



WALKING TOGETHER

Support Group

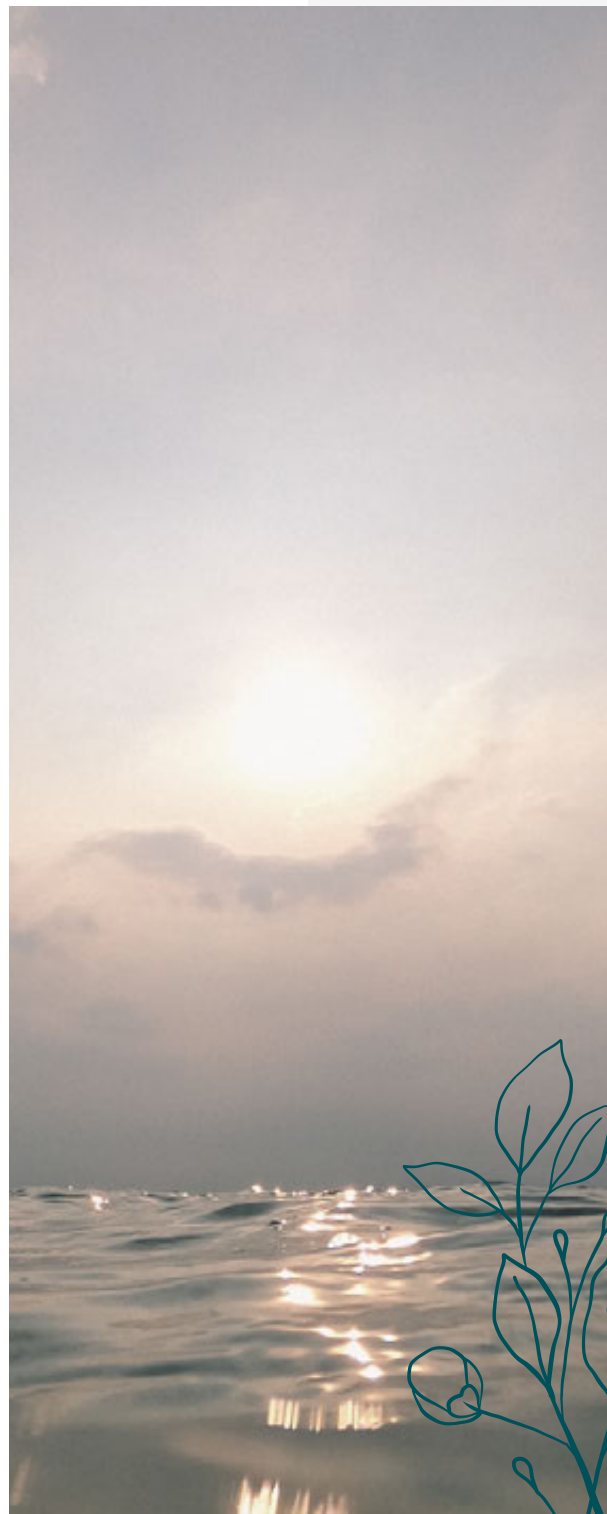
sexualized
violence
prevention
and response



**THOMPSON
RIVERS
UNIVERSITY**

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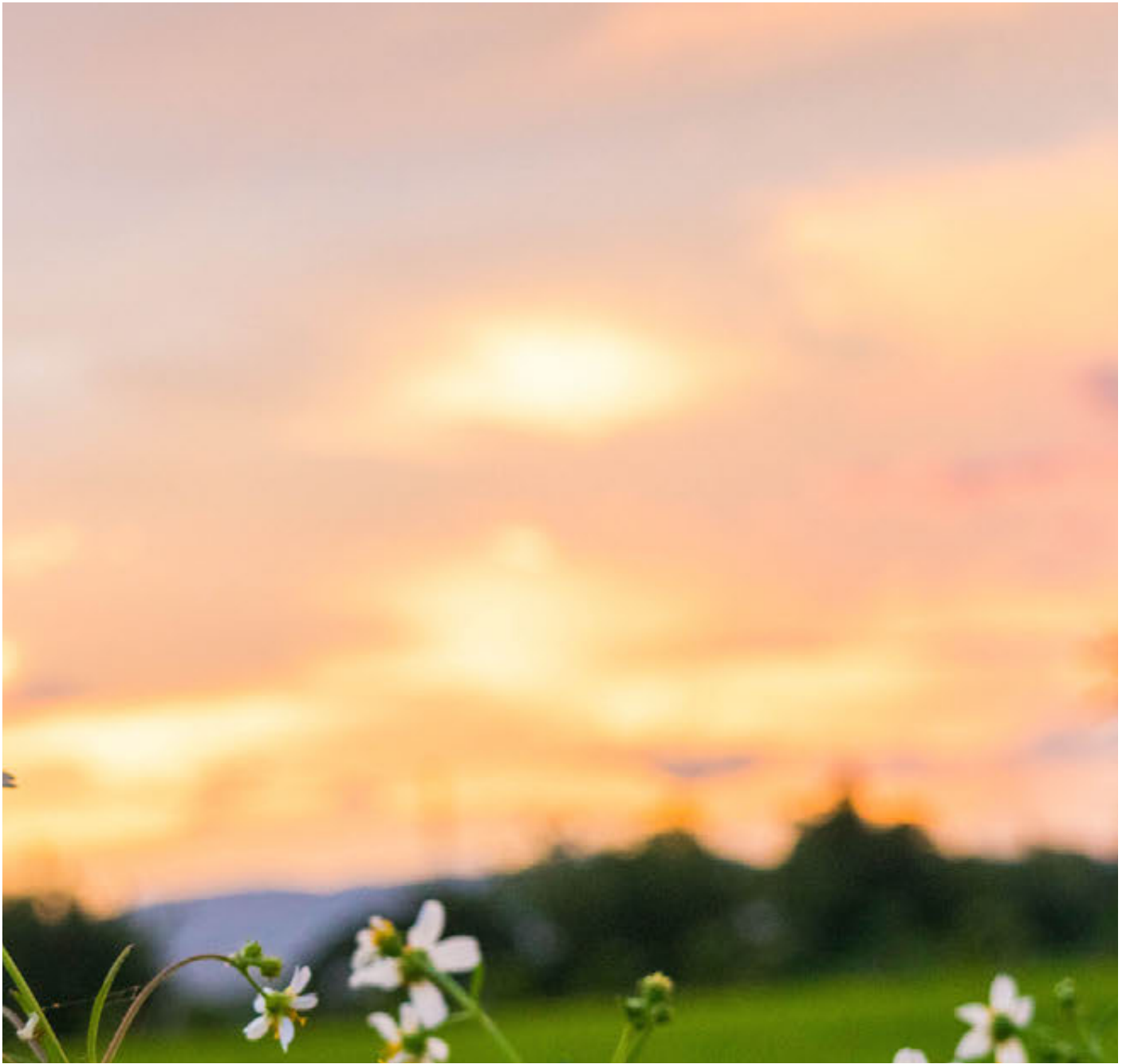


