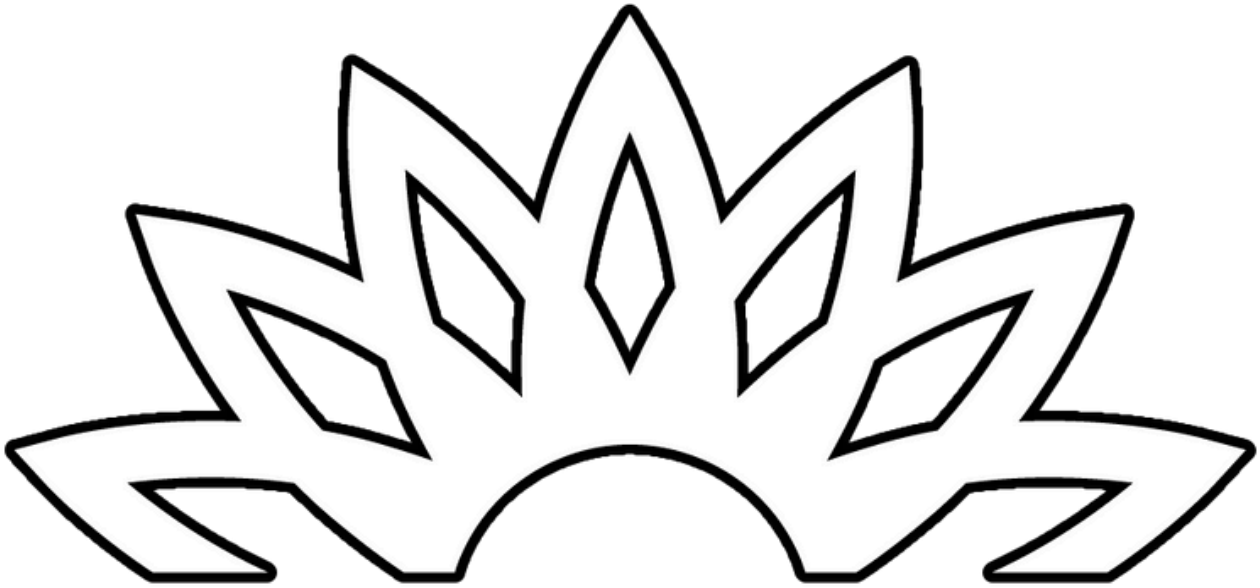
BUILDING RESILIENCE AFTER TRAUMA

Workbook



SURVIVOR SPACE OXFORDSHIRE

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Survivor Space Oxfordshire

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COURSE OUTLINE

1

MODULE 1: TRAUMA AND ITS EFFECTS

In this module you'll learn how trauma is processed in the brain and becomes embedded in the body, causing trauma symptoms. And why you are not to blame.

2

MODULE 2: RESOURCES

We'll look at the resources that helped you survive trauma, resources that will help you heal from it, and beliefs that can keep you stuck.

3

MODULE 3: OVERWHELM

We'll explore why and in what ways can trauma survivors become overwhelmed and look at strategies for containing difficult emotions.

4

MODULE 4: SHUTDOWN

In this module you'll learn about why you might find yourself shutting down. We'll look at shame, fear and dissociation and think about how to counter them.

5

MODULE 5: SELF-HARM

The overwhelm and shutdown of trauma can lead to some scary and very intense thoughts and urges. We'll explore ways to manage them safely.

6

MODULE 6: NURTURING RESLIENCE

In this last module, you'll pull together what you've learned into an individual toolkit to help your healing journey while you are waiting to access therapy.

WELCOME!

WE'RE SO GLAD YOU'RE HERE!

We know that sexual violence can have a devastating effect on your life, and we're here to provide a safe, friendly space where you can meet other survivors, learn to reconnect with yourself at your own pace, and find support and information to help you manage the physical and emotional effects of trauma.

We're delighted to be able to offer this short course on understanding and healing from trauma while you're waiting to access our services. This workbook contains information that will help you to get the most from the course. Use this workbook alongside the 6 modules and their video recordings. We encourage you to make as much use of it as feels comfortable for you.

The Survivor Space Psychoeducation Specialist Team



BEFORE YOU START

Trauma is what happens when we experience a deeply distressing or frightening event that overwhelms our ability to cope, and causes us to feel helpless, powerless, hopeless, trapped. It can be a one-off event or experienced repeatedly over time, and can have a profound effect on our sense of self and safety.

This course aims to give you a better understanding of how what happened to you affected your brain and body and the way you see the world. But more importantly, it will also explain how it is possible to heal from trauma. No, really! You'll learn to identify your own innate resources and strategies that will help you reconnect to yourself, others and the world.

During the course, you might find yourself becoming upset and overwhelmed or numb and 'spacey' (all normal reactions as you'll learn!). It's really important that you have a self-care plan for keeping yourself safe and well before, during and after each module session.

This might include having comforting objects nearby, a list of people you can call if you're distressed, hobbies or activities you can engage in, or special rituals like having a cup of tea, taking a walk, listening to music or watching a favourite TV programme.

You may already have a self-care plan. If not, feel free to use the worksheet overleaf to make one.

BEFORE YOU START

WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Trauma has different effects on different people. There's no right or wrong way to react or to feel about yourself, others and the world around you.

To understand where you are right now, please rate how strongly you agree with the following statements, where 1 means "I don't agree at all" and 10 means "I strongly agree".

01. I feel like I understand my emotional reactions to things that happen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
02. I have resources and strategies that I can use to help me cope when I feel overwhelmed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
03. I can tell when I'm getting overwhelmed and find ways to calm down	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
04. I can tell when I'm feeling numb or shut down and find ways to feel better	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
05. I believe it's possible to feel comfortable in my own body	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
06. I know how to nurture my resilience as I recover from trauma	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

BEFORE YOU START

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE FROM THE COURSE



1. What is the worst thing about how you're feeling at the moment?

2. What would you like to be different once you've finished the course?

“TRAUMA IS ANYTHING THAT WAS TOO MUCH, TOO SOON, AND TOO FAST FOR US TO PROCESS AND INTEGRATE.”

- KARINE BELL

MODULE 1

TRAUMA AND ITS EFFECTS

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

- How trauma and complex trauma are defined
- The mind/body connection and how the brain and body react to traumatic experiences
- Why you're not to blame for your trauma response
- Simple grounding techniques

MODULE 1

UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

Trauma is what happens to us when we experience something that is unexpected, scary and maybe even life threatening. it overwhelms our ability to process what is happening and can have lasting effects.

Trauma can be a one-off event or happen over time. Complex or developmental trauma happens when someone goes through many traumatic events during childhood.

Reacting to Trauma

Because our minds and bodies are linked, during trauma they react together automatically:

- Our instinctive, 'feeling brain' signals the body to get ready to run or fight.
- Our 'thinking brain' switches off in favour of instinct.
- We become hyperfocused on the threat.
- If we can't run or fight, we freeze and become numb.

In our brain, memories are saved as fragments, with no 'date stamp'.Those brain and body responses, known as the stress response, are necessary for survival. Most of the time, we are able to process stress— even trauma—without long-term effects.

Getting Stuck

Sometimes, though, it's as if our brain becomes stuck in trauma.

Think of the stress response as a smoke alarm. It's good that it alerts us to danger, but less helpful when it goes off every time we make toast!

