



*Sharing the Un-shareable:*  
A resource for women on  
recovering from child sexual abuse

# Cover



## WARATAH SPIRITS

*Traditional lore has a story for every plant and animal co-existing with the people of that country. The waratah holds a special place for the Darug people. It is a flower that provides nourishment but was also a symbol of friendship between the Darug and those early settlers who treated the local people with empathy and respect. It was known that the Darug gave the flower to those they saw as friends.*

*The waratah (translates in Darug as 'faraway beauty') can be seen from afar in the bush and is one of the flowers used for their nectar. As with all plants and animals of the native world, they are protected by bush spirits.*

### *Sharing the Un-Shareable: A Resource for Women on Recovering from Child Sexual Abuse*

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# *About this Booklet*

This booklet has been written from the gathered wisdom of many survivors of child sexual abuse, counsellors and research. It aims to share with you stories and knowledge about child sexual abuse, and most importantly what has helped in the journey of surviving and thriving.

It is dedicated to all women who have experienced child sexual abuse.

The term survivor is used throughout this booklet in acknowledgement that victims of child sexual abuse face many challenges and find their own ways to survive and grow.

The title *Sharing the Un-shareable* reflects survivors experience of the freedom to speak about things they felt could never be shared, and is a quote from one survivor (Kate), sharing her experience of speaking with other survivors.

## *Acknowledgements*

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Thank you also to all those who took the time to read and edit this booklet.

## *Reading this Booklet*

If you are a survivor reading this booklet, read and use what is relevant to you. Everyone's story is unique, but you may draw strength from knowing you are not alone, and that there are many paths to recovery.

This booklet starts with some **information and facts about child sexual abuse**. It then moves on to **Women's Stories**, and the power of speaking out.

**Understanding the impact** of child sexual abuse in later life follows, then some shared wisdom about what helps in the **journey of recovery**.

Dealing with **particular issues** looks at some of the complex things that can happen after child sexual abuse like different forms of self harm, dissociation, fragmented memories, and issues in relationships with family, partners and children.

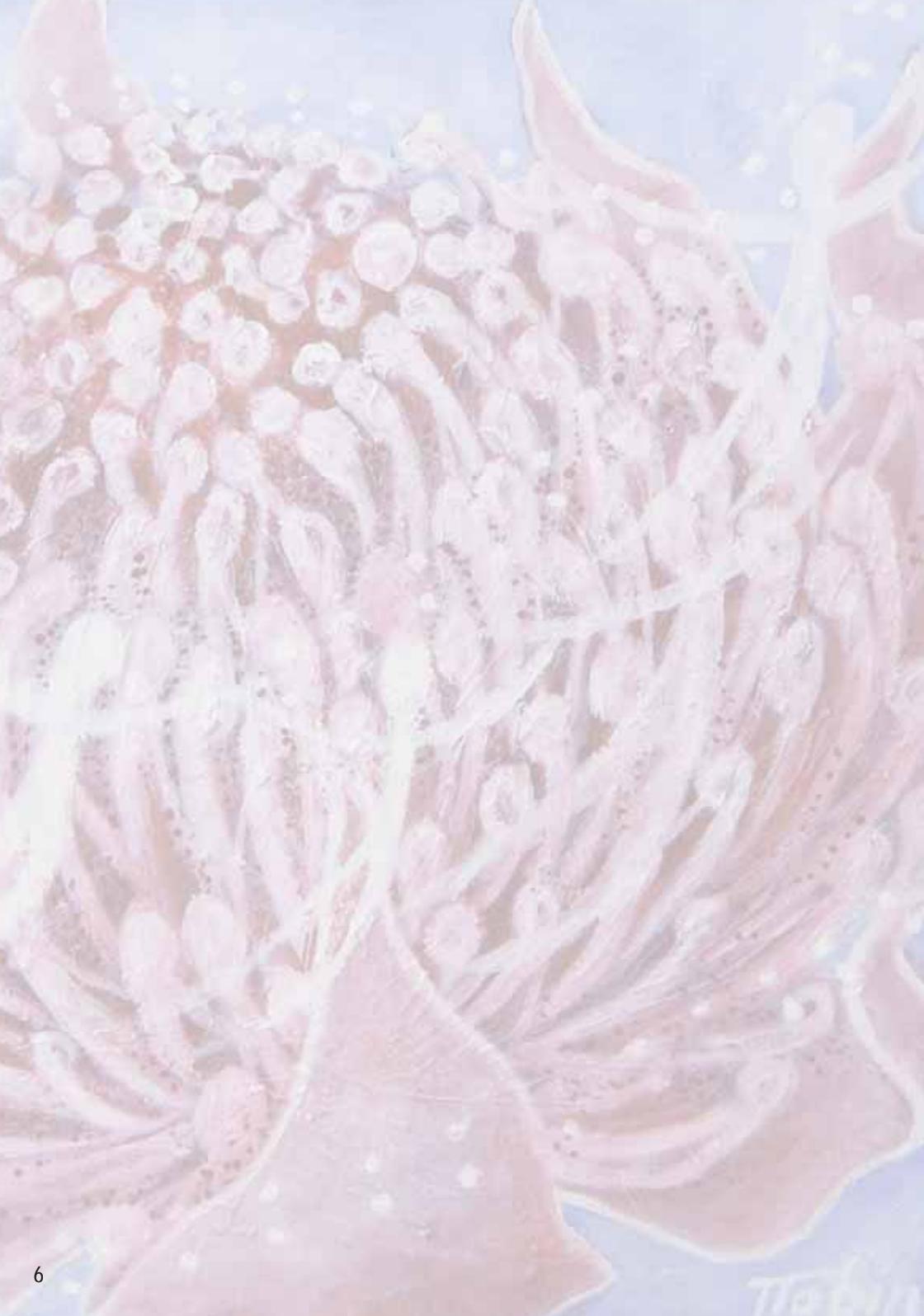
There's a chapter for **family and friends**, then **other resources and links** to services you might find helpful.

We hope you will find in this booklet some stepping stones to assist you in your journey.

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*Chapter 1*  
**What We Know About  
Child Sexual Abuse**



## *What is Child Sexual Abuse?*

The term child sexual abuse (or child sexual assault) refers to any sexual act or sexual threat imposed on a child by an adult, young person or older child.

Adults and young people who sexually abuse children take advantage of the child's trust, innocence and/or developmental stage.

Many survivors question whether what happened to them was called child sexual abuse.

This section explains what child sexual abuse is and looks at some of the common questions survivors have.

Child sexual abuse includes a wide range of behaviours and acts. These are some examples:

- exposing children to pornographic material or behaviours, or taking visual images of children for pornographic purposes
- a person exposing their genitals or masturbating in front of a child
- touching a child/young person's genitals or breasts and forcing or persuading a child to touch the perpetrators genitals
- penetrating a child with a finger, penis or object
- involving a child in oral, vaginal or anal sexual activity

**All of these behaviours and actions are crimes**

## *Who Does the Abusing?*

Those who coerce, trick or force sexual acts and behaviours on children are most commonly someone a child or young person trusts, and who has more power than the child or young person. They may be a parent or parent figure, brother, family member, teacher, coach, priest, babysitter, neighbour etc. The majority of abusers are male (over 90%)<sup>1</sup>, but some are female.

They don't have to be an adult, in fact many young people commit these acts.

Often survivors do not identify what happened to them as abuse until years later:

*I had problems naming what it was with me obviously because it was my sister. It was like, was it really sexual assault? What was it? And the fact that she didn't do it for any pleasure of hers, it was all just violence and power. I can't see that she would have got anything out of it. For me to then try and put a name to it was really tough for me. Survivor*

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<sup>1</sup> Mullen, P.E. & Fergusson, D.M. (1999) *Childhood Sexual Abuse: An Evidence Based Perspective* p44-49 Sage UK



# *Understanding the Tactics of Sexual Abuse*

Research with both survivors and those who abuse children clearly show that sexual abuse is **not** a random, compulsive act that abusers have little control over. Rather, abusers use planning and deliberate acts to ensure they can abuse the child and that they will not be found out. This has come to be called **conditioning** or more commonly the '**Grooming Process**'<sup>2</sup>.

This can take many survivors by surprise as they were completely unaware of the planned nature of the abuse. In trying to understand this conditioning process it can be helpful to look at it in three stages.

## **1. How do offenders target children?**

Abusers need to first identify children they wish to engage in sexual activity. They may spend a great deal of time fantasising about and planning the activity. Most offenders look for children they have access to, for example, children in their own family, children they teach or have some relationship of control over, children of friends etc. They also look for opportunities to have access to children, for example, bedtime or bath time, time alone with children, sporting camps, car trips, babysitting, sleepovers etc. Abusers sometimes have a preference for particular children, such as very young children or children of one gender. They may also target children who are in some way dependent on them, so may become coaches, carers or 'helpers'.

*When I refused to leave Mum and go to school, Mum gave my brother the job of seeing me to and from school. This gave him another opportunity to have power over me. Survivor*

## **2. How do offenders recruit children in to abusive situations?**

Abusers use a wide range of strategies to engage the child in a relationship. They may spend a great deal of time doing this. This ensures that the child somehow feels co-opted in to the abusive relationship, at least in part responsible for the sexual activity, and is therefore less likely to disclose.

Such tactics may include:

- **Building trust:** Many abusers use the relationship they already have with a child to deepen trust and dependence on them. Tactics used may include spending time with the child, gifts, telling the child that they are the only one who understands them, listening to them, finding out what they like, helping them, or treating them as 'special' or 'adult'.

*When my sister's boyfriend started including me and giving me respect I began to think that maybe I wasn't so unlikeable. He used my need to belong to begin to groom me. Mia*

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Conte, J, Wolfe, S & Smith, T (1989) What Sexual Offenders Tell Us About Prevention Strategies Child Abuse & Neglect vol 13 293-301

- **Using secrecy:** After gaining a child's trust, it is an easy transition to introduce 'secrets'. Abusers may say something like 'this is our special treat, but let's not tell Mum, we might get into trouble'. They may also use secrets as a game, or deliberate threats such as 'if you tell you will get into a lot of trouble...and I will go to jail...it will break up the family'.
- **Desensitisation:** This may include introducing sexualised language and behaviors gradually: 'accidental' touching, checking out how the child is responding before progressing to the next level, building confusion into what they are doing (such as talking about their day at school whilst doing something sexual at the same time). Abusers adapt their strategies to the age and developmental stage of the child or young person.
- **Building complicity:** This means that abusers seek opportunities to make the child feel they agreed to and/or are responsible for the sexual activity. This may be by making the child experience sexual pleasure, using them as a confidante or saying things like: 'you are just too sexy', 'we have to be careful...' 'when you looked at me I knew what you wanted.'
- **Using violence and threats:** Some abusers use threats of, and actual violence. Sexual abuse may be part of a bigger pattern of systematic violence including physical and psychological abuse. For example, some abusers use threats 'I'll have to start on your Sister' or 'I'll tell your Mum and she'll be very angry with you'.
- **Using power:** Abusers may also take advantage of their position and their power to ensure compliance from a child. When abusers already have a great deal of power through knowledge, expertise, money, discipline, provision of a child's needs etc, it is one extra step to add sexual power over a child.

*As a child you look to adults to teach you... with my Father – he didn't just abuse me, also others in the family, and the way he went about it was like well, this is what I do. That it was his right, so I think as a child it is very confusing. Survivor*

### 3. What do offenders do to ensure the abuse is maintained?

Once a pattern of abuse is established, the abuser has to put in place a number of 'checks and balances of risk' to ensure the abuse will not be detected, or believed if disclosed. This is achieved by monitoring the child and putting in place strategies that will ensure secrecy and compliance, and also by 'grooming' other people in the child's life. Grooming others can include using their position of power as a parent, older sibling, family friend, priest, teacher etc. to ensure others see them as respectable, likeable and responsible, or to threaten, as in situations of domestic violence. Abusers may also introduce other people to alternative explanations of the child's behaviour, for example, 'she is a flirt with others', 'she has a vivid imagination', 'she tells lies', or work to separate the child from their sources of support so they become isolated.

Much of the abuser's manipulative tactics are invisible to the child being abused, and to the people around them. Children often feel trapped and powerless, seeing no way of escape, fearful that others will blame them if it is found out.



*I was 9 years old when my Dad began touching me in a sexual manner. I was used to being physically abused by our Stepmother, so when this behaviour began from Dad I remember thinking that at least I wasn't being bashed. The affection and attention from my father was good, but the touching wasn't. I had always been emotionally starved so Dad's attention to me was confusing. Survivor*

*The sexual abuse continued until I was 14 years old when one night Dad plied me with alcohol and raped me. I am much older now and I can still remember that night vividly. He told me no one would believe me if I told anyone and I believed him. He told all the members of our family and any friends and contacts we had that I was a liar and a tramp and couldn't be trusted. Survivor*

Confusion also arises when you have 'mixed' feelings towards the abuser: 'I loved my Dad... just not what he did'.... 'Did he really care about me, or did he just pretend he cared so he could abuse me?'

It can be both distressing and freeing as an adult to look back on the abuse in the light of this understanding.

*Does any of this information fit with your experience?*

*How do you feel reading this?*

*Does it help you shift some of the burdens you have been carrying?*

*Is there someone you can talk to about this?*

## **Questions You May Have...**

**Did he abuse me because he was abused as a child?**

**Answer:** Many abusers claim to have been sexually abused as children. However, for the majority of abusers this is not true. Many abusers may use this as an excuse for their behaviour. The pathway to becoming an abuser is complex and different for each person. However, regardless of what reason is given for the abuse, the abuser is responsible for the abuse – they chose to do it.

**If I was sexually abused as a child, does that mean that I might abuse children?**

**Answer:** There is **no** such thing as a 'victim to offender' cycle. Many people who were abused as children are terrified that they may go on to abuse. Survivors often talk about deliberately avoiding certain activities with children or choosing not to be around them because of fear that they may abuse a child. This is an unnecessary fear because the sexual abuse of a child is a deliberate and calculated act and is not something that 'just happens' or 'accidentally' happens in the course of caring for a child. Survivors of child sexual abuse talk about making deliberate decisions to ensure the safety and happiness of the children in their lives.



## Why did he do it?

**Answer:** There are many theories about why someone sexually abuses a child. However, most of these theories do not help the abuser take responsibility for his actions but instead blame others. Research and conversations with abusers about why and how they have abused children have highlighted that an abuser does so because he wanted to, and because he could. Abusers have spoken about targeting children whom they have access to and where they are a trusted person in the child's life. Some abusers will use the excuse that they abused a child because they were drunk, because they were depressed or had some other mental illness or because they 'couldn't control themselves' as though it was an addiction or a compulsive act. These are excuses. The sexual abuse of a child is a choice and is often well planned.

## Do all young people who abuse go on to be adult offenders?

**Answer:** No. Young people are still developing physically, emotionally and cognitively. Some young people will stop on their own and others will stop after receiving professional help. The risk of young people continuing to abuse as adults drops dramatically if they receive help to address their behaviour.

## Should Mothers share some of the blame because they didn't do anything to stop it?

**Answer:** Most abusers set up the abuse in such a way that Mothers have no idea that it is going on. Abusers will often do or say things to make the child believe that their Mother knows. They may do or say things to the Mother to make her believe there is another reason for the child's behaviour or to make sure the child is not believed if she tells someone about the abuse.

One of the tactics abusers use is to cause trouble or distance between the child or young person and their Mother. Mothers may then view any problems they see as the child's problem.

Many survivors believe that their mother knew about the abuse and didn't act to protect them. This may be true. However, it is important to always question the abuser's part in this.

For more discussion on Mothers see Ch 3 Speaking Out, page 19.

## Is it partly my fault if the abuse continued after childhood?

**Answer:** Given what we know about how abusers set up the situation to make the child feel responsible for, or complicit in the abuse, it is not surprising that abuse may continue into late adolescence and adulthood.