GROUP GUIDELINES

For safety and support in the group



- 1 Confidentiality: Your group facilitators are professionally bound by confidentiality to not share your information with other unless you are at imminent risk of harm. Group participants are not bound by this same reasoning. Please don't share the names of anyone else attending group or their story.
- 2 Take space, make space: Be mindful about the amount of airtime that you are taking up. If you feel like you can share a lot during the session, that's great, just be mindful that you are making space to let others share as well.
- 3 You decide how you show up: Participation and attendance are by choice. You will never be forced to engage.
- 4 Be mindful about what you share: Sharing details about your own experience of violence could be triggering to other participants, so please take care with your words and sharing. If this feels hard, please speak with one of the Facilitators.



TRAUMA RESPONSES

and Isolation



WHAT IS TRAUMA?



Three common elements:

1. It was unexpected
2. The person was unprepared
3. There was nothing the person could do to stop it from happening



Trauma is...

A single or repeated experience that is completely overwhelming in nature, and impacts the ability to cope or process the emotions or details of the event. Such events can often include losing a loved one, sudden job loss, an accident, or experiences of sexualized violence or domestic violence.

A traumatic event is out of your control.

Traumatic events often cause a feeling of shame due to the powerlessness they create. The impacts of the event are not things that happen once and then leave after the event is over. These experiences and impacts can stay with you for long periods of time- which is completely normal and valid.

FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE, & FAWN

When you experience a traumatic event, it is likely that your internal security system will try to keep you safe by engaging in fight, flight, freeze, or fawn.

Fight

The fight response is any physical or verbal responses that you might have during a time of threat. Imagine a mosquito is not leaving you alone, and your first response is to swat at it. It can also be any action that you take to stand up to the threat, even after the event.

Flight

The flight response is the desire to escape the situation. This might take a literal form including leaving the situation. We can also 'take flight' with our minds, by thinking about a better place to be or turning off our emotions. Imagine a big, angry wasp is chasing you, and your instinct is to run away so that you don't get stung or make it more angry.

Freeze

The freeze response is when your brain hits the pause button. It is likely that the other two responses might not be safe or possible, so your body freezes up. For example, you see a large bear when you are out for a walk and it stops you right in your tracks.

Fawn

The fawn response helps get your mind and body to safety by pleasing the person that is threatening you. This can look like automatically agreeing with what they say, giving compliments, or avoiding sharing your own thoughts or opinions. This can be like if your beloved pet cat hisses at you, and you think that maybe it needs more love and snuggles to make it feel better.

All of these responses are justified and natural.



HOW DOES TRAUMA SHOW UP?



Trauma responses vary from person to person. Here are some common ways that your mind and body can respond to trauma.

Physical

- Chronic pain
- Shakiness
- Nervousness or always feeling on guard
- Difficulty sleeping or eating

Emotional/ Cognitive

- Anger
- Depression and anxiety
- Feelings of helplessness
- Guilt and shame/self-blame
- Fear of authority
- Difficulty concentrating and decision making
- Overthinking
- Suicidal thoughts

Behavioural

- Isolating from loved ones or community
- Using alcohol or substances differently
- Missing appointments or class
- Not engaging in previously desired activity



ISOLATION



Social isolation is a normal responses to a traumatic event.

Survivors might engage in isolation for a variety of reasons. These can include:

- Worry that people will make you feel like what happened was your fault
- Feeling pressure to re-tell your story again
- Not having the emotional stamina to bear other people's sadness, anger or fear
- Worry that it might happen again (through attending social gatherings, clubs, group outings)
- Not having the mental resources to socialize or make small talk with people
- Worry that someone will share your story
- Needing time to process what happened and figure out how to "be" in the world again

Although it might feel safer to isolate yourself, it can also affect your personal relationships, career and education, and the ability to move forward and heal. Taking time to recuperate and process what's happened is good thing, and it is also important to be able to identify those people, places, and things that are safe to turn to when you need support. You don't have to do this alone.



ACTIVITY

There are many people who believe you and want to support you. Write a list of people you can connect with when you feel sad, isolated, or need compassion.

*They can be ancestors, friends, family, chosen family, loved pets, or even celebrities. If you would like to engage in a further activity, try listing how each person makes you feel when you are around them.



TRAUMA RESPONSES ARE
EVIDENCE OF YOUR
BODY'S EFFORTS TO
KEEP YOU SAFE.





EMOTIONS

self-blame, shame, guilt



WAVES OF EMOTIONS



Common emotional responses:

- shame
- self-blame
- anger
- guilt
- sadness
- anxiousness
- numbness
- humiliation
- hopelessness
- indifference