When we get stuck in trauma, it can cause a range of symptoms:

- Physical: insomnia, fatigue, headaches, stomach aches, tight chest, eating problems, jumpiness or feeling 'wired'.
- Psychological: flashbacks, anxiety, depression, anger, guilt, thoughts about self harm or suicide.
- Behavioural: avoidance, risk taking, not trusting others, numbing (e.g. with alcohol).

We don't know for sure why some traumas get processed easily and others get stuck. What we do know is that when a hyper-sensitive 'smoke alarm' keeps going off it's responding to some reminder of the trauma.

Getting Triggered

These triggers might be obvious: being in the place where it happened, hearing certain sounds or words, smelling a particular scent, or seeing someone who looks like your attacker.

But sometimes they are subtle. They may be things that you don't consciously remember. You might feel like your reaction is arbitrary and irrational.

It's not.

You are having a completely normal reaction to something that your brain has perceived as a threat.

Trauma can make you believe that you're in danger all the time. It's exhausting and it can also lead to some particularly unhelpful coping.

MODULE 1

Over the next few weeks, we'll be taking a closer look at some of the most difficult feelings that can arise from trauma, and stay with you for a long time afterwards

Trauma leaves behind a sense that the world is unsafe and nothing—and perhaps no one—can be trusted. You may believe that you were to blame for what happened to you then, and have little or no control over what might happen to you now.

Feelings of guilt, shame, anger, fear, anxiety, mistrust and depression are all common after experiencing trauma. And these responses are completely normal.

Guilt and Shame

Trauma is outside of your control, and the human brain doesn't like that feeling. So it tries to find a logical explanation.

Unfortunately, sometimes the easiest and safest explanation is to blame yourself. When the world an the people in it no longer feel safe, self-blame is a way of taking back some control. “If it’s my fault, then I can stop it happening again.”

Guilt ("I did something bad") can be internalised as a deep feeling of shame ("I am a bad person") and lead you to believe that you could and should have stopped the what happened to you. You're not alone in thinking that; it's a common response among survivors.

But it's not true.

Anger

Given the intensity of traumatic emotions and the fact that, in cases of sexual violence, very few perpetrators are brought to justice,

Anger is a clear sign that your needs aren't being met or your boundaries aren't being respected. But it can feel extremely unpleasant for a few reasons:

- It involves the stress response and can trigger memories of the trauma.
- It may remind you of the anger of someone who hurt you, or make you worry that you are like them.
- Expressing it can make others angry, and that may feel threatening.

Fear and Mistrust

For many survivors, fear (and its close companion mistrust) is one of the most difficult effects to overcome.

The stress response produces fear, because that's the right reaction to something that might hurt or kill you. If you've got stuck in trauma, though, fear becomes second nature. You might feel afraid even if you know there's nothing to fear, or respond as though the risk is huge, even if it's not.

When fear is always there, you might also fear other people. After all, they can be unpredictable, unpleasant and unsafe. This mistrust might feel protective, and at times will be appropriate. But it might be making you cut yourself off from relationships that are safe, healing and comforting.

With all of these feelings, it's important to remember that **your reaction was automatic and normal**. Your instinctive brain made the best choice it could with the resources it had at the time.

MODULE 1

UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

Grounding techniques can help calm your brain's automatic stress response and keep you connected to the present moment. You may find it difficult at first, but with practice you'll find it asier. These are just some suggestions. Not every technique works for everyone. Feel free to find what works for you!

Breathing

Breathe slowly and in a rhythm that feels good to you. You might try breathing in for 7 and out for 10, or imagine inhaling calmness and exhaling agitation. Heart-focused breathing is about directing your attention to the heart area, imagining breathing in and out through your heart. You can place your hand over your heart as you breathe to help. Heartmath.org has some excellent resources.

Focus on Sensations

Name three things you can see, hear or feel. Look for small details such as patterns, reflected light, sounds you habitually tune out, and textures that you might normally overlook. You might find it helpful to keep a box of things with comforting textures or scents ready for when you need it.

Take a Walk

It might sound cliched but it really works. Research has shown that gentle rhythmic movement like walking has a calming effect on brain waves, helping to reduce stress, improve mood and sleep, and reduce 'brain fog' (that feeling where it's hard to think straight or make a decision.

Be a Tree

Stand somewhere (ideally outside on grass and barefoot!) and imagine your feet are connected to the earth just as a tree's roots are, connected to the stability of the earth. If it feels right for you, imagine your body reaching up like branches to the sky. Some people find that this helps them to feel both grounded and connected to something bigger than themselves, which can feel comforting.

Visualise

Imagine turning down an emotional dial, shrinking difficult feelings or releasing them from your body with a gesture or movement. You might try blowing out bad feelings like a candle, throwing them out into the universe, or flicking them away with your fingers. You could also try guided meditation to visualise a safe space.

MODULE 1

JOURNAL PROMPTS

1. How have you been affected by what happened to you?
What trauma responses do you recognise in yourself?

2. What comes up for you when you think about processing your trauma? What are your hopes and fears? What gets in the way of healing? What messages do you hear from others about how you should be reacting to what happened to you?

3. What beliefs do you hold about what happened to you?
Do you blame yourself? In what way? What do you tell yourself about what you could have done differently? How does it feel to hold on to the blame?

4. What grounding techniques help you most?
How do you know when a grounding technique is working? What feels different in your body? How do your thoughts or feelings change and you go through the exercise?

“COURAGE STARTS WITH SHOWING UP AND LETTING OURSELVES BE SEEN”

- BRENE BROWN

MODULE 2

RESOURCES
FOR SURVIVAL AND HEALING

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

- What survival resources are, why they develop and how they help
- Why it's easy to get stuck in the trauma response, and how you might react as a result
- How to identify and use healing resources
- Understanding your comfort zone

MODULE 2

HOW YOU SURVIVED

In the first module, you learned that during trauma your brain and body react to threat instinctively with the stress response, which prepares the body to fight or run.

If neither is possible, we freeze and shut down instead. This stops us from being overwhelmed with fear in the moment.

When the stress response is repeatedly activated and/or if you were unable to process a trauma immediately afterwards, it can become hypersensitive and get set off even when there's no real danger.

During and after a traumatic experience, your brain will look for strategies to protect you from overwhelm. These survival resources can include freezing, avoidance, distraction, numbing, and hyper-vigilance.

All of them are helpful at the time, but can sometimes become problems afterwards.

Freezing

The freeze part of the stress response is itself a survival resource.

If you've ever watched a wildlife documentary, you may have seen an animal 'play dead'. Most predators avoid eating animals that are already dead, so if the prey is unable to outrun their hunter, the freeze response may be their only chance at survival.

You may find yourself freezing or shutting down in response to identifiable triggers or 'out of the blue' to triggers that you aren't consciously aware of.

Avoidance

If something feels unsafe, it makes sense to avoid it! But for some survivors of trauma, large parts of life feel unsafe and avoidance becomes the norm.

You may find you avoid things deliberately, for example staying indoors, no longer engaging in hobbies or activities, or withdrawing from friends and family.

You may also avoid things unconsciously through dissociation. Survivors who dissociate describe the experience as feeling disconnected from the world, as if they're not really there or their surroundings or they themselves aren't real.

Distraction

Distraction takes many forms, and can be extremely helpful when you feel less able to cope with difficult feelings.

Finding something else to do gives you time to reflect and recharge.