There may be additional factors that complicate the issue such as experiencing sexual pleasure, not perceiving or experiencing it as abuse, or loving the abuser. It is important to examine your own situation in the light of understanding the dynamics of abuse, particularly in relation to who holds the power in the relationship. The responsibility should always be placed with the abuser.

These issues are complex and it can help to talk to someone with professional skills and training. (See Ch 8 Finding Help, Information & Support, page 63).



# *Chapter 2* **Women's Stories**

*Artwork: Prayer/Hope/Healing – Suzanne Chamberlain*



*Jacqueline, glass artist & survivor, courtesy of Northern Rivers Echo.*

## ***No language to tell, just a burden of guilt...***

I was a shy child who was frequently left out as the youngest of my siblings. I was bullied at school and had no confidence. When an older and very popular boy started to give me respect I started to think maybe I wasn't so unlikeable. Just before I turned 9 his effort came to fruition when he conned my parents into letting me stay over at his house with another girl and his brother. He was 15. When I woke up naked with him in my bed I knew something was very wrong and I was scared. He cunningly pressured me to agree to have sex with him. At the time I didn't even know what he meant but when he started I tried to stop him and he grew violent instantly. Then he raped me. I didn't tell any adults as I had no language to describe what had happened. I just felt lucky to be alive because I thought he was trying to kill me. For years I could not see that I had been raped, I still carried guilt. I had actually felt sorry for my abuser all those years, whilst being angry at myself the whole time for being stupid enough to say yes, I know now that he groomed me with intention to rape me. Realising that my abuser is totally responsible in the eyes of the law, and now in my own eyes has set me free. Through the help of my counsellor and Heartfelt House I have forgiven my 8 year old self. It has allowed me to love my daughter completely as I don't hate that part of myself anymore. My journey through all this has been long and hard but looking back at all I've been through I can see I am so strong. I love the person that I am and I'm using my experiences to grow on.

***Mia***

## *It happens to young people too...*

When I was in Year 9 at school I had to go and stay at Aunt's as Mum was suffering with depression. In my Aunt's house was her foster daughter (aged 8) and her son (aged 19).

I shared a room with the 8 year old, but we used to watch tele in my Cousin's room after dinner.

From the very beginning of my time there my Cousin laid his claim on me. He would put a blanket over us as we sat on the bed leaning up against the wall, and feel me under the blanket. I couldn't believe it was happening.

There was no escape from him. As my Aunt was a shift worker, we were often left in his care. He would come into our room when we were in bed and declare 'it's playtime!', then choose which of us to go to that night. In his room he subjected me to many sexual acts. I figured that as long as I let him do it to me it would be one less time the little girl would have to put up with it.

Now I know that I was sexually abused and that it is not ok. I also know that it isn't my fault and that I am not a bad person and that the guilt and shame that I felt for so long do not belong to me, but to my Cousin who abused me.

**Zoe**

## *Something's just not right...*

I reached the age of 45 I think and my health was going downhill. I lost all my strength, I've been quite a physical person working on the farm.

I'm the oldest of 9 children, and I'd sorta said a bit of my abuse to my siblings at different times and they just said, 'oh it happened and get on with it'. We've all heard this story no doubt but I just found that I couldn't get on with it. There was something in my life that wasn't right, I thought it was my relationship, I thought it was menopause. I got quite desperate and for some reason picked up a business card from one of the craft shows and I kept it for a year. Then one day my youngest daughter told me she'd been abused, and well, that really spiralled me and I got quite desperate and rang for help.

And that's such a big bonus. And now I speak to my Sisters about it, and my Brothers, and they've been abused too. It's so important to speak out about it, to get it outside of yourself...

I've been married for 38 years, nearly, only just! He didn't understand the full extent of the abuse and still probably doesn't, but I've gotta give him credit that he is still there!

**Shirley**

## *Looking for anything to change the way I felt...*



I was sexually abused by my Father, my Grandfather, my older Brother and a couple of my Father's mates.

I tried to tell on 3 separate occasions with disastrous consequences each time. Never again.

Through the years of prostitution; what else was I on this planet for except to service men?

The drug addiction; going looking for anything to change the way I felt.

The years of moving on, moving around, calling it travelling. Not just moving away from disasters but running from any hint of kindness bestowed. That was always more terrifying than the battles I found myself in.

Years ago, beginning to come out of that world in increments, not realising I was slowly being made well.

First came a qualification followed by years trying to live in 2 worlds (unsuccessfully). Finally getting clean.

12 step programs are a mainstay but only go so far.

4-5 years with a gifted psychologist changed my focus, my insight, how I view my life now, and my history, gave me a sense that I was worth talking to and that my story was believed by at least one person.

Then going to a survivor group. Turning up on the first day of an 8 week course I was filled with my usual judgment and condemnation: these losers haven't lived my life, what can they possibly do for me?

One by one these women bravely, sadly told their stories of horror.

Those 'losers' I met that first day are the most courageous and warm, loving women I have ever had the privilege to spend time with.

***Kate***



***The hidden shame...***

I am a Wiradiguri woman who suffered a sexual assault at the age of 8 years old.

The feeling of going through a horrible assault at that age was so frightening and I was so ashamed what people would think and say.

This is why I had kept the hidden shame to myself for all my life till now, the reason for me speaking out and speaking up is because I don't want the future generations to do what I did in hiding it. Why I allowed myself to feel this, I still don't understand how we cope in situations beyond our control when we are children. The FEAR, SHAME, PAIN, we must learn to be strong within ourselves to SPEAK UP, SAY NO MORE SEXUAL ASSAULT IN OUR COMMUNITIES.

*Jennifer*



*Artwork: Land Under Rule – Leanne Tobin*



## *Safe no where...*

My parents were entertainers and out a lot arriving home late at night and always intoxicated. If I heard the car door slam I would know that my Dad would end up in my bedroom that night, so the anxiety was always waiting to hear the door slam – or not.

When my parents were out I had an older Brother who was placed in charge. I was to come under the same special treatment by my Brother. His abuse was sometimes quite violent. I remember once climbing a tree in an effort to escape him.

By the time I was 16 I thought my abuse was over and I was getting old enough to speak up for myself. I approached my Mother and asked her if she would keep Dad out of my bedroom. My request was met with a blank stare, no comment or action was ever taken.

However, this is not the end of my abuse. I was assaulted and raped by two men on separate occasions, neither of these assaults were reported to the Police. For me it was just another incident and a reinforcement of my place in this world.

It's only now at the age of 62 that I realise the gravity of what was done to me. I've spent a lifetime of anxiety and self-loathing, and finally after all this time I'm coming to terms with my life. I only have one regret and that is that I didn't seek help sooner.

It took other survivors and counsellors to show me my own worth and to make me realise I played no part in what was done to me. I will be forever grateful for their kindness and understanding.

*Lorraine*



# *Chapter 3* **Speaking Out**

*Artwork: Tribal Links – Wendy Lageman*

**Sharing the Un-shareable.** Many survivors testify that speaking out about what happened was one of most important stepping stones to recovery.

As a child or young person disclosing the abuse was often very difficult.

*Telling is the hardest thing. There are lots of reasons why you can't tell... you are afraid... you have lots of worries that make you feel sick inside... you think it's your fault and you will be in trouble... you won't be believed... people like him – he does lots of nice things for other people ...you're just a kid<sup>8</sup>*

Many survivors tried to tell when they were a child, but were misunderstood, not heard, believed or supported. Others had to hold on to the secret out of fear or self blame.

*No one helped me because no one knew. When I eventually told people, many years later, everyone did believe me and I began to heal.*

*My real healing happened when I began talking honestly and openly to my genuine friends, and told them all that had been done to me. I had to be brave because I was becoming desperate in my pain and guilt.*

*My advice to any victim is to talk to people you know love you, trust them with your pain and let them help you heal. Jacqui.*

## **Telling Your Story**

Finding a way to give expression to what happened to you can help in the healing process. Survivors use a variety of ways to do this. For example, some write in a journal or express themselves in painting, drawing, poetry, dancing and singing, as well as speaking out or telling others.

How you tell, who you tell and how much you tell is an individual decision. There is no 'right way'. One survivor puts it like this...

*Really listen to your own thoughts about who are you going to tell and how you are going to do it. I think it's one of these things where sometimes it just comes out and it just happens, so be it. But I think a part of the power that we have is making those choices – Who, Where, Why... and making sure we have that protection there. Jacqui*

*A dear friend sent me a quote very early on in my journey to recovery which I have pinned to my bedroom wall and read it every day for strength...*

*'Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter'. Martin Luther King. ...what happened to me mattered and it matters to all who travel the same path. It needs to be shouted from the rooftops without shame until everyone hears about it so we can all begin to walk a different path. Jacqueline*

## *Reporting Child Sexual Abuse*

Many survivors struggle with questions about whether they should report the abuse. These questions can be driven by thoughts such as:

Could he have abused other children....Was I the only one...Do I have to report it...If I tell someone will they report it...Will he come and get me if I report it...If I report will it destroy my family....Will everyone find out...It was so long ago would the Police take me seriously...Will I have to see him if I report it...I'm worried he might do it to his own children...

One way of speaking out about the abuse is reporting it. It is each survivor's decision whether or not to report the abuse. Many survivors choose not to report and this should be respected. If you are thinking of reporting, there are a number of options available. It is often valuable to talk through these options with a counsellor from a Sexual Assault Service. They can also assist you in making contact with the appropriate person, as this is often a particularly difficult first step to undertake on your own. (See Sexual Assault Services in Ch 8 Finding Help, Information & Support, page 63).

*Past injustice refuses to be silenced, and continues to disturb the present until it's heard. It was in being heard that I finally heard myself. Vicki*

## *Can I Report to Police?*

Child sexual abuse is a crime. As a victim of crime, you have the right to report to Police and to be taken seriously. (See the Charter of Victims Rights in Ch 9 Further Reading, page 84). Even if the abuse occurred many years ago, you can still report it to Police (there is no 'statute of limitations' on serious crime). There are two ways you can do this:

### **1. Formal Statement**

You can make a statement to the Police about what happened and they will assess whether they can investigate it. A statement is not just telling the Police what happened. It involves carefully going through the explicit details of the abuse, and this can take several hours and sometimes more than one session. How far an investigation goes depends on what other evidence is available, such as witnesses, documents, diaries, other victims etc. The Police will also look at the laws that applied at the time of the crime, and where it occurred. If an investigation does progress to charging the abuser, you may be required to give evidence in court proceedings. The Police will ensure that if charges are laid, your matter may be handled by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution (ODPP) who will ensure that you have access to support through the criminal prosecution process. You will also receive legal and police protection from the abuser contacting you or your family. At court, there are services to support you through the giving of evidence. (See Ch 8 Finding Help, Information & Support, page 63). For your nearest Police station call 131 444 or TTY (02) 9211 3776. It's a good idea to set up an appointment to do this and to take a support person with you if you would like.

## 2. Non-formal Police Report

You may decide that you don't want to make a statement to Police, and possibly face a legal process, but would like them to know about the crime. Sometimes this is because you are concerned about whether the offender has access to other children, or you didn't have the opportunity to report it as a child or young person. It means you can give Police information about the abuse and the abuser, but not take it further. This information can be valuable to Police as some abusers sexually assault many children, often over years. Police then have valuable evidence that may help in other investigations. 'Crimestoppers', a 24 hour, 7 day a week Police service across Australia, collects information about crimes. You can call them on 1800 333 000, or online via [www.crimestoppers.com.au](http://www.crimestoppers.com.au). You can give the Police your details or provide the information anonymously by completing a 'Pass on Information Confidentially' report.

## *Can I Report Children Who Might Be at Risk of Abuse From This Person?*

Survivors are often worried about other children who could be at risk of abuse.

It is possible to report 'children at risk of harm' to the NSW Family and Community Services through their 24 hour Child Protection Helpline on 132 111 (TTY 1800 212 936).

To do this, it is necessary to have identifying details (such as names, addresses and ages) of the children you are concerned about and identify reasons for your concerns. NSW Family and Community Services will decide what to do with this information, such as investigate, refer to another agency or keep the information on file. They will not usually tell you what their course of action will be.

## *Are There Other Means of Reporting?*

If the abuser was in a position of authority or responsibility (such as a teacher, health practitioner, priest, or counsellor) you may also have the option of reporting to a statutory authority such as Professional Boards, Church, or Government Department Ombudsman. Whilst these statutory authorities do not have the power of the law, they can do their own investigations and stop or restrict the abuser working in their designated position.

# *What About Compensation?*

As a victim of serious crime, you may be entitled to compensation. There are three main ways this can be obtained:

## **1. Victims Compensation**

If the abuse occurred in NSW you can apply for financial compensation through Victims Services. The offender does not have to have been located or charged for you to be eligible to apply. You do not have to go to court to be eligible for compensation.

There are a number of criteria that have to be met, and it is advisable to get a lawyer to help you apply. Victims Services usually pays the lawyers costs and they can give you a list of lawyers in your local area. The contact details for Victims Services can be found in the Ch 8 Finding Help, Information & Support, page 73. If the abuse occurred in other States or overseas you will need to contact the Police or NSW Government Victims Services website.

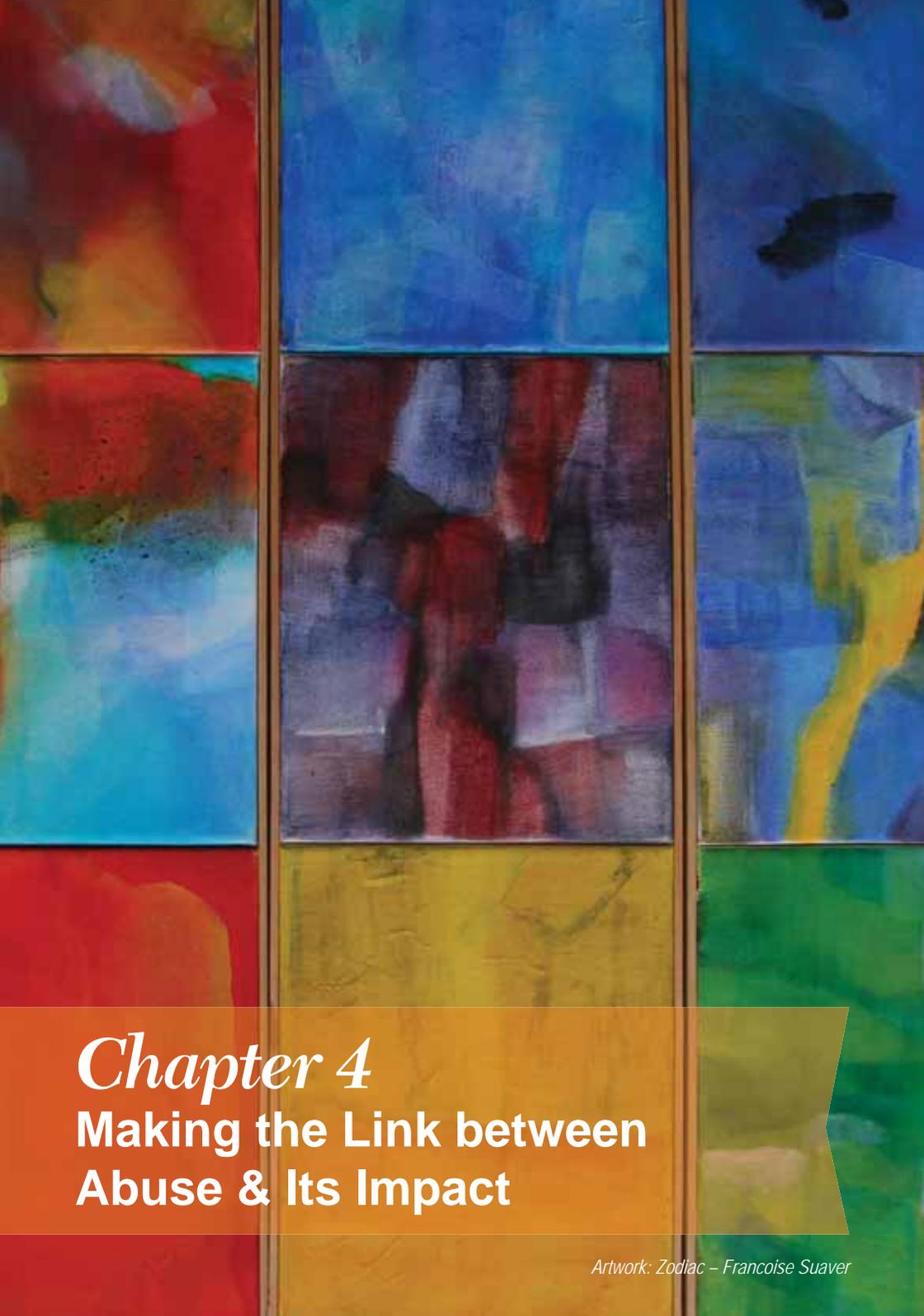
## **2. Civil Court Compensation**

Less commonly, survivors may seek financial compensation from the abuser or responsible authority through the 'civil' courts. This involves a lengthy and often expensive court process. It is sometimes used, for example, when a group of victims of the same abuser, sue an organisation for failure of duty of care, as in a school or institution where the abuse took place. Some law firms may take on such a case 'pro bono' meaning they will be paid if compensation is granted, with limited expense to you. (See Ch 8, Finding Help, Information & Support, page 63).

