



A GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE TOOLKIT



DRCC

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre



Co-funded by the
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JUSTISIGNS2

*empowering people who experience
domestic, sexual & gender-based violence*





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ABOUT DUBLIN RAPE CRISIS CENTRE

The mission of DRCC is to prevent the harm and heal the trauma of sexual violence. DRCC works with victims/survivors of all genders, gender identities, sexualities, ethnicities and statuses. DRCC also provides support to those working with and supporting victims/survivors of sexual violence.

NATIONAL 24-HOUR HELPLINE: 1800 778888

DRCC hosts the National 24-Hour Helpline provides free and confidential support and advice to anyone affected by sexual violence at any time. DRCC telephone counsellors are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. For victims/survivors who do not speak English, the Helpline interpreting service provides free and confidential support in 200+ languages. For people who are deaf or hard of hearing, DRCC's text service is available on 086-823 8443. DRCC also provides a webchat service available from our website at

COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

DRCC provides an empathic, non-judgemental counselling service, to help all victim/survivors cope with and recover from the trauma of rape, sexual assault, childhood sexual abuse and sexual harassment. For clients who are deaf or are hard of hearing, or for those who do not speak English, counselling is provided through interpreters. For more information, please call 1800 77 8888 during office hours or e-mail counselling@rcc.ie.

ACCOMPANIMENT SERVICES

DRCC offers psychological support, information and accompaniment to victims/survivors attending the Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (SATU), to Garda Stations, Courts, and to Asylum Hearings.

FINDING YOUR WAY AFTER SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Finding Your Way after Sexual Violence is an online guide to options and supports after sexual violence in Ireland. It provides information on accessing a Sexual Assault Treatment Unit, reporting to the Gardaí, and navigating the courts and legal process. The guide is for anyone in Ireland affected by sexual violence, including victims and survivors, their supporters and others engaged in these systems. To access Finding Your Way after Sexual Violence, go to: www.drcc.ie/fyw.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

DRCC provides training for various groups who work with people impacted by the trauma of sexual violence, including dealing with disclosures of sexual violence. We also offer prevention and awareness courses to those working with young people aimed at preventing sexual violence. All our training is trauma-informed and focuses on the welfare of victim/survivors and of those supporting them. For more information, contact etadmin@rcc.ie or go to www.drcc.ie.

POLICY, RESEARCH & ADVOCACY AND CAMPAIGNS

DRCC draws on our expertise and our experience with supporting victims/survivors to inform how we advocate, towards a society free from sexual violence. We collaborate with diverse groups and contribute to policy-making at national level. We collect and disseminate data to advance an understanding of the prevalence and incidence of sexual violence, particularly from a survivor perspective. DRCC also campaigns for victim-centred, trauma-aware systems of justice, education and health. We raise awareness on the need to prevent and combat sexual violence.

WE CONSENT

We-Consent is a new long-term national programme to inform, educate and engage with all members of our society about consent. For further information and resources, go to www.we-consent.ie.





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Erasmus+

- definitely
- I consent
- yes...100% sure
- totally agree

01

that's consent



CONSENT: WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

A CLEAR, ONGOING & CONTINUOUS PROCESS

In general, consent is about feeling in control and saying yes or no, doing or not doing things because you choose to, not because someone is pressuring you.

When it comes to sexual activity, consent is the voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity in a relationship with equal power.

This agreement can be verbal or non-verbal, but should be given freely by individuals capable of consenting. This means you and whoever you are with should be over the legal age of consent and not under the influence of drugs or alcohol and not asleep or unconscious.

Consent should never be assumed – it should be a clear, ongoing & continuous process in every new or repeated sexual encounter.

Some examples of when there is no consent



A person has not actively agreed



A person gives consent for someone else



A person has protested in any way



A person is not capable of giving consent

WHAT THE LAW SAYS ABOUT CONSENT?

The Criminal Law Sexual Offences Act (2017)

SAYS THAT A PERSON 'CONSENTS TO A SEXUAL ACT IF HE OR SHE FREELY AND VOLUNTARILY AGREES TO ENGAGE IN THAT ACT'.

THERE IS NO CONSENT TO A SEXUAL ACT IF:

- Force is used
- There is a threat of force to self or other; well-founded fear of force
- The person is asleep or unconscious
- Under the effects of alcohol or drug
- The person has a physical disability which prevents communication of consent
- The person is mistaken as to nature, purpose of act or identity of other
- unlawfully detained
- consent is by a third party

THE LAW ALSO STATES THAT:

- Consent to a sexual act can be withdrawn at any time
- Any failure or omission on the part of a person to offer resistance to an act does not of itself constitute consent to that act.

LEGAL AGE OF CONSENT

According to Irish law, the legal age for consenting to sexual acts is 17. This means that it is illegal to engage in sexual activity with anyone under 17 and for a person in a position of authority, it is illegal to engage in sexual activity with anyone under 18.

The law acknowledges that young people may be engaging in sexual activity with each other and has included a 'proximity of age' defence in the 2017 Sexual Offences Act. This means that if a person has been charged with an offence of engaging in a sexual act with a person between the ages of 15 and 17 years, he or she can put forward a defence, but only if all of these conditions apply:

- the age difference between the two people is not more than two years,
- agreement was given freely and voluntarily,
- neither party was exploited or intimidated, and
- neither person was in a position of authority.

COMMUNICATING CONSENT

Many people worry that talking about consent will be awkward or a mood-killer, but this is not the case. Communication is a healthy part of a sexual relationship. If anything, the mood is much more positive when everyone can freely communicate what they want or don't want. Here are some ways to check for consent:

What you can check with the other person	
Are you comfortable?	Is this ok?
Does this feel good?	Tell me what you like?
Are you ok to continue?	
What you can check with yourself	
How am I feeling?	Am I really comfortable with this?
Do I feel under pressure?	Am I putting pressure on myself?
Am I doing this because I want to?	
What you can say	
Can we slow down a bit?	This is enough for me
I like that	I don't feel comfortable with this

Giving and getting consent before taking part in any type of sexual activity means that you know what is being agreed to and everyone can enjoy what they feel comfortable with.

