



# MOVING FORWARD AFTER SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Even though recovery from sexual violence is a complex process, with the right care and support it is possible to heal and move forward into a positive and fulfilling future.

You can use the tips below along with other information at the website [wearesurvivors.online](http://wearesurvivors.online) to help yourself move towards your goals and the future you plan for yourself.

## Establish a Balanced, Healthy Lifestyle

Developing and maintaining a healthy, balanced lifestyle is an important foundation for moving forward from sexual violence. Aspects of a balanced and healthy lifestyle can include:

- Making sure you are safe.
- Seeking professional help if needed.
- Limiting your exposure to trauma stories and bad news.
- Informing and educating yourself about what you are experiencing.
- Managing your stress and anxiety.
- Connecting with others.
- Getting health checks.
- Exercising regularly.
- Challenging your brain.
- Practicing meditation and mindfulness.
- Helping others.
- Expressing gratitude for the good things.
- Sleeping well.
- Using positive self-talk.
- Eating a healthy diet.
- Getting sunshine.
- Being creative.
- Laughing often.
- Stimulating your senses daily, such as tasting delicious foods or smelling the aroma of flowers or essential oils.
- Breaking routines, trying new things, and learning new skills.
- Having a sense of purpose in life.

## FIND JOY AND MEANING

Enjoying positive, healthy relationships with people who bring positivity into your life and who respect and support you will be an important part of your journey forward. Spend time with these people and celebrate the good things that they bring into your life and that you bring into theirs.

Reconnect with hobbies and activities that bring you joy. These things don't need to be expensive, in fact, they might not even cost anything. They might include appreciating the flowers or birdlife at a local park near you, teaching yourself singing, or joining a free group activity that you enjoy at a local library or support organisation.

## PERSONAL GROWTH AND SELF-EMPOWERMENT

Set yourself some achievable personal goals, both short-term and long-term ones, that focus on your well-being and personal growth. Remember to celebrate small achievements along the way!

Consider undertaking some education or skills training to enhance your personal and professional growth. This can help build your confidence and open new opportunities. Some support organisations offer free courses and skills training programs.

## BECOME ACTIVE FOR POSITIVE CHANGE IN THE WORLD

You can use the negative life experience of sexual violence to help you make the world a better place. For example, making a public statement about sexual assault or child sexual abuse is one way to take a stand. Taking part in protest marches, signing petitions, participating in survivor forums, and lobbying lawmakers for reform are all ways that you can become empowered and that you can empower others to make positive change.

Getting involved in volunteering or advocacy work, especially activities that are related to supporting other survivors or raising awareness about sexual assault in your community, can be very empowering and give you a sense of purpose and achievement.

## SEEK CULTURAL HEALING

Many people believe that cultural customs and rituals have great healing power. They can strengthen a sense of identity and purpose, nurture a sense of belonging, and create meaningful relationships.

Understanding your culture with language, customs, artwork, dancing, storytelling, traditional foods, and medicines can all play a significant role in your ongoing social, emotional, and spiritual development.

## ACTIVELY PRACTICING GRATITUDE

Gratitude means recognising things we are thankful for. It can be easy to forget to notice the positives in our lives and the beauty all around us. Regularly practicing gratitude is a very simple way to bring balance and positivity into your life as you move forward from trauma.

Perhaps you can create a gratitude notebook where you can actively acknowledge even the small things in life that you are grateful for. For example,

- First thing each morning write down three things that you are grateful for in your life
- Decorate your gratitude page if you would like to
- Each evening, write down at least three positive things from your day
- When you are having a low day, read back over what you have written
- Try to make this a habit – you will be amazed at the positive difference it makes!

## Keep Going

It might take a lot of time, effort, and ongoing work to reach a place in your life where you feel okay or even happy; but the journey is worthwhile. Be encouraged that many survivors of sexual violence have been able to find happiness again in their life ... it is possible!

Healing can sometimes be slow-going, gradual, with lots of ups and downs. Like everyone else, you will have good days and bad days. But the important thing is to **keep going**, a good day is just around the corner so don't give up!

On a 'bad day', give yourself permission to feel your feelings (both good and bad), do not blame yourself, and reach out for help if needed. When you are having a particularly difficult day, sometimes it helps to just put everything on hold for the day, make an effort to get a decent night's sleep, and then face the world again the next day.

**Always remember this – you are brave, you are resilient, you are strong, you are a SURVIVOR!**