## **3. Other Compensation**

Some organisations may also provide compensation or counselling for survivors. These include church organisations, private schools and government departments. Talk with your local Sexual Assault Service for more information. (See Ch 8 Finding Help, Information & Support, page 68).





*Chapter 4*  
**Making the Link between  
Abuse & Its Impact**

*Artwork: Zodiac – Françoise Suaver*

Child sexual abuse can have significant consequences for a person's ongoing sense of self, health and well-being. Some survivors wonder why something that happened so long ago still affects them now, whilst others might not make a link between current difficulties and the past.

Survivors commonly struggle with a range of long term impacts of child sexual abuse. These can include pervasive sense of fear, anxiety, depression, sense of powerlessness, relationship difficulties in adult life, difficulties with trust, fears about parenting, alcohol/substance use, self-injury, thoughts of suicide, post-traumatic stress disorder, low self-esteem, dissociation, feelings of responsibility for the abuse, eating disorders, and increased risk of vulnerability to repeated abuse. For some survivors there are physical consequences such as pregnancy and health problems.

*I know that a lot of the stuff that I faced I thought 'what is wrong with me?'. Once I found out that that's actually a normal side effect, I thought, ok that makes sense now I can deal with it... Kali*

*It's quite scary when you are in that state and thinking what the hell is wrong with me, oh God I think I'm going crazy. Really, it's too frightening to think that it might be something.... As you said you are having a normal reaction to an abnormal event. I have to keep telling myself that many, many times, just to kind of feel that it's ok. Survivor*

## ***Why Am I Still Carrying These Burdens?***

Many survivors struggle to understand why they are experiencing these things, which further reinforce feelings of low self-worth and self-blame.

To understand the connection, it can be useful to look at ways in which the abuser interacts with the child to abuse and silence them, and the longer term consequences of this.<sup>4</sup>

### **Feeling Responsible for the Abuse**

The abuser's tactics of shifting responsibility onto the child by making them feel complicit in the abuse in some way can leave them with feelings of guilt and self blame. Commonly the abuser also transfers responsibility onto others. For example, 'you didn't ask me to stop, so you must have wanted it', 'your Mother knows or doesn't care, otherwise she would have stopped it', 'if you don't let me do this I'll start on your Sister', 'if your Mother knew she'd kick you out'.

Cycles of guilt and blame between Mothers and children are often created by the abuser. This guilt and shame can stay with survivors into their adulthood.



<sup>4</sup> Laing, L (1987) NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence – unpublished paper

*For me, I used to think, hang on I'm as bad as him, my body enjoyed that so I must be just as guilty. Survivor*

*And you carry his shame. Survivor*

*And that's part of the manipulation. That you are in that position. One of my things that I always used to think was that it wasn't that bad because I wasn't physically hurt. Jacqui*

## **Being Made to Keep It Secret**

The child is encouraged to keep the abuse secret and as a consequence is isolated from others. They often feel different (and not as good as) their peers. The abuser exploits this isolation further by creating the child's reality for them. For instance 'this doesn't hurt', 'this is what all Brothers and Sisters do'. The child is powerless to check out with others if this is true, and doubts their own feelings and reactions.

In later life, many survivors continue to struggle with feelings of isolation, and lack confidence in their own ideas and perceptions and experience intense self doubt.

*I isolate myself and I'll only keep one good friend then other friends won't keep in touch with me but then I feel so isolated and lonely so I've done it to myself and I don't know why. Survivor*

## **Protecting Everyone Else**

In being given the responsibility for keeping quiet, the child is also made to feel the burden of protecting others. A common tactic of an abuser is to say to the child, 'if you don't let me I will have to start on your Sister', only later to discover that the abuser said the same thing to the Sister. Other common tactics are to suggest that 'your Mum will be so hurt if she finds out what we do', 'if you tell I will kill myself', and 'you must protect the reputation of the family'.

Some survivors also feel a sense of loyalty towards the offender. For instance they may have mixed feelings towards the abuser who showed them love and affection as well as abusing them.

Over time, the child learns that protection is not something she is entitled to, but rather something that she must provide for others whatever the cost to herself. It is not surprising that survivors struggle with patterns of 'self erasure' (making oneself less visible), for example, anorexia, suicide attempts and drug and alcohol misuse, or sometimes 'super-responsibility' for others in adulthood, for example, putting others' needs before your own, making sure others' feelings are attended to whilst ignoring your own.



## Feeling Powerless

There is a huge imbalance of power between a child and her abuser. Many abusers use the power they already have over the child, for example, being the parent, knowing more than the child, having control over discipline, and extend that into sexual power. The abuser uses his power to ignore the child's experience and create a climate of uncertainty, powerlessness, fear and lack of safety. The child is unable to stop or prevent the abuse. It is not surprising that fear and anxiety are persistent and common problems for survivors well into their adult life. Trusting others, needing to feel in control, or believing in yourself can also be difficult.



*So you either become an over controller or you abandon yourself and I went both ends of the spectrum and I was so controlling to the point where I couldn't stand it then you would just abandon yourself. And it's just a repeat of what was done to you. Survivor*

**Understanding these connections can help in understanding yourself better, and allow you to shift some of the burdens back to the abuser.**

*Do any of these dynamics (i.e. responsibility, secrecy, protection and powerlessness) ring true for you?*

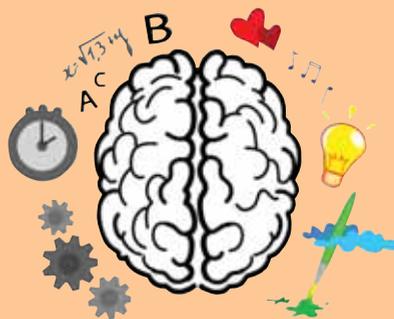
*How does this help in your understanding of child sexual assault? In particular, what happened to you?*

## *The Body-Mind Connection*

In recent years our knowledge about the relationship between mind and body has grown enormously. This knowledge is helpful in understanding how childhood trauma affects both mind and body and gives legitimacy to survivors' descriptions of what happens to them.

A child's brain develops and grows largely through the experience they have with significant caregivers. Healthy attachments in childhood are building blocks for later life. When these healthy attachments are disrupted significantly by experiences caused by an abuser the brain must find ways to adapt to the situation.

One area of brain development that is affected is memory. Memory is stored in the cerebral cortex. The right hemisphere of the cerebral cortex (right brain) largely holds our feelings, imaginative and sensory experiences, and the left hemisphere (left brain) holds our thinking, logic and conscious memory. Traumatic memories are largely stored in the right brain. This means, for instance, that traumatic memories of childhood sexual abuse may be re-experienced rather than remembered. This is why flashbacks, panic attacks and anxiety are common experiences for many survivors, many of whom may not have clear memories to attach to these feeling states.



Brain development is also affected by stress and pain. When stress crosses the line and becomes overwhelming, our nervous system is put on high alert. The brain sends out an alarm which causes the brain chemistry (hormones and neurotransmitters) to protect the body. Thus, mechanisms of fight, flight or freeze may be activated. The feelings of being hyper-alert, panicky or on-guard, and/or leaving your body or 'blanking out' are common reactions to this fight/fight/freeze response. If the trauma is ongoing, these mechanisms may become chronically raised. Thus, later in life, in response to 'triggers' or reminders of abuse a '90/10 reaction'<sup>5</sup> may result.

'The 90/10 reaction occurs when 10% of the emotional response comes from the present, and 90% comes from the past. When this happens, you might be criticised for 'over-reacting' or 'making a mountain out of a molehill'. The reason for the 90/10 reaction is that there is a real mountain of trauma in the past. This mountain still resides in your memory banks and in your sensitised nervous system'<sup>6</sup>

*Whenever someone comes too close to me, especially from behind, I start to get feelings of panic. I can be standing in a queue and if the person behind is too close my heart starts to race and I want to turn around and scream at them, or push them. I can't seem to help it – I have to get them away, or leave the queue. My family gets very embarrassed and frustrated. It helps knowing why I do that now, but it's hard to get my body NOT to react. Survivor*

**The good news is that the brain can change and repair!** Changing the 90/10 reaction does occur, particularly when you are able to identify the 'triggers' to the reaction, why it occurs and learn new ways of responding. (See Ch 5, Carry Bag for Dealing with the Anxiety & Panic, page 42).

<sup>5</sup> Lewis, L., Kelly, K & Allen, J (2004) Restoring Hope & Trust: An Illustrated Guide to Mastering Trauma Sidran Press USA.  
<sup>6</sup> op cit.

## *Re-Assessing the Impact: Victim or Survivor?*

It is important to pay respect to the ways children and young people have found to survive and overcome the abuse and its impact. Judith Herman, a psychiatrist specialising in trauma pays tribute to the extraordinary capacity of child abuse survivors.

**The child trapped in an abusive environment is faced with the formidable task of adaptation. She must find a way to preserve a sense of trust in people who are untrustworthy, safety in a situation that is unsafe, control in a situation that is terrifyingly unpredictable.....  
the pathological environment of childhood abuse forces the development of extraordinary capacities, both creative and destructive<sup>7</sup>.**

Women who contributed to this booklet shared a diverse range of coping capacities...

*Humour... Just cover everything up... Being another person... Fixing everyone else's problems but your own... Exercise... I shut down from about 10 to about 22... Denial... Being the goody-goody... Achieving... Burning yourself out... Learning to read people... I smoked a lot of pot... For me when I was in secondary school I would just dream, just switch off... Look out the window a lot... Dissociation... Alcohol is definitely a coping strategy... I used to try and pick relationships that wouldn't go anywhere... I found being unreliable was really good protection – always being late... Blend in... Stay in the shadows*

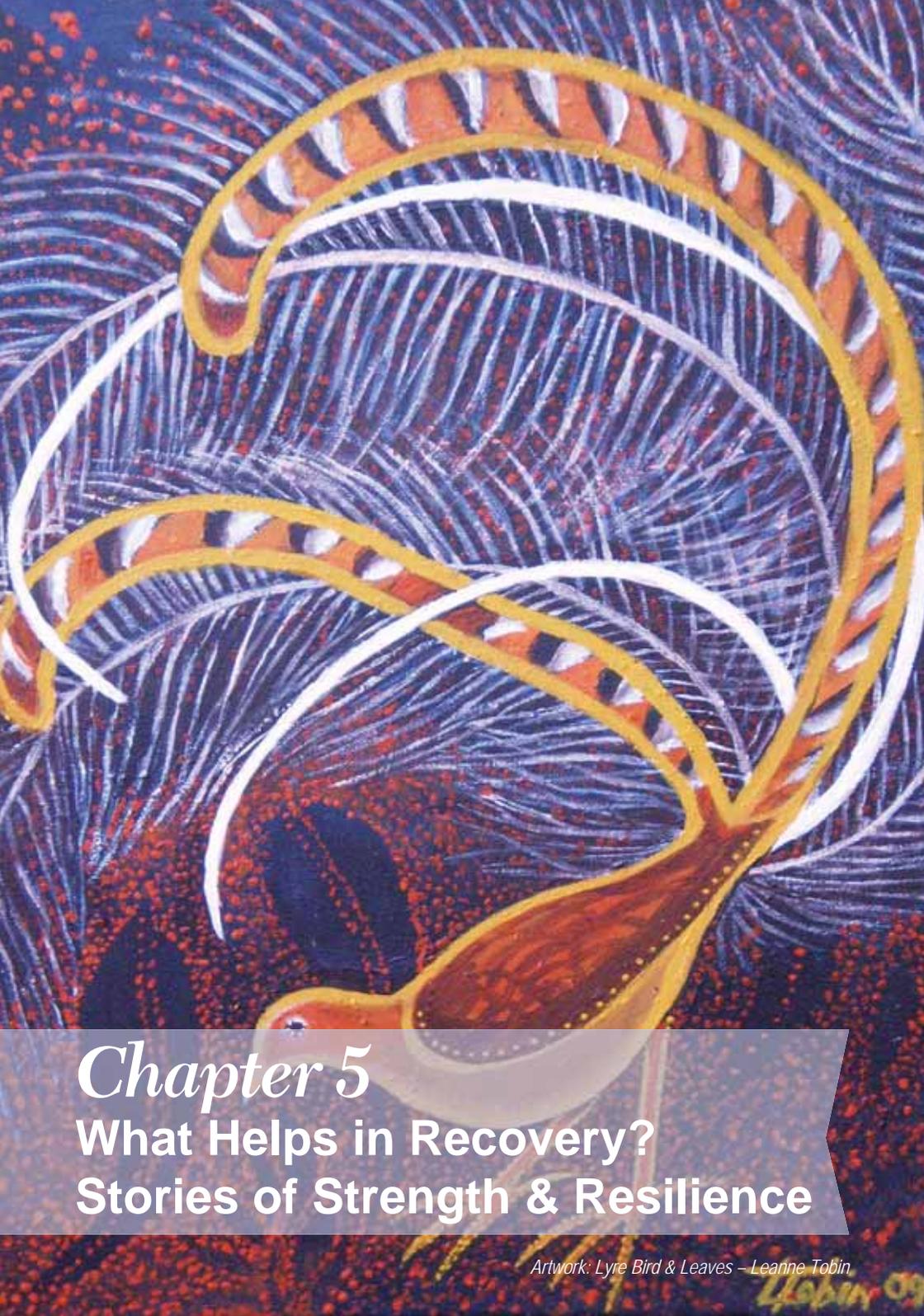
Over time, some of these strategies cause problems in themselves, and persist long past their 'use by date'. As you come to understand yourself better, you are in a stronger position to judge the 'helpfulness' of these strategies and choose ones that increase your well being and enhance your relationships.

In the following chapter on 'What Helps in Recovery', survivors share ideas on helpful strategies.

*What have been your coping strategies?*

*Have they changed over time as you understand yourself better?*

<sup>7</sup> Herman. J. L (1997). "Recovery from psychological trauma." *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences* 52(S5): 145 - 156.



*Chapter 5*  
**What Helps in Recovery?  
Stories of Strength & Resilience**

Artwork: Lyre Bird & Leaves – Leanne Tobin

*I have a feeling that when I started this journey that I just wanted everything to be okay as soon as possible and... I think it's going to be longer and it is going to be layers and layers and layers... but it gets easier. Survivor*

Moving on from child sexual abuse is a journey that lasts a lifetime. Whilst everyone's journey is different, there are a number of stepping stones that help along the way.