Consent is an important part of healthy relationships. In a healthy relationship, there is a responsibility to look after each other, and make sure the people who we are with are happy, safe, and giving their consent.

IN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

- People feel safe, equal, respected and happy
- People don't put pressure on anyone else & it's easy to say 'no' as well as 'yes'
- People don't do things that make others feel uncomfortable or anxious



SIGNS OF A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP



good communication



mutual respect



trust



honesty



being yourself



equality

WE-CONSENT RESOURCES

- The We-Consent Resource Hub is a treasure trove of resources around consent, healthy relationships, the law and legal systems, and more. For further information and resources go to: bitly.ws/DTch

OTHER CONSENT RESOURCES:

- Youth programmes at DRCC visit: bitly.ws/DTgq
- Cycling through consent visit: bitly.ws/DTbt
- Consent is like Cup of Tea visit: bitly.ws/ArJF
- SpunOut visit: bitly.ws/DTcu
- Jigsaw visit: www.jigsaw.ie
- ThinkUKnow (UK) visit: bitly.ws/DTcP

HOW DUBLIN RAPE CRISIS CENTRE WORKS TO RAISE AWARENESS ON CONSENT

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre has been active in promoting a wider understanding of consent for many years. It does this via:

- ➔ policy and research
- ➔ training courses for educators/youth workers and for young people
- ➔ talks and outreach in schools and colleges
- ➔ campaigns and advocacy work

WE-CONSENT PROGRAMME

We-Consent is a new long-term national programme to inform, educate and engage with all members of our society about consent. We want to work together to strengthen understanding of consent, to learn more about each other's experiences, and to support everyone to have important conversations and to play their part in building a society where everybody values consent. **For more information please visit www.we-consent.ie**



We-Consent

all people, all situations, all relationships

02



HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

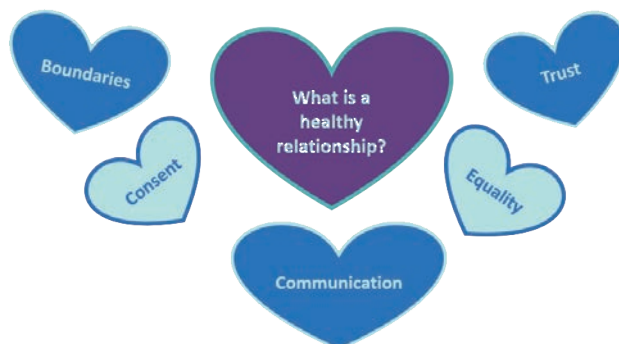
WHAT IS A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP?

Relationships are an important part of our everyday life and well-being. Whether with family, friends, boyfriends, girlfriends, partners or pets, a healthy relationship can boost our mental health, improve our self-esteem, and provide crucial support when times get tough.

But an unhealthy relationship can have the opposite effect and can leave us feeling anxious, scared, isolated, and confused.

All relationships will have their challenges, but these can be overcome with open communication and mutual respect.

Your relationship should help you feel confident, secure, respected and trusted. You should be able to voice what you want and need – as well as what's not right for you – and feel like you are listened to and that your choices are respected. If that's not the case, it might be time to leave.



FACTORS IN A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

COMMUNICATION

Open communication is one of the key features of a healthy relationship. You should feel comfortable talking about anything from everyday life to concerns about health, finances, work, school, family or friends. You should be able to express how you feel, whether happy or sad, and feel like your partner is listening to you **without judgement**. You don't always have to agree, but you should feel that your choices and opinions are respected, and vice versa.

CONSENT

Consent is when we **freely and voluntarily** agree to engage in sexual activity. It's about our communication of "yes" and "no" and our partner listening to and respecting our wishes. If we feel pressured to do something we don't want to, or are unsure about, then it's not consent.

Consent is a clear and resounding "YES!" Just because someone doesn't say "no", doesn't mean they have given consent. If your partner goes silent or does not respond to your touch, then they are not consenting to sex and should not be pressured to do so.

Consent **can be verbal or non-verbal**, but it is an ongoing process – this means regular checking in on what you both want. At any point, you both have the right to change your mind.

To check if your partner consents, ask them: "Is this ok?" "Does this feel good?" "Do you want to continue?" This can help set the mood and increase the intimacy and enjoyment for everyone.

BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF

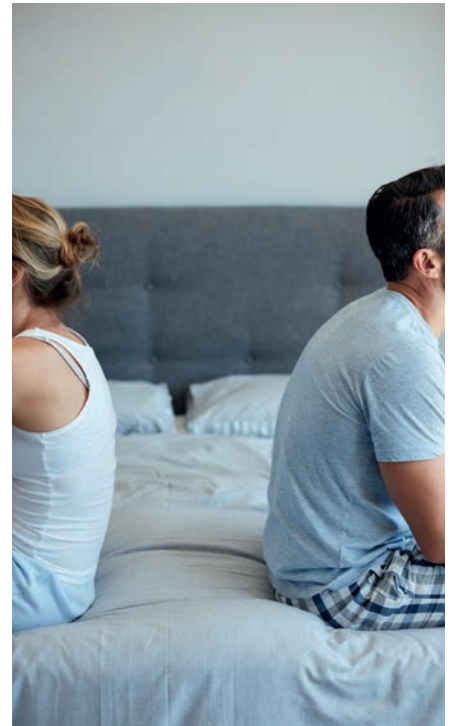
Sometimes we feel pressured to behave a certain way, or to do things we don't want to because we think that's what's expected of us. We look at celebs on TV, influencers on social media, or actors in pornography and think that we should be more like them, have a similarly "perfect" relationship, or perform sex the way they do.

But in a healthy relationship, **you don't have to act a certain way to make the other person happy**: you can relax knowing that they accept you for who you are. **The relationship develops at a pace that suits both of you** – you are not forced into anything that you are uncomfortable with and your self-esteem is not dependent on their approval. You care for each other, but **still invest time in your own interests and friendships** outside of the relationship.



