

# APPENDIX A: TRAUMA RECOVERY AND SELF-CARE

## Trauma Recovery

People affected by trauma tend to feel unsafe in their bodies and in their relationships with others. Regaining a sense of safety may take days to weeks with acutely traumatized individuals or months to years with individuals who have experienced ongoing/chronic abuse. Figuring out what areas of life need to be stabilized and how that will be accomplished will be helpful in moving toward recovery. For example:

- A person who has experienced trauma may struggle with regulating or soothing difficult emotions in everyday life which they might not associate directly to the trauma.
- A person who has experienced trauma may need to learn how to regulate and manage these difficult, overwhelming emotions.
- Some people who experienced trauma, particularly complex trauma, may find that speaking about their experiences emotionally overwhelming.

The next task shifts to processing the trauma, putting words and emotions to it, and making meaning of it. This process is usually undertaken with a counselor or therapist in group and/or individual therapy. It might not be necessary or required to spend a lot of time in this phase. It is however necessary to attend to safety and stability during this phase. Attending to safety allows the person affected by trauma to move through this phase in a way that integrates the story of the trauma rather than reacts to it in a fight, flight or freeze response.

Pacing and timing are crucial during this phase. If the person affected by trauma becomes quickly overwhelmed and emotionally flooded when talking about their trauma memories, safety and stability must be regained before moving further on with the story. The point is not to “re-live” the trauma nor is it to tell the story with no emotions attached.

This involves the important task of exploring and mourning the losses associated with the trauma and providing space to grieve and express emotions.

In the next phase there must now be a creation a new sense of self and a new future. This final task involves redefining oneself in the context of meaningful relationships. Through this process, the trauma no longer is a defining and organizing principle in someone’s life. The trauma becomes integrated into their life story but is not the only story that defines them.

In this third stage of recovery, the person affected by trauma recognizes the impact of the victimization but are now ready to take concrete steps towards empowerment and self-determined living.

Adapted from: <https://trauma-recovery.ca/recovery/phases-of-trauma-recovery/>

## Self-Care

Victim Connect Resource Center. Self – Care. 2019.

Retrieved from <https://victimconnect.org/learn/self-care/>

The term “self-care” refers to actions and attitudes we use to consciously contribute to the maintenance of our overall well-being and personal health. Self-care can include physical activities

as well as emotional practices and changing our perceptions of situations in our lives. While this concept is big in the field of victim services, it can also be generalized to those who are not currently experiencing trauma but are looking to feel more internally healthy and balanced.

Many crimes involve the use of force or violence against victims. Crime victims of all types of crime may experience trauma – physical damage to their bodies or emotional wounds or shock caused by the violence against them. Reactions to trauma vary from person to person and can last for hours, days, weeks, months, or years.

**Physical trauma:** Crime victims may experience physical trauma—serious injury or shock to the body, as from a major accident. Examples of physical trauma include:

- Cuts, bruises, fractured arms or legs, or internal injuries.
- Intense stress reactions where breathing, blood pressure, and heart rate may increase, and muscles may tighten.
- Feeling exhausted but unable to sleep
- Headaches
- Increased or decreased appetites, or digestive problems

**Emotional trauma:** Victims may experience emotional trauma—emotional wounds or shocks that may have long-lasting effects. Emotional trauma may take many different forms:

- **Shock or numbness:** Victims may feel “frozen” and cut off from their own emotions. Some victims say they feel as if they are “watching a movie” rather than having their own experiences. Victims may not be able to make decisions or conduct their lives as they did before the crime.
- **Denial, Disbelief, and Anger:** Victims may experience “denial,” an unconscious defense against painful or unbearable memories and feelings about the crime. Or they may experience disbelief, telling themselves, “this just could not have happened to me!” They may feel intense anger and a desire to get even with the offender.
- **Stress:** Some crime victims may experience trouble sleeping, flashbacks, extreme tension or anxiety, outbursts of anger, memory problems, trouble concentrating, and other symptoms of distress for days or weeks following a trauma.

Some examples of self-care might include activities such as:

- **Positive Affirmations** – Each day (or in stressful situations) think through some kind thoughts about yourself and your life. Remind yourself that you have taken steps to care for yourself that might seem easy but are very important, like taking a shower, getting out of bed, or going for a walk. Remind yourself that you are worth praising through nice notes about your appearance, goals, and confidence on your mirror or written down throughout your day.
- **Relaxation Exercises** – Anything from breathing techniques to practicing meditation and creating bedtime routine can help to create a relaxing environment to heal and reflect.
- **Channeling pain into creativity** – Taking up activities like poetry writing, short stories, journaling, drawing or dance serve as outlets to release and process emotions that might otherwise be overwhelming.
- **Physical Self-Care** – Getting up and moving your body in a way that feels good to you can change your whole mood. If you’re not a person who loves the gym, you can go for a walk with a friend, do some stretches, or dance at home to some feel good music. Anything that allows you to connect to what your body physically needs in that moment.

- **Know and communicate your boundaries** – Let others around you know up front what is and is not okay for you. This is especially important in the context of sexual partners but can be applied to any friends, loved ones, and acquaintances.
- **Ask for help** – No one should be expected to go through life alone and everyone needs help from time-to-time. Asking loved ones for help with life feels overwhelming is important.
- **Remind yourself it is okay to walk away from situations that are too stressful or triggering.**

## Support Resources

- Love Is Respect - <https://www.loveisrespect.org/for-yourself/self-care/>
- Your Life, Your Voice - <http://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org/pages/tip-99-coping-skills.aspx>
- The Mighty - <https://themighty.com/2016/04/self-care-ideas-for-a-bad-day/>
- RAINN - <https://www.rainn.org/news/self-care-tips-survivors>
- The National Domestic Violence Hotline - <https://www.thehotline.org/2016/03/31/5-self-care-tips-for-abuse-and-trauma-survivors/>

Contact the Victim Connect Hotline by phone at 1-855-4-VICTIM or by chat for more information or assistance in locating services that can help you or a loved one with self-care ideas.

**“Appendix A: Trauma Recovery and Self-Care”** is part of *Survivors Speak: How to share your story to advocate for legislative change in Nebraska*. For more information about how you can share your story to advocate for change, check out the full guide at <https://survivorsrisingomaha.org/survivors-speak/>.