The following may have some resonance with your experience.



## ***1. Being Heard & Believed***

*Listening to others' stories was transformative – it is so important to hear and understand at a deep level what others have suffered, that there are common reactions which are normal, and that it is possible to draw on almost unimaginable reserves of courage to overcome fear, depression and even despair. Catharsis is the word that springs to mind and I lost that sense of aloneness after that... Di*

Having an opportunity to **give words** to what happened to you... and your journey since then, is an important part of recovery. It can help shift some of the trauma so that it is not locked inside your body and mind, but rather becomes part of your past. Sometimes these 'words' are speaking, sometimes they are writing, drawing, music and other creative expression.

**Being heard and affirmed** is also important. Even long after the abuse has stopped, to experience understanding and belief and to know there are others who have walked a similar road, helps you find reserves of strength within.

*How have you told your story?*

*Have you found others who have heard and affirmed you?*

*Have you heard others' stories that have given you courage to continue on the journey?*



Finding the right person/people to tell is important. Their response can make a world of difference to your journey of recovery. Sometimes telling occurs spontaneously, at other times it may be helpful to give thought to talking about your journey with someone you trust, who can support & guide you at times. This needs to be someone you feel safe to be vulnerable with, and who is able to hear your story. It may be a partner, a friend, a family member, a counsellor or a group of survivors. (See Ch 8 Finding Help, Information & Support, page 63).

*Really listen to your own thoughts about who you are going to tell and how you are going to do it. I think it is one of these things where sometimes it just comes out and it just happens, so be it. But I think a part of the power that we have is in making those choices – who, where, why... and making sure we have protection there. Survivor*

## 2. Nurturing Relationships

*I found a boyfriend who cared for me a lot, and discovered what it was like to be loved. I hung around his family home all the time... they were incredibly accepting, this was very healing for me. Heather*

Heather's experience highlights a key stepping stone in recovery: a relationship with someone who gives you a nurturing experience of yourself. Many survivors can identify someone in their growing up years and adulthood who did this for them – a teacher, an Aunt, a friend, a boyfriend, a work colleague, a survivor group, a counsellor... This was a person who 'believed in you', or who encouraged your talents, who shared your passion for something, or who told you to keep trying and not give up...

*Who have been your stepping stones in the journey?  
How have they been a stepping stone for you?*

Negotiating relationships are difficult at times for everyone. Survivors sometimes struggle with identifying when relationships with family, friends and partner have become unhealthy or abusive. Survivors of child sexual abuse often struggle with believing they can have mutually nurturing relationships because of difficulties with trust, boundaries and self-belief.

It is important to be discerning about relationships that are nurturing and those that are not. You can find 'nurture' in many different relationships. There are those who we might tell everything to and others who we can spend a light hearted time with.

Become discerning about people around you – notice a kind word spoken to you and believe it! Look for opportunities to work or play together with people who share your interests. Treat people with kindness and respect, and notice those who show that in return. Be proud of each step you take.



For some survivors, the first experience of a nurturing relationship is with a counsellor, or a survivor group. Within the boundaries of a safe, therapeutic relationship the survivor is able to be vulnerable, to share her struggles and triumphs, to have someone bear witness to the pain and offer guidance when necessary. Such an experience provides a stepping stone to finding safe relationships in the wider world.

### *A 'health check' for your relationships:*

- Do **you** have a variety of relationships?
- In your relationship, do you have shared interests, shared power and shared decision making?
- Do you have normal ups and downs, with more ups than downs?
- Can you disagree and solve problems without verbal or physical abuse?
- Do you support the other in their dreams, goals and endeavours?
- Are you both feeling good about yourselves in the relationship?
- Can you be honest and vulnerable with each other?

*Having looked at these questions are you able to discuss them with the person concerned?*

## **3. Finding Comfort & Soothing Yourself**

Under the burden of carrying the secrecy and responsibility, and whilst having their own feelings ignored or used against them, children who experience child sexual abuse must find a way to manage the overwhelming feelings. Such children learn that they themselves are not entitled to safety, comfort and protection, but must secure this for others.

Not surprisingly, as adults, survivors struggle with feelings of deep shame, fear, grief, anger, pain, and self hate, and sometimes have very little healthy, developmental experience of managing strong emotions or feelings. Self harm, dissociation, avoidance and self medication are common strategies used in childhood, and often into adulthood.

Sometimes you have had to sooth yourself by hurting yourself. This can compound your feelings of shame and guilt and further isolate you. It can help to create a space within yourself that lets you know you have done the best you can and to know that you are on a journey of finding comfort that nurtures you.

It can take time and practice to discover coping strategies that comfort and soothe these strong feelings. It can also take time to allow yourself to be soothed, and to feel safe.

*Finding myself again... as simple as warm biscuits and warm tea is, it's just the medicine that you need for your soul because we live in a very academic, intellectual society that doesn't deal well with heart matters. We've got no language for the heart other than poetry and if you're not gifted that way then places like this are few and far between. Survivor*

It can be helpful again to think of what children do, and what we often want to do, to soothe strong feelings.

*I still sleep in the foetal position with everything tucked around. Survivor*

*I always like singing but now I really like to expand on letting myself sing and not worrying about if someone's listening or not. Not being so self conscious. Survivor*

Other ideas are making or finding yourself a soft blanket to wrap up in, identifying or creating a space that is calming and going there when overwhelmed (for example, in nature or lighting a candle), having a massage, listening to certain music, rocking, crying, expressing strong feelings safely (such as hitting a ball, punching a pillow, yelling), giving yourself a gift, being held safely, cuddling your pet, a soft toy or pillow.

*What ways have you found to comfort yourself?  
Are any of these ideas ones you'd like to try?*



## ***4. When the Past Intrudes into the Present: Having a Management Plan***

*I thought I dealt with it... it doesn't mean I failed. At different stages different triggers are going to happen and you are going to have to go and deal with that even though you thought that it's all over and I don't have to look at it again. It's not a failure on your part. Survivor*

The journey of recovery is an ongoing one. Sometimes the trauma of childhood abuse feels a long way in the past, like you've 'dealt with it', then at other times in your life it re-emerges. This re-emergence can be evoked by specific triggers such as seeing the abuser, attending family events, certain smells or places or having sex. Other triggers are less easy to identify, such as your child reaching the age you were when you were abused as a child, illness, change or difficulty in a relationship. Sometimes you feel depressed, anxious or have other feelings and you don't know why.

When this happens you can focus on getting through another rough patch or unfamiliar part of the journey. The following ideas may help:

## A. Identifying triggers

Where possible, identify the things that trigger the feelings or responses. This puts you in a better position to think about how to manage them, rather than react. Triggers are the things that remind you of aspects of the abuse such as events, times, smells, places, sights, sounds, feelings or relationships.

*Do you know what triggers memories of the past for you?*

*What ways do you respond to these triggers?*

*Are there other ways you can manage these?*

*What do you do when triggers happen?*

*It's ok... I'm allowed to have ups and downs and I can really recognise triggers now which is one of the most important things and when I start to head in that place where things are getting wobbly I can actually stop now and I can go "alright take a moment, where are we?" and touch base. Liza*

## B. Having a self care plan

Having a structure like this can be helpful in getting through a difficult time. Such 'scaffolding' holds us when the foundations are feeling shaky.

*It helps to have a daily routine. I was nursing at the time. I used to write care plans for patients. I would write my own care plan and I had a daily routine of things that I just really needed to do on a daily basis in order to just feel ok and function. Quite a simple matter really. Survivor*

*Could you write yourself a self care plan to use when the journey is difficult?*

There are two examples of daily self care plans in the Ch 9 Further Reading (page 86) at the end of this booklet.

## C. Dealing with old thought patterns

How we make meaning of our experiences has a powerful impact on our thinking, decisions and feelings.

The abuser has a lot of influence in determining a child's reality and thinking. Statements like, 'we'd better not tell... I know you want me' are examples of implicit messages of conditioning so that a child unconsciously is made to take responsibility for the secret and the abuse, resulting in long term patterns of self criticism and self blame.



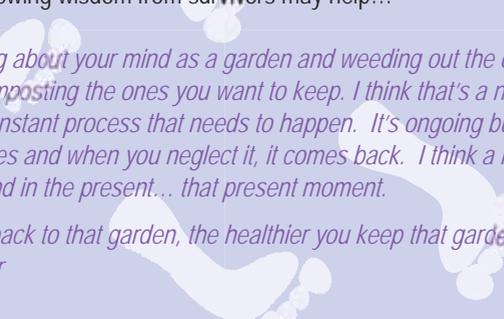
**Note: Remember that the basics of good sleep, diet and exercise always make a difference in difficult circumstances.**



Becoming aware of what your mind is saying about the past and how you have coped is very important in recovery. Some of the 'mindfulness' practices and techniques that are provided here (see also Ch 8 Finding Help, Information & Support, page 63) can be useful in developing this awareness. Counselling can also be an important tool in dealing with these patterns of thinking.

For example, if your mind is saying, 'You have dealt with this, why are you going back to it now... you really are a failure...', then it is likely you will feel a failure and may spiral into deeper feelings of hopelessness. If you instead say, 'Oh yes, I recognise this familiar feeling, it happens whenever I.....' then you are better placed to manage it.

The following wisdom from survivors may help...



*Thinking about your mind as a garden and weeding out the ones you don't want and watering and composting the ones you want to keep. I think that's a nice metaphor for the mind. And it's a constant process that needs to happen. It's ongoing but when you do it regularly then it flourishes and when you neglect it, it comes back. I think a lot of it is awareness in mind and body and in the present... that present moment.*

*Going back to that garden, the healthier you keep that garden the fewer the weeds grow.  
Survivor*

*Having a Teflon mind being on guard and only letting in thoughts that you want to let in at certain times. Survivor*



Here are a couple of exercises to try:

## *A Mindfulness Exercise*



Get into a position where you can be comfortable

Ask yourself what is happening for you right at this moment

Notice and name those thoughts without being too caught up in them,  
for example, that's a tired feeling, that's a worry about...  
this is a feeling of tension....

Let those thoughts or feelings come to your attention then drift away

Each time they come let them drift away again. Notice rather than  
think about them

As you do this, notice also the things around you –  
the temperature, sounds, colours etc

Notice your breathing

Notice as you do this that the feelings become less intense

Notice that you are staying in the present, observing not reacting  
to the feelings and thoughts



## *Being Positive Exercise*<sup>8</sup>

When you're feeling down, have a think about some of these positive statements.

You could even write them down and stick them on the mirror!

- I'm doing the best I can
- I have a right to aim for my dreams
- This is going to upset me but I know I can handle it
- I've made important and hard decisions and I know I can get through this
- I deserve to be treated with respect
- I'll take one day at a time
- I can do this one step at a time
- I know I am a capable person
- I'm a loving parent
- I can ask for help
- I am not to blame for the violence

Staying in the present, observing and not reacting can help you feel better when strong feelings arise.

## *5. Reclaiming Childhood*

Child sexual abuse frequently robs a child of her innocence.

Grieving the loss of the childhood that you didn't have or the missing experiences that come with being a child can be an important and often painful part of healing.

*To me it's pretty important to look for that child, find out where she is and bring her forward and let her jump in puddles or sing nursery rhymes. Survivor*

There are so many ways to reclaim childhood experiences. Sometimes having your own children or grandchildren gives you that opportunity:

*Playing soccer, I looked after my grandson the other day and he says 'Nan come on let's go and play soccer' so there we are in the backyard playing soccer. He was running and I'm running after him and I thought I just loved it. I let him beat me with the running and just him laughing and saying 'I scored another goal Nanna' and he let me score a couple. It just lifts you so much. Survivor*

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<sup>8</sup> (used with kind permission from Little Black Book for Strong Black Women 2007 Central Coast Domestic Violence Committee)

Enjoying the world through a child's experience is open to everyone – there is no age limit to having fun and enjoying simple pleasures like:

- Jumping on a trampoline
- Colouring in books in front of the TV
- Swings
- Doing something silly, like rolling down a hill
- Crawling around with your grandkids
- Eating two cakes at the one time or just eating the icing and leaving the cake
- Having a teddy bear
- Getting a pet

*If I'm a bit stressed or I can feel it start getting a bit uncomfortable I will go and just walk outside or sit out with the dog and just go ok I'm going to look at the world through a child's eyes and take that time. And it just slows everything down and it's like you re-centre and you can do that with anything even just the rain, it's just seeing the wonder in things again. Survivor*



*Colour is important to me because at a certain time the world sort of grey's over. And so that was something I did last year a lot of colour therapy – sewing, using materials and colouring. I used that to try and embrace it and go... It's ok, I'm allowed to do this, I'm allowed to have fun. Liza*

*What things do you do or would like to do to reclaim some childhood?*



## 6. Looking Outward with Hope

*A key stepping stone in all survivors' journeys is 'hope'.*

*Hope is a response to felt tragedy.<sup>9</sup> Hope recognises in the face of its close companion, fear, that we can move beyond fear. It recognises that: it's not enough to survive; I want to thrive.<sup>10</sup>*

Thriving means engaging more fully in life, and believing in a future. Many survivors do this by developing meaningful relationships, achieving their goals, having an ambition, parenting children, recognising and using one's talents, finding spirituality, and becoming safe. Some survivors do this by social action – like being involved in a cause, political action, education, or working with other survivors.

Out of this thriving comes a deep appreciation for the wonders of life, the ordinary things, of love and beauty.

*What signs of hope do you notice in yourself?*

9 Allen, J (2005) Coping with Trauma p282

10 Allen, J (2005) Coping with Trauma p283

## *Carry Bag for Dealing with the Anxiety & Panic*



- **Breathing** – focus your attention on the breath-breathing as evenly as you can. Breathe out for slightly longer than the breath in, for example, breathe in for the count of 3 and breathe out for the count of 5 ensuring you breathe out all the air. Do this until you feel calmer.
- **Exercise** – try out a number of different types (for example, dance, yoga, walking, running, sport, gym, gardening etc) and identify which ones work best for you when anxious. As hard as it is to do, it works.
- **Self soothing** – can be useful when you are feeling emotionally fragile or vulnerable. It can help to think of what children use – wrapping up in a blanket, cuddling a soft toy or pillow or a pet, snuggling in bed, receiving a hug from someone you love, comforting food or drink, having a good cry, a warm bath or shower, a swim, rewarding yourself with a gift or placing a warm heat pack on your chest.
- **Creative Expression** – experiment with different ways to express yourself – all survivors have amazing talents in creativity (many not yet discovered). Try singing, dancing, painting, sewing, poetry, writing, clay work, drama, study etc. Find what 'fits' for you. In particular, journaling, or writing your story, can help prevent and alleviate anxiety symptoms.
- **Recognising Triggers** – be your own detective and discover what sets off panic or anxiety. Think of different senses – smell, sight, sound, touch, taste as well as times, events, people and places. You are then in a better position to manage the reaction before it becomes overwhelming.
- **Using Mindfulness** – mindfulness exercises are becoming increasingly popular as a skill that can be learnt to manage critical self talk, act rather than react and stay in the present. Many books and resources are available to assist (See Ch 8 Finding Help, Information & Support, page 63).
- **Seek Support**– telling someone you trust how you are feeling can often take the 'heat' out of anxiety. Reassurance that you are ok and a kind word are sometimes a powerful antidote.



# *Chapter 6*

## **Dealing with Particular Issues**

*Artwork: Disconnected – Lesley Brown*



This chapter looks at some significant issues survivors sometimes struggle with. It looks at managing patterns of behaviour that can cause difficulties in moving on from abuse, fragmented memories of abuse, dissociation, intimacy and sexuality, and parenting.