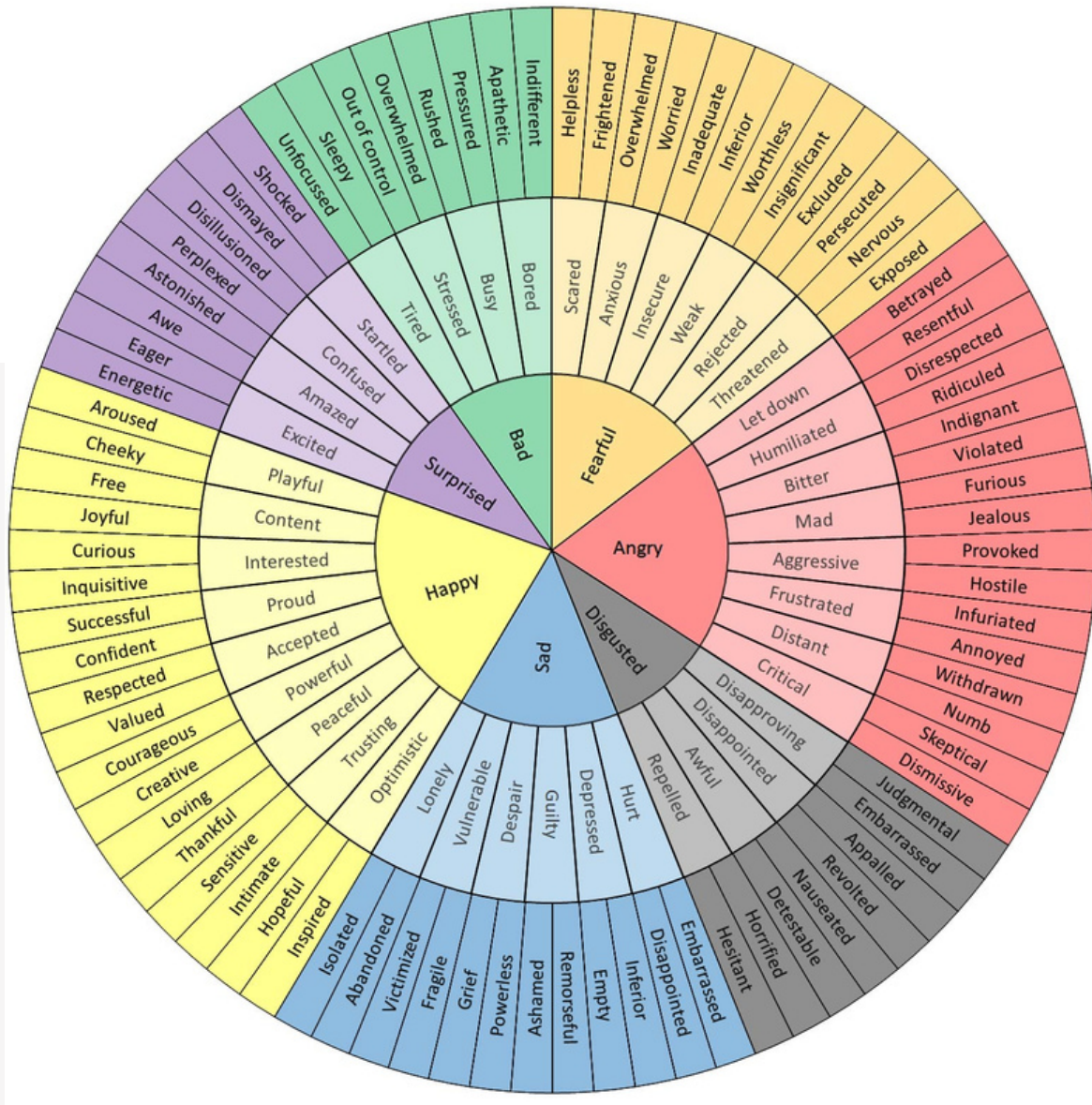
Like the water seen in the picture above, emotions after an experience of violence can flow in many ways. They can be choppy, angry, and forceful like the waves of an ocean on a stormy night. They can also be slow moving and meandering like a stream full of stones and leaves.

Water can take on many forms, speeds, and intensities, and so can your emotions. There is no wrong way to feel them or move through them.

Some of the more common emotions that are experienced by survivors include shame, guilt, and self-blame. Being able to identify these emotions, how they feel in your body and why they show up can help normalize them--and also gain some control over them. Feeling strong emotions during your healing, whether they are immediate, long-term, or intergenerational, is a very personal and unique process.

All of your emotions are valid.

FEELING WHEEL



A feeling wheel, like the one in the picture above, can be a great way to help you identify what you are feeling and what emotions you might be experiencing. If you are having a hard time understanding what or how you are feeling, you can start at the center and work your way out until you find one that feels right.

By identifying and naming your emotions it can help you better be able to discuss them, find ways to work through them, and sometimes help deflate them if they feel too powerful. Give it a try with how you are feeling right now!

ACTIVITY

List some strategies that you can use help the wave of big emotions pass.

*This can be things like listening to music, eating your favorite food, engaging in meditation, or talking about it with a friend.



SHAME & GUILT



Shame can show up in many ways after experiences of violence.

The shame felt after an experience of violence may feel quite different from our everyday experience of shame, like when we make a mistake or do something that we should have known better to do. Shame might feel as deeply rooted as the tall trees in a forest, and might eventually impact your identity or self-worth. It can be acute or chronic and may come and go throughout your healing journey.

Some of the reasons you might feel shame after an experience of violence could be:

- that you feel the event changed you deeply as a person
- the event did not meet your own expectations of what relationships or sexual experiences are supposed to be
- or that other people would view and think of you differently if they found out

Whatever your reason for feeling shame is, know that it is a completely normal reaction to an experience of violence and that you are not alone.

Guilt can be intertwined with many emotions.

Guilt often accompanies feelings of shame and self-blame. Guilt might make you feel as though you had some responsibility in your experience of violence. You might feel that you could have done something different to put a stop to what was happening. It's important to remember that the only person responsible for what happened is the person who perpetrated violence. You are not to blame for what happened. Along every story of violence runs a parallel story of resistance. Please see SVPR's "Resistance is Ever Present" resource for more information about how the ways survivors resist sexualized violence.



SHAME VS GUILT



Shame says



"I did a bad thing because I am a bad person. I am worthless, unlovable, and incompetent. I can't let anyone find out or I'll be rejected."

Guilt says



"I did something I am not proud of. I should try to fix it, and not do it again."

As we can see, the messages of shame and guilt are often not rooted in truth or facts. However, they can feel very real to us and can be useful to tell the difference between them. Take a moment to reflect on how shame and guilt might show up for you.

SHAME & SEXUALITY



Shame and sexual experience have a longstanding relationship.

In many cultures, like the one we experience in Canada, sexuality and sexual health are often "taboo" conversations. We may receive messages that it's not socially acceptable for certain people to enjoy sexual activities, feel pleasure, or experience multiple partners. When a sexual act goes against these set norms, there can be a lot of shame and blame placed on the individual(s). Many cultures and religious affiliations believe that sex should only occur after entering a heteronormative marriage between a male-identified person and a female-identified person. If individuals engage in a relationship or sexual activity outside of these socially constructed norms, there can be a lot of shame placed on them.

By understanding how shame can be experienced frequently by individuals who engage in a variety sexual activities, as well as how shame can be present during experiences of violence, these shame experiences can be interwoven like a spider web. Each strand of the web includes features of you such as your sex, gender, identity, cultural or religious affiliation, and everything that makes you who you are. Connecting each strand of the web can further create the experience of shame you are feeling. Consider what your spider we might look like, and whether or not feelings of shame might be tied to societal beliefs, norms, and values.



