



Managing trauma while awaiting counselling



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HORIZON
Grymuso Goroeswyr | Empowering Survivors
Trais Rhywiol | of Sexual Violence



**Sexual violence
or abuse can
happen to anyone,
regardless of age,
gender or
social status**

If you have experienced sexual violence or abuse, recently or in the past, you will have probably experienced trauma.

Speaking out and acknowledging what has happened to you is an important part of healing.

At Horizon, we offer sexual violence counselling; this is specialist counselling and therapy that works in a trauma-informed way. It can help individuals bring about effective change, develop coping mechanisms and reduce harmful behaviours.



Becoming a victim of sexual violence happens a lot – 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men – but resources are limited and there may be a waiting list for counselling support. We know that it can be a very difficult time between disclosure and waiting for counselling. Horizon does offer other types of support such as peer support groups and ISVA (Independent Sexual Violence Advisor) support, but victims and survivors have told us what they would find really useful is a self-help leaflet on ways they can manage some of the effects of trauma themselves.

What is trauma?

This booklet is to help you understand and process your own personal reactions to your experience.

When a person has experienced a shocking, unexpected or traumatic incident, they are likely to develop deep emotional and physical shock or stress. These reactions are normal and will be unique, personal and individual.

This trauma occurs when you are exposed to danger or a traumatic event such as sexual violence or abuse; the intuitive side of your brain takes over. It does what it needs to survive. When you have suffered trauma it can affect how you think, feel, behave and how you see the world. You may use negative coping mechanisms to try to distract you from the pain you may be feeling such as alcohol, drugs or self-harming.

Remember: what you are feeling is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation

There will be certain things, sights, smells that remind you of the trauma, these are called triggers.



When something has triggered you, it can be extremely frightening and distressing. It can make you feel like you are experiencing the trauma all over again.

You may experience flashbacks. A flashback is a sudden or unexpected memory; they will be extremely vivid and you feel like the event is happening over again – you can see, hear, feel and smell the same things that you did at the time.

These reactions are normal and will be unique, personal and individual to you. Some of these typical reactions may be:

Physical

Rapid heartbeat, unsteady breathing, tension.

Emotional

Panic attacks, nightmares, loss of self-confidence.

Behavioural

Increased smoking or drinking, impulsiveness, cutting or other self-harm.

It can be hard to stop thinking about what happened to you. Trying to understand it can be confusing and can lead you to think things about yourself that are not true: blaming yourself, feeling different to others or feeling alone.

Coping methods

There are techniques that can help you deal with these thoughts and coping mechanisms to help you manage your trauma.

It may be helpful to look at what your triggers are – can you figure out what, when, where and who can set off a flashback or anxious thought? A trigger record will help you manage or avoid trigger-situations. It will also help you prepare for them.

This preparation will help you cope when you have a flashback. Once you recognise your triggers and understand what is happening to your body, try some of these techniques:

- 1 Tell yourself you are having a flashback and remind yourself that the worst is over – the feelings and sensations you are experiencing now are memories of the past and you have survived it.
- 2 Think about your breathing, it will be shallow when you are anxious and panicky; you need to take deep slow breaths. Get grounded and focus on the present, use your senses to keep you focused on the here and now, know where you are and that you are no longer trapped in a situation you can't escape from.
- 3 Tell your friends, partner or relatives about flashbacks – it is important that the people around you know about flashbacks so that they know how to help you. Decide what you find most helpful and let others know.
- 4 Give yourself some boundaries; you might lose the sense of where you finish and where the world begins – wrap yourself in a blanket or hold a pillow to feel protected. Take time to recover, take a nap, have a warm bath or take some quiet time; show yourself some kindness.

Think about what is important to you. Make a list of your strengths that keep you going on your journey; you are a survivor, you are still here!

Look at your inner resources – like good memories and experiences, previous successes, things you have dealt with well, your positive characteristics and strengths. Draw on these instead of focusing on what you imagine are your negative traits.

What outer resources do you have that can help you cope? People who love or have loved you and believed in you. Animals, nature, objects that mean a lot to you, a safe place or activities you enjoy.

Distraction techniques can also help you to move away from those negative thoughts and give something else to focus on:

- Go for a walk
- Watch TV/read a book
- Listen to music
- Contact a friend
- Visit a place that makes you feel safe
- Do something creative
- Practice grounding techniques, mindfulness and meditation, all of which are useful tools for managing trauma and anxiety – meditation has been shown to help people stress less, focus more and sleep better

There are some really good apps you can use on your phone or computer as well as some websites, YouTube videos or books.

Useful Apps and Links



Headspace

www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app

Living well for male survivors

www.livingwell.org.au/managing-difficulties/

My Little Book of Coping Methods by Roisin Ross and The PEACH Diaries

www.horizonsvs.org.uk/user_resources/images/contentfiles/MyLittleBook.pdf

Self-help videos

www.getselfhelp.co.uk/videos.htm

Road to Wellbeing / NHS links and leaflets

www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/866/page/80703

SARSAS self-help guides

<https://www.sarsas.org.uk/self-help-guides/>

Insight Timer – Meditation

www.insighttimer.com





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