## *Challenging Patterns of Behaviour*

Survivors often struggle with ways of being that may have developed in response to the abuse or in coping with the impact of the abuse. These may include:

- Self injury/self harm (such as cutting, burning, head banging etc)
- Over-use of drugs, medication, alcohol and tobacco
- Eating disorders
- Obsessions (such as over-exercising, washing, cleaning, routines etc)
- Risk taking behaviour (such as fast driving, low regard for personal safety, impaired judgement of sense of danger)
- Poor boundaries
- Reduced ability to assess others integrity and intentions
- Chronic thoughts of death or suicidality
- Dissociation (disconnection from current time, place and feeling)

In order to challenge some of these patterns of behaviour it may be useful to:

- Understand the function that these behaviours have
- Learn ways to tolerate strong emotions
- Find additional ways of coping when these strong feelings arise

### **1. Understanding why these Behaviours Develop**

Many of these patterns of behaviour bring an added sense of shame for survivors particularly when they persist into adult life. It is important that we understand (and even honour) the function that these behaviours have served in survival.

*My pain could not be seen, therefore it must not have been real, so I made wounds to match the hurt. Made it real. When I was at my darkest moments suffering from flashbacks and anxiety attacks, self harm was my first line of defence. Nat<sup>11</sup>*

*I was 13 years when the abuse stopped and had gained some weight – which I now know was normal at that age – but I thought he stopped touching me because I was fat. So I stayed fat. I weigh over 130kg and have for some years now. Every time I have lost weight I start to feel vulnerable and scared and before you know it I am back to eating a lot again. Sara<sup>12</sup>*

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11 The Silent No More Project 2008. WILMA Women's Health Centre Pg 46

12 Op Cit, Pg 49

*I couldn't understand why I wanted to be close to people but couldn't. It was like an invisible brick wall around me. I began to realise that being close to people emotionally felt like my Father. I loved him but hated the abuse. The closer I got to people the less safe I felt – I'd then push them away. Survivor*

These stories from survivors illustrate how these behaviours serve the function of **protecting** them from further pain or abuse or reminders of the abuse.

Sometimes challenging behaviours have other functions such as regaining a **sense of control**.

*Some days my anxiety is so bad the only thing that relieves it is to get out the bleach and scrub the entire house until all the dirt is gone. Survivor*

For some survivors the ultimate way to bring an end to the struggle or to regain control in a life that feels uncontrollable is to contemplate death.

*By the time I was 11 I was obsessed with running away or killing myself. I didn't care about school or have many friends. I was totally disconnected from living. I'd walk around in a daze not caring if I lived or died. 'Would this be the day I died?', was my first thought each morning. I tried to kill myself a couple of times, threw myself in front of cars, took pills but I just felt more of a failure when that didn't work. Heather*

*I have to be in control of myself at all times... I am trying to let go, and I have let go a little, but that was my big thing. Survivor*

It is important to find ways to acknowledge and express strong feelings safely.

*So you either become an over controller or you abandoned yourself and I went both ends of the spectrum and I was so controlling to the point that I couldn't stand it. Then you would just abandon yourself and it was just a repeat of what was done to you. Survivor*

Sometimes these patterns of behaviour function unconsciously to re-live or **re-enact aspects of the trauma**. Like flashbacks, this is an adaptive way the brain seeks to process what is overwhelming. Thus, failing to see potentially unsafe situations, having poor boundaries or recognise abusive relationships are not uncommon.

*The years of prostitution... what else was I on the planet for except to service men. When they paid me I thought they loved me. When they wanted and got a freebie outside of work I thought I had a boyfriend. Kate*

Sometimes it is difficult to understand why these patterns are so hard to change. It may help to know that many of these behaviours have served the important function of **self soothing** and have developed in order to regulate very strong feelings.

Self harming behaviours, bingeing on food and using substances are common ways to soothe overwhelming feelings and induce comfort or calm. Over time the effectiveness of these behaviours is so strong they become difficult to change.

*If I dried out or got clean I would just become this icicle inside.... with drugs I didn't have to think about why I was scared of sex, scared of love, scared of caring.<sup>13</sup>*

*Drug addiction... Going looking for anything to change the way I felt. Kate*

*Can you identify any of these patterns of behaviours in yourself?*

*Have they been protective, helped you stay in control, or provide self soothing (maybe all three)?*

## 2. Learning to Tolerate Strong Feelings

Building on an understanding of the function of these behaviours, survivors face the task of learning to tolerate and express strong feelings, something they did not have the opportunity to do in childhood. For many children suffering childhood abuse, their feelings were ignored, minimised or punished. Later in life, survivors struggle to safely acknowledge and express their feelings.

*In the group we did, I didn't want to do the session on anger. I felt too uncomfortable even talking about it. I knew I was really angry inside but I was terrified of what my anger might do if I let it come to the surface. I was a real expert on pushing my anger away. Mel<sup>14</sup>*

*I was so scared of feeling anything – I never got angry, never got upset, and then I would explode and rage and cry for days... I felt like my feelings were completely out of my control. Now I can say to myself a feeling is just a feeling, I can choose what I do with it. It doesn't always work, but it is beginning to help me be less afraid of my feelings. Maria<sup>15</sup>*

*What feelings do you find difficult to manage?*

13 Breckenridge & Carmody (1992) Crimes of Violence. Allen & Unwin pg 185

14 The Silent No More Project 2008. WILMA Women's Health Centre Pg 35

15 Op Cit pg 32

### 3. Finding Alternative Ways

An important starting point can be to acknowledge and understand the role these behaviours may have played in your adaptation to trauma.

It can be useful to contemplate alternative ways of responding to, and adding to, these existing behaviours. These could include a range of self-soothing or comforting behaviours. It can be helpful to think about what children need to help calm themselves, such as wrapping up in a blanket, rocking gently or crying, or being held or hugged by someone you feel safe with. It is also important to find ways of expressing strong feelings safely such as creating a safe calming space or finding an expressive activity such as kick boxing, dancing, running, art, music and writing. For more ideas see Ch 5 What Helps in Recovery, page 31.

It can really help to talk through these strong feelings on a regular basis with someone you trust. This person can provide a sense of being truly heard and support you as you make changes in your patterns of behaviour. They can then provide valuable feedback as you travel forwards.

*What changes would you like to make in your patterns of behaviour?*

*Are there new ones that you like to try?*

*What do you need in order to do this?*

*Who could support you to try out these new behaviours?*

## A Word About Memory...

*I didn't remember my childhood abuse until I was in my 30's. It came back to me when I was having a surgical procedure and the doctor said 'this will feel a bit peculiar'. I started then to get flashbacks to the things that my Father used to do to me. Survivor*

Many survivors worry that their memories of their childhood and the abuse are fragmented. Others worry that their memories are unreliable. Not being able to remember, particularly in early childhood is a common experience for everyone. Not being able to remember traumatic memories such as child sexual abuse is also common. Research<sup>16</sup> has shown that while some survivors may remember great detail of the abuse, others will have either no memory or only partial memory of the abuse. (For further understanding of the impact of trauma on brain development see the 'Body-Mind Connection' in Ch 4 Making The Link Between Abuse and Its Impact, page 25)

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16 Meyer Williams, L. (1994) 'Recall of Childhood Trauma: A Prospective Study of Women's Memories of Child Sexual Abuse'. *Jnl of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* Vol 62. No 6

## ***A Word About Dissociation...***

Dissociation is when you disconnect or 'blank out' from what's going on around you. Dissociation is a tool commonly used by children experiencing abuse to distance or disconnect themselves from what is happening to their body and mind. Over time this can become a well developed unconscious coping mechanism. This often occurs in the presence of triggers to the abuse or any situation that feels threatening. Long after the abuse is passed, dissociation may have become a well entrenched pattern. It may be as simple as losing time or 'blinking out', or more complex, as in not being able to remember large chunks of time.

One of the side effects of dissociation is that it can stop people from participating fully in experiences of life that can bring both pleasure and pain.

Many survivors will become experts in knowing when and where they dissociate and consciously work to stay connected with the present.

Dissociation becomes less of a problem when a survivor experiences safety in her life, and with increased self awareness. The strategies suggested in Ch 5 What Helps in Recovery, (page 31), also assist in dealing with dissociation.

*My therapist told me a good one. Just actually feeling my body, feeling my legs and feeling my feet on the ground and really trying to connect with my body and being in my body. And even just looking around the room, actually just being present, making an effort to do that. Survivor*

*What keeps me from dissociating is having passion in my life. Like I have to be in love absolutely with what I am doing, that stops me from dissociating. Survivor*

## ***Relationships with Family After the Abuse***

Given the conditioning/grooming process used by abusers on children and family members, (see Ch 1 What We Know About Child Sexual Abuse, page 7), it is not surprising that survivors continue to experience difficulties with family relationships long after the abuse is over. These difficulties may be many and varied:

*When family members found out they didn't do anything other than separate me from him and it was never mentioned for years. I didn't know that they knew, and I was carrying the secret. They were speaking about him like he was a wonderful wonderful man. These adults, these guiders in my life knew and not one person said anything... to finally to get to that point that the silence was broken and they'd known all along. That's the most destroying part. Survivor*

*The subtleties to keep the good family name. And it's so subtle and it's the same ploy that the perpetrator uses that same subtleties. Survivor*

*And a lot of families don't tolerate too much honesty. Our family didn't. Survivor*

Survivors struggle with how to have relationships with family members after the abuse:

- Whether to continue to keep the secret...
- Having disclosed – is there belief and support or denial...
- Dealing with family events such as Christmas, weddings, funerals...
- Coping with family members varied reactions such as minimising the abuse or denying that it occurred, or disclosures that other family members subsequently make.

Many survivors struggle particularly with feeling that their mothers did not protect them.

*There was a lot of violence in our family aimed wholly at the kids. Mother appeared to be worshipped by him – now I see she was being kept distant. Locked in her glass castle. Kate*

**Whilst we cannot choose our family or control what happened in the past, adult survivors have a great capacity to make choices about how they respond and relate to family members. Some important principles that can guide these choices are:**

- Self awareness – valuing yourself and your feelings
- Self care and protection now – not exposing yourself to situations and people that make you unsafe or have clear plans for how to manage if you have to spend time with unsafe people
- Examining expectations – we cannot change others (like wanting family to like or love us) but we can find acceptance and love in other relationships
- Understanding the dynamics of abuse can help inform you about your situation
- Belief and support can be fluid – family members can take time to come to terms with what happened as they were often groomed as well
- Responsibility for the abuse lies with the offender

*What are some of the particular struggles you have with your family?*

*Can you apply some of these principles to your situation to assist in dealing with these struggles?*

One survivor, in talking to her therapist about the struggles she had with her Mother, reveals how she came to make meaning of that relationship:

*You taught me how to let go of unrealistic goals, I couldn't make her love me, I tried and tried, and you helped me to see that I had to let go of that, and that the relationship was never going to be there, that I was never going to have a Mother in the capacity that a normal child has... it was so hard to let go of things. But I found out it wasn't the only kind of love in the world and you don't die without it. I began to get love from lots of other people – good love. Shirley Turcotte<sup>17</sup>*

## Intimacy & Sexuality

In the vulnerability that comes with increasing levels of intimacy, survivors are often confronted with the memories of the abuse intruding upon their ability to form safe and satisfying relationships.

Survivors commonly report a range of concerns...

*I don't know what normal is... how do I know who to trust... I hate people being too close – how will I ever be able to find a partner... I hate sex... I can only do it if I've had a few drinks... I am attracted to women – is this because I was sexually abused by a man... will my partner see me as damaged goods... I masturbate whenever I am anxious... has my body been damaged by the abuse... I use my body to get attention... I experienced sexual pleasure during the abuse, does that make me partly to blame... my head goes away from my body whenever we have sex... I have flashbacks whenever I try to have sex...*

These concerns may be difficult to admit, let alone talk about with someone. They are often accompanied by feelings of shame.

There are so many different concerns it is not possible to address them all here. For a fuller exploration of this topic there are some useful resources to read. They are listed in Ch 9 Further Reading, page 81.

Some suggestions that come from the wisdom of survivors who have struggled with this issue may have meaning for you.

### 1. Making the Links Between the Past Abuse and Current Difficulties

Understanding how the offender and the abuse experience has shaped your thinking, feelings and experience of your body is important.

*My Sister's boyfriend was my abuser and there was no father figure in my life, my Dad wasn't around and so he preyed on that and he chose me and I grew up thinking this is what you gotta do to get love. For someone to love you sex was the only way that you're gonna get love. Survivor*

As this survivor explains, understanding rather than blaming yourself puts you in a better position to make choices about your needs and how they are met, rather than repeating old patterns of seeking and getting love.

### 2. Reclaiming your Body, Mind and Emotions

As the abuse trauma begins to become part of the past, the survivor is faced with the task of reclaiming herself.

This journey starts, and keeps coming back to, feeling safe and comfortable with oneself. It means trusting your own judgement, learning to like who you are, believing you are loveable, believing you have a rightful place in the world, that you are of value.

In everyday terms, it can mean learning to care for your body, feeding your mind, exploring your hopes, experimenting with what helps, being brave, trusting your instincts.

*I started a journal and learnt yoga and meditation. This helped enormously and started me off on a personal development and healing journey that slowly and steadily transformed the suffering, and ultimately changed my life. Heather*

### 3. Developing Good Communication

A foundation stone of healthy relationships is good communication. This is not easily achieved, and must continually be worked on. The experience of having to keep the secret, of denying one's own needs to protect others, and carrying the blame alone leaves the survivor without important childhood experiences of being heard and valued. It takes time, trust and hard work to feel secure in one's interaction with others.



### 4. Building Healthy Intimate Relationships

Intimacy and sexuality don't always have to be linked. Emotional intimacy, i.e. feeling safe in sharing feelings with someone is as important as sexual intimacy. Similarly, physical intimacy including touching, holding hands, and hugging don't inevitably have to lead to sexual intimacy.

A survivor seeks intimate relationships that are protective and nurturing, but also struggles with fears of abandonment or further abuse.

Experiences of relationships that are safe and nurturing during childhood, adolescence and as an adult, can help so much in 'modelling' what a healthy relationship feels like.

*I found a boyfriend who cared for me a lot, and discovered what it was like to be loved. I hung around his family home all the time and totally disconnected from my family. He and his family were incredibly accepting, and this was very healing for me. Heather*

Learning what healthy boundaries are in different kinds of relationships may be part of that journey. For example, learning that you can say no and have that respected, that you can decide what sexual pleasuring you like and don't like, that you do not have to always put your own needs behind someone else's.

The following CERTS for Positive Healthy Sexuality<sup>18</sup> in this section don't just apply to sexual intimacy, but to all manner of relationships.

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18 Maltz, W & Holman, B (1987) Incest & Sexuality Lexington Books

Developing sexual intimacy is a particular challenge for many survivors as the physiological process of arousal may be intruded with reminders of the abuse. Fortunately there are some useful resources to assist survivors in dealing with this. These include identifying what and when 'triggers' occur (for example, certain positions, smells, times, places, sensations, sights); talking with your partner about what you can do differently; taking things slowly and maximising your feelings of control in the situation.

*Say no until you really want to say yes. Share the feelings that come up with your partner when they come up or as soon as you can. Explore your own body. Learn to please yourself and teach your partner. Allow yourself to be pleased, to receive, to be vulnerable.<sup>19</sup>*

CERTS and the Bill of Sexual Rights<sup>20</sup> could be helpful in examining your relationships and in talking with your partner.

There are also some ideas for managing flashbacks during intimacy.

## ***CERTS***

### **Requirements for positive, healthy sexuality**

**C**onsent: I can freely and comfortably choose whether to engage in sexual activity. I am able to stop the activity at any time during the sexual contact.

**E**quality: My feeling of personal power is on an equal level with my partner. Neither of us dominates the other.

**R**espect: I have a positive regard for myself and for my partner. I feel respected by my partner. I feel supportive of my partner and supported by my partner.

