

Exercise: List 5 things you enjoy doing with your partner...

Challenge yourself and your partner to do one of these activities together this week

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Support From The Gatehouse:

First, the survivor will have an intake assessment to determine that they are eligible to join groups at The Gatehouse. After the intake the survivor may enroll in the 15-week phase 1 group, attend the drop-in group, or have up to 6 one-on-one sessions to discuss any concerns, hesitations, or anxieties towards joining a group.

After the intake, you as the partner may go with your loved one to attend the introductory partners support workshop. This workshop is a one-day pre-requisite to the partners-only group. Please visit the website or call to find out when the next workshop is being held.

Next, you as the partner may attend the partners only group which is held the last Monday of every month from 7:00PM – 9:00PM. Please note that the programs offered at The Gatehouse are peer-support based and not counselling. For more information and to register call (416) 255-5900.

Family Focused Support External to The Gatehouse:

Family Association for Mental Health Everywhere

Address: Multiple Locations across the GTA

Phone: (416) 207-5032

Family Outreach Response Program (CMHA)

Address: 2333 Dundas St. W. Suite 501

Phone: (416) 539-9449 (for DBT group ext. 223)

Family Resource Centre (CAMH)

Address: 100 Stokes St. Rm. 1314

Phone: (416) 535-8501 ext. 33202

Looking for walk-in counselling?

There are various walk in counselling service locations in Toronto. The find the one nearest you visit:

<http://www.whatsupwalkin.ca/>

Please note that these times are subject to change without notice.

Emergency / Crisis Resources:

If you are in crisis and need of immediate support call 911. You may also request a Mobile Crisis Intervention Team, in this case a mental health nurse will accompany the officer.

Toronto Distress Centre	(416) 408-4357
Gerstein Crisis Centre	(416) 929-5200
Assaulted Women's Helpline	(416) 863-0511
Spectra Helpline	(416) 920-0497
Spectra (Brampton/Mississauga)	(905) 459-7777
York Region Crisis Line	1 (855) 310-2673



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For the Partners
of Childhood
Sexual Abuse
Survivors:
Supporting Your
Loved One



How can I support my partner or loved one?

Where do I start? If your partner has disclosed that they are a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, it is common to feel overwhelmed. Your partner is someone you love and care about, wrapping your head around the fact that someone has inflicted horrific acts upon them, is a lot to take in. Your partner has likely experienced shame, guilt, anger, and other mental health challenges as a result of the trauma they've experienced and their disclosure to you means they trust you, feel safe with you, and want to share their journey towards healing with you.

Acknowledge their experience and validate their emotional responses, it is very likely it took extreme amounts of courage for them to share their story with you.

Educating yourself on childhood sexual abuse, the signs, symptoms, and experience of a survivor, will better help you understand what your loved one is going through. Knowing that some of the effects of childhood sexual abuse include flashbacks, dissociation, anxious thoughts, or nightmares; can help you respond more effectively and empathetically when it appears that your partner is in distress.

Self-care is acknowledging that you, as the partner, need support for yourself to walk alongside your loved one in their journey towards healing. Be mindful of your emotional reactions and attend to your needs. It is challenging to support others without first supporting ourselves.

(Doyle & Napier-Hemy, 2008)

Your Response to the Disclosure: Re-framing initial reactions into helpful responses

You might think: I can't believe that happened, it doesn't sound real that someone could do that to a child. What if they're making it up or overreacting?

Why this isn't helpful: what you might be experiencing is disbelief and the inability to accept what happened due to the horrific nature of the trauma. This can increase your partners feelings of shame and guilt.

Try Instead: Let them know whole-heartedly that you believe them and ask them what they need from you to feel supported.

You might think: Their abuser is still alive, I just want to kill them.

Why this isn't helpful: This response is your anger talking (and that's valid). However, expressing your anger to your partner may increase feeling of shame and remind them of how their power was taken away.

Try Instead: Let your partner know it wasn't their fault and they did the best they could considering the circumstances. This understanding will come with more education around childhood sexual abuse.

You might think: It happened years ago why is my partner letting it effect our relationship now?

Why this isn't helpful: this response minimizes their experience and puts the blame on your partner. The effects of trauma can last a lifetime and the journey towards healing is not linear.

Try Instead: Involving yourself in the healing journey, showing your partner that you want to walk alongside them by getting support for yourself too.

(Doyle & Napier-Hemy, 2008)

Active Listening:

1. **Face them and give eye contact**, shows your loved one, with your body language, that you are interested and present.
2. **Leave judgements at the door**, by walking into a conversation with an open-mind and the readiness to accept whatever they have to say.
3. **Don't should all over them**, in-other-words don't impose solutions or tell your partner what they "should do". Focus instead on just listening, remembering, and being present.
4. **Ask questions**, to avoid assumptions, and perceptions of judgement. Including more questions shows that you are interested, receiving clarification to avoid misunderstanding, and holding the space for your partner to have voice.
5. **Silence can be powerful**, being comfortable in silence with your partner is a skill. Resist the urge to fill the space and give your partner more time to process the emotions they are feelings.

Intimacy & Sex

It is common for individuals who have been sexually abused as children to have concerns with intimacy and sex. If there is also a lack of communication, this can make intimacy and sex possibly feel rejecting, confusing, or disconnected. To help support your loved one when they feel this way, start by recognizing that something doesn't feel right. Ask your partner what they need in that moment to feel safe. Remember that sexual activity can be a trigger for many survivors and it is not a personal rejection. Try to reframe these moments as opportunities to build non-sexual intimacy and strengthen communication.

(Doyle & Napier-Hemy, 2008)