SIGNS OF AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

- **Jealousy and controlling behaviour:** If your partner tries to control what you do, who you see or meet, and/or what you wear, it's a sign of an unhealthy relationship. In a healthy relationship, you are still able to live your own independent life. Your friends, family, hobbies and interests are vitally important and you should never be made to feel guilty for maintaining them, or feel pressured to ignore them.
- **Criticising and belittling:** There's nothing wrong with your partner expressing concern about something that is worrying them, but if they are constantly criticising you, making you feel bad about yourself or saying hurtful things, it can have a detrimental impact on your self-esteem. You might find yourself working extra hard in the relationship or doing things you're not fully comfortable with just to make your partner happy. **A healthy relationship should help you feel loved, confident and secure; never anxious, scared or needy.**
- **Intensity:** Healthy relationships move at a pace that everyone is comfortable with. But sometimes a person might come on very strong, pressurize you to commit, or love-bomb you with extravagant gifts and declarations of love. This type of **intense behaviour can feel overwhelming and can be a form of manipulation and control.**
- **Volatility:** There is conflict in every relationship, but some couples swing from fighting one day to being totally loved up the next, and the underlying issues are never really addressed. **Conflict should be resolved through open communication.** You don't have to agree with everything the other says or does, but **if you are constantly arguing and then making up, it can be a sign of an unhealthy relationship.**



HOW DO I ESTABLISH HEALTHY BOUNDARIES?

Regardless of your relationship status, it's useful to think about what "healthy" looks and feels like to you. One way to do this is to consider what your personal boundaries are. Our boundaries are our personal limits – they can be physical, sexual, emotional, mental, material, and cultural. Setting and asserting boundaries for yourself, while also respecting the boundaries of others, can help everyone to feel more confident and secure in the relationship.

- **How comfortable are you with saying 'no'?** Being able to say 'no' without feeling guilty is a sign of a healthy boundary. Whether you say no to a friend asking you out, to a parent asking you to visit, or to a partner asking for sex, you never need to offer excuses or to feel bad for asserting and prioritising yourself.
- **How happy are you when you say 'yes'?** Sometimes we say 'yes' to things that we don't feel fully comfortable with; we might be afraid to say no, or maybe we don't want to hurt the other's feelings. But this puts the other's needs before our own, and disregards our own personal boundaries.
- **How much responsibility do you take for others feelings?** When we take responsibility for other people's feelings, we end up sacrificing our own needs and wants. Maybe we want to make them happy, or we don't want to disappoint them. But trying to please others in this way, means our own boundaries get trampled on.

We don't have to say "yes" to make another person happy, and we can say "no" without feeling guilty. Being able to do so is a sign of healthy boundaries.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I'M CONCERNED ABOUT MY RELATIONSHIP?

If you are worried about your relationship, talk to someone you can trust: a friend, a parent, or a therapist about your concerns. Below is a list of organisations providing non-judgemental and confidential support, as well as information on safe sex and healthy relationships.

- **BeLonGTo** provides support to young LGBTI+ people through advice, youth groups, training and workshops, and counselling services. **Visit: www.belongto.org.**
- **Dublin Rape Crisis Centre** hosts the National Confidential Helpline for anyone affected by sexual violence, including those who are supporting others. **Tel: 1800 77 88 88.**
- **Jigsaw** supports young people's mental health; from 1:1 online chat, to group chats, to in-person counselling. Visit **www.jigsaw.ie** to find out more.
- **Men's Aid** hosts the National Confidential Helpline for men who are experiencing domestic abuse and coercive control. **Tel: 01 554 3811 or Visit www.mensaid.ie**
- **SpunOut** is a youth information website that provides material about sex, relationships, gender identity, sexual orientation, mental health, and much more: **Visit www.spunout.ie**
- **Safe Ireland** represents services & refuges around Ireland that support women & children seeking to escape domestic abuse & coercive control. **Visit: www.safeireland.ie**
- **Women's Aid** hosts the National Freephone Helpline for women who are being abused by current or former boyfriends, partners or husbands - **Tel: 1800 341 900 or Visit www.womensaid.ie**





03

DEBUNKING RAPE MYTHS

LET'S TALK FACTS

Sexual assault and rape are frightening and distressing issues. To protect ourselves psychologically, we may create sets of rules for behaviour to try to distance ourselves from the possibility that we, or someone we love, could be violated – or could violate someone else – in this way.

Likewise, societies develop beliefs, myths & attitudes about why rape and sexual assault happens, to protect themselves from having to deal with the reality of these issues.

These beliefs are often deeply misinformed and unhelpful to the victim, compounding the impact of the assault. They deny the reality of rape and sexual assault. Very commonly, they minimise its impact and seek to place responsibility for the assault on the victim. They protect the perpetrator and allow abusive behaviours to go unchallenged. And they are not borne out in evidence.

We need to be aware of and alert to the extent to which we have internalised misinformed beliefs, myths and attitudes, so we can challenge and manage these within ourselves and ensure they do not interfere with our ability to be helpful and supportive. Such myths may even be entrenched in and upheld by our laws and state policies.

Below we explore some harmful rape myths that damage victim/survivors and their chance to heal and seek justice, and allow the perpetrators to deny responsibility and carry on harmful behaviours.

MYTH: Rape comes from overwhelming sexual desire.

FACT:

Sexual assault & rape are acts of violence driven by the wish to dominate or degrade. The perpetrator overrules the victim/survivor's own wishes through coercion or overt violence.

- ◆ When a victim/survivor believes that rape is caused by the perpetrator being so sexually aroused as not to be able to help themselves, they often question their own dress, behaviour or demeanour and end up blaming themselves.
- ◆ This affects the victim/survivor's ability to access supports and services, and their expectations of how they will be seen and judged. The supporter or service provider needs to be very conscious of this and be actively non-judgemental.

MYTH: You can provoke rape by your dress and behaviour.