You may have found healthy activities that help you to 'switch off' from your feelings, like reading, listening to music or working, or less healthy ones like spending too much or gambling.

As with avoidance, distraction can become a habit that stops you connecting with your feelings and being able to fully heal.

Numbing

Emotions are one way that humans make sense of the world and learn to connect with other people. But during trauma, emotions are overwhelming and the world and the people in it become threatening.

MODULE 2

As a temporary measure, your brain automatically blocked out difficult and painful feelings to help you survive the original trauma. Later you may have begun to use numbing behaviours or substances to protect you from further emotional or physical pain and so that you could get back to some version of a 'normal' life.

Numbness can become a way of life and stop you from experiencing even pleasant feelings or connecting with others. And sometimes that can lead to attempts to feel something—anything!—through self harm, taking unnecessary risks, picking fights or getting involved in unhealthy relationships.

Hyper-vigilance

An over-active stress response system reacts even to safe situations as if there's a threat. As a result, your brain is sending constant signals to your body to stay alert.

Hyper-vigilance is exhausting but because your brain thinks it's keeping you safe, it's reluctant to 'switch off'.

Flashbacks may also be related to hyper□-vigilance because of the way traumatic memory works. Non-traumatic memories are saved as a whole 'story' and include a sort of 'date stamp' on them, like you might find on a photo in your phone.

Traumatic memories on the other hand are saved as fragments, without a 'date stamp'. When they are recalled, it can feel as if they are not memories at all but are instead happening in the present. That in turn reinforces the need to stay alert.

Survival Resources Aren't Bad!

To survive trauma, you did the best you could with the resources you had at the time. Your brain and body reacted wisely, automatically and instinctively.

The response was completely normal and it made sure you survived!

At some point along the way, your brain decided to stick with those instinctive reactions, even though they're problematic now. Because they worked before, your brain is reluctant to let them go.

But the brain continues to grow and learn throughout life. By doing this course, and looking closely at why you feel the way you do, you'll be teaching your brain that the trauma is in the past and there are better strategies for coping and surviving.

Finding Healing Resources

A healing resource is simply anything, internal or external, that helps you to cope with difficult experience or emotions. It might help you stay grounded, or feel safe, hopeful or connected, even if temporarily.

For some people, it's easier to start thinking about external resources. One way to do that is to think about people, places, objects, characteristics, behaviours, and attitudes that feel important or soothing.

Internal resources might be something that you value (even a little) in yourself: beliefs, experiences, talents. The list overleaf isn't exhaustive, but see if you recognise any of your resources in it.

Remember, what's helpful for one survivor, might have the opposite effect on you. It's important to find what works for you!

MODULE 2

HEALING RESOURCES

External resources

- A supportive friend or loved one
- A social group, e.g. a sports team, reading group or just a group of friends you feel good with
- A religious community or service
- Family gatherings
- A place of relaxation or safety
- Textures, e.g. a cat's soft fur, a smooth pebble or similar.
- Patterns, especially soothing ones like those in a mandala.
- Exercise, like walking, running, swimming, etc.
- Singing, playing or listening to music
- Reading or writing
- Journalling or other self-expression
- Experiences, like travel, hearing live music, learning something new
- Soothing sounds, scents, or tastes
- Meditation or mindfulness

Internal resources

- The fact that you have survived trauma!
- Love for a partner, child, parent or family member, pet, etc.
- Artistic or creative talent
- Physical talent like dancing or sports
- A feeling of spirituality or connection to a higher power
- Characteristics like determination, compassion, empathy, etc.
- The ability to think through a problem
- The ability to identify your emotions
- A memory or image of a safe place
- A good memory of a past event
- with positive associations
- Interest in a subject or hobby
- Curiosity about how things work
- Being willing to ask for help
- Sensitivity to others' upsets
- Appreciation of beauty
- The ability to teach others a skill

Creating a self-care box

Some survivors find it helpful to create a self-care box, filled with things that remind them of their internal and external resources. You can use an old shoe box or Amazon box (or buy a wooden or cardboard storage box from a craft store) and decorate it yourself, or use an empty coffee tins, old handbag or a carrier bag.

What matters is that your self-care collection contains things that connect you with a sense of safety and comfort. That could include photographs, inspirational quotes, a book of poetry, a scrap of soft fabric, essential oils, scented candles, old letters from your nan...whatever works for you!

MODULE 2

FINDING YOUR COMFORT ZONE

You've Got a Nerve

In fact, you have a whole nervous system whose job it is to help you function in the world, reacting to cues of safety or threat. When you're safe and supported, you spend most of the time in the comfort zone (often called the Window of Tolerance*). Here you feel connected and safe. You're able to think and feel, make decisions and react to the world around you in helpful, positive ways.

At times of stress, though, two other settings take over:

- **Sympathetic**: triggers your fight or flight instinct and feels like emotional overwhelm
- **Parasympathetic**: causes you to freeze and feels like being numb or shut down

Part of the work of trauma healing is learning how to increase the amount of time you spend in the comfort zone, and to change the way you respond to triggers that push you out of it.

Healing resources like those you identified earlier can help you return to your comfort zone when you've started feeling overwhelmed or shut down.

It's important to find ways of staying in the comfort zone that feel good and are safe. Some strategies might work, but are harmful or trigger feelings of shame.

* *This is a term coined by neuroscientist Dr Dan Siegel.*

Building Your Comfort Toolkit

A toolkit of healthy strategies can help you get better and better at staying in the comfort zone in a safe, healthy way. It can also help you widen your comfort zone so that things that are triggering now become less so.

In the next two modules, we'll look at the experience of overwhelm and shutdown more closely. Using the idea of the comfort zone, we'll explore ways that you can start to retrain your brain to 'put on the brakes' when heading towards overwhelm or 'rev the engine' when heading toward shutdown.

You can use the time in between modules to build on your list of healing resources. As you go through your week, try to recognise times when you're becoming overwhelmed or shutting down. If you can, note what was happening at the time and whether you were able to do anything to make you feel better.



MODULE 2

JOURNAL PROMPTS

1. What survival resources helped you to survive your trauma?
Or which ones felt familiar to you?

2. What healing resources can you identify in yourself?
If you find it difficult, you could think about resources that you admire in others.

3. What is your comfort zone like?
Is it narrow or wide? What tips you out of it? How do you get back into it?

4. What is overwhelm and shutdown like for you?
How do you know when you're in or headed toward either state?

MODULE 3

OVERWHELM
ANXIETY, ANGER AND FEAR

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

- Why trauma survivors can become overwhelmed
- How anxiety, anger and fear are related to the fight or flight response
- Why flashbacks can happen during overwhelm
- Strategies for containing difficult emotions

MODULE 3

OVERWHELM

Trauma shrinks your world. When it happens, your focus on the danger and nothing else. In that moment, everything is trauma and trauma is everything.

Some survivors of trauma find that this focus on danger stays with them. And it can be a bit like the saying: "When all you've got is a hammer, everything looks like a nail". Your nervous system is pushed into overwhelm, and reacts with intense fear, anxiety and anger, just as it would if you were in danger. As far as your nervous system in concerned, you are in danger!

Fear

Fear is an important emotion for survival. It's at the heart of the fight, flight or freeze response, alerting us to the presence of a threat. Without fear, we would never have survived our first steps outside of the cave. The first sabre-toothed tiger that came along would have eaten us!

