need it– then you might be able to use it more easily in the times you do need to use it.





## Calming and relaxation skills

Guided visualisation (can be used before sleep)

Get into a comfortable position. Close your eyes if you want to. Otherwise, just ensure you are quiet and comfortable and soften your gaze.

Take a breath in for 5 and out for 7.

Complete this 3 times, breathing in and slowly out from your belly.

When you breathe in you should feel your belly balloon outwards and when you breathe outwards you should feel your belly deflate.

Imagine that you are sitting on the bank of a river, watching the water flowing slowly downstream. You notice how the water gently runs downstream and you notice that occasionally a large leaf drops from a tall tree onto the river and is then gently carried downstream.

You watch as a leaf begins its journey, passes you by, and is then carried further downstream until it disappears from view.

Now notice your own thoughts and whenever a thought arises imagine gently placing that thought on a leaf and watching it float away.

As each leaf drops from the tree it carries with it a different thought, each leaf is a different colour size and texture and holds different thoughts and each thought slowly flows down the stream and disappears out of view. You might imagine that each thought has a different shaped leaf or a different colour, you might imagine its weight or texture and watch it as the thought slowly drifts away down the stream.

Now take a moment to sit with this feeling allowing each thought to drift onto the leaf and float downstream.

Focus your attention back to your slow belly breathing and just allow your thoughts to drift down the stream.

Taken from *Activate your life* Neil Frude 2015



## Help with intrusive thoughts, or overthinking

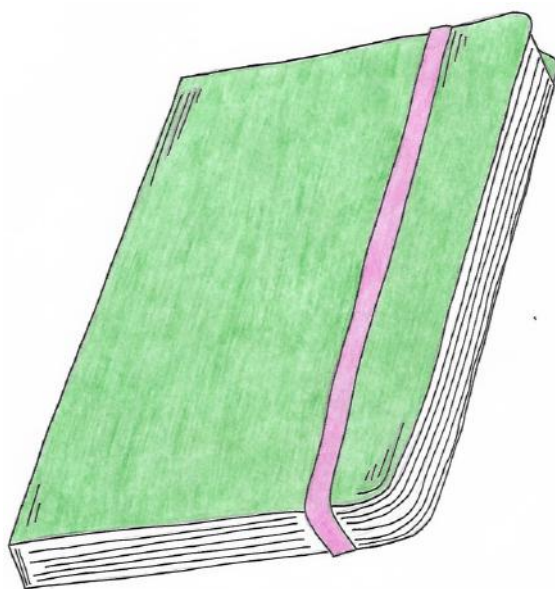
### Writing as a helpful tool...

This exercise is useful for people who find it difficult to deal with intrusive thoughts about their abuse or underlying feelings. Writing it down can be cathartic, if you have a thought or a dream about it you might want to put it outside of your head onto paper. This can sometimes be helpful as it can be a cathartic release to vent it and put the thought outside your mind. It is seen by some experts as a form of meditation– it can settle the mind, be a de-stressor, it can release tension and is often a mood-changer. It is an outlet that helps you to let go of your negative thoughts.

Keeping a daily record of your thoughts or feelings can help with logging how often you might be having difficult thoughts. However, equally, it is important to record the positive or uplifting things that might have happened in your day or ideas you have thought about.

Keeping a journal of thoughts, feelings and activities you have done that day might help you to notice patterns or observe things you do that help to lift your mood.

**Writing** can be a way to help with difficult dreams as well. Sometimes if you have had a dream or nightmare you could try out writing the dream/nightmare into a notebook you keep by the bed or even on your phone if that is easier (whatever works for you). You can write the dream out so that it puts it outside of your head, but then you might also try re-scripting the dream. You could try to add a hero/heroine, or a magical element, to the dream and change its ending. Or, you may wish to completely re-write the dream. By spending time re-scripting the dream, to take back control, you can try out a different ending and it may then be possible not to re-enter the dream if you fall back to sleep. You may also be left feeling much more in control.



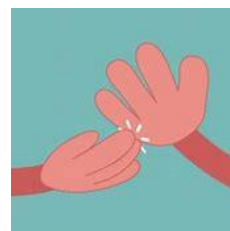




## Useful Apps

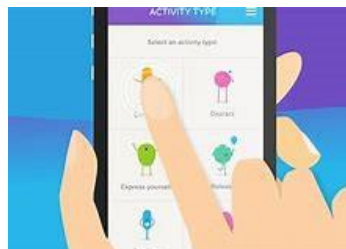
Your phone can be a great place to find resources which can help, especially with mindfulness and meditation practice. Try some out and let us know what you think!