FACT:

How you dress and what you do is never reason for assault. Compared to other crimes, rapes & sexual assaults see the victim more frequently blamed for the crime and indeed blaming themselves for it. A person may behave and dress in ways which are utterly normal and socially accepted, yet when someone rapes them, they are blamed. *Such victim blaming/shaming is a response across almost all cultures and societies.*

- ◆ Victim blaming hugely compounds the impact of sexual violence on the victim, who may feel they cannot tell/report as they will be shunned and stigmatised if they do.
- ◆ People may agonise over what it was in their dress or behaviour that led to the attack, even though it was not about those factors. They **may censor and limit their activities** to avoid being a target of sexual violence, but people of all ages, in diverse situations, are sexually assaulted or raped and thus this censoring and limiting **creates a false sense of security.**
- ◆ A victim/survivor may feel that something he or she did – or didn't do – led to the rape or sexual assault: They stayed late at the office, drank at a party, took a lift home from a friend or a neighbour, took a taxi. But we do these things regularly and in safety all the time. **What turns everyday activities into an instance of rape or sexual assault is the action of the perpetrator: They are the only one responsible.**
- ◆ In rape, the perpetrator takes advantage of an aspect of a situation which gives them power to rape: maybe because the victim/survivor trusts them; because he/she is alone, or sick, or older; because the perpetrator is physically stronger; or any situation where there is an imbalance of power in favour of the perpetrator. **The responsibility for rape lies with the perpetrator, who has used this imbalance of power to subject another person to a traumatic & horrifying ordeal.**

- ◆ Many individuals who have been raped or sexually assaulted internalise the blame and shame of what has been done to them and will need a lot of support to see it differently and place the responsibility and shame where it belongs: with the perpetrator.

MYTH: Men are not raped.

FACT: **Men are raped & assaulted.** Assault on men is very under-reported, for reasons such as the way in which men are socialised or fears of being labelled, so it is difficult to be sure of the true extent. *In 2021, 18.7% of callers to DRCC's Helpline and 8.8% of DRCC's counselling clients were male.* Many are men who experienced rape, sexual assault and/or child sexual abuse.

MYTH: People are usually sexually assaulted by strangers.

FACT: **Most people know the person who raped them.** *In 2021, almost 84% of DRCC clients who had been attacked as adults, and 94% abused as children, knew their attacker.* For one in five clients, the assault was by a partner. In these cases, the trauma is compounded by the breach of trust, the sense that no one is safe, and the likelihood of meeting the perpetrator in their home, in the family circle, in the neighbourhood, in college, at work. This can lead to social isolation, job loss, or dropping out of education – a huge impact.

MYTH: People often make false accusations of rape out of spite or to cover up their own behaviour.

FACT: **International research shows false rape accusations are rare.** Research across 11 European countries shows *police deemed over 91% of allegations of rape as meeting crime investigation thresholds.* UK data indicates that *less than 1% of rape claims are false.* In fact, rape is an under-reported crime: In Ireland, less than 10% of victims report it.

MYTH: Rape can only happen through violence, so if there are no injuries, it wasn't rape.

FACT: **Rape does not always involve physical violence.** In Irish law, rape is recognised as non-consensual sexual intercourse. 'Non-consensual' may mean the perpetrator **coerced the victim/survivor**, that is, he or she forced the person using intimidation, threats or fear. Also, **some people cannot give consent**, such as those asleep, unconscious or under the influence of drugs, young people aged under 17 or people with certain disabilities. Physical violence is not an essential ingredient of this crime.

MYTH: If you didn't say no, it was not rape.

FACT: **It is not always possible to say 'no'.** People have a variety of responses to danger. Two survival mechanisms are well known: the 'fight' or 'flight' responses. However, there are also the 'freeze' and 'fawn' responses. A person may freeze up in response to a threat, unable to move or speak. Alternatively, the person may seek to mollify or 'befriend' the attacker, hoping that this will help them avoid harm. All these responses are automatic – a person has no control over which way they will react. **For some people, therefore, it will be impossible to say 'no'** as their own survival mechanism prevents it. **It does not mean they consent** to the activity. Consent must be ongoing and given freely – it is possible *to ensure all parties are consenting*.

MYTH: Only young, attractive women are raped.

FACT: **Women of any age, appearance, social class, ethnic origin and intellectual ability are vulnerable to rape. Men and children are also raped. People with physical or intellectual disabilities are raped.** In a war situation, women can be raped as a policy of intimidation, revenge or demoralization, and in that case all females, from the very youngest to the very oldest, may be targeted.

MYTH: If you were ok to have sex with the person before, it isn't rape now.

FACT: **If a sexual encounter is non-consensual, it is a crime.** *Sexual consent is an ongoing process and can be withdrawn.* Consent given in a previous encounter does not automatically bestow consent in any subsequent encounter. Person A can decide to stop a sexual encounter with Person B and withdraw consent at any point. Or, Person A can have a consensual encounter or series of encounters with Person B, and then decide not to repeat the experience. Person B may be disappointed, but has no entitlement to consent & cannot force or coerce Person A into having sex because of a past relationship or sexual encounter. If Person B does this, it is rape and it is second only to murder as a serious crime.

More reading:

- *The SAVI Report: Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland*, McGee et al, The Liffey Press, 2002.
- **Sexual Violence Survey, 2022 - Main Results, Central Statistics Office, 2023**
- *Different systems, similar outcomes? Tracking attrition in reported rape cases in eleven countries*, Kelly & Lovett, CWASU, 2009.
- *21% of Irish say sex without consent OK in certain circumstances*, Eurobarometer poll on Violence Against Women, EU Commission, 2016.
- **DRCC Statistical Supplement 2021, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre 2022**
- *Knowledge or Belief concerning Consent in Rape Law*, Law Reform Commission, 2019.
- **Consent: What do I need to know? An overview resource, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, 2020.**
- <http://bitly.ws/DuEf>

04



IMPACTS OF RAPE & SEXUAL ASSAULT

People have very individual responses to the trauma of rape and sexual assault and the long-term effects also vary widely. Because of this, it is important to respect each person's way of coping. These impacts may occur many years after a rape or assault as well as in the immediate aftermath.