Our experience of shame is often connected to social norms and values. These can be hard to untangle.



SELF-BLAME

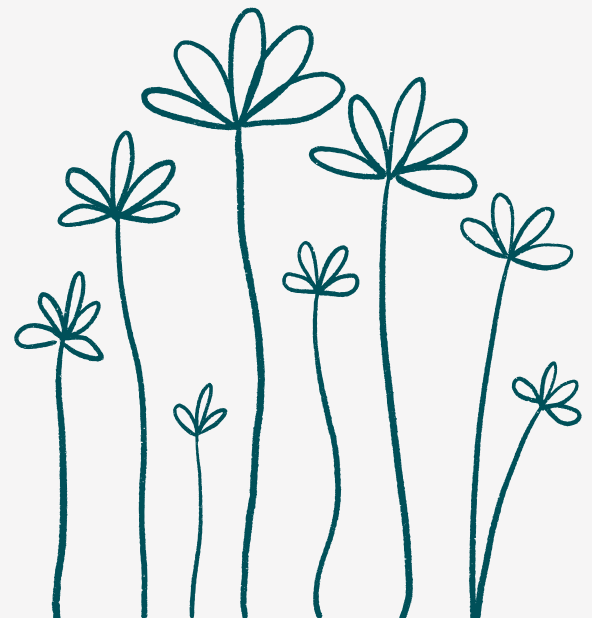


You are not to blame for what happened to you.

Self-blame can set in like dark clouds and make it challenging to see past them. What happened was not your fault. It is common after an experience of violence for you to blame yourself, to feel like you were "asking" for it, or that if you had done something differently it would not have happened. Experiencing self-blame can make it very challenging to talk about what happened and to reach out for support. Start by recognizing those moments in which you blame yourself, and pause. Notice what kinds of conversations or situations bring up these feelings for you. Let your awareness be the wind that gently blows those clouds away.

Common self-blaming thoughts:

- "I should have..."
- "I shouldn't have..."
- "I deserved it because..."
- "I was asking for it by..."
- "I led them on when..."



CHALLENGING SELF-BLAME



Challenging self-blame can help us gain control of our thoughts and feelings.

Challenging your self-blame thoughts can be done in a variety of ways. Interrupting these painful statements can reduce the suffering you experience and remind you of your own truth.

Be your own best friend.

Think of yourself as your own best friend. The negative statements that you are saying to yourself are likely not things that you would say to your best friend if they experienced a similar situation. Think to yourself "If my best friend told me that this happened to them, would I blame them?" Think of what you would say to your friend to support them and use those statements on yourself. You can also extend compassion to past versions of yourself (what would you say to your younger self).

Use evidence and the truth.

Use evidence to make arguments about your self-blame statements and thoughts. You can write out a list of all of the self-blame statements that you think, and then write all of the counterarguments that you can think of against the statement. You can also remind yourself with simple, repeated mantras like, "That's not the truth, I did what I could". Whenever a negative self-blaming thought comes to mind, stop it with that statement and then replace it with the true statements that you have constructed.

ACTIVITY

Write down some of the self-blame statements that you often tell yourself. Then, rewrite the statements using truth and facts.

Self-Blame Statement	Truth Statement
I should have known that the person could become violent.	They went out of their way to gain my trust and deceive me. I trusted that they would not hurt me and they made the decision to do so.

POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

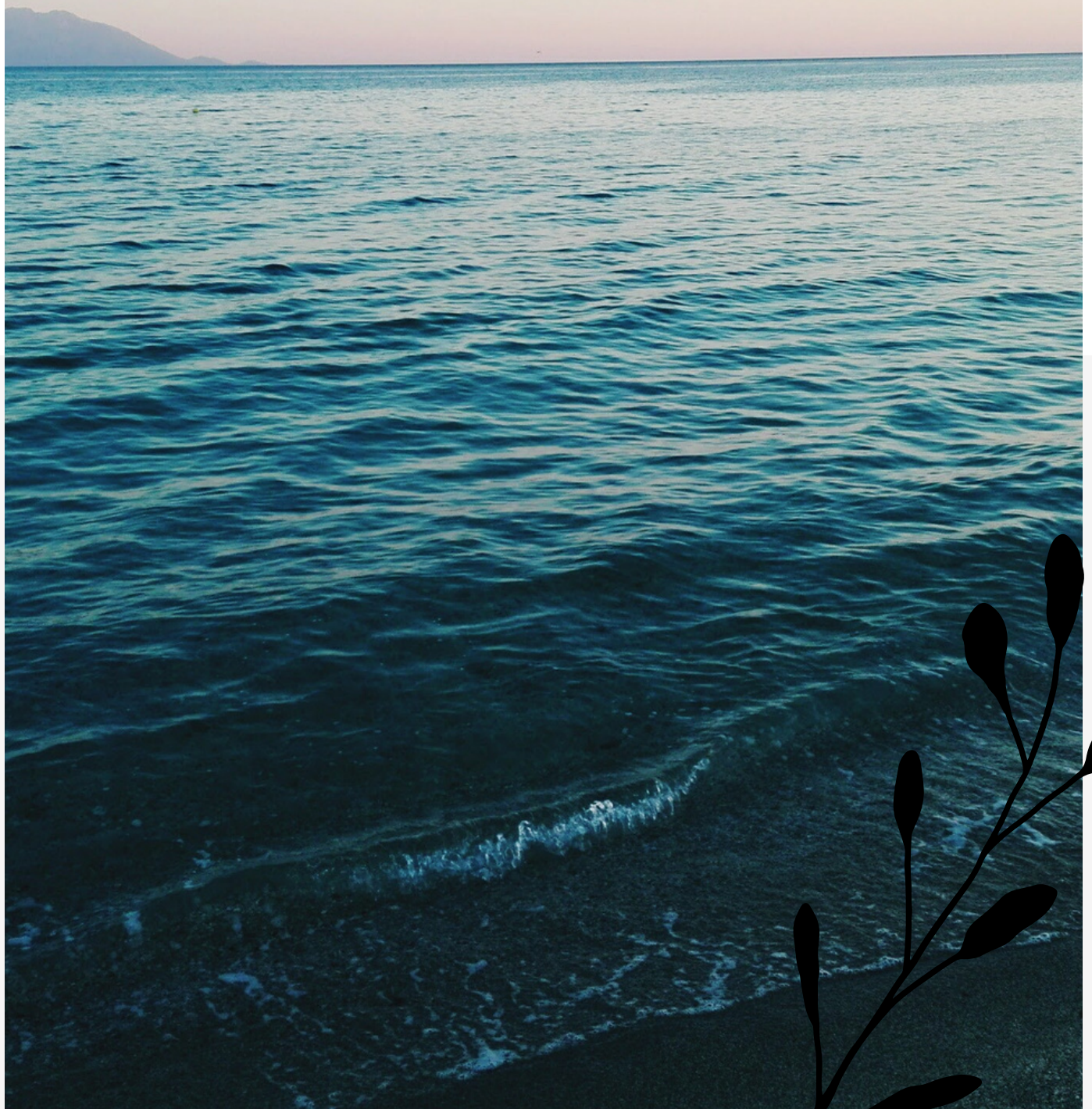
Positive affirmations can help you challenge negative self-blaming thoughts and reframe how you view yourself. Whenever you start to experience self-blame, replace it with a positive affirmation about the things that you like about yourself. You can say it in your head, shout it, sing it, or chant it. It can sometimes feel silly, but give it a try!