- Headspace
- Calm
- Insight
- The Mindfulness App
- Smiling Mind
- Buddhify
- SelfHelpforTrauma



Other Mental Health and Support Apps include:

- ◇ 7 Cups
- ◇ Code Blue
- ◇ Lantern
- ◇ Big White Wall
- ◇ What's Up
- ◇ CalmHarm
- ◇ Antistress





## What to expect from counselling

Counselling is space just for you, to speak about your thoughts and feelings or use the space in a way that helps you. It is not necessary for you to fully understand what counselling is in order to benefit from it.

However, having some ideas can help you to prepare. Here is some information that may help you to gain an insight into what counselling is and how it may help you. Counselling is a safe space and time that is just for you. Counselling allows you to gain a different perspective. Counselling can help you gain control over your thoughts mindfully



### The counsellor/therapist...

Therapists are trained in different ways, some might use talking, being led by the client (humanistic). Others might help you to reflect upon your past and present in order to gain an understanding about the way you are feeling (psychoanalytic). Some counsellors are trained in how to use non-verbal communication with their clients such as art psychotherapy, drama therapy or music therapy. Some counsellors use skills to help clients challenge and reflect upon their thoughts, feelings and behaviours (cognitive behavioural therapy– CBT). Counsellors working at New Pathways will have a background in trauma training. They will all have been trained in how to work safely with trauma and, therefore, should help you to work at a pace that is right for you.

The person you see for counselling will be your designated counsellor. However, if you don't feel that your designated counsellor is the right person for you then you can say and have choice in who you see. Your place on the waiting list wouldn't be affected by this.

### What about silence?

Don't be afraid to sit in silence. It is okay if you don't feel like talking. You can use the therapy space in the way that is right for you. Sometimes you might need some space and silence is okay if it is needed. It doesn't mean it is awkward.

Don't feel like you have to talk. Don't feel like you have to make eye contact with your counsellor if it makes you feel uncomfortable. It is not necessary to be looking at your counsellor. Many counselling rooms will have things on the table such as pens, play-doughs, plasticine, fidget gadgets or sensory tools that you might want to use whilst you are in the therapy session.

Talking is not the only way.... You might sometimes want to draw out things, mind map, use sand trays or express yourself in other ways and this is possible too.



## What to expect from counselling

### How long will I have counselling for?

At New Pathways, we understand that the pacing of the sessions is important. You may take some time to build up coping skills and strategies to manage your trauma symptoms and it is okay to take your time. Don't rush. During each weekly counselling sessions you will review how you are feeling with your counsellor. Every six sessions you will review the counselling process as a whole. This is a chance for you, and your counsellor, to reflect on what is working well or what might need to be tweaked or altered to make the sessions most useful for you. Counselling is a collaboration between you and your counsellor. You can ask them for help with filling out paperwork. You should never be afraid or embarrassed to say if you don't understand something.

Be honest with yourself, and with your counsellor, about how you are genuinely feeling.

### Myths about counselling

Challenge your perceptions of what is counselling.

Common myths in the media include that a counsellor might sit and write notes during your whole session and expect you to talk about everything that has happened straight away. This is not how counselling works. Your counsellor will work with you to make the session most supportive for you. Trauma training allows New Pathways' counsellors to understand that the building of coping skills and feeling comfortable and safe are vital in the support we offer.

### Contract/agreement

You will have a contract/agreement between you and your counsellor. This will set out the agreed aspects of the sessions. You will be informed about how information about you is stored and you will know the boundaries of your sessions and confidentiality .

### Consider what you want to make...

Before starting counselling think about what you want to make during your sessions. If you were making a cake you would consider the prep time, the ingredients, the cooking time and the outcome - the cake itself. What do you want to achieve through counselling? Start to think about this before you go to your first session. You will see your counsellor each week, over a set number of weeks. What do you want to gain from them? Are there things you would like to be different in your life as a result of counselling? Are those wants/hopes achievable in that time limit? How can the counsellor help you with your goals?





## Useful websites and organisations

Victim Support: [www.victimsupport.co.uk](http://www.victimsupport.co.uk)

Samaritans: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

NHS direct (Wales) [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)

Rights of Women: [www.rightsofwomen.org.uk](http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk) (legal aid and advice)

Mankind UK: [www.mankinduk.co.uk](http://www.mankinduk.co.uk) (for male victims)

NAPAC: [www.napac.org.uk](http://www.napac.org.uk) (National Association for People Abused in Childhood)

Survivors UK Helpline: [www.survivorsuk.co.uk](http://www.survivorsuk.co.uk) (for male victims)

Din Project: [dynproject@safer.cardiff.freeuk.com](mailto:dynproject@safer.cardiff.freeuk.com) (for male victims of domestic violence)

Childline: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

NSPCC: [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

The Mental Health Foundation: [www.mhf.org.uk](http://www.mhf.org.uk)