A person's behaviour in the aftermath of an assault can range from frozen to panicked, numb to angry, laughter to tears. Some people can appear calm and rational. Others may:

- feel hyper alert or vigilant,
- be unable to eat or sleep,
- blame themselves for the attack,
- have flashbacks to the attack,
- experience confusion or helplessness,
- feel a sense of shame or violation or degradation,
- feel a compulsion to wash,
- obsess on details of the rape or assault,
- become suicidal or self-harming.

In the longer-term, trauma may lead to effects across several categories. These can be:



PHYSICAL,

such as self-neglect, eating disorders, digestive problems, sleep disruption, and stress-related ill health.



EMOTIONAL,

such as over-reactions to any stimulus, a need to tightly control their environment, mood swings, anxiety, depression, substance abuse or suicidal thinking.



COGNITIVE,

such as finding it difficult to handle everyday tasks, or having impaired memory or concentration that leads to them losing a job or leaving education.

They may lose the capacity to trust, feel too ashamed or self-blaming to sustain a relationship, or feel unable to be in social situations.

WAYS TO SUPPORT SURVIVORS

A person may disclose or refer to a rape or sexual assault to a friend or family member, or during an interaction with frontline staff. The following points may be useful to keep in mind when supporting them:

- This **may be the first time** the person has disclosed or spoken about a rape or assault to anyone. It is thus very important to be sensitive and caring and to offer non-judgemental support
- Whenever appropriate, people should be referred to **Rape Crisis Centre support**, either by direct contact to one of the 16 Centres around the country (see a list at www.drcc.ie/support/find-local-supports) or to the National 24-hour Freephone Helpline at 1800 77 8888 for signposting, further information and support.
- **Sexual assault, including rape, is a crime:** those who experience it should know that they have the right to report it to the Gardaí - more information at bit.ly/reportSV.
- If the assault is recent, they may need to be referred to a **Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (SATU)**. There are six SATUs around Ireland which provide medical care and support to victims of sexual assault including rape, as well as collecting forensic evidence for possible later court action – for more information see bit.ly/HSEsatu.
- It is important to **help the person make their own decisions**, rather decide for them, and that they feel heard and validated.



- If a person reports the rape or assault to the Gardaí, they will arrange to bring the person to SATU. However, the person can directly avail of SATU's comprehensive medical services without going through the Gardaí or making a formal report. It must be their own decision to report the crime.
- You should **protect the person's privacy** as far as possible.
- There may be no need for you as a support person to know all the details of an assault or rape, just enough to ensure the person is safe and their immediate health needs are met.

- ➔ As a supporter, you can **determine the person's immediate needs**, whether it is for medical attention, food, sleep, or just company, and help make that happen.
- ➔ It is important that you yourself remain grounded and calm, handling practical issues, so that the person in crisis can feel supported and contained.
- ➔ As described above, survivors may have problems with everyday activities like eating, sleeping and concentrating on work or study. This is because they are traumatised and may express this in various ways. Don't expect them to be 'back to normal' quickly – try to understand.
- ➔ It's important that you as a supporter **focus on the feelings and reactions of the affected person**, rather than your own feelings, when supporting them. You should however note your own reactions and seek support for yourself when appropriate.



05



GROUNDING TECHNIQUES WHEN TRIGGERED

INTRODUCTION

When we become anxious, we can become 'ungrounded', find our anxiety growing, begin to lose contact with reality as our thoughts get more panicked or fearful, and as our body reacts with tightening or sensations.

If we have experienced any kind of trauma, it can happen that certain things such as specific smells, tastes, touches, shadows, images or something someone says or does can trigger us into a traumatic reaction. We may find ourselves suddenly in a state that feels like panic or terror, blanked out, or mentally transported back to a traumatic event so that it feels like it is happening in the present.

We can also sometimes find ourselves feeling collapsed, numb, flatlining.

There are some techniques that can really help: here are some possibilities.

Try them out, adapt them, some may work for you, others may not. Some may not suit you at all because of associations they hold for you.

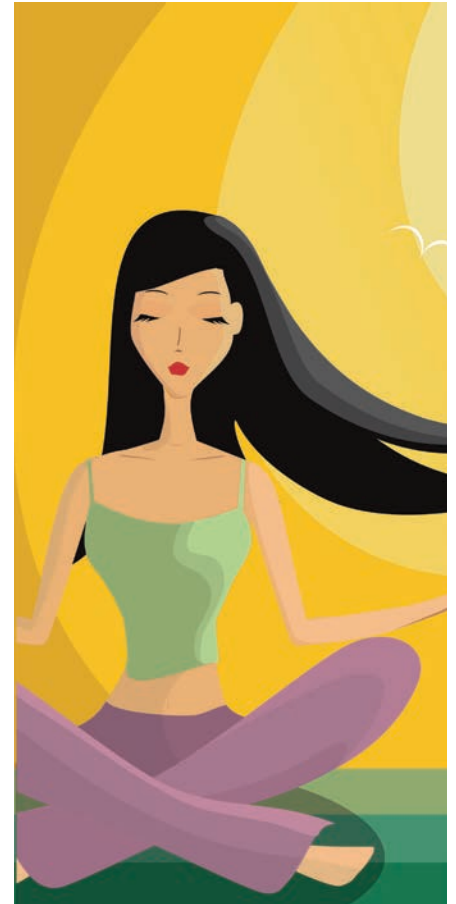
These techniques need to be practiced. This will allow you to find out which techniques work for you, and if you practice them throughout the day, they will help to regulate anxiety, keep you grounded and present, and you will be able to access them easily when you need to.

USING OUR TASTE AND SMELL

- Eat something with a strong taste.
- Smells can help. Pierce the flesh of an orange, lime or a lemon and draw in the scent. Maybe there is a smell you find comforting? Break fresh ginger and inhale it. Cook, and smell the spices as you do. Draw in the scent of coffee.
- If going into a possibly triggering situation, wear a strong scent that is associated with comfort or safety, and breathe it in when needed.