**T**rust: I trust my partner on both a physical and emotional level. We have a mutual acceptance of vulnerability and an ability to respond to it with sensitivity.

**S**afety: I feel secure and safe within the sexual setting. I am comfortable with and assertive about where, when and how the sexual activity takes place. I feel safe from the possibility of unwanted pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted diseases.

From *Incest and Sexuality: a Guide to Understanding and Healing* by Wendy Maltz and Beverley Holman. 1987.  
Used with kind permission

<sup>19</sup> Maltz, W & Holman, B (1987) *Incest & Sexuality*, Lexington Books  
<sup>20</sup> Op Cit

## ***Bill of Sexual Rights***

1. I have a right to own my own body.
2. I have a right to my own feelings, beliefs, opinions and perceptions.
3. I have a right to trust my own values about sexual contact.
4. I have a right to set my own sexual limits.
5. I have a right to say no.
6. I have a right to say yes.
7. I have a right to experience sexual pleasure.
8. I have a right to be sexually assertive.
9. I have a right to be the initiator in a sexual relationship.
10. I have a right to be in control of my sexual experience.
11. I have a right to have a loving partner.
12. I have a right to my sexual preferences.
13. I have a right to have a partner who respects me, understands me and is willing to communicate with me.
14. I have a right to talk to my partner about the sexual abuse.
15. I have a right to ask questions.
16. I have a right to receive accurate sexual information.

From *Incest and Sexuality: a Guide to Understanding and Healing* by Wendy Maltz and Beverley Holman. 1987  
Used with kind permission

## *Tips for Dealing with Flashbacks During Intimacy & Lovemaking*

Before...

- Become aware of what your triggers are (see Identifying Triggers in Ch 5 What Helps in Recovery, page 31)
- Identify safe intimate practices (**green lights**) for you and communicate these to your partner
- Identify those practices that don't feel as safe (**orange lights**) but you would like to experiment with and talk with your partner about
- Identify 'no go' zones (**red lights**) that definitely do not feel safe and communicate these to your partner

During...

- Tell yourself you are having a reaction to trigger(s)
- Stop if you do not feel comfortable, and calm yourself, for example, take slow deep breaths, tell yourself something reassuring about the present
- Change what you can to avoid the triggers occurring, for example, a different position, use of lighting, feeling in control, a different place
- Talk with your partner afterwards about what else you can both do

## *Pregnancy & Parenting*

### **Pregnancy**

Becoming a parent is a life changing journey that brings with it many joys and challenges for every parent. Pregnancy is a time when there is an intense focus on a woman's body, which can be both **exciting** (*I can create new life*), and **challenging** (*having other people look at and touch my intimate parts*), for all women, and particularly survivors of child sexual abuse.

Being vulnerable again, either physically or emotionally, can be particularly challenging for survivors. It sets in motion a whole series of anxiety and stress reactions. It can be difficult to hold on to the present reality when these feelings become strong.

There can be many experiences during pregnancy and childbirth that can make you vulnerable again, for example, physical examinations, emotional and physical changes to your body, medical interventions, pain, lack of control over what happens, doubts and fears about your ability to produce and care for a baby.

Managing this vulnerability and developing confidence in your ability to be pregnant, give birth and parent effectively is an important part of the journey.

The key to doing this is **not** to try and do it alone. Your partner, family members, friends, counsellor, midwife and doctor are all potential sources of support. Choose people from your network who you can share your fears, concerns, joys and challenges with. Become informed about what to expect during pregnancy and childbirth, and what choices you have. Exercise these choices, take someone with you when facing a challenge (for example, a physical examination). Know what 'pushes your buttons' and work out ways of managing these with relevant people.

Celebrate, with a slowly growing confidence, your body's ability to achieve great things, and to give life to a child.

*It's being safe... I made the choice and I knew who was going to be at the birth and I knew those people and so I'm never going to feel like I'm on display.<sup>21</sup>*

In the words of one survivor who had a difficult first birth and wanted the second to be different:

*The midwife was very positive in re-affirming the power and ability of my body to deliver... During the birth, the pain was my pain coming from within to produce a baby. The pain of incest, locked in the memory of my body is the pain of being helpless, a victim. These two kinds of pain could not have been more different. The former calls out to be felt and celebrated, the latter demands silence, fear and shame.*

*I have had my baby. I felt strong and capable, celebrated my baby's arrival.<sup>22</sup>*

## Parenting

Being a parent is a journey filled with a rich tapestry of experiences that are different every day. All parents struggle with the demands and responsibilities of parenting, but also find it a very rewarding journey.

Survivors often face additional challenges as having children provokes memories and experiences from your own childhood, for example, you may ask yourself, 'Will my abuse get in the way of loving and caring for my child?'

Survivors are acutely aware of the power of adults and the vulnerability of children, and are often anxious to 'get it right'. In particular, they do not want their own children to experience what they went through.

*When I first held my baby I felt incredibly sad. I couldn't stop crying. Everyone said 'baby blues' but I know – I saw how small and vulnerable she was. I thought 'how could I ever hurt her?' How could my parents have hurt me? Survivor<sup>23</sup>*

21 Parratt, Jenny (1994) The Experience of Childbirth for Survivors of Incest' Midwifery 1994 10 26-39

22 Parents magazine June 1994

23 The Silent No More Project 2008. WILMA Women's Health Centre Pg 42.

24 Op Cit Pg 43

*In counselling... I realised that my own unsafety as a child had made me want to protect her so badly that I had 'stifled' her... Survivor<sup>24</sup>*

As this survivor so aptly describes, concerns for safety are often paramount, and trying to achieve a balance between protection and developing autonomy is challenging.

Also common, are the memories and feelings that surface with the particular gender of children, and when children reach the age you were when you were abused.

*I used to find it hard to bond with my daughter compared to my son. I thought this was because my relationship with my own Mother was never good. About two months ago I realised I hadn't forgiven the child in me for being raped. I drove home from my counsellor's crying and holding my chest and feeling sad for the little girl I'd lost in me, not angry at her for the first time. As soon as my daughter came home I realised that I can love her so much more now that I've forgiven myself. Mia*

*When I was step parenting a daughter through that same period in her life stuff started coming up for me again. Then I had a child of my own and I realised I wasn't going to be everything that I wanted to be as a parent if I didn't look at it. When I started looking at it, I was able to recognise a whole lot of stuff about how I'd been set up to be in relationships that enabled the abuse, so it wasn't just the perpetrator of the sexual assault that I'd lost my power to. Those patterns had already been conditioned into me earlier by other people who weren't necessarily sexual perpetrators and I've been able to let go of so much crap that wasn't mine and been able to see things more clearly. Zoe*



Artwork: Shay & Me  
– Leanne Tobin

Being honest with yourself, being prepared to look at things that might trigger memories and reactions, and talking it over with someone else such as a partner, friend or counsellor, can bring valuable insight and help in dealing with the challenges you face.

It is also important to keep in mind that having children can bring unexpected opportunities to have good childhood experiences with your children that you may have missed because of the abuse.

*Having kids for me was when I healed. I wanted my kids to have love and fun and safety – and giving that to them meant I gave it to myself too. I learnt to play from my kids, and to laugh, and to leave the housework to watch a butterfly. Survivor<sup>25</sup>*

*What do you think is positive about your parenting?  
What concerns do you have about being a parent?  
Is there someone you can talk to about your concerns?*

24 'The Silent No More Project' 2008. WILMA Women's Health Centre, pg 43.  
25 Op Cit Pg 43.



# *Chapter 7*

## **How Family & Friends Can Help**

*Artwork: Colours of Autumn – Jan McMullen*



Having an understanding of the facts about child sexual abuse and its far reaching impact can go a long way to supporting a survivor in her journey of recovery.

This section addresses issues and questions you may have, as a family member or friend of a survivor. It offers some ideas for supporting survivors as well as looking after yourself.

## **Questions & Concerns**

### **Why can't she just put it behind her?**

*My husband said one night to me when I was going through a terrible time, he said Jacqui, I'm over it, I don't want you to talk about it anymore. Jacqui*

Survivors of child sexual abuse ask themselves the same question: why **can't** I get over it?

Looking back on Ch 4 Making the Link Between Abuse and Its Impact, (page 25), it is not surprising that it is so difficult to move on. The nature of this trauma is that it refuses to remain in the past – it frequently intrudes into the present as the mind and body seek to process the impact. At different times in a survivor's life 'aftershocks' occur which again shake the foundations and demand attention. Once again the survivor is confronted with the past. For example, parenting a child can bring up powerful feelings and memories of her own childhood, or a conflict with a boss may evoke flashbacks to a controlling and abusive Father. The survivor may then react or behave in ways that may not seem to fit the situation, but make perfect sense in light of the memories and feelings being triggered.

### **There's a part of me that doesn't want to know...**

Some family and friends are shocked and upset to learn that someone they are close to was a victim of child sexual abuse. It may evoke guilt that they were unable to stop it or didn't know. It may be very difficult to believe that someone you loved and trusted (like a family member) would commit this crime against a child.

Some men feel 'gender guilt', for example, because it is mostly men who abuse children, the survivor may associate them with such men. It might trigger painful memories of your own past. Or you may just not want to know.

You don't have to know the details of what occurred to support a survivor in her journey of recovery. However, your belief and support play a very important part in her recovery.

### **I feel like I need support, too, sometimes...**

*Because quite often they don't know what to do and all they know is that their loved one is telling them this has all happened and they're just angry because it's happened to their loved one and they don't know what to do. Survivor*

*And they feel powerless because of the pain we're going through. I know that was the issue with my husband. He was hurting because of how much I was hurting and he couldn't do anything. Jacqui*



Supporting someone through their journey of recovery can be heavy going at times. You may feel helpless. You may also wonder whether it is OK to express your needs too. Getting some support for yourself can help to deal with some of these issues. Talking to others in a similar situation, or to a counsellor, may also be helpful. It is important that you have a space to express how this is impacting on you. (See Ch 8 Finding Help, Information & Support, page 63).

### **She doesn't remember much of what happened... does this mean it might not be true?**

How the brain 'remembers' is a complicated phenomenon. (See Ch 4 Making the Link Between Abuse and Its Impact, page 25). It is difficult to remember things that occurred as a very young child, and the memory cannot store every experience that occurs. It is also a normal neurological response to 'forget' what is overwhelming and traumatic, particularly in childhood, then 'remember' at a later time when associations or 'triggers' to something traumatic occur. Recalling or remembering can sometimes be fragmented and re-experienced in feelings and flashbacks.

It can be helpful to focus less on details of the memories and more on how the survivor is experiencing those memories in the here and now, and what you can do to assist at this present time. This assistance may be such things as listening and helping her to focus on breathing to stay in the here and now.

### **It seems a big reaction for something that didn't seem that bad...**

It is important not to judge a person's disclosure of the experience of abuse. Survivors may minimise what they tell you out of shame, or they may remember only fragments. Child sexual abuse is not just about sexual acts, it is about emotional abuse, manipulation, isolation, threats, and a fundamental breach of a child's need to experience safety and nurture in the growing years. They can take a long time to repair.

## ***The Importance of Your Response***

*The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention... A loving silence often has far more power to heal and to connect than most well intentioned words. Rachel Naomi Remen<sup>26</sup>*

Possibly one of the most important factors in determining healing from child sexual abuse is how a child or adult survivor is responded to when they disclose. The tactics of abusers ensure that the child carries the burden of secrecy and responsibility, often into adulthood. Many children try to tell, but are not heard. Breaking that silence therefore carries great risk – risk of the abuser finding out, but also risk of being disbelieved, shamed, ridiculed, judged or their experience minimised. Disclosure leaves survivors feeling emotionally vulnerable.

Your response is crucial.

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in 'Seasons of Change': 2006. A Rosie's Place Publication pg 74



Some helpful responses are:

- **Listening** with an open heart and mind
- Allowing her to tell you in her **own time** without interrupting
- Thank her for **trusting** you
- Convey your **belief** and support
- Check that she is **safe** from further abuse, and feeling safe in her life now
- Ask about how you can **support** her, but don't make promises you can't keep, such as 'You can call me 24/7', 'I'll always be there for you'
- Show sensitivity with **touch** by asking first if you want to offer a hug or touch her
- **Don't defend** the abuser or offer explanations about why they did the abusing
- Support the survivor in **taking back control** of her life. This can include what action (or inaction) she wishes to take in response, such as reporting to Police, telling other family members
- Respect her right to determine who knows – be mindful of her **confidentiality**. This can be difficult when you are carrying something and you can't share it with someone else
- Acknowledge her **survival** and convey your belief in her journey to recovery



## *Suggestions from Survivors ...*

*One of the most healing things I have heard was when Heidi said "I'm sorry that I couldn't be there to help when you were little but I can be here now".*

*We don't want sympathy, we want empathy*

*Listen*

*I believe you*

*I'm sorry that that happened to you*

*But none of us probably wanted our family to fix it for us and I think that's an important message that just because I'm telling you it doesn't mean you have to fix it.*

*And he just didn't try to offer all these things to try and fix it, was just there. Emotionally actually. For him to just hold me and for my heart to just be nurtured by him – that was just the biggest thing I could have ever asked for.*

*What are the things I admire about the survivor in my life?*

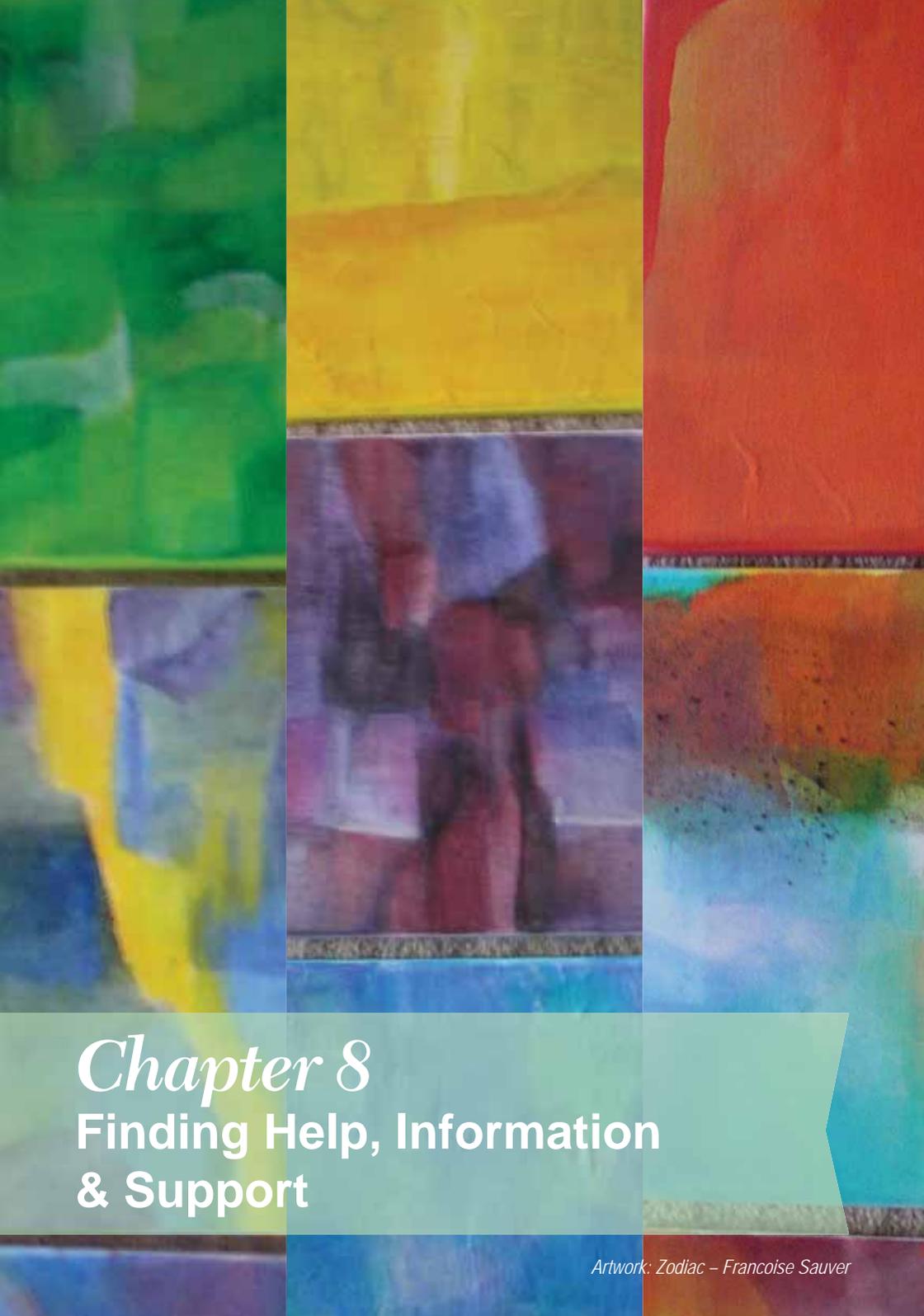
*What can I contribute to her healing journey?*

*What is difficult for me?*

*What support do I need?*





The background of the page is a complex abstract artwork. It features a grid of rectangular panels in various colors, including green, yellow, orange, red, purple, blue, and teal. The panels are separated by thin, dark, textured lines. The overall effect is a vibrant, multi-colored collage.