Womankind: [www.womankindbirstol.org.uk](http://www.womankindbirstol.org.uk) (for female sufferers of depression)

Depression Alliance Cymru: [www.depressionalliance.org](http://www.depressionalliance.org)

Welsh Women's Aid: [www.welshwomensaid.org](http://www.welshwomensaid.org)

Eating Disorders Association: [www.edauk.com](http://www.edauk.com)

ASSIST: [www.traumatic-stress.freeservice.co.uk](http://www.traumatic-stress.freeservice.co.uk) (support for trauma survivors)

Mpower: [www.male-rape.org.uk](http://www.male-rape.org.uk) (for male victims)

NHSN: [www.nhsn.co.uk](http://www.nhsn.co.uk) (national self-harm network)

Harmless – email [info@harmless.org.uk](mailto:info@harmless.org.uk)

National Self Harm Network forums

YoungMinds Parents Helpline – call 0808 802 5544 (9.30am to 4pm on weekdays)

C.A.L.L Helpline: 0800 132737 or text help to 81066

Helpful information on trauma, sleep, anxiety and emotions: [www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk)



## Useful websites and organisations

Drug Aid: [www.drugaidcymru.com](http://www.drugaidcymru.com) (support and advice on drug-related issues)

First steps: [www.first-steps.org](http://www.first-steps.org)(obsessive-compulsive/eating disorders; panic attacks)

Alcohol Concern: [www.alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk)

The Survivors' Trust: [www.thesurvivorstrust.org.uk](http://www.thesurvivorstrust.org.uk) (Umbrella Organisation dealing with survivors of sexual violence).

Relate: [www.relate.org.uk](http://www.relate.org.uk) (relationship issues, family therapy, and psychosexual therapy)

## Other Resources

If you want to read more about sexual abuse you may find some of the following useful.

“Breaking Free” by Ainscough & Toon (2000)

“Victims NO Longer” by M. Lew (2004)

“The Courage to Heal” by W. Bass & Davis (2002)

“The Sexual Healing Journey” by W. Maltz (1992)

“Surviving Childhood Sexual Abuse” by Ainscough and Toon (2000)

“Out of the Darkness” by Caine & Royston (2004)

“An inch from Murder” by Nealus (2005)

“The Body Remembers Vol.1” by Babette Rothschild (2000)

“The Body Remembers: Volume 2: Revolutionizing Trauma Treatment” by Babette Rothschild (2017)

“8 Keys to safe trauma Recovery” by Babette Rothschild (2010)

“Healing the Fragmented Selves of Trauma Survivors” by Janina Fisher (2017)

“Rescuing the "Inner Child": Therapy for Adults Sexually Abused as Children” by Penny Parks (1994)

**Merthyr Tydfil HQ & SARC:**

Willow House, 11 Church Street, Merthyr Tydfil  
CF47 0BW

Tel: 01685 379310, Email: [enquiries@newpathways.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@newpathways.org.uk)

Web address: [www.newpathways.org.uk](http://www.newpathways.org.uk)

**Mid Wales Rape Support Centre:**

Canolfan Helygen, 46 Great Darkgate Street, Aberystwyth SY 23 1DE

Tel: 01970 610124,

Email: [enquiries@midwalesrsc.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@midwalesrsc.org.uk)

**Risca SARC:**

Laburnum House, Tredegar Street, Risca, Gwent  
NP11 6YA

Tel: 01495 233971, Email: [riscasarc@newpathways.org.uk](mailto:riscasarc@newpathways.org.uk)

**Newtown SARC:**

Ty Coeden Bedw, Park Lane, Newtown SY16 1EN

Tel: 01267 226166

**Carmarthen SARC:**

Elm Tree House, Glangwili Hospital, Francis Well, Carmarthen SA31 2AF

Tel: 01267 235464, Email: [carmarthen-sarc@newpathways.org.uk](mailto:carmarthen-sarc@newpathways.org.uk)

**Cardiff Office:**

Lime Tree Centre, 19 St. Andrews Centre, Cardiff  
CF10 3DB

Tel: 02920 220390,

Email: [enquiries@newpathways.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@newpathways.org.uk)

**Swansea SARC:**

Unit 3, Langdon House, Langdon Road, SA1 8QY

Tel: 01792 966660, Email: [swansea-sarc@newpathways.org.uk](mailto:swansea-sarc@newpathways.org.uk)

**Newport Office:**

Maple Tree Centre, 20/21 High Street, Newport  
NP20 1FW

Tel: 01633 250205,

Email: [enquiries@newpathways.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@newpathways.org.uk)



New Pathways Self-Help Booklet 2019

Co-produced by a former service user; we want to thank her for all her work on this booklet