Instead of saying self-blaming statements, try:

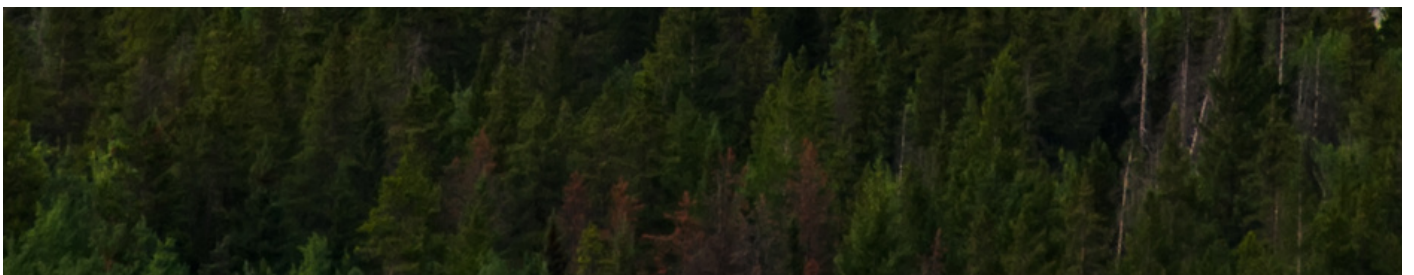
- 1 "I am so brave."
- 2 "I am a survivor."
- 3 "I am doing the best that I can."
- 4 "I am a kind and worthy person."
- 5 "I am more than just this experience."

EMOTIONS CAN COME
AND GO LIKE THE WAVES
OF THE OCEAN.





HAVING HARD CONVERSATIONS



TELLING YOUR STORY



You get to decide who you share your story with, and how.

There is no right or wrong way to travel along your healing journey, which includes choosing to share your story with those around you. It is your decision to share your story including whom you tell, when you tell them, how much you share with them, and the type of support you would like from them. If you are planning to share your story, it can be helpful to have a plan or have these details somewhat decided in your mind.

What

You have the authority to decide what you share about your experience and how much you wish to share. When you tell someone for the first time, they might not know how to respond, and they might ask you for more details about what happened. If this happens and you do not feel comfortable sharing more, you can respond by saying "I wanted to share this with you but I don't feel comfortable sharing any more details right now".

Who

Deciding whom to tell about your experience can be a difficult decision. You may want to consider: Will the person be supportive and receptive? Have you heard them make unsupportive jokes or remarks about sexualized violence or survivors before (e.g. when seeing news stories)? Have they experienced sexualized violence themselves? Do they have a relationship with the person who caused harm and the skills to navigate that relationship? Do you trust them to keep your experience confidential?

TELLING YOUR STORY



When

Timing can also be an important factor when sharing your story. Deciding when to tell someone about your experience might influence the type of reaction they have and how they respond to you. For example, if the person you are about to tell is intoxicated, getting ready to go to bed, or in a bad mood, it might be beneficial to wait and tell them at a different time. Let them know beforehand that you need to have a sensitive or important conversation and work together to set up a time that works for both of you.

Where

It can be helpful to pick a place that is private and quiet to tell them. This might make you feel more comfortable knowing that there are no other people around to listen in to your story and that there will be very few distractions. However, if you feel that the person might become angry or cause a scene, it might be best to tell them in a public place and ask a safe and trusted person to come with you for support.

How

There is a variety of ways you can decide to tell someone about your experience. Some of the options include in person, over the phone, or through a letter. You have the right to tell the person in whatever way feels best to you.

ACTIVITY

You deserve to be seen, heard, and believed when you share your story. Write down some things you would like to hear when you share what happened.





STARTING A NEW RELATIONSHIP



Starting a new relationship can be exciting and scary all at the same time.

Throughout this handbook, many of the effects of sexualized or intimate partner violence have been discussed. Trauma and feelings associated with the experience (like trust, safety, self-blame and shame) can also impact new relationships. It can be really hard to trust a new person and to feel comfortable starting a new intimate or romantic relationship with a partner. Engaging in activities or situations that remind you of what happened can be very activating, and it might feel really scary and overwhelming. This does not mean that you are broken, it just means that your brain is really good at trying to keep you safe and you may need some more time or strategies to process what has happened.

If you are triggered within a new relationship due to reminders of your experience, it can be beneficial to remind yourself of all of the differences between then and now. Consider how your new partner makes you feel, actions that they take to support you, and ways that you are now safe. Being triggered can pop up every now and again, but reflect back on these if you need some help in the moment (making a list can also be helpful for some).



TELLING A NEW PARTNER



It can be challenging to tell a new partner about a past experience.

When you decide that you are ready to start a new relationship, you might eventually decide to share your experiences with your partner. You get to decide when and how to tell them, and how much you want to share. Disclosing to your partner might make you feel very vulnerable, and you might worry that your partner will see or treat you differently.

If you're trying to decide whether to tell your partner, here are some questions to ask yourself:

- Is your past experience(s) of violence having a negative impact on your current relationship?
 - For example: is it making it challenging to connect, and express your feelings, or making you avoid situations and conversations?
- Do you trust your new partner and feel safe sharing with them?
- Is there anything that you and your partner would gain by sharing the experience with them?



If you decide that you wish to discuss it with your partner, know that you do not have to tell them everything right away. This can be an ongoing conversation that you have as you grow and progress together. If you only feel safe telling them some pieces of the experience and not others, that is okay too.