It is of course completely normal to feel afraid during a trauma and for that fear to stick around for some time afterwards. But some survivors find that they continue to feel afraid long after the event has passed. That is particularly true of people who experienced repeated trauma as a child.

Fear is connected to flashbacks, the experience where a memory is experienced as if it's happening again right now. That's because of how your brain processes emotions and memories during trauma.

In your brain, fear is associated with the amygdala, which reacts to any experiences of danger by 'tagging' the memory with FEAR so that you will easily identify a similar danger next time.

Another brain structure, the hippocampus, is responsible to making sure those memories are tidied away so that you can recognise them as being in the past, and only pull them out when you need them.

During a trauma, though, your amygdala is over-active while your hippocampus is under-active. That means that the FEAR tag takes on much more importance, while at the same time it's not being tidied away so that it can start to feel like it's in the past. As a result, the memories always seem fresh.

Because fear is at the heart of the fight or flight response, any time this response is activated, it may trigger a flashback. Over time, you can develop intense fears or even phobias of people, places or object that may trigger the stress response and therefore a flashback.

Anxiety

Anxiety is closely related to fear. This sense of being constantly on edge, jumpy or 'wired' is what happens when fear becomes habitual and unconnected with a specific threat. Anxiety can feel like waiting for something awful to happen, and is related to hyper-vigilance (an exaggerated fear of danger).

You might find yourself scanning your surroundings and making sure you have an escape route. You might startle easily, too.

MODULE 3

Anxiety and hyper-vigilance can lead to avoidance of people, places and activities because they feel threatening even if they're not. Avoidance is one of those Comfort Zone strategies that may seem to work, but does so at your expense. Over time, it can increase anxiety and stop you living a fulfilling life.

Anxiety can also trick you into believing that you're powerless, by triggering the feelings of helplessness you experienced when you were traumatised. You may end up believing that you aren't capable of dealing with things and feeling trapped and unable to move on.

At its worst, anxiety can cause panic attacks, intrusive and obsessive thoughts, compulsive behaviours, and phobias, for example agoraphobia, which is the fear of leaving your home.

Anger

Anger is a valid emotion and one that is necessary for our survival. It helps us to cope with threats (equipping us to fight) and is a natural response to not having our needs met, to our boundaries not being respected and to having our trust betrayed.

Anger is also a natural reaction to trauma and having your beliefs about the world, and the people in it, shattered.

The trauma of sexual violence can lead to feelings of profound anger towards the person or people who hurt you and even towards those who didn't protect you. Some survivors feel anger towards the justice system or medical professionals.

They may have felt interrogated or that they weren't believed. Anger can be directed at society, politicians and law-makers, and at the world in general. And some survivors feel angry with themselves as well.

Anger can be problematic when it feels uncontrollable, leads to aggression or damages relationships with others.

In some societies and families, we're conditioned as children to suppress our anger. That temptation might be even stronger when anger arises from sexual violence, because expressing your anger might mean sharing something that feels shameful or embarrassing.

This is another example of an unhelpful comfort zone strategy. Without a safe way of expressing anger, it turns inward, causing emotional problems like self-loathing and guilt, and physical problems like high blood pressure or heart attacks.

Sympathetic Overwhelm

All of these feelings have one big thing in common: they are all reactions of the sympathetic nervous system, which is the source of the fight or flight response.

That causes physical reactions, such as a racing heart, rapid breathing, dry mouth, and a sense of being hijacked or overwhelmed by intense emotions.



Sympathetic
Emotional overwhelm

Fear
Anxiety
Anger
Intense emotions
Panicky
Racing heart
Breathless
Racing thoughts
Impulsivity
Nervousness
Want to escape
Need to move
Taking risks
Manic

Throughout this process you might experience a whole range of physical sensations:

- Breathing fast and unevenly. It might feel hard to breathe.
- A rapid and/or irregular heartbeat, which you might feel in your throat or abdomen.
- Weakness in your legs.
- Tightness in your chest.
- A churning stomach or loose bowels.
- Urge to urinate or wetting yourself.
- Dizziness or vertigo.
- Cold sweats or feeling hot all
- over.
- Dry mouth.
- Tight throat and inability to speak.
- Trembling or shaking.
- Tunnel vision. Some people describe it as having blackness on the edge of their vision. If you're angry, it might feel like 'seeing red'.
- Urge to run and hide.
- Hearing a high-pitched whine in your ears or experiencing sounds as unnaturally loud.
- Hearing voices (often as though they are in your head or being spoken just next to or behind you).
- Feeling as though you can't blink or close your eyes properly.
- Racing thoughts or having repetitive (sometimes unpleasant) thoughts.
- Feeling snappy, angry or impatient.
- Urge to hurt yourself or someone else (even if you don't act on it).
- Seeking out numbing activities or substances.
- Urge to take or actually taking unnecessary risks.

Many of these sensations and experiences will start out small and grow. And it may feel as though you have no power over that. But you actually can affect what is happening.

Putting on the Brakes

In a time of danger, we respond instinctively, but it is important to remember that we learn to recognise danger.

Human babies are born with only two innate fears: falling and loud noises. Everything else is learned. We pick it up from others, especially our parents. And we may be predisposed to certain fears (e.g. of animals or insects) because of evolution.

But we learn most of our fears through association. We experience something that triggers the fight or flight response, and our brain files it away as something to fear. Not only that, but it applies that experience to situations that might be similar!

By finding ways to put on the brakes when you're in or heading towards fight or flight, you are teaching your brain to differentiate between real danger and everything else.

This can be a long process, and it's not always easy, but over time, not only will you become more able to return to your comfort zone more easily, your nervous system will learn not to react to triggers that don't actually represent real danger.

And crucially, learning to get back to your comfort zone will allow you to explore the feelings that lie under the triggers and need healing.

> “True healing occurs when I give myself permission to feel whatever feelings live below the triggers.”
>
> Gabby Bernstein

MODULE 3

CALMING DOWN THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Calming the sympathetic nervous system is like putting on the brakes on a bike or in a car. It helps to slow down your mind, disengage the fight or flight reaction and get back into your comfort zone.

Discovering what works best for you might take some experimentation. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Remember, not every idea works for every survivor, and some might even make you feel worse! Find what's right for you.

- Diaphragmatic breathing (deep and slow tummy breathing)
- Drinking from a straw
- Throwing a tennis ball at a blank wall or outside wall
- Jumping on a trampoline or mini trampoline
- Weighted blanket
- Warm bath or shower
- Shaking or stomping out excess energy
- Heavy work (lifting, pulling, push-ups, etc.)
- Music (soothing and calming music and sounds)
- Comforting food (hot chocolate or something soft and chewy)
- Grounding techniques like those in Module 1
- Guided meditation (or just regular meditation!)
- Yoga or stretching
- Gratitude practice
- Chanting or humming

Adapted from https://www.calmwithyoga.com/3-ways-to-calm-an-overactive-sympathetic-nervous-system-stress-response/ and https://www.attachment-and-trauma-treatment-centre-for-healing.com/blogs/understanding-and-working-with-the-window-of-tolerance

MODULE 3

JOURNAL PROMPTS

1. Think about a time when you felt afraid recently.
What did it feel like in your body? What were you thinking at the time?

2. Think about a time when you felt angry recently.
What did it feel like in your body? What were you thinking at the time?

3. What triggers are you aware of?
What is guaranteed to send you into fight or flight? What might do it?

4. Write about something you do that improves your mood or stress level.
How do you feel in your body when you are doing it? What do you think about?