# *Chapter 8*

## **Finding Help, Information & Support**

*Artwork: Zodiac – Françoise Sauver*

This chapter provides you with some additional resources to assist you in your journey of recovery.

## ***Finding a Counsellor or Support Group***

Many survivors report that counselling can be helpful in their journey of recovery.

Counselling can provide an opportunity to break the silence of abuse, give you an opportunity to explore the impact on your life and explore strategies to assist in overcoming the impacts. It can offer a safe, confidential relationship without judgement, and offer support as you share your story, make choices and changes.

As many people can call themselves a 'counsellor,' it is important for you to know some things about them.

**You have a right to be fully informed of what services they are offering, and their qualifications to offer these services. When seeking counselling, don't be afraid to ask questions of the counsellor, and decide if this is a person you would/do feel safe with, and who has appropriate expertise.**

### **What should I expect from a counsellor?**

- To feel safe – this may develop over time. You don't have to trust your counsellor straight away
- Provide confidentiality
- To have knowledge about the dynamics of child sexual abuse
- Listens to you and respects you
- Does not judge you
- Allows you to choose what you do and don't talk about
- Empowers you to make your own choices and decisions
- Provides information about your rights
- Offers a range of resources to assist you
- Is clear about the process of counselling

### **What should I ask a counsellor to help me determine this?**

- What qualifications, training and experience do you have?
- Do you belong to a professional association?
- What do you charge, how do I pay, what happens if I cancel?
- What kind of confidentiality can I expect?
- Do you keep notes of our counselling and who has access to them?
- What counselling approaches do you use and can you describe them?

## What about Survivor Groups?

The same questions and process can be applied to survivor groups. Before signing up for a group, do check out the group leaders, using the above questions.

### You may want to ask yourself...

- Is this something I want (or have others advised me to do this)?
- What do I hope to gain from the group and will this group meet those needs?
- Is this a good 'time' for me, for example, what else do I currently have to deal with, can I commit to the group, do I have enough support?
- How will I deal with things the group 'triggers' for me especially strong feelings or memories?

### You may also want to ask group leaders...

- What qualifications and training do you have to run the group?
- How will you ensure the group is safe?
- How will you address confidentiality?
- What topics will be covered and how will they be covered, for example, guest speakers and discussion, group members sharing their stories, or particular therapies such as artwork or meditation?
- If someone becomes 'triggered' or upset how will you manage it?
- You may also talk through with the group leaders the questions you ask yourself.

If well run and safe, survivor groups can provide a powerful tool for healing...

*'I'll be eternally grateful for the time spent with the group. What a devastatingly powerful time that was – all those extraordinary women showing me ways of being I'd not seen close up, and allowing me to question how they got there. Sharing the un-shareable.'* Kate

Remember it can take some time to build a safe, trusting relationship. If things aren't going the way you had hoped, try and raise your concerns with the counsellor. If the first counsellor or group isn't helpful, keep trying until you find what you need.

## Useful Websites & Online Support

Organisation	Services Provided	Contact
<p><b>ASCA (Adults Surviving Child Abuse)</b></p>	<p>Australian non-Govt organisation dedicated to the health &amp; wellbeing of adult survivors of all forms of child abuse &amp; neglect</p>	<p><a href="http://www.asca.org.au">www.asca.org.au</a></p>
<p><b>NSW Rape Crisis Service</b></p>	<p>A NSW based service that provides 24/7 telephone counselling &amp; online crisis counselling for anyone affected by sexual violence. Face to face counselling is also available for survivors of child sexual abuse through Women's Health Centres in NSW</p>	<p><a href="http://www.nswrapecrisis.com.au">www.nswrapecrisis.com.au</a></p>
<p><b>Victims Services (NSW Attorney General &amp; Justice)</b></p>	<p>NSW Govt service providing counselling, compensation and information about the justice process for victims of crime</p>	<p><a href="http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs">www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs</a></p>
<p><b>Heartfelt House</b></p>	<p>A NSW based service that provides support to adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The website provides information on childhood sexual abuse, on the services they provide eg. group programs they run and links to other services/websites</p>	<p><a href="http://www.heartfelthouse.org.au">www.heartfelthouse.org.au</a></p>

Organisation	Services Provided	Contact
<p><b>Pandora's Aquarium or Pandora's Project</b></p>	<p>USA based message board and online support group for survivors of sexual violence. Provides information &amp; a library of resources on a range of different topics eg sexual abuse, pregnancy, childbirth and parenting. Links to other websites</p>	<p><a href="http://www.pandys.org">www.pandys.org</a>  <a href="http://www.pandorasproject.org">www.pandorasproject.org</a></p>
<p><b>UN Women (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women)</b></p>	<p>Organises annual white ribbon campaign against sexual violence</p>	<p><a href="http://www.unwomen.org.au">www.unwomen.org.au</a></p>
<p><b>Mindfulness &amp; Meditation</b></p> <p><b>Be Mindful</b></p>	<p>An Australian resource with information on mindfulness</p> <p>A United Kingdom based website that provides information about online courses eg. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)</p>	<p><a href="http://www.malhuxter.com">www.malhuxter.com</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.bemindful.co.uk">www.bemindful.co.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Petrea King's Quest for Life Centre</b></p> <p><b>Bursting The Bubble</b></p> <p><b>Relationships Australia</b></p>	<p>A resource centre and retreat providing resources on wellbeing and healing from a range of traumas</p> <p>Provides a guide for young women to identify whether abuse is occurring in the home and how to deal with it</p> <p>Provides online support &amp; counselling on relationship &amp; other related issues eg. parenting, life skills</p>	<p><a href="http://www.questforlife.com.au">www.questforlife.com.au</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.burstingthebubble.com">www.burstingthebubble.com</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.relationships.org.au">www.relationships.org.au</a></p>

# Counselling Services

## 24 hour Crisis Telephone Counselling

Organisation	Phone Number	Website
Victims Services (NSW Attorney General & Justice)	Freecall 1800 633 063 (02) 8688 5511	<a href="http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs">www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs</a>
NSW Rape Crisis Centre	Freecall 1800 424 017 (02) 9819 6565	<a href="http://www.nswrapecrisis.com.au">www.nswrapecrisis.com.au</a> <a href="mailto:info@nswrapecrisis.com.au">info@nswrapecrisis.com.au</a>
Lifeline	13 11 14	<a href="http://www.lifeline.org.au">www.lifeline.org.au</a>

## NSW Health Sexual Assault Services

These services provide specialist sexual assault counselling and medical services across NSW. Note: Not all NSW sexual assault services are able to provide counselling to adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse due to high demand and staffing issues. Please check with your local Sexual Assault Service.

Organisation	Phone Number	After Hours Number
<b>Southern NSW</b>		
Albury SAS	(02) 6058 1800	Albury Hospital: (02) 6058 4584
Bega Valley SAS	(02) 6492 9620	(02) 6492 4416
Cooma SAS	(02) 6455 3201	(02) 6455 3222
Deniliquin SAS	(03) 5882 2900	Albury Hospital: (02) 6058 4584
Griffith SAS	(02) 6966 9900	Wagga Base Hospital: (02) 6938 6666
Yass SAS	(02) 6220 2000	Goulburn Base Hospital: (02) 4827 3111
Goulburn SAS	(02) 4827 3913	Goulburn Base Hospital: (02) 4827 3111

Organisation	Phone Number	After Hours Number
Eurobodalla SAS	(02) 4474 1561 and 1300 139 887	(02) 6492 4416
Queanbeyan SAS	(02) 6298 9233	(02) 6247 2525
Wagga SAS	(02) 6938 6411	Wagga Base Hospital: (02) 6938 6666
Young SAS	(02) 6382 8729	Goulburn Base Hospital: (02) 4827 3111
<b>Western NSW</b>		
Bathurst SAS	(02) 6330 5677	Bathurst Base Hospital: (02) 6330 5217
Broken Hill SAS	(08) 8080 1554	Broken Hill Hospital: (08) 8080 1333
Bourke SAS	(02) 6870 8883	Bourke Hospital: (02) 6870 8888
Coonabarabran SAS	(02) 6826 6133	Coonabarabran Hospital: (02) 6842 6404
Coonamble SAS	(02) 6827 1100	Coonamble Hospital: (02) 6822 1100
Cowra SAS	(02) 6340 2356	Orange Hospital: (02) 6393 3000
Dubbo SAS	(02) 6885 8999	Dubbo Base Hospital: (02) 6885 8666
Forbes SAS	(02) 6850 2233	Forbes Base Hospital: (02) 6850 2000
Lightning Ridge SAS	(02) 6829 9900	Lightning Ridge Hospital: (02) 6829 9999
Mudgee SAS	(02) 6378 6236	Dubbo Base Hospital: (02) 6885 8666
Orange SAS	(02) 6369 3000	Orange Hospital: (02) 6369 3000
Parkes SAS	(02) 6861 2500	Parkes Hospital: (02) 6861 2400

Organisation	Phone Number	After Hours Number
<b>Hunter New England NSW</b>		
Armidale SAS	(02) 6776 9600	Armidale Hospital A&E: (02) 6776 9622
Glen Innes SAS	(02) 6739 0100	Inverell Hospital: (02) 6721 9500
Gunnedah SAS	(02) 6741 8000	Gunnedah Hospital: (02) 6741 8000
Inverell SAS	(02) 6721 9600	Inverell Hospital: (02) 6721 9500
Lower Hunter SAS	(02) 4931 2000	John Hunter Hospital: (02) 4921 3000
Moree SAS	(02) 6757 0200	Moree Hospital: (02) 6757 0000
Narrabri SAS	(02) 6757 0200	Moree Hospital: (02) 6757 0000
Newcastle SAS	(02) 4924 6333	John Hunter Hospital: (02) 4921 3000
Tamworth SAS	(02) 6767 8100	Tamworth Rural Referral Hospital: (02) 6767 7000
Taree SAS	(02) 6592 9315	Manning Base Hospital: (02) 6592 9111
Toomelah Community Health Care	(07) 4671 9701 and (07) 4671 9702	Goondiwindi Hospital: (07) 4671 6666
Upper Hunter SAS	(02) 6542 2725	1800 642 357
<b>North Coast NSW</b>		
Clarence Valley SAS	(02) 6640 2402	Grafton Base Hospital: (02) 6640 2222
Coffs Harbour SAS	(02) 6656 7200	Coffs Harbour Hospital: (02) 6656 7000
Port Macquarie SAS	(02) 6588 2762	Port Macquarie Hospital: (02) 6581 2000
Kempsey SAS	(02) 6562 6066	Kempsey District Hospital: (02) 6562 6155
Richmond SAS	(02) 6620 2970	Lismore Base Hospital: (02) 6621 8000
Tweed Valley SAS	(07) 5506 7540	Tweed Heads Hospital: (07) 5536 1133

Organisation	Phone Number	After Hours Number
<b>Northern Sydney &amp; Central Coast</b>		
Biala Cottage	(02) 4320 3175	Gosford Hospital: (02) 4320 2111
Northern Sydney Child Protection Unit	(02) 9926 6060	Royal North Shore Hospital: (02) 9926 7111
Northern Sydney SAS (Adult Service)	(02) 9926 7580	Royal North Shore Hospital: (02) 9926 7111
<b>Southern Sydney &amp; South Coast</b>		
Child Protection Unit	(02) 9382 1412	Sydney Children's Hospital: (02) 9382 1111
Nowra SAS, Links House	(02) 4423 9211	(02) 4423 9211
Southern Sydney SAS	(02) 9113 2494	St George Hospital: (02) 9113 1111
Wollongong SAS	(02) 4222 5408 and (02) 4222 5407	Wollongong Hospital: (02) 4222 5000
<b>South West Sydney</b>		
Bankstown SAS	(02) 9780 2777	Liverpool Hospital: (02) 9828 3000
Royal Prince Alfred / Eastern & Central SAS	(02) 9515 9040	Royal Prince Alfred Hospital: (02) 9515 6111
Liverpool/Fairfield	(02) 9828 4844	Liverpool Hospital: (02) 9828 3000
Macarthur SAS	(02) 4633 4100	Liverpool Hospital: (02) 9828 3000
Wingecarribee SAS	(02) 4861 8000	Liverpool Hospital: (02) 9828 3000

Organisation	Phone Number	After Hours Number
<b>Western Sydney</b>		
Grevillea Cottage, Westmead SAS	(02) 9845 7940	Westmead Hospital: (02) 9845 5555
Blacktown/Mt Druitt SAS	(02) 9881 8700	Westmead Hospital: (02) 9845 5555
Penrith SAS (Springfield Cottage)	(02) 4734 2512	Nepean Hospital: (02) 4734 2000
Child Protection Unit	(02) 9845 2434	The Children's Hospital, Westmead: (02) 9845 0000

## Community Based Counselling

NSW Rape Crisis Centre trauma counsellors are available in seven Women's Health Centres throughout NSW. They provide counselling for women who were sexually assaulted when they were children. Appointments can be made by contacting the Women's Health Centre.