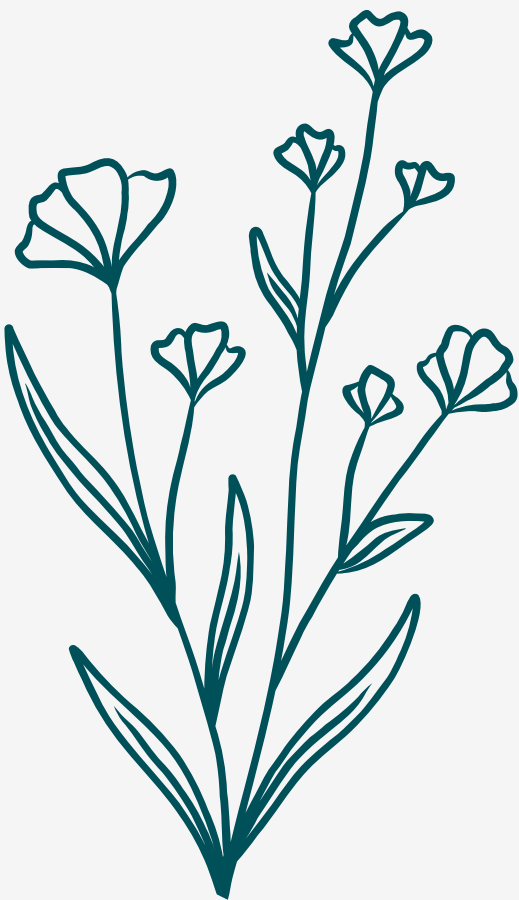
WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME TO SHARE?



Some "green flags" that can help you decide when to share

- Your partner shows empathy towards others who have experienced challenging times or violence
- When conversations of sexualized or intimate violence are brought up they do not engage in victim blaming
- They have demonstrated to you that they are a good listener
- They respect your boundaries
- They have not been physically, psychologically, or verbally aggressive with you

Even if your partner meets all of these "green flags" and you still don't feel ready, that is normal. It can be a big decision to tell, and you are not alone in feeling that way.



YOU GET TO DECIDE
WHO WALKS WITH YOU
ON YOUR HEALING
JOURNEY.





WHAT TO EXPECT

with Healing





THE HEALING JOURNEY

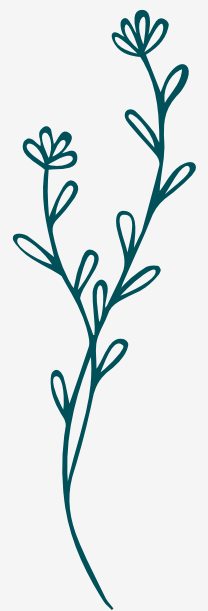


The healing journey can be a winding road.

The healing journey is not like a GPS where you leave your experience and travel directly to the destination healed. It is often a winding road full of twists, turns, backtracking, and uncertainty. It is common to feel like you should have reached your destination already, but for some, it can take time to feel like you are back in a "normal" place in your life. Sometimes this place is just a new normal, and there is no right way to heal.

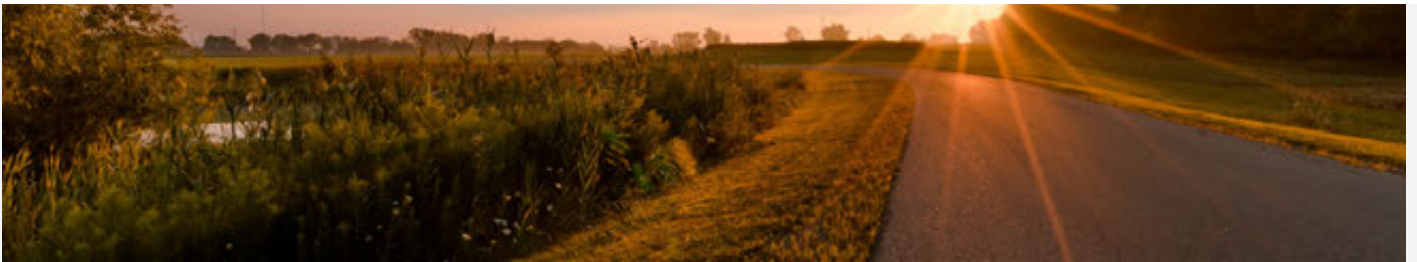
Healing can look like:

- Noticing things don't feel great and that you want something different
- Making the decision to reach out for help
- Recognizing the impacts that your experience has had on your life
- Breaking the silence and telling someone about your experience
- Working through the shame and understanding that it was not your fault
- Learning to trust yourself
- Grieving how the experience has changed you and your life
- Allowing yourself to feel your feelings
- Riding the waves of emotions, good and bad
- Taking one step forward, and two steps back: all the work counts





STAGES OF HEALING



Your healing process will be as unique as you are. There can be some main checkpoints along the way, but remember that no matter what it looks like, it is still valid. You might experience these in a different way, at the same time, or go through the stages many times.

Safety and Stabilization

- Finding resources and supports that are helpful
- Learning skills to deal with triggers, flashbacks, and emotions
- Being able to access/use healthy coping skills

Remembrance and Mourning (Trauma-Processing)