MODULE 4

SHUTDOWN
TERROR, DISSOCIATION AND SHAME

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

- Why trauma survivors can shut down
- How shame, fear and dissociation are ways of shutting down
- How to start to heal it

MODULE 4

SHUTTING DOWN

Writer Sloane Crosley once wrote that focusing only on fight or flight "doesn't give enough credit to the more common reaction of curling up into a little ball".* Prolonged and/or intense and overwhelming stress, can lead to shutdown, sometimes called the freeze response.

This response, like fight and flight, is a natural human reaction to danger. Just as an animal may 'play dead' to escape a predator, we instinctively protect ourselves by shutting down conscious awareness and the ability to experience overwhelming sensations or feelings.

In this module, we'll look at the most common ways trauma survivors shut down and how it can lead to feelings of self-blame. Then we'll explore how you can bring yourself back from shutdown gently and safely.

Fear

In a situation where there is an immediate threat to your safety, and even your life, you feel afraid. Fear starts the whole biological process of fighting the danger or running away from it.

But in many traumatic experiences, the threat (and the fear) cannot be outrun or fought off and the acute fear becomes unsustainable. The brain just can't keep being afraid indefinitely. When fear is prolonged and inescapable, it eventually leads to shutdown.

*Crosley S. (2010) How Did You Get This Number. New York: Portobello Books.

People who have experienced freezing trauma describe feeling unable to move or use their voice. Some felt they left their body, almost as if what was happening was affecting someone else, not them.

As we've learned, after a trauma the brain can become stuck in the stress response, feeling constantly on edge and afraid. Those feelings can build up until the brain, overwhelmed and unable to escape the fear, pushes you into shutdown.

Shutdown is a bit like forced rest. Waiting for the next threat to show up is exhausting and too much for the body to handle for too long. Shutdown is the brain's way of forcing you to relax. The trouble is, this sort of relaxation isn't pleasant and it can be hard to get back into a state where you can interact and connect with others and with life in general.

Dissociation

"How funny, to have a body when I am not a body? How funny, to be inside when I am outside." — Helena Fox*

“I could no longer discern what was real... Everything, including the present, seemed to be both too much and nothing at all.” — Clementine Wamariya^

Those words give a sense of the feelings of strangeness and disconnection that come with the experience of dissociation. As with all the other responses we've discussed, dissociation is an unconscious, instinctive response to trauma. During the event, when running or fighting is impossible, it allows a sort of 'escape'. Survivors describe 'floating away' or watching what happened from a distance.

Some survivors continue to experience dissociation even after the trauma is over. You might find that you 'zone out' for a time and 'come to' feeling disorientated or unsure of what you've been doing.

You may even feel like you're not quite real or that you're watching a movie or a play. This is called depersonalisation and it may also make you feel detached from your thoughts and feelings.

Dissociation can affect how you remember things that have happened to you, whether traumatic or not. You might not be able to remember some events at all, or you can remember an event but not how you felt about it (derealisation). Some survivors feel as if memories what happened are not your own but belong to someone else.

Shame

Everyone experiences shame and its close relative guilt. If we hurt someone or do something that is harmful to those around us, guilt an shame let us know that we need to make things right.

But some traumatic experiences, especially sexual violence, can make shame toxic. That can happen if, for example, you were raised to believe that sex is bad or that men can't resist temptation. If you experienced childhood abuse, you may have developed a belief that it was your fault simply because it was safer to believe that than to accept that someone you loved and trusted was choosing to inflict hurt and pain.

For those who identify as LGBTQ, society's lack of understanding and deep prejudices can add yet another layer of shame to their feelings about sex and sexuality, which are compounded by sexual violence.

Unresolved, toxic shame may affect relationships, life decisions and your sense of well-being. It may cause you to feel that you are completely and irreversibly bad, that you deserved or allowed what happened to you, or brought it on yourself.

But none of that is true.

Parasympathetic Shutdown

What these responses have in common is that they are examples of shutdown. It can be experienced in a number of ways during and after a traumatic event. You might feel exhausted and sleepy, limp or unable to move, emotionally and physically numb, or like you're outside of your own body. Some survivors may feel like they or the world around them isn't real.



Parasympathetic Shutdown

Exhausted
Sleepy
Limp
Numb
Disconnected
Unreal
Cold
Unable to think
Frozen
Stiff
Unable to move
Heavy
Stuck

*Fox H. (2019) How It Feels to Float. New York: The Dial Press.

^Wamariya C. (2018) The Girl Who Smiled Beads: A Story of War and What Comes After. Toronto: Doubleday Canada.

MODULE 4

ENERGISING THE PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

If calming the sympathetic nervous system is like putting on the brakes on a bike or in a car, then energising the parasympathetic nervous system is like pedalling hard or revving the engine.

Although shutdown may feel better than overwhelm, it can lead to a sense of loneliness and disconnection that stops you from being able to live a full life. Activities that gently stimulate the sense will help you move out of shutdown and back into the comfort zone where you can more readily connect with others and develop a sense of safety.

Here are some ideas to get you started. Find what's right for you.

- Smelling essential oils
- Eating spicy, chewy or crunchy food
- Tactile activities like working with clay or kneading bread
- Jumping on a mini trampoline or skipping rope
- Bouncing on an exercise ball
- Dancing and singing
- Exercise like jumping jacks or jogging
- Clapping, snapping or stomping your feet
- Energising breathing exercises (find them online)
- Spend time with others

Adapted from https://www.attachment-and-trauma-treatment-centre-for-healing.com/blogs/understanding-and-working-with-the-window-of-tolerance

MODULE 4

CHALLENGING SELF-BLAME

The freeze response and parasympathetic shutdown are both natural responses to the feeling of being in danger, whether the threat is a real and ongoing trauma or something your brain has mistakenly identified as dangerous. To survive, you freeze, become small, disappear into your own mind. But it can leave you with a misplaced sense of self-blame. Here we challenge some common thoughts survivors may have.

I was drunk/high/made myself vulnerable

Being vulnerable isn't an invitation for sexual activity. You didn't ask to be attacked and no one should have to plan their life to avoid being assaulted.

I wasn't injured, so it wasn't assault

Not every sexual assault results in physical injuries. Some attackers use emotional coercion and control, and the freeze response that shuts you down may also protect you from injury.

I didn't run/fight back/scream

During trauma, the logical brain 'switches off' and our instinctive brain takes over and decides if it's safest to run, fight or freeze. It's not something you consciously chose to do and it definitely doesn't mean that you consented to what was happening to you.

I stayed with them afterwards

In the immediate aftermath of an assault, your brain is trying to make sense of what happened and you may feel unable to move. If you are in a relationship with your attacker, it may not be easy to leave or you may have conflicting feelings about it.

I was flirting/I said yes at first

It doesn't matter. You're allowed to flirt and not want sex. If you say yes then change your mind, you're allowed to withdraw consent.

I can't remember things properly

In a trauma like a sexual assault, the brain saves fragments, without any context about time or place. As a result, your memory may feel splintered and unreal.

MODULE 4

JOURNAL PROMPTS

1. Think about a time when you felt shame recently.
What did it feel like in your body? What were you thinking at the time?

2. Think about a time when you dissociated or felt numb recently.
What did it feel like in your body? What were you thinking at the time?

