



Sexual Assault Response Services *of Southern Maine*

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STRATEGIES FOR LONG-TERM HEALING

Healing from sexual assault or abuse can be a long and sometimes difficult process. As survivors, we often feel impatient with ourselves, overwhelmed, afraid, or angry about the long-term effects the assault or abuse may have on our lives.

Discovering a comfortable balance between acknowledging these effects and feeling “damaged forever” is a challenge that most survivors encounter at some point in their healing process. The following information may help you find the balance that feels comfortable for you.

Although we know that denying the assault/abuse will not make it go away, we also know that most survivors reach a place in their recovery when the assault/abuse no longer feels like the center of one’s life.

The following list highlights some of the more effective long-term healing strategies for people recovering from sexual assault or abuse:

1. Recognize signs of stress, including emotional, physical, and behavioral indicators. By recognizing the signs, we can take actions to prevent “overload.”
2. Recognize the stressor. Is it something you can change or avoid? Is it a trigger? Can you develop a coping strategy to alleviate the stress if you cannot change or avoid the stressor?
3. Respond to your physical needs (rest, exercise, nutrition, and relaxation).
4. Avoid unrealistic expectations of yourself and others.
5. Acknowledge your own vulnerabilities and limitations.
6. Avoid isolation. Seek out nurturing and supportive friends, family or appropriate community resources.
7. Nurture yourself as best you can. Things to think about: What do you do for fun? What things help you relax or feel good about yourself? What do you do with your free time?
8. Remember that you come first. Try to address your own needs before responding to others.
9. Do things at a pace that feels comfortable to you. Try to avoid putting “shoulds and musts” on yourself.
10. Take time to relax. Learn and practice relaxation techniques.
11. Focus on the positive in yourself. As a survivor, you are an amazing reservoir of strength, creativity and courage. Acknowledging that in you can help to lessen feelings of hopelessness, low self-esteem, and despair.
12. Keep your sense of humor!

These things are not a guarantee for quick, painless, stress-free recovery. They can, however, help you reduce the stress in your life, help you feel good about yourself as a person and survivor, and energize yourself for the process of healing.

Help, Hope, and Healing