USING OUR BREATH

- When you breathe, the breath quite literally goes right down through the centre of your body, and will centre and align and ground you if you allow it. As you breathe, feel this and allow your body to align and balance around your breath.
- Focus on breathing slowly and deeply rather than shallowly and rapidly. Place your hand on your tummy so that you can feel it rise as the breath comes in. You may place your other hand against your chest, and feel how that contains and supports you.
- When you are hyper-aroused – anxious, thoughts moving fast, body tight, breathing shallow – breathe so that the in breath is shorter than the out breath – for example breathe in for the count of 4 and out for 7, or in for 6 and out for 9.
- If you are feeling flat, numb, lethargic, let the outbreath be shorter than the in breath – for example, breathe in for six and out – phew! – for four.
- Sometimes focusing on breathing can increase panic and anxiety: if this is the case, stop focusing.
- A short mindfulness exercise could become part of your daily routine e.g. a 3-minute breathing space. (Click here to watch bitly.ws/DTop) This will keep your system calmer, and your body will respond more to the use of your breath when you are activated.
- You may like to keep brief breathing and calming exercises on your phone so that you can listen to them during the day or when anxious or panicky.



USING OUR VISION CAN BE HELPFUL, AND BRINGING OUR THINKING BRAIN BACK ON LINE THROUGH CONCRETE DESCRIBING OF WHAT WE SEE

- Make eye contact with a supportive person, or pet.
- Open your eyes and really study and notice the detail of the things around you: ask yourself about colour, shape, image, design..... describe an object or picture to yourself, try to find the right word for the colour, the texture, the shapes.

- Name what you see around you: look around the room and name what you see on the walls, the furniture.
- Count how many objects there are: these activities bring the thinking brain back online.

USING IMAGERY

- Spend time developing grounding images so that you can access and use them easily when triggered: allow yourself to imagine and deepen into a felt image of being in a safe place; being on top of a mountain feeling expanded; being in a soft bubble; with a supporter at your side.
- Are there images that bring on feelings of comfort and security, of calm? If so think of having these on your phone or nearby at home.

USING OUR BODIES TO GROUND OURSELVES

- Rub your feet flat on the ground. Take your shoes off, if you can to do this. Walk on the grass in your bare feet.
- Rub one hand against another. Rub the back of your neck. Feel a texture, the ribbed sleeve of your sweater, the arms of your chair. Lean back against the chair, feel its solid support.
- Your body may feel frozen in place: If you can, move your body or some part of it. Get up and move around, if you can. Wave or stretch your arms. Jump. Stamp around, feel and hear your feet contact the ground.
- If you are in a situation where you cannot stand up or move around, make small movements eg rotate your shoulder or ankle, or move your elbows, wiggle your toes, notice how this feels, the rhythm of it.
- Comb or brush your hair. A lot of people 'play with their hair' in different ways – this is often an unconscious self-soothing or grounding mechanism. If you do something like this, notice, and notice in what way it helps you.
- Hold your hands under cold or warm running water and savour the sensation.
- Wash your hands, while noticing yourself doing so.
- Hold an ice cube, or place your hands around the sides of a cup of warm drink.
- Splash water on your face. Wash your face carefully, noticing each sensation.
- Bring your hands together. Fold them over each other. Stroke one with another. Bring them together palm to palm: notice which ways of holding and moving your hands help you to feel grounded, steady, held.

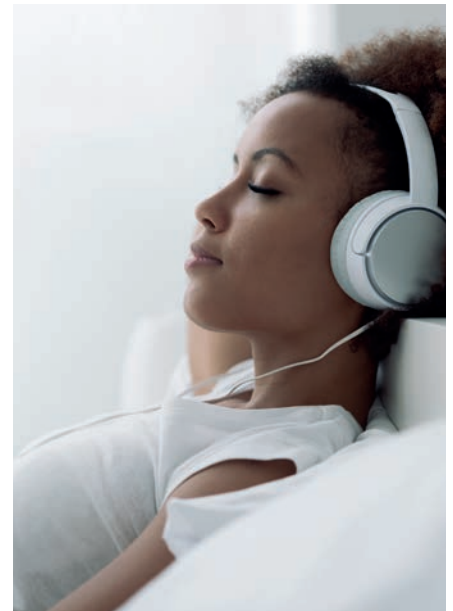


USING OUR THINKING

- Use a thought, for example say to yourself "That was then, this is now". Calmly and gently ask yourself to listen and to hear this 'Did you hear – I said that was then, and this is now. None of that is happening right here, right now'. Say it aloud if possible.
- You may prefer to use words or short phrases such as 'I am safe here and now'. Try out some words and phrases, say them and listen to them, notice which words or phrases calm and ground you; which ones steady you; which ones give you support or hope.
- Be aware and remind yourself of what is different in this place than what was in the place from the past you have been triggered into.

USING MUSIC

- When anxious or panicked, calming music can be very helpful. What music calms you? When numb or low, music that has strong rhythm can be helpful – bluegrass, salsa. Sometimes we need first to listen to the music that reflects where we are at the moment – fast music when anxious, moving to a slower piece, moving to calm; - calm and comforting music when numb or dispirited, moving to music with more energy and rhythm. Think of making your own playlist you can use when anxiety begins to rise, or your energy lowers.
- Sing a song, paying attention to the words. Think about what song might support you when anxious or panicky, so that you don't have to think of one at the time.
- Experiment with humming or singing different tunes: which ones calm you, which ones give you energy, which ones bring a smile, which ones comfort your sadness or aloneness, which ones give you hope



CONCENTRATING ON WHAT WE HEAR

- Listen to and really pay attention to sounds: the clock ticking, the birds outside, the tinkle of your bracelet, the tapping of the keys on a keyboard.
- Listen to a piece of music, follow one voice or instrument throughout.

USING TOUCH

- Get up and touch objects. See 5 things. Name 5 things. Touch 5 things.
- Stroke and/or talk to a pet.
- Stroke and/or talk to a cuddly toy.
- Take a hug and give a hug.
- Massage or comforting touch from a trusted person

- Touch and feel an object that connects you with a support – the necklace your friend gave you, the spiritual emblem you wear, the small teddy on your key ring.