3. What triggers are you aware of?
What is guaranteed to send you into shutdown? What might do it?

4. Write about something you do that energises you when you feel numb.
How do you feel in your body when you are doing it? What do you think about?

MODULE 5

SELF-HARM
AND SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

- Why self-harm and suicidal thoughts are trauma responses
- How self-harm can feel good and suicide can seem the only way out
- How to help yourself when you have the urge to harm yourself or end your life
- Helpful resources

MODULE 5

SELF-HARM AND SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

NOTE: Reading about self-harm and suicide may be triggering for you. Please make sure you have support available and only read this section if you feel up to it.

By now you have some understanding of exactly how trauma might have affected you then and since. In particular you know:

- The stress response (aka the trauma response or fight, flight or freeze response) happens automatically and instinctively. Your brain decides for you whether the best response is to fight, run away or play dead.
- Trauma messes with your memories. It files them away without context and can leave you with only fragmented images or impressions. Some people who survive trauma find themselves 'stuck' in the
- stress response. Their brains' threat detectors become hyper-sensitive and go off even when there's no real threat.
- As a result, they find themselves easily tipped out of their comfort zone and into fight or flight (overwhelm) or freeze (shutdown).
- Fear, anxiety, anger, flashbacks, fear, dissociation, shame and self-blame can become constant unwelcome companions and lead to prolonged depression and disconnection.

When these feelings are unresolved, they have a profound affect on a survivor's ability to enjoy life.

Overwhelm is exhausting, and numbness, while offering some respite, can be upsetting and lonely. And both states can lead to frightening thoughts and urges.

Self-harm

When you have a persistent sense of heartbreak and gutwrench, the physical sensations become intolerable and [you] will do anything to make [them]disappear.

—Bessel van der Kolk

If you can bleed — see it, feel it — then you know you're alive. It's irrefutable, undeniable proof.

—Amy Efaw

Self-harm is when you hurt yourself on purpose. Cutting is common but it's not the only form of self-harm.

What people who self harm tend to have in common is that they so so either to stop painful feelings ('gutwrench', as Bessel van der Kolk calls it) or to feel something that can break through overpowering numbness (as Amy Efaw suggests).

When you're injured, the body produces endorphins, which help to stop the physical pain but also has a calming effect on the stress response. During overwhelm, self-harm causes pain and the endorphin 'hit' then makes both the physical and the emotional pain feel better.

Conversely, if you're in shutdown, the pain of self-harm cuts (sometimes literally) through the fog of numbness, and the endorphins give a sense of well being.

Unfortunately, these effects are only temporary.

MODULE 5

Suicidal Thoughts

For some trauma survivors, the pain and loneliness of overwhelm and shutdown can become overpowering and lead them to think about ending their lives or to actually make an attempt.

Feeling suicidal does not make you crazy or abnormal. Distress is a natural human reaction to pain and trauma. Even if the trauma was a long time ago, the feelings it caused can remain powerful.

But intense emotional pain distorts your ability to think clearly about things, and can make it seem like the way you're feeling is permanent.

Most people who feel suicidal are hurting and can't see another way out. If you've felt this way, you may not want to die so much as you just want the pain to stop.

It might be helpful to remember that emotions are always temporary. As Pocahontas sang in the Disney movie:

"You can't step in the same river twice. The water's always changing, always flowing."*

The same is true of emotions. How you feel today may be completely different from how you'll feel the next day.

Suicide and Shame

If you've thought about or tried ending your life, you might feel guilty or ashamed. Family or friends might have made it worse by telling you you're selfish or just looking for attention.

The truth is when you're in emotional pain it's difficult to focus on anything else. It's not your fault and it's nothing to be ashamed of.

Coping with a Crisis

Mental health charity Rethink Mental Illness gives this advice for people thinking about self-harm or ending their lives:

- Don't make a decision right now. You will still have the option open to you later, but by them you might feel differently.

- Follow your crisis plan if you have one. If you don't have one, you might want to make one, and add it to your self-care box. Your plan might include, e.g., getting to a safe place, talking to someone you trust, or just being around other people.

- And speaking of self-care boxes, make use of yours to help bring your feelings back into the comfort zone. (Rethink calls it a Crisis Box.)
- Distract yourself. Thoughts about self-harm and suicide can get stronger the more you focus on them. Distractions create a space for you to focus on something you enjoy. Your self-care box can contain a list of distractions so you always have them to hand.

- Take a walk in nature. Studies show that walking in nature reduces stress hormones and increases meditative brain waves that help calm you down.^

- Use an app. Calm Harm helps people resist or manage the urge to self-harm, while Stay Alive offers information and tools to help you stay safe if you are thinking about ending your life. You can search for other apps, too.

- Avoid drugs and alcohol. It can be tempting to numb the feelings, but these substances can make you more likely to act on your thoughts.

MODULE 5

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

If you've thought about or tried ending your life, you might feel guilty or ashamed. Family or friends might have made it worse by telling you you're selfish or just looking for attention.

The truth is when you're in emotional pain it's difficult to focus on anything else. It's not your fault and it's nothing to be ashamed of.

Coping Skills

Learning about things like grounding, mindfulness, the comfort zone, etc., can help you to cope with the feelings that might otherwise lead to the desire to hurt yourself or end your life. Just by taking this course, you are equipping yourself with skills to stay safe!

Reasons to Live

Everyone's reasons to live will be different, and it can help to have reminders of them around you. Your partner or children, a job you enjoy, family and friends, something to look forward to, or just finding beauty in the world can all be reasons to live.

Connection with others

Human beings survive and thrive in connection with others. Even if you are an introvert! Loneliness can amplify the feelings that may lead to self-harm or suicidal thoughts, so having people around you that you can talk to (even if it's not about your mental health or feelings) is really helpful.

Feeling part of a community

Connecting with others individually is only part of it. Humans like to feel as though we are part of a group. Even when the belonging is based on something like trauma,
knowing that you are not alone in our pain can offer a
sense of safety and acceptance.

Creativity or activity

The act of creating something or doing a task that results in a clear outcome can have a profound effect on your wellbeing. You don't even have to be good at what you do! Starting an activity or creative work is an act of faith that you will see the outcome.

Sense of purpose

For some a sense of purpose might be found in spiritual beliefs, for others practical identities such as wife, mother, daughter, friend provide purpose. Everyone's sense of purpose is different, and you might even struggle to find yours. But doing so can help connect you with life in a in a way that takes on bigger meaning and importance.

MODULE 5

JOURNAL PROMPTS

1. What gives your life meaning right now?
Think about important people or events, hopes for the future, community, etc.

2. What has stopped you self-harming or ending your life in the past?
What can you do to make sure those things are readily available to you?

3. Who can you call if you're feeling like self-harming or ending your life?
What is it about them that helps?

4. What can you do that is active or creative to help distract yourself?
How can you make sure that you are able to do them if you're feeling unsafe?

RESOURCES

1

RAPE CRISIS ENGLAND WALES HELPLINE

You can find information about a range of issues on RCEW 's website https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help/tools-for-victims-and-survivors/

2

SHOUT

Shout is a free, confidential, anonymous text support service. You can text them from wherever you are in the UK on 85258.

3

SELF-INJURY SUPPORT

Support for girls and women affected by self-harm. Email tessmail@selfinjurysupport.org.uk any time. Or you can call 0808 800 8088, text 07537 432444, or use webchat (www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk) Tues through Thurs 7 – 9.30pm.

