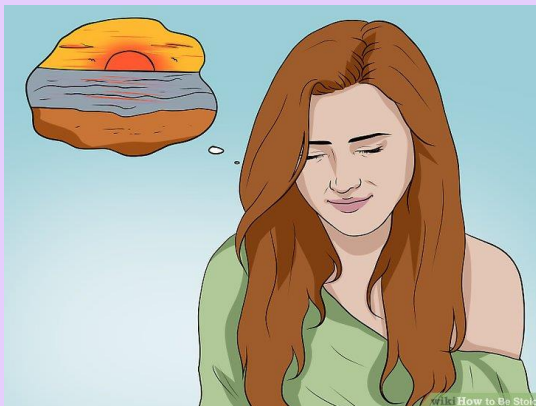


Internal Safety: Imagining an Ideal Safe Space

Sometimes when you cannot create a physical safe space for whatever reason; if you are away from it or cannot reach it there is an opportunity to imagine what an ideal safe space would look like. It does not have to be reality based, you can create a fantasy safe place. Imagine what would be there, what would you see, smell, hear, and be able to touch? Spend time with this imaginary safe place on a regular basis to strengthen your internal experience of safety. Without internal safety, sex can feel scary and triggering, this is one way to develop internal safety. This place even if it may be imaginary is a comfortable place that you can call your own. No one can go into it without your permission, it is yours.



Support from The Gatehouse:

After your intake appointment the programs available to you are:

- Phase 1 Program
- Weekly Co-ed Drop-in
- Partners Support 1-day workshop (attended with your partner)

Six one-on-one support sessions are also available to you.

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.



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

Rape Crisis Centre Toronto: (416)-597-8808

CMHA-Peel-Mobile Crisis: (905)-278-9306

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Childhood Sexual Abuse Survivors and Sexuality



The following information is solely meant to provide general information about sexuality. It does not substitute the information from a person's healthcare provider. It is recommended for individuals to contact a qualified medical/mental health professional for additional information surrounding their unique situation.

Sexual Abuse is Not Sex

One of the hardest things for abuse survivors to do is separate sexual abuse from sex. It is worth repeating many times that even if you liked the attention, approached your abuser for attention, were aroused, or had an orgasm, it is still not sex and you are not responsible. Placing responsibility on your abuser is an important step in separating the abuse from your sexuality. This is the time to reassure the hurt child inside you that it wasn't her/his fault.

The Myth that Sexual Abuse causes Survivors' Sexual Orientation

There is a long held belief that same sex abuse causes survivors to be gay. As well as when a survivor has been abused by a member of the other sex and the survivor identifies as gay that it is a result of the abuse. This can cause survivors to question their sexual identity. It is important to remember what makes you feel comfortable emotionally and sexually. Or take the time to read up on positive perspectives about sex and sexuality. Learn and challenge yourself to find your desires, fantasies, passion and emotional and physical attractions.

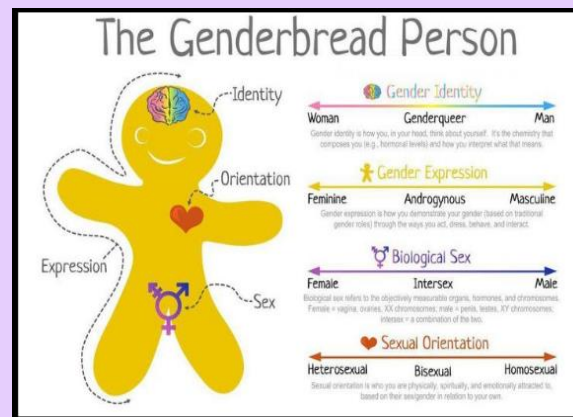
Munro, Kali, Sexual Abuse Survivors and Sex "An article about becoming more comfortable with sex" *Healing Words Newsletter Vol 3* (April 2001).

When You Don't Feel Safe

Many survivors can feel unsafe when the person they are with or the situation they are in is safe. There is a difference between feeling safe and being safe. The first is a feeling and is affected by your past experiences with safety or lack of safety. The second is an actual fact of whether the people or place you are, are safe. It is important to develop a sense of safety (see "**internal safety**") and have a way to identify whether people and situations are safe (external safety).

Trust

Sexual Abuse is a major violation on trust. Survivors can sometimes have difficulty trusting their own perceptions as well as other people. Without trust sex can seem scary and unsafe. It is okay to go slow, to stop, to breathe when you need to. It is important to know your boundaries and to respect them.



Body

1. Breathing Exercises i.e. Focus on your breathing as it moves in and out of your body.
2. Body Awareness Exercises i.e. Lie down and notice different areas of your body such as tension, feelings, and memories.
3. Relaxation Exercises i.e. Lie down and tense up one of your body parts and hold your breath for ten seconds. Then release the tension and your breath.
4. Notice how you feel in your body when you are feeling sexual.

Triggers:

1. Identify that you are triggered and that you have a choice. You can put the feelings aside or you can deal with them when they surface.
2. Acknowledge that you are triggered to yourself or your partner.
3. Look at relational patterns like control and safety with your partner.
4. Certain sexual activities can feel more triggering. It is okay to take these activities off the table and have a conversation with your partner.

Sexual Healing

It is possible for survivors to feel better about their sexuality and sex. The key is to break the association between your sexuality and the sexual abuse. Knowing why you are afraid to initiate sexual contact can help decrease that fear. Working on your specific needs like feeling better about yourself and your body. Only you can really know what feels safe, good and exciting to you.