



CARING FOR YOURSELF AFTER SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual violence is frightening. If any type of sexual violence has happened to you, you might have strong anger, fear, hurt or other emotions that stop you from enjoying your life. You might also feel different in your body or have injuries that keep hurting. If you are new to Australia, on a temporary visa or you don't have safe people around you then you may also feel alone and afraid that you might not be able to stay in Australia unless you keep your hurt to yourself.

Caring for yourself after you have experienced sexual violence is an important part of your healing. It is something that you can do for yourself every day to help you to feel better in a safe way.

Here are some easy ways that you can care for yourself:

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

In order to heal from sexual violence you must be kind to yourself and to other people. This can be hard if there is any part of yourself that blames yourself for what happened. If you find it hard to be kind to yourself because you blame yourself, imagine hearing from another innocent person who has gone through what you have gone through and is now struggling with the feelings and effects that you are experiencing. Be as kind to yourself as you would be to that person! Another way to be able to be kind to yourself is to think about someone who has been kind to you in the past and imagine having this own care for yourself. Be patient with yourself - healing takes time.

SET BOUNDARIES

It is important to set boundaries to protect your emotional and physical wellbeing. This might include staying away from anyone who makes you feel unsafe in any way and limiting contact with any people who do not support your healing.

ESTABLISH A DAILY ROUTINE

Maintain a set routine each day to provide structure and get back in to normal life. Part of this includes having regular meals, exercise, and leisure activities.

FIND POSITIVE WAYS TO EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS

Writing about your feelings and experiences in a diary or as poetry or stories, can be a good way to process your emotions.

Doing creative activities such as drawing, painting, or music to express yourself can also be a valuable part of caring for yourself.

Prayer, relaxation or meditation can be very useful in managing stress and helping your body to relax. Deep breathing exercises can calm your mind and body during moments of distress. There are many apps and online resources to help you do this and they are available in various languages.

LOOK AFTER YOUR BODY AND MIND

An important part of caring for yourself is taking care of your body and mind. Find out more information about medical and mental health care by downloading the 'Getting Medical and Legal Help' tipsheet from wearesurvivors.online.

Regular exercise and physical activity can help reduce your stress and improve your mood. There are lots of activities to choose from, such as walking, dancing, yoga, or swimming, but be sure to choose ones that you enjoy!

Maintaining a balanced diet and having good nutrition is essential to support your body and mind.

Get lots of sleep and rest. One way to do this is to have a bedtime routine to help you relax before sleeping and improve your sleep.

CONNECT CULTURALLY AND SPIRITUALLY

Taking part in your culture and traditions can help bring you comfort and a sense of identity. This can include things like traditional cooking, music, dance, or religious rituals.

If you are religious or spiritual, you might find a lot of comfort and support from your faith community. This might include talking with a trusted religious leader, taking part in religious services or participating in special religious events and festivals.

LOOK AFTER YOUR EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS

Be sure to surround yourself with family members, friends, or community members who are supportive and understanding.

If you are feeling isolated or lonely, reach out to support services and organisations that work in your community.

You can also get involved in community activities and events that interest you.

All of these things are important parts of self-care and can help you build a strong support network and regain a sense of belonging.

FIND A COUNSELLING SERVICE AND/OR A SUPPORT GROUP

Many survivors of sexual violence find speaking with a qualified counsellor is an important way they can care for themselves. Specialised support services can provide confidential support. You can find out more information about counselling and how to find a counsellor by viewing the tip sheet on healing after sexual violence, at the website wearesurvivors.online. Support groups can be safe spaces where you can share your experiences with others who have gone through similar situations. Many counselling organisations also run support groups.

DO SOMETHING YOU ENJOY EACH DAY!

Taking care of yourself is essential, so schedule time each day for something you enjoy. Make time every day to unwind and prepare larger treats in advance so you always have something to look forward to.

Here are some ideas taken from the Sexual Assault Resource Centre (Western Australia) Care package for Survivors:

- Read a good book
- Listen to your favourite music
- Plan a camping, snorkelling or hiking trip
- Soak in a warm bath filled with bubbles, bath salts or essential oils
- Go for a picnic
- Swim in the sea or walk on the sand or do both!
- Watch the sunset
- Book tickets to a movie, show or sporting event
- Light candles, diffuse essential oils or burn incense
- Go for a bike ride
- See a live band
- Have a massage
- Cook your favourite meal
- Meet a friend for coffee and maybe cake!
- Spend time in the garden and buy or pick fresh flowers

There are many organisations who have a lot of experience in helping survivors of sexual violence. Get in contact with a support service to receive help and support in your healing journey.

- **1800RESPECT:**
National sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service.
Call 1800 737 732.
- **NSW Sexual Violence Helpline.**
Call 1800 424 017.

If you don't speak English, you can use:

- **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National):**
Provides immediate interpreting services.
Call 131 450.

There are also organisations who have experience in helping survivors of sexual violence who are new to Australia, or who can help refugees, asylum seekers or people holding temporary visas.

- **The Asylum Seekers Centre.**
Call (02) 9078 1900.
- **The NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors – STARTTS.**
Call (02) 9646 6700.
- **Settlement Services International – SSI.**
Call (02) 8799 6700.