4

SAMARITANS

You can get in touch about anything that's troubling you, no matter how large or small the issue feels. Call on 116 123 or email jo@samartians.org.

5

HARMLESS SELF-HARM RESOURCES

Find a range of information about self harm and suicide prevention on http://www.harmless.org.uk/

6

SURVIVOR SPACE SIGNPOSTING

Find more resources and services on our signposting document, available on our website.

MODULE 6

NURTURING RESILIENCE

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

- How to plan a Wellness Action Plan
- Support available to you

MODULE 6

NURTURING RESLIENCE

If you're active on social media, you will almost certainly have come across a memes that say:

She knew she could, so she did. Or *Change your outlook, change your life*.

So far so positive, right? Only, when you regularly experience any of the post- trauma effects you've been learning about, these memes can make you feel awful.

Memes like these are examples of Toxic Positivity. They send the message that if you're hurting, it must be because you're being negative.

Positive messages can be helpful, especially those that normalise what you're going through and help you to realise that it's not your fault. But trauma hurts, and if you're in pain you shouldn't be required to hide it.

Nurturing resilience isn't about ignoring difficult feelings, it's about learning that difficult feelings don't define you, that you can cope with them while increasing your ability to feel positive emotions.

Neuroplasticity

The brain can form new neural pathways well into adulthood and old age. This means that you are hard wired to be able to change the way you react to triggers and difficult emotions and to strengthen your ability to feel positive emotions.

It's not always easy, but this module will look at how you can continue your journey toward resilience after trauma.

Knowing Your Needs

In 1943, Abraham Maslow proposed that all human behaviour was about meeting needs, and that some needs had to be met before others could be met.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs said that basic needs (food, water, shelter, safety) had to be met before psychological and self-fulfilment needs like love, learning, personal growth, achieving goals, etc.

Swedish artist Matilda Heindow (she's @CrazyComics on Instagram) took that a step further and created a hierarchy of mental health needs as she found ways to deal with PTSD.

Unlike Maslow's pyramid, these needs can be met 'out of order', though it might be helpful to think of them in categories:

- Basic needs: support, treatment, sleep and coping strategies.
- Core needs to help build a strong core of resilience: healthy relationships, self-compassion, self-transcendence.
- Healing needs to strengthen resilience and create joy.



MODULE 6

Basic Needs

It's likely that you're already getting some of your basic mental health needs met. Many people are referred to or told about Survivor Space by their GP or a mental health practitioner or counsellor.

Having support and, where appropriate, treatment from healthcare professionals provides a stable, base from which to begin recovering from trauma.

Support from friends, family and partners is important, too. Not everyone understands mental health issues and trauma, so you may want to find groups (like Survivor Space's Drop-in Group or a similar support network) of people who understand or have experienced something similar. Just knowing you're not alone can be healing.

Many people who have experienced trauma have trouble sleeping. You might find that nightmares wake you up or make you afraid to go to sleep.

A technique that can help is the Dream Completion Technique. You can watch a video about it here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lv38dzpcxfA.

And this video by Therapy in a Nutshell has helpful advice for sleeping well: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fk-_SwHhLLc&t=2s

This course has taught you some basic coping techniques. You can find lots of advice online, especially on YouTube, like this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=td4LQ2rxVa0

You could also look for courses on Udemy or similar learning platforms.

Core Needs for Building Resilience

When you think about relationships, you might automatically think about a romantic one. But healthy relationships can take lots of forms.

For some trauma survivors, especially those who experienced ongoing abuse at the hands of someone they loved and trusted, even basic interactions with other people can lead to overwhelm or shutdown.

If you have someone in your life whom you trust, spending time with them can help you reassure your brain that not all relationships are dangerous and that it is possible to learn to trust.

They can also provide a space in which you can experience what it's like to be seen, heard and valued, which can actually trigger physical changes in the nervous system that will help you return to your comfort zone more quickly and easily.

You can also begin to consolidate your resilience by practicing self- compassion and self-care.

The pain and confusion that can arise from trauma, especially sexual violence,
often gets turned inward and expressed as self-hatred and self- blame. And these ideas can solidify into such deep-seated beliefs that they feel as though they are a fact, nota mistaken belief.

Healing from trauma requires a willingness to challenge those negative core beliefs.

This video explains how we develop core belief sand how we can challenge them: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIWmG45mYsk

MODULE 6

Self-care is a big part of self-compassion. You may think of things like having a hot drink or taking a bubble bath, and certainly theseare examples of self-care.

But self-care can also be taking steps to broaden your comfort zone by, doing something uncomfortable, e.g.:

- Challenging negative beliefs
- Allowing yourself to trust someone Going out even if it scares you
- Mindfully feeling a difficult emotion.

It may help you to remember this: **You don't have to do it all at once!** Baby steps, little and often, are the key to healing.

Trying to do it all right now is a recipe for overwhelm or shutdown. But doing one small thing now and then repeating it or adding another small think slowly and gently teaches your nervous system that it's OK to be OK. You have the ability, tools and support to handle difficulties.

Healing Needs for Nurturing Resilience

Humour, empathy, rest and hope. These things might seem like fairy tales to you. Trauma and triggers cause our instinctive stress reaction to kick in.

In that state, there's no room for laughter or connecting and understanding others, and it's downright dangerous to rest. And hope? Well, hope can feel a very long way away.

But as you become more aware of your comfort zone and when you're in it, and as you learn to push the edges and make it wider, you will start to discover that you have moments, however brief, where you can laugh and feel empathy, when you are safe enough to rest and even to hope.

One way of becoming aware is to make a practice of noticing when these fleeting moments happen. For example:

- Keep a **gratitude journal**. Gratitude is frequently flung around as part of toxic positivity, but there is evidence* that it helps to improve mental health and create new neural pathways. Use your journal to write down three things you're grateful for each day. It can take time to notice the changes, so stick with it.

- **Feel humour mindfully**. Watch or read something funny, and really notice what it feels like physically when you're amused. It may not feel very strong; notice it anyway. Then throughout the week try to identify moments when those same feelings arise.

- **Practice empathy**. Trauma can sometimes trap you in your own world. it feels like all you can do is just manage your own pain, but that can keep you stuck in a place that might feel pretty hopeless. Practicing empathy for others can help you to get out of your head and show you other experiences (which might offer you another key to your own healing). This blog offers ideas: https://marthabeck.com/2013/03/the-empathy-workout/ (Trigger warning: domestic violence and one sexual term.)

- **Don't banish hope**. When you're waiting for the next threat to arrive, it's easy to find yourself pushing hope away any time it dares to make an appearance. Why welcome it if you'll only end up hurt again? But feelings are just feelings. Hoping won't stop you hurting but it may keep you going.

MODULE 6

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Hopefully, you feel you now have a better understanding of how the trauma you experienced affected you then and afterward. Most importantly, you now know that your brain's response wasn't abnormal, crazy or weak. And it most definitely did not mean that you deserved or were to blame for what happened to you.

Recovering from trauma, especially trauma that has become stuck, isn't easy but it is possible. The more you begin to notice your comfort zone and what triggers you out of it, and the more you understand how your unique brain responds to those triggers the more you will learn what works best for you to cope with difficult feelings and to build resilience. Here are three truths to leave you with:

Setbacks do not Equal Failure

As you do the work, you will have amazing breakthroughs. And from time to time you'll also have setbacks. That's normal, too! It's easy to give up when you've had a setback, especially if your past experiences have taught you that it's safer not to try to to hope. But setbacks do no equal failure.