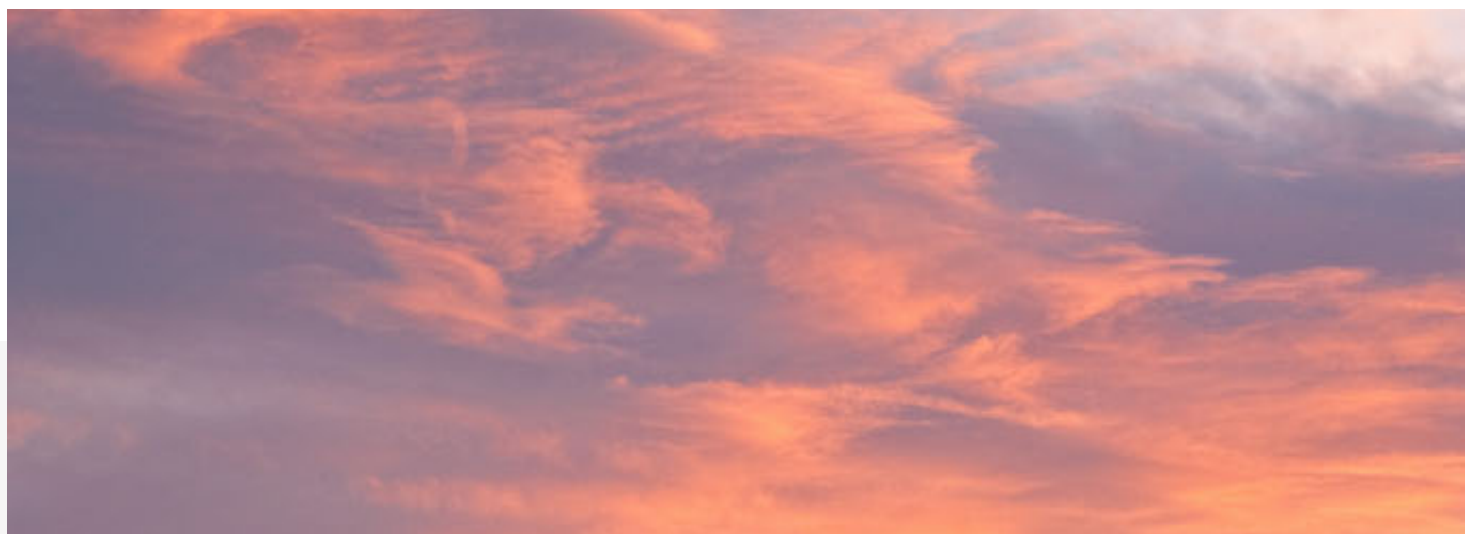
- Processing memories and emotions with a counsellor or support person
- Separating the past from the present
- Building connections with yourself
- Movement back and forth between processing and stabilization

Reconnection and Integration

- Integration back into everyday life
- Forming or strengthening new attachments or relationships
- Creating boundaries and holding them as best you can
- Feeling as though it is okay to move through each previous stage and return back to this one



SELF CARE



The healing journey can be long and tiring. Self care can help.

Self care can help you to cope with the impacts of a traumatic event, both short and long term. Self care can take on many forms and be unique to you and your interests. It can take some time to find self care that works best for you, and that's okay. Some suggestions include:

Physical Self Care

- Create a deliberate sleep routine that helps you get the rest you need
 - This can include having a set time to go to bed each night, taking naps during the day, or finding rest in other ways that feel good to you.
- Be aware and compassionate of how you are fueling your body.
 - You may notice that you're eating more or less than usual.
 - Make sure you're drinking water and eating at least one meal a day.
 - Purchasing food can be very costly, if you are finding it challenging to access food check out tru.ca/foodsecurity
- Moving your body in whatever way might feel best to you
 - Some people find that walking, engaging in yoga, or other light movements are beneficial.



SELF CARE



Emotional Self Care

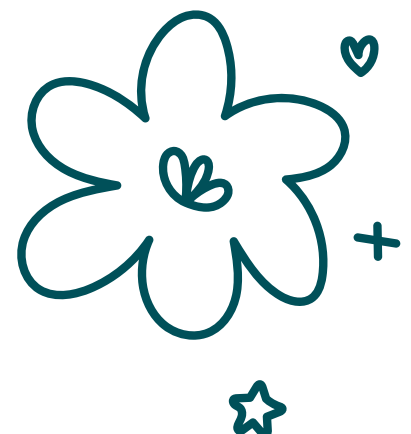
- Identify some fun or leisure activities that you enjoy or would like to try
 - Some examples could include: watching movies, listening to music, creating art
- Engaging in **journaling** can be a beneficial way to express your thoughts and feelings in a safe space
 - If this is something that interests you, you can pick out a fun printed journal that brings you joy or ask the SVPR office for one
 - If you want to practice journaling but aren't sure what to write about, check out some prompts on Pinterest or Google
- Identify some people or things that are positive and uplifting for you to be around
 - This could look like friends, family members, the baristas at your favourite coffee shop, social media accounts or even the ducks at your favourite park
- Find small ways that you can honour yourself on hard days
 - Treat yourself to your favourite coffee, listen to your favourite music, spend a little time in the sunshine



FREE SELF CARE

Some self care activities can come at a cost, making them challenging to participate in. If you are looking for a way to take care of yourself without spending money, try one of these!

- Wrapping yourself up in a cozy blanket and watching your favorite movie or tv show
- Use a blank sheet of paper to write about how you are feeling, draw a picture, or write down hopes or good memories
- Head to the library and rent a good book, magazine, or movie
 - Don't have a library card? Sign up for free at one of the local libraries
- Let some fresh air fill your lungs
 - This doesn't have to involve going anywhere, it can include sitting by an open window, sitting on your balcony, or hangout in a public park or space
- Clean up your space and light a candle
- Try out some grounding techniques or meditation
 - 5-4-3-2-1 can be an effective grounding technique if you are feeling activated
 - Look to YouTube or Headspace for some great guided meditations
- Brew yourself a fresh cup of tea or a warm beverage- notice the feeling of the cup, how the tea tastes, and other factors that are pleasant.
- Take a nice warm shower
 - Even if this just looks like getting in and letting the water run over you
- Give a family member, friend, or trusted person a phone call to check in
- Spend time with a pet (yours or a friend's)
 - Pets can be great listeners or comforting friends



ACTIVITY

What self-care practices would be most effective for you? List a few ways you currently practice or would like to practice self-care



CONSUMING MEDIA

Ongoing healing and self care



Media can be a prominent part of your self care.

For some, consuming media (e.g. watching t.v., scrolling on social media, or watching movies) can be a great way to have downtime and practice self care. It's also important to be aware of the type of media you are consuming and how it effects you. Here are some great tips and reminders:

- You are in control of what type of media you consume
 - If you are exposed to media that is triggering, you have every right to step away from it
- Be aware of warning on things like movies and t.v. shows
 - These warning can provide you with what type of content you are about to see, and allow you to decide if that works for you
- Try not to compare yourself to people you see in media
 - You are unique and so is your experience, media will not always share the whole story

EMPOWERING MEDIA ACCOUNTS

Healing Comes in Waves (podcast series)

@Journey_to_wellness_ (Instagram account)

@headspace (Instagram account, app)

@wetheurban (Instagram account)

@thenapministry (Instagram)

@dandelion.hill (Instagram)

@ancestorsintraining (Instagram)

@softcore_trauma (Instagram)

