

# Beginning to Heal

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The effects of sexual violence can be difficult to overcome and the healing journey may seem to be a long one. There are many paths to healing; any action that leads you toward greater health, expanded self-awareness, and increased self-respect is beneficial in beginning or in sustaining the healing process.

There are many ways to heal from sexualized violence, and there is no “right” way.

Healing can involve:

- Making a decision to heal. Taking that first step and deciding that you would like to make change in your life.
- Facing the crisis of beginning to realize the impact of the abuse/assault on your life.
- Remembering more details or remembering feelings associated with the abuse/assault.
- Working through the desire to deny or minimize the abuse/assault and to believe and accept that it really happened.
- Breaking the silence and telling about the abuse/assault.
- Healing the shame and coming to understand that it wasn't your fault.
- Learning to trust yourself and your perceptions and judgments.
- Grieving the loss that resulted from the abuse/assault (of innocence, of trust, of a sense of security).
- Getting in touch with your feelings including your anger about what happened.
- Developing a sense of spirituality or meaning through art, music, religion, or a spiritual practice.
- Resolution – achieving some sense of peace and still allowing you to cycle through previous stages if necessary with less pain and with greater self-awareness

*(Adapted by PEIRSAC from Victoria Sexual Assault Centre publication)*

Bass, E. & Davis, L. (2003). *There's more than anger, more than sadness, more than terror, there's hope.* Horning, E. *Beginning to Heal: A first book for survivors of child sexual abuse.* New York: HarperCollins.

# Stages of Trauma Healing

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Our counselling work is based on a three phased approach to trauma healing, and the understanding that the first stage is necessary before going onto other work. This three phase approach is based on the work of Judith Hermann, and is considered Best Practice in trauma healing work.

## **STAGE ONE: Safety and Stabilization**

Establishing a basic sense of safety and stability, both internally and externally through:

- Identifying and developing resources
- learning skills to deal with triggers, flashbacks, emotions
- learning healthy coping skills

This foundation is necessary before doing Stage 2 work. You might decide that this stage is all you want.

## **STAGE TWO: Remembrance and Mourning or Trauma-Processing**

In this phase there is often movement back and forth between processing work and phase one stabilizing work

- Gradually processing memories of trauma so they become part of one's story, but they no longer have the same emotional charge
- Processing emotions (e.g. grieving, working through anger, etc...)
- Separating past from present
- Building connection within self (e.g. increase awareness of body)

## **STAGE THREE: Reconnection/integration**

- Integration of skills and knowledge into everyday life
- Making meaning of the past
- Developing and strengthening attachments
- Holding appropriate boundaries
- Exploring intimacy

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