

Remind yourself every day that you are moving forward with your life because you deserve to be happy. You are a beautiful, valuable person and you are in control of your own future. You do not have to do all of the work alone - there are lots of people that want to help. You can talk to the staff at Avalon Sexual Assault Centre to help make a plan for your own personal healing journey.

Healing from sexualized violence looks different for every person that faces the challenge. It is a process that can take months, years, or even a lifetime. The important thing is to remember is that healing IS possible.

This guide is designed to help you recognize and understand some of the feelings that you may be experiencing following a sexual assault. More importantly, it contains useful information about how you can learn to manage these emotions and continue to live your life in a positive, meaningful way.

Contact and Support Information

Avalon Sexual Assault Centre
902-422-4240

Avalon Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner
24 hr Response line
902-425-0122

Helpline
902-421-1188

Mental Health Mobile Crisis Unit
902-429-8167

Victim's Services Emotional Support
902-490-5300



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SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTRE

“Avalon gives you a voice when
you’ve been silenced.”

-Client

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Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner: (902)
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Healing and Empowerment

A guide for people who have
experienced sexualized violence



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Everyone is different. The skills that help us respond in the aftermath of assault are the result of many different factors. This includes our upbringing and family lives, our cultures, religions and belief systems, our life experiences and support systems, past traumas, age, class, race, gender, and everything else that makes us who we are. The good news is that we can develop more skills and knowledge with every challenge that we face.

Immediately following a sexual assault, it is important to be kind and gentle with yourself. Trust that what you are feeling is a valid and normal reaction to what you have experienced. Some people who have experienced a sexual assault will want to go back to work or school right away, while others will need some time to process what has happened to them - either alone or in the company of supportive friends and family members.

Healing from sexualized violence is a process and can be painful and difficult. It can also connect you with ideas and values about your life that are empowering and rewarding. These conflicting outcomes can make the process seem confusing or exhausting at times. It is normal to experience a lot of ups and downs as you continue to recover.

Self-Care

Self-care is a critical part of any healing journey. It means taking good care of all of your needs - physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual. Your self-care, like much of this healing process, depends on your own preferences and resources.

Examples of Self-Care:

- Taking a bath
- Listening to music
- Spending time with a friend
- Going for a walk
- Eating your favorite food
- Singing, dancing, laughing
- Eating, healthy and regularly

- Getting adequate, regular sleep
- Getting regular exercise
- Playing with pets

Healing from sexualized violence takes a lot of work. Be kind and forgiving with yourself. Understand that there will be good days and bad days. You should be proud that you have made the decision to take back control. The first steps are always the most difficult.

It can help to keep a journal or log of your journey. Notice the progress and make an effort to highlight times when you find strength and hope. You can reflect back on these insights when you are feeling down.

Give yourself permission to feel happy, even if you can only manage to do so for a short while every day. These time periods will increase as your healing journey progresses.

Give yourself permission to feel sad. Especially if you are the type of person that wants to "just get on with life." Take the time to cry and talk about your pain in a safe and supportive environment. Then reward yourself for doing such difficult healing work.

"I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it."
- Maya Angelou

Triggers

Triggers can be anything that serves as a reminder of the traumatic event for a survivor. A trigger can be something you see, hear, taste, smell, or touch. It can be something obvious, or some small detail.

Some examples of triggers include:

- Specific sounds (songs or voices)
- Specific smells (deodorant, cologne, gum, cigarettes, alcohol or marijuana)
- Certain places (where the assault occurred, places you may have seen them)
- Specific dates or times (holidays, seasons, anniversary dates, nighttime)
- Genital medical exams
- Sexual contact, intimacy, or physical contact

Once you learn to recognize what your specific triggers are, you can begin to manage the emotions that they bring up for you. Remember that it is okay to avoid or disengage with things that remind you of the assault.

Flashbacks

Many survivors experience flashbacks of the traumatic episode. A flashback is an experience of reliving the event. It seems very real to the survivor and is usually disruptive and terrifying. A flashback may last anywhere from a few seconds to several hours.

Once you learn to recognize what a flashback looks and feels like, you can employ "grounding techniques" to help bring you back to reality sooner. Grounding can be done on your own or with the support of a safe, trusted person. Some examples of grounding techniques include:

- Tell yourself that you are having a flashback
- Remind yourself that the flashback is not real and that you are safe right now, in this moment
- Plant your feet firmly on the ground
- Notice and name objects, sounds and smells in your surroundings
- Stomp your feet, clap your hands, etc.
- Call a supportive friend or family member, or Avalon Sexual Assault Centre
- Take time to recover from the flashback by doing something that you find relaxing