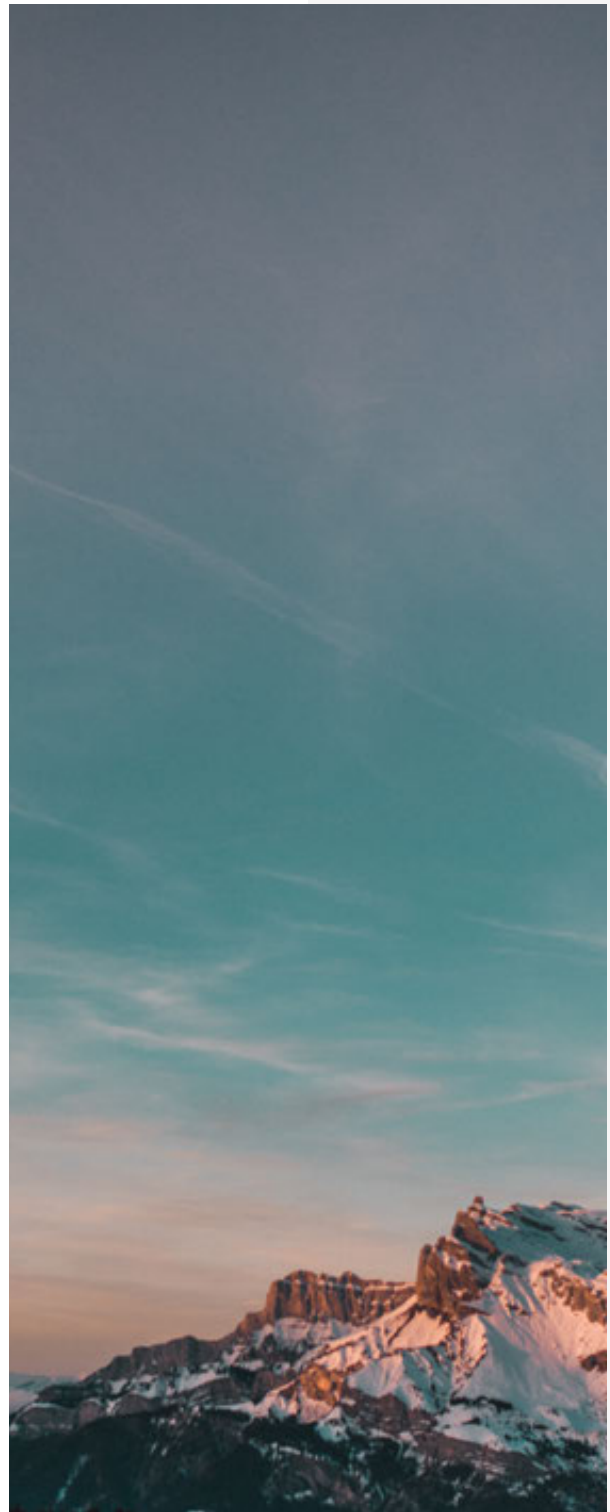
@makerswomen (Instagram)

@recipesforselflove (Instagram)

@girlupcampaign (Instagram)

Empowered Affirmations: Awakening Your

Power Within (podcast series- Spotify)



ATTENDING COUNSELLING



Choosing to start counselling can be scary and overwhelming.

Counselling is an open and nonjudgmental space for you to work through any challenging problems, thoughts, behaviours, or feelings. A counselling session often involves you sharing what you have been going through, and you and your counsellor finding new coping skills, strategies or ways to manage the situation. If you have been dealing with thoughts or feelings that you do not feel are safe to share with friends or family members, counselling can be a great place to work through it.

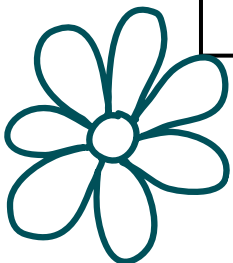
What to consider when looking for a counsellor

- As a survivor, it might be wise to see a counsellor who has experience working with sexualized or intimate partner violence. This can ensure that they have experience and are comfortable with specific challenges you might face.
- Think about what kind of personality you would hope for in a counsellor. Just like with a friend, it is easier to talk about challenging things when you feel comfortable with the person you are sharing with. Finding a counsellor that you "click" with might take a few tries, and it is okay to change counsellors if you do not feel comfortable.
- It might be helpful to consider what type of counselling would work best for you. This does not mean you need to be an expert! Do you want to see someone in person, or are you comfortable accessing virtually? Do you want to do all of your healing work through talking in session or would you prefer to have tasks to complete outside of counselling like homework? Do you want them to provide you with readings or books? Trying new things can help you pinpoint what works best!

ACTIVITY

It can be helpful to identify "red flags" and "green flags" of a counsellor when thinking about attending counselling.

Helpful and beneficial qualities you would like your counsellor to have (green flags)	Qualities or behaviors that would tell you that you are not with the right support (red flag)



HELPFUL RESOURCES

Reach out if you have questions or need support.

TRU Counselling

TRU counsellors work with students to promote career development, academic success, and personal growth. To book an appointment stop by the front desk at OM 1631, call 250-828-5023, or email studentservices@tru.ca

TRU Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response Office

TRU Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response Office offers emotional and practical support to survivors of sexualized and intimate partner violence. Additional supports include safety planning, housing and academic supports, reporting options, and referrals to campus and community supports.

Kamloops Sexual Assault Counselling Centre (KSACC)

KSACC offers trauma counselling, support, and information to survivors of sexualized violence and abuse. All services are free, client centered, and confidential. To book an appointment call 250-372-0179 or email ksacc@ksacc.ca. The crisis line can be accessed by calling 1-888-974-7278

VictimLinkBC

VictimLinkBC is a free and confidential multilingual phone service that is available anytime. This phone service offer support for all victims of crime, and can be accessed by calling 1-800-563-0808

Y Women's Emergency Shelter

Emergency housing, support, and referrals for women and children experiencing violence. To access, call 250-374-6162 or visit kamloopsy.org

Stopping the Violence Outreach Services

Mobile individual and group support, accompaniment and advocacy for women experiencing violence. To access, call or text 250-320-3110

Crime Victim Assistance

The Crime Victim Assistance Program offers private counselling coverage for survivors, or those closely related, that have been affected by crime. For further information email cvap@gov.bc.ca

keep.meSAFE

This service offers immediate and ongoing support through the My SSP app or over the phone, is available anytime in multiple languages, and provides support with school, health, or general life concerns. To access download the My SSP app or call 1-844-451-9700



YOU HAVE SO MUCH
COURAGE, POWER, AND
RESILIENCY.

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