Feelings do not Equal Facts

Emotions are temporary. All of them. Their job is to prompt us to take action in a way that will help us survive and stay in a safe equilibrium. When you get used to being overwhelmed or numb, it's easy to believe that it's just the way things have always been and will always be. That's not true. Feelings are just feelings. They do not define who you are.

You Aren't Required to Own the Shame you Feel

People who have experienced sexual violence often feel ashamed. Sometimes it's connected to specific thoughts like "I should have stopped it" or "I should have run or fought back" (and other myths covered in Module 4) and sometimes it's generalised and pervasive. Witherway, it feelslike it belongs to you. it doesn't. As actor Angelina Jolie said: "We must send a message across the world that there is no disgrace in being a survivor of sexual violence– the shame is on the aggressor".

Survivor Space is honoured to walk alongside you on your journey towards healing from trauma.

> “Be patient where you sit in the dark. the dawn is coming”
>
> -Rumi

MODULE 6

JOURNAL PROMPTS

1. Think of a three things you were grateful for today.
What did they make you grateful?

2. Where did you find humour today?
Was it dark humour? Silly, joyous, slapstick?

3. Think about someone in your life and imagine what it's like to be them.
What might make them act the way they do?

4. Someone once said Hope is the thing with feathers. How would you describe it?

AWARENESS EXERCISES



- Begin by sitting comfortably and breathing regularly.
- Think about a time when you felt relatively safe and connected to others (your comfort zone). If this is difficult, you could use safe space imagery.
- When you're ready, focus your attention on what you could see, hear, touch, taste or smell at that safe time or space.
- Next, take your awareness to what is happening in your mind when you think about the safe time or place. What emotions, thoughts, memories, hopes, beliefs, images, etc., come up for you?
- When you're ready, take a few moments to scan your entire body for sensations associated with what's going on in your mind. Do you feel warm or cool? Is your breathing fast or slow? Where do you sense the emotions or beliefs or hopes live in your body?
- Now shift your attention to how you are connected to others while you are thinking about a safe time of space. What does it feel like?
- And then gently focus on your sense of self in this safe time or space. Without judgement, consider how 'real' and 'present' you feel. Give it a number between 1 (not real/present) and 10 (fully real/present).
- Finally, while keeping awareness on your comfort zone and on your safe time or space, consider how being in fight or flight mode or shutdown might compare to being in it. What might change in each of the categories above?

AWARENESS EXERCISES

Use this exercise to identify and challenge negative automatic thoughts or core beliefs

1. What was the negative thought or belief that came up
Note the images or feelings that accompanied it.

2. What can you tell yourself instead?
Is there another explanation? What would you say to a friend feeling this way?

3. What can you do to bring yourself back to the comfort zone?
What has worked in the past? What resources would help?

4. Who can help you get back to your comfort zone and challenge the thought?
This might be a friend, partner, helpline, therapist, etc.

APPENDIX: EXERCISES

THEN AND NOW

This exercise can help you differentiate between what was happening at the time of the trauma and what is different now. You can do it as soon as the flashback has passed, to help you to calm down, or you can wait until you are back in your comfort zone.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT NOW?	WHAT HAPPENED THEN?
Time	Time
Environment	Environment
Who was there	Who was there
What could you see	What could you see
What could you hear?	What could you hear?
What could you smell?	What could you smell?
What could you feel?	What could you feel?
Was it warm or cold?	Was it warm or cold?
How were you feeling?	How were you feeling?

USING AFFIRMATIONS

Trauma and its after-effects can make it difficult to do anything besides wait for the next bad thing to happen. If you have experienced an anxiety attack, flashback or nightmares, dissociation or any of the other overwhelm and shutdown symptoms, , you can end up so fearful of it happening again that you end up in a state of perpetual anxiety.
And it can be a hard cycle to break.

One way you can conquer anxiety is by using positive affirmations. These statements are a simple way to change your thought processes so you aren't always waiting for anxiety to take charge of your life.

Many people create their own affirmations while others use affirmations from websites or books. It doesn't matter where you find the affirmations, just as long as you begin using them effectively throughout your day.

Choose affirmations that speak to you and help you overcome your fear of anxiety. They should focus on the present and be about you, not anyone else.

Some examples are:

- I can overcome my fears because I am in control.
- I no longer need to be frightened. I allow myself to receive the light of who I am.
- I am safe and strong. I can protect myself.
- I've felt hopeless before but I survived then and am surviving now.
- Feelings are just feelings, and they always pass.
- I am not what happened to me. I am more than my trauma.
- Everything will work out for my highest good.
- My past is behind me and I am in control of my future.

By using these affirmations when you are feeling anxious, you are basically reprogramming your mind by encouraging your brain to create new neural pathways. By refocusing your mind away from your anxiety and fear, you leave less and less room for the overwhelm and shutdown to get a foothold.

APPENDIX: EXERCISES

VISUALISATION

Your mind has an amazing ability to create your reality. Yes really!

Human brains are wired to spot patterns, which help us make decisions based on what we have learned throughout our lives. It's a helpful shortcut, but what happens if what you have learned was forged during a traumatic past or upsetting events?

What happens is that the brain becomes primed to spot threats in order to stay safe. It expects to see danger so it looks for evidence that danger is near. And before long, everything looks like a threat and other possibilities are hidden from your awareness.

Visualisation is a tool for deliberate focus on a desired outcome, imagining it in such vivid detail that you brain tags it as "something to pay attention to" and begins to look for evidence to support it instead of threats.

Follow these steps to effective visualisation:

Make sure you're in a quiet environment without distractions.

- If you feel comfortable doing so, close your eyes and breathe deeply. Breathe in slowly through your nose to a count of five, then exhale through your mouth to a count of five or more. As you breathe in, your diaphragm should expand, and as you exhale, it should flatten. Take at least three to five breaths like this to slow your heart rate and calm your mind.
- Picture a clear mental image of what you desire. Focus on the details. Notice the colours, textures, sounds and smells within your vision. See yourself touching the things in your vision. Let it play like a movie in your mind, with you as the director and leading star. Really picture yourself already doing or having the things you want to happen.
- Practice visualizing the thing you want at least two times each day. In order for visualization to work to its highest potential, you must be consistent with your new habit and use the practice every day.
- If you start to experience negative thoughts during your day, stop them and replace them with your vision and the positive thoughts connected to it.

Don't rush through your visualization. Allow yourself enough time to experience the vision fully; about ten minutes or so is usually sufficient.

Visualisation may feel difficult at first, and it's OK to start small, for example by visualising how you want your day to be before you go to bed the night before, while you get the hang of it. With practice, visualisation can lead you to greater peace of mind, serenity and contentment.

YOUR NOTES

YOUR NOTES

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Have you been affected by rape, sexual assault or abuse?

Don't know what to do or where to turn?

Survivor Space can help

We can provide specialist practical support for children, young people and adults in Oxfordshire who have experienced sexual violence at any point in their lives.

MAKE A REFERRAL USING OUR ONLINE FORM
OR GET IN TOUCH FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

www.survivorspace.org.uk/make-a-referral

We provide:

- Independent advocacy
- Counselling and Psychoeducation
- Facilitated group work
- Children's & young people's services
- Outreach with schools, colleges and universities

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