OUR RELATIONSHIPS

- If there is someone else around and available, talk to them. Call or text a friend, if no one is home.
- Imagine a supportive person, think of what they would say to you now.
- Name what is happening if you are with others and you get anxious or dissociate: 'I just left there for a moment', 'I got disconnected'.

To become anxious, to experience panic or to collapse and experience low energy are very common. These suggestions may be helpful, or experimenting with them may lead you to find your own individual ways of supporting yourself when these things happen to you.







06



COPING WITH NIGHTMARES

WORKING WITH SYMPTOMS OF TRAUMA

NIGHTMARES & THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA

Distressing nightmares and disturbed sleep are common symptoms of sexual violence and trauma. They can increase anxiety before going to bed and provoke intense fear on awakening. You might feel like you are reliving the traumatic event or doubt your sanity.

But for many survivors, they are a normal part of recovery and a way to unconsciously work through what has happened. Although nightmares can be extremely scary, there are ways to reduce their likelihood and intensity, and to access good quality sleep and healing.



WHY AM I HAVING NIGHTMARES?

Dreams are an unconscious way of processing our day-to-day experiences, feelings and memories. But if those experiences are difficult and traumatic, then our dreams might be too.

Traumatic events can send our body into a continual state of **hyperarousal**. This means that even when there is no real threat, our nervous system remains always on the alert for danger. Being in this constant state of “fight or flight” can make it hard to go to sleep, and we might experience nightmares when we do, because our body is trying to work through the trauma.

WHAT CAN I DO TO IMPROVE MY SLEEP?

To help calm your nervous system, practice some (or all) of these actions regularly. Remember that **healing from trauma can take time, but it is possible**.

- **Establish a bedtime routine:** Your room should be a relaxing place, with comforting items nearby. Take exercise during the day to tire your body and eat early in the evening. Have a bath before bed, drink a herbal tea or write in your journal, then go to bed when you are tired.
- **Practice relaxation techniques:** Try slow-breathing, body-scans, mindfulness or yoga to calm the nervous system. Some people also find activities like singing, writing and drawing useful ways to release stress.
- **Reduce caffeine:** Caffeine is a stimulant, and drinking it in large quantities can make it difficult to sleep. Try to avoid tea, coffee, and energy drinks after 1pm.
- **Avoid screens:** TV, video games, and social media should be avoided at bedtime as they leave the brain in a stimulated state.
- **Avoid alcohol & other addictive substances:** Drugs and alcohol may seem to help reduce stress in the short-term, but they can have a negative impact on sleep, can increase nightmares, and can lead to longer-term difficulties.
- **Check your medication:** Some medication has the side effect of disturbed sleep and nightmares. Consult with your doctor and ask for alternatives if necessary.
- **Have a safe place:** Develop a ‘safe place’ in your mind where you feel safe and comfortable. Imagine the emotions, sounds, sensations and sights associated with it. It could be a real place or one from your imagination. Practise visiting this safe space when you are feeling good, so when you waken from a nightmare, you can go there easily.
- **Speak to a counsellor:** Counselling can provide a safe and supportive environment to connect with and process our thoughts, emotions, memories and fears and in doing so help us to move towards a more restful sleep.

National 24-Hour Helpline: 1800 77 88 88 – you can call to find out more about counselling or visit www.drcc.ie.

MINDFULNESS BEFORE BEDTIME

Before going to sleep, **read the text in the box on the next page out loud and with mindful awareness**. With each sentence, **make sure that you are listening to yourself** and hearing what is being said. **Take your time:** if it feels like a ‘part’ of you cannot hear what you are saying, give it time. What age does this part of you feel like? Can you speak to this part directly? They might need a bit more care and attention.

PRE-SLEEP TEXT

Tonight, I may have a nightmare and wake up feeling...

(name the emotions)

Sensations in my body may include...

(name some sensations e.g. my heart beating fast, tight-chest, difficulty breathing)

If that happens, I will tell myself that this nightmare is an effect of the abuse I have suffered and is not my fault.

(If you wish, name the trauma, but without details)

Then I will sit up as soon as I can, turn on the light, and look around the room.

I will name some things in my room that I can see right now, like...

(look at and name several things you can see)

I will sit on the edge of the bed and feel my feet on the floor.

I will gradually slow my breathing.

I will take my comfort object and allow myself to be comforted.

I will tell myself that I just had a nightmare; that what was happening in the nightmare is not real and is not happening right now.

MINDFULNESS AFTER A NIGHTMARE

The actions suggested below can help you feel safe and grounded after a nightmare.

Afterwards, you might find it helpful to get up and move around, go to the bathroom, make a cup of tea, or read for a few minutes.

THINGS TO TRY AFTER YOU'VE HAD A NIGHTMARE

Light: Turn on a light.

Look: Look around the room, identify some familiar objects, and name them out loud.

Acknowledge: Allow yourself to acknowledge & name the sensations in your body.

Safe talk: Sit up when you can and say out loud that you are safe, fully awake and that the nightmare is not real. Maybe keep a phone recording, of yourself or someone you trust, offering reassurance. If your emotional self feels younger, soothe yourself as you would someone of that age.

Breathe: Take long slow breaths through your nose. Count to five as you inhale and count to seven as you exhale. Lengthen the breaths little by little.

Comfort: Take a comfort object and allow it to soothe you.

Ground: Ground yourself with each one of the senses.

- **Taste** something with a strong pleasant taste - maybe keep mints by your bed.
- **Touch** something with a rough, silky or fluffy texture.
- **Smell** something pleasant - maybe there's an oil or cream that you like.
- **Listen** to something that is comforting, like soothing music.





COPING WITH PANIC ATTACKS

WORKING WITH SYMPTOMS OF TRAUMA

WHAT ARE PANIC ATTACKS?