Central Coast Community Women's Health Centre	(02) 4324 2533
Central West Women's Health Centre	(02) 6331 4133
Leichhardt Women's Community Health Centre	(02) 9560 3011
Lismore and District Women's Health Centre child care available	(02) 6621 9800
Liverpool Women's Health Centre	(02) 9601 3555
Penrith Women's Health Centre child care available	(02) 4721 8749
Women's Centre Albury-Wodonga	(02) 6041 1977

## *Legal Information & Resources*

Organisation	Services Provided	Contact
NSW Police Force Police Assistance Line  Crimestoppers	Initial contact for reporting crime  NSW Police Customer Assistance Unit	13 14 44 – Non Emergency/ General Enquiries  TTY (02) 9211 3776 Freecall 1800 622 571  www.crimestoppers.com.au
Law Access NSW	Free Govt telephone service that provides legal information, advice & referrals for people who have a legal problem	1300 888 529 (Mon-Fri 9am – 5pm) TTY 1300 889 529 www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au
Victim Access Line: Victims Services, NSW Attorney General & Justice	Provides a range of information, compensation, counselling and support services to victims of crime	(02) 8688 5511 Freecall 1800 633 063 Aboriginal Contact Line Freecall 1800 019 123 www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs
Women's Legal Services NSW	Free community legal advice, information & referral	(02) 8745 6988 Freecall 1800 801 501 TTY 1800 674 333 www.womenslegalsw.asn.au
Aboriginal Women's Legal Contact Line	Legal information, advice & referrals	(02) 8745 6977 Freecall 1800 639 784
Domestic Violence Legal Advice Line	Free legal advisory telephone service. Provides legal advice, legal information & referrals	(02) 8745 6999 Freecall 1800 810 784
IDRS (Intellectual Disability Rights Service)	Community legal centre assisting people with disabilities to exercise & advance their rights	(02) 9318 0144 Freecall 1800 666 611 www.idrs.org.au info@idrs.org.au
Lawstuff : Know Your Rights	Australian website that provides free legal information by email. Relates to children, young people and the law	www.lawstuff.org.au Email a question about the law and a lawyer will email information back to you

## *Court Preparation & Support*

Organisation	Services Provided	Contact
Victims Services (NSW Attorney General & Justice)	Provides a range of information, counselling and support services to victims of crime	(02) 8688 5511 Freecall 1800 633 063 <a href="http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs">www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs</a>
Victims Register	Gives victims of sexual assault some information when the offender has been convicted and in custody.	(02) 8346 1374
Witness Assistance Service (WAS) ODPP	Provides information, support and court preparation to victims of crime going through the court system. It has branches across NSW.	(02) 9285 2502 Freecall 1800 814 534 TTY (02) 9285 8646 <a href="mailto:WAS@odpp.nsw.gov.au">WAS@odpp.nsw.gov.au</a>
NSW Health Sexual Assault Services	Provides advice for women going to court to give evidence as a witness	See under Sexual Assault Services for local contact details

## *Complaints About Service Providers*

Organisation	Services Provided	Contact
NSW Ombudsman's Office	Provides assistance for making complaints about NSW Government services	(02) 9286 1000 Freecall 1800 451 524 TTY (02) 9264 8050 <a href="http://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au">www.ombo.nsw.gov.au</a> Provides links to other complaint handling agencies
NSW Police Customer Assistance Unit	For complaints or problems about Police	Freecall 1800 622 571 TTY (02) 9211 3776
Health Care Complaints Commission	For complaints about health care providers	(02) 9219 7444 TTY (02) 9219 7555 Freecall 1800 043 159 <a href="mailto:hccc@hccc.nsw.gov.au">hccc@hccc.nsw.gov.au</a>
Judicial Commission of NSW	For complaints about judges and magistrates	(02) 9299 4421 <a href="http://www.judcom.nsw.gov.au">www.judcom.nsw.gov.au</a>
Office of the Legal Services Commissioner	For complaints about lawyer's behaviour in court	(02) 9377 1800 TTY (02) 9377 1855 Freecall 1800 242 958 <a href="http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/olsc">www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/olsc</a>

# *Specialist Services & Resources*

## Drug and Alcohol Services

Organisation	Services Provided	Contact
<b>Australian Drug Information Network (ADIN)</b>	Provides information on alcohol and drug treatment. Also information on services in Australia	<a href="http://www.adin.com.au">www.adin.com.au</a>
<b>Drug Information Clearinghouse Australian Drug Foundation</b>	Information about alcohol, drugs, drug prevention and drink spiking	1300 858 584 <a href="http://www.druginfo.adf.org.au">www.druginfo.adf.org.au</a>
<b>NSW Health Drug Information</b>	Provides information on illicit drugs, fact sheets, government policies, legal issues and the roles of parents, families and the broader community in reducing drug abuse. Can access listings of NSW Health Services	<a href="http://www.druginfo.nsw.gov.au">www.druginfo.nsw.gov.au</a>

## Domestic Violence Support Services

Organisation	Services Provided	Contact
<b>Domestic Violence Crisis Line</b>	24 hour telephone information and referral service, including refuge referral	Freecall 1800 656 463 TTY 1800 671 442
<b>Domestic Violence Legal Advice Line</b>	Free legal advisory telephone service. Provides legal advice, legal information and referrals	(02) 8745 6999 Freecall 1800 810 784

## Housing

Organisation	Services Provided	Contact
Housing NSW	After hours temporary accommodation  Housing contact centre	Freecall 1800 152 152  1300 HOUSING or 1300 468 746 <a href="http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au">www.housing.nsw.gov.au</a>
Stepping Out Housing Program	Specialist supported housing program for adult survivors, based in Sydney's inner west. 6-12 months housing with case management	(02) 9550 9398 <a href="http://www.stepsout.org.au">www.stepsout.org.au</a> <a href="mailto:info@stepsout.org.au">info@stepsout.org.au</a>
Homeless Person's Information Centre	State-wide emergency accommodation	Freecall 1800 234 566

## Services for Young Women

Organisation	Services Provided	Contact
<b>CASAC – Child &amp; Adolescent Sexual Assault Counselling Services:</b>  Armidale Bathurst – Central West Wollongong – West Street Centre Moruya – Cassie’s Place Lismore Wagga – Linden Place Katoomba – Gunnedoo  Bankstown – Women’s Health Centre Auburn – Barnardo’s Marrickville – Catholic Care Marrickville – Rosemount Liverpool – Rosebank Rooty Hill – Rosies Place	A range of services for children, young people and families. Based in community. May also provide counselling to adults sexually assaulted as children	www.casac.org.au  (02) 6772 9973 (02) 6331 4133 (02) 4226 6441  (02) 4475 0999 (02) 6621 9861 (02) 6921 4441 (02) 4782 5326  (02) 9790 1378  (02) 9646 2770 (02) 9519 6788 (02) 8571 7800 (02) 9601 3790 (02) 9625 2599
<b>Stepping Out Housing Program</b>	Provides housing assistance for young people & women who are victims of child sexual abuse	(02) 9550 9398 info@steppingout.org.au
<b>Head Space</b>	Provides counselling, an online service, information & links to other websites /social media & health services for young people aged 12 – 25 years of age	www.headspace.org.au
<b>National Association for Youth Health</b>	Provides a link to all youth health services in NSW	(02) 9351 0956 www.nayh.org.au

## Services for Lesbian Women

Organisation	Services Provided	Contact
Gay & Lesbian Counselling Service	Provides counselling to gay & lesbian individuals	General (02) 8594 9596 Freecall 1800 184 527 Lesbian Only (02) 8594 9595 www.glcsnsw.org.au

## Services for Aboriginal Women

Organisation	Service Provided	Contact
Indigenous Women's Legal Contact Line	Legal information, advice & referrals	Freecall 1800 639 784 (02) 8745 6977
Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre	Legal information, advice & referrals	Freecall 1800 686 587 (02) 9569 3847
Mudgin-Gal Aboriginal Corporation	Support & education programs for women & children	(02) 9319 2613
Witness Assistance Service (WAS) within the (ODPP)	Provides Aboriginal workers in some areas	(02) 9285 2502 Freecall 1800 814 534

## Services for Women from Differing Cultural Groups

Organisation	Services Provided	Contact
Health Care Interpreter Service	Provides accredited interpreters to NSW Health Services	Contact through your local health service or hospital
Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS)	Free 24hr telephone based interpreters	13 14 50
Immigrant Women's Speakout	Information & referral	(02) 9635 8022 www.speakout.org.au
Transcultural Mental Health Centre	Information, counselling & referral	Freecall 1800 648 911 (02) 9912 3851
Services for Treatment & Rehabilitation of Torture & Trauma Survivors (STARTTS)	Counselling & group therapy for refugees	(02) 9794 1900

## Services for Women with a Mental Illness

Organisation	Services Provided	Contact
Consumer Activity Network (Mental Health) Inc	Support & empowerment of mental health consumers	1300 135 846 or (02) 9114 8150
The Mental Health Line	Is a 24 hour line that provides: Intake and triage for anyone who feels mentally unwell. Staff will make an assessment and refer to either an emergency service, or if less urgent, another service within the local area. Provide information on referral services in another health district.	1800 011 511 <a href="http://www.mentalhealth.asn.au">www.mentalhealth.asn.au</a>
Petrea King's Quest for Life Centre	Centre & web based services	<a href="http://www.questforlife.com.au">www.questforlife.com.au</a> (02) 4883 6599
Beyond Blue	Information & research about depression, anxiety & bipolar disorder	<a href="http://www.beyondblue.org.au">www.beyondblue.org.au</a>
Black Dog Institute	Educational, research, clinical & community-oriented facility offering expertise in depression & bipolar disorder	<a href="http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au">www.blackdoginstitute.org.au</a>
SANE	Information on a range of mental illnesses	<a href="http://www.sane.org">www.sane.org</a>
Depression Net	Information about counselling, support groups, personal stories. Links to other sites	<a href="http://www.depressionnet.com.au">www.depressionnet.com.au</a>

## Services for Women with a Disability

Organisation	Services Provided	Contact
<b>IDRS (Intellectual Disability Rights Service)</b>	Community legal centre assisting people with disabilities to exercise & advance their rights	(02) 9318 0144 Freecall 1800 666 611 www.idrs.org.au info@idrs.org.au
<b>Criminal Justice Support Network</b>	Provides support and information for people with an intellectual disability who are in contact with the criminal justice system	1300 665 908 (after hours) (02) 9318 0144
<b>PWD (People With Disabilities)</b>	Provides advocacy for people with disabilities	(02) 9370 3100 Freecall 1800 422 015 TTY (02) 9318 2138
<b>National Disability Service Abuse &amp; Neglect Hotline</b>	Advice, advocacy and investigation. A free service that takes reports of abuse & neglect of people with disability. In consultation with caller finds appropriate ways to have reports addressed	Freecall 1800 880 052 TTY 1800 301 130 www.disabilityhotline.org
<b>Myalla: Responding to People with a Disability who have been Sexually Assaulted</b>	Book on Information and resources on supporting a person with an intellectual disability	Northern Sydney Sexual Assault Service (02) 9926 7580

## Services for Deaf / Hearing Impaired Women

Organisation	Services Provided	Contact
<b>Deaf Society of NSW</b>	Support, information & advocacy	(02) 8833 3600 Freecall 1800 893 855 TTY (02) 8833 3691 Freecall TTY 1800 893 885 www.deafsocietynsw.org.au
<b>National Relay Service</b>	Assists phone communication	13 36 77 www.relayservice.com.au



*Chapter 9*  
Further Reading

Artwork: Zodiac – Françoise Sauer

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Charter of Victims Rights

The Charter, set out in the Victims Rights Act (1996) establishes standards for the appropriate treatment of victims of crime when dealing with government agencies and those funded by government – this includes Police, health, welfare, prosecution and correctional services.

### 1. Respect

You will be treated with respect, dignity and compassion. At all times your culture will be respected.

### 2. Information About Services

You will be told as soon as possible about the different services that can help you, including counselling and legal services.

### 3. Access to Services

If you need medical, counselling, and legal help you will be able to get it if it is available.

### 4. Information About Investigation of the Crime

If you ask, you will be told about how the Police investigation is going. But in some cases there may be some things the police can't tell you.

### 5. Information About the Prosecution

Prosecution is about taking the offender to court for the crime. This is done by the Police, or, in serious cases, the Director of Public Prosecutions.

As a victim, you will be told:

- what the charges are OR why the offender has NOT been charged
- any decision of the prosecution to change or drop charges
- the date and place of the court hearing
- the final court result, including any appeal or jail sentence given.

If the prosecution is thinking about changing or dropping the charges they will have a talk to you about this if the crime:

- was a serious sex crime, or
- caused you physical harm, mental illness or emotional shock.

BUT the prosecution don't have to talk to you if:

- you don't want to talk about it, or
- they can't find you.

### 6. Information About Being a Witness

If you have to give evidence as a witness in a trial you will be told about HOW the trial works and WHAT you have to do.

### **7. No Contact with the Offender**

While your case is in court you will be protected from contact with the offender and the offender's witnesses.

### **8. Protection of your Privacy**

You can keep your address and phone numbers private unless the court says different.

### **9. Court Business Before the Trial**

You do NOT have to go to any committal hearing (like a mini trial) or other court business before the trial UNLESS the court says you must.

### **10. Returning your Goods Used as Evidence**

If the Police or prosecution took any of your goods as evidence you have the right to get it back as soon as possible.

### **11. Your Protection**

If you need protection tell the Police or prosecution when the offender applies for bail.

### **12. Special Bail Conditions**

You will be told about any special bail conditions the offender is given, which are meant to protect you or your family, like a condition which says the offender must not contact you.

### **13. Bail Decision**

If you were the victim of sexual assault or other serious assault you will be told if the offender gets bail or not.

### **14. Victim Impact Statement**

If you want to tell the court about how the crime has affected you, then you will be given help and support to do this. This is called giving a 'victim impact statement'.

### **15. When the Offender gets Released**

If the offender is in jail you can be told if the offender is going to be released from jail soon, has escaped gaol or is on day release.

### **16. When the Offender Applies for Parole**

You can have a say if your offender applies for parole.

### **17. Victims Compensation**

If you were the victim of sexual assault or other serious assault, you can apply for victims compensation.

### **18. Information About Complaint Procedures**

You can make a complaint if you think your rights under the Charter have not been met. You can ask for information about how to do this.

## Appendix 2

# *Daily Self Care Plan - Template*

(Adapt for different issues/challenges)

### 1. Identify the Problem/Issue for the Day

(for example, feeling depressed, anxious, experiencing sleeplessness)

### 2. Identify the Goal

(it is hard to deal with overwhelming feelings and multiple issues.  
It can be helpful to break it down into small steps)

### 3. Develop an Action Plan

(these things should be small and achievable...  
try aiming for three small goals in the three sections below)

#### a) Get Through the Moment

(for example, having a cup of tea, taking 5 deep breaths)

#### b) Get Through the Day

(for example, make sure you connect with someone you trust, practice relaxation)

#### c) Deal With the Problem

(for example, identify the source of the problem with some help)

*See some examples of completed care plans on the next two pages.....*

# *Example 1*

## *Daily Self Care Plan*

(Adapt for different issues/challenges)

### 1. Identify the Problem/Issue for the Day (be specific)

Feeling depressed – feeling hopeless about myself, unhappy in my job and relationships

### 2. Identify the Goal

To feel better about myself and to have more energy

### 3. Develop an Action Plan

#### a) Get Through the Moment

- Have a shower
- Read some words of encouragement and affirmation or humour
- Write in a journal
- Notice or look at something beautiful
- Smell something nice
- Listen to music, birds, or wind in the trees
- Sing
- Touch something, for example, pat the dog, use some hand cream, cuddle a pillow
- Eat or drink something healthy

#### b) Get Through the Day

- Do a timetable for the above
- Do something pleasurable
- Connect with someone
- Practice relaxing, for example, breathing

#### c) Deal With the Problem

- Identify source or trigger
- Make an appointment to see someone
- Access resources, information through the library or internet

## *Example 2*

### *Daily Self Care Plan*

(Adapt for different issues/challenges)

#### 1. Identify the Problem/Issue for the Day (be specific)

Seeing my Sister today – always have conflict with her, making me feel very angry

#### 2. Identify the Goal

Not to be affected by the conflict

Try to begin to repair the relationship

#### 3. Action Plan

##### a) Get Through the Moment

- Cup of tea
- 5 deep breaths
- Take a shower or bath afterwards
- Go outside
- Focus on something else
- Talk it out without yelling

##### b) Get Through the Day

- Do something physical
- Eat healthy food
- Do a pleasurable activity
- Practice relaxing, for example, breathing
- Tune out from focusing on the problem

##### c) Deal With the Problem

- Wait until calmer to think about it (let the dust settle)
- Write it out
- Talk it over with someone you trust
- Identify what you did well and what you could have done differently
- Use 'I' statements
- Try to listen to the other's point of view



*The most authentic thing about us  
is our capacity to create, to overcome  
to endure, to transform, to love  
and to be greater than our suffering*

*Ben Okri*





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