Panic attacks are very frightening events that feel like they come out of nowhere and for no apparent reason. They trigger intense fear-responses in the body, including:

- Heart palpitations / chest pain
- Trembling / wobbling
- Difficulty breathing / rapid breathing
- Sweating
- Dizziness / light-headedness

If you have experienced a trauma like sexual violence, your body might be on constant high alert for danger. Panic attacks are a natural response to this kind of chronic stress and anxiety, and could be triggered by something seemingly insignificant, or by something you associate with the past trauma.

Even though there is no real immediate danger, panic attacks can sometimes feel like you are having a heart-attack, or that you are going to die. They usually last between 5 and 30 minutes. If you experience one, **consult with your GP** to reassure yourself that there are no underlying health conditions. You might also like to **speak to a counsellor or contact the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre** for support.

Remember, panic attacks are a natural response to sexual violence and trauma, and although very frightening, **they can be managed and overcome.**

WILL IT HAPPEN AGAIN?

Once a person has had a panic attack, they can live in constant fear of the next one. This increased tension & anxiety can push them closer to the edges of their *Window of Tolerance*.

Because the cause of an attack is not always clear, you may try to stop it from recurring by avoiding people, places or events around which it took place. But isolating yourself in this way can reduce your confidence and limit your resources, making the next panic attack more likely.

Understanding what causes panic attacks and building your resources can help you to manage them, reduce their likelihood, and feel safe in the here and now.

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY BODY DURING A PANIC ATTACK?

During a panic attack, **your rational mind is hijacked by the primitive fight-or-flight brain**. There is a sudden surge of adrenaline into the bloodstream, making you feel like you are physically preparing to run away or fight back. This can cause symptoms like sweating, nausea, dizziness, rapid heartbeat and difficulty in breathing.

▶ WHAT HAPPENS TO MY BREATHING?

When your **breathing** speeds up (hyperventilation), you take more oxygen in and there is less carbon dioxide. This leads to a narrowing of the blood vessels and reduced blood flow to your brain, resulting in dizziness, confusion, blurred vision, and lapses in concentration and memory.

WHAT CAN I DO WHEN I HAVE A PANIC ATTACK?

▶ PAUSE AND BREATHE:

Using **basic breathing techniques** can rebalance the oxygen/ carbon dioxide in your system, and help you to feel more relaxed and grounded.

- ➞ Put your hand on your chest or stomach to feel the breath going in and out. Then breathe in deeply for a count of five and exhale slowly for a count of six.
- ➞ If you are still having difficulty, try using a paper bag or cupping your hands around your nose and mouth. Breathe slowly and steadily with the out-breath longer than the in-breath, inhaling the carbon dioxide that you exhale to balance your system. In a few minutes, you should begin to feel better. Breath focus may not work for everyone, so try something else if it isn't working for you.

▶ REFOCUS:

For some people, focusing on their breath can increase panic. Instead, you can focus on the detail of your immediate surroundings to return to the here and now.

- ➞ Take hold of an object around you and focus on its colour, its touch, its shape...

- Inhale a scent associated with calm; an essential oil, perfume, fresh fruit or flowers...
- Use the **5-4-3-2-1** method to give slow and caring attention to all your senses:
 - ✦ What **5** things can you **see**?
 - ✦ What **4** things can you **touch**?
 - ✦ What **3** things can you **hear**?
 - ✦ What **2** things can you **smell**?
 - ✦ What **1** thing can you **taste**?

▶ RECONNECT TO YOUR BODY:

Becoming more aware of your body can help you regain control:

- **Relax:** In time with the breath, tense then relax each one of your muscles. Begin with your toes & work up to your legs, buttocks, stomach, shoulders, arms, & head.
- **Move:** Try dancing, stamping your feet, or giving yourself a massage.

▶ USE REASSURING PHRASES:

Thoughts that accompany panic may be very de-resourcing and have a life-or-death quality. Replace these with soothing, personalised thoughts and phrases.

- **Reassure:** Tell yourself "this is a panic attack, it is a temporary and natural reaction and will pass," or "I feel like I am in danger, but really I am safe now."
- **Visualize:** See yourself in your very own safe place, where you are calm and relaxed.

WHAT CAN I DO AFTER I HAVE A PANIC ATTACK?

Be kind towards yourself. Panic attacks are emotional experiences, after which you might feel upset, tired, weak or anxious. **These feelings are perfectly normal;** don't push yourself to get back to daily tasks and responsibilities. Give yourself some compassion and caring.

- Listen to music, make a hot drink, journal, talk to someone you trust.
- Try not to worry that it will happen again. Remind yourself that this one passed and that you have the resources to manage if it ever happens again.

HOW CAN I PREVENT IT FROM HAPPENING AGAIN?

Although it often feels like panic attacks come out of the blue and without warning, there are ways to manage them and to prevent them from recurring.

BECOME AWARE OF WHAT HAPPENS:

- You may like to note your experiences in a journal & perhaps discuss them with a trusted person to see if there is any pattern.
- ◆ **How were you feeling and thinking?** What did you sense before, during and after?
- ◆ **Where were you and who were you with?** Are there any particular triggers, e.g. journeys, fatigue, crowded places, pre-menstrual tension?
- ◆ **What helps and what hinders?** Are there times when it can be controlled?

BE YOUR OWN BEST FRIEND:

- After experiences of trauma, we can become disconnected from our bodies. Paying attention to our physical needs helps us to re-regulate.
- ◆ **Take regular exercise.** Go for a daily walk, or try an online class.
- ◆ **Eat regular meals.** Cut down on stimulants like caffeine, sugar, alcohol & cigarettes.
- ◆ **Develop a bedtime routine.** Organise sleeping arrangements so that you feel more comfortable, safer and less interrupted.
- ◆ **Breathe.** Focus on slow conscious breathing several times a day.
- ◆ **Express yourself.** Sometimes anxiety needs expression: stamp your feet, move your arms, slam your hands down on cushions, shout out how you feel.
- ◆ **Practice.** Use regular relaxation and visualisation to release stress.

Challenge unhelpful thoughts. Develop and savour a key phrase that helps you to feel safe. There is no need to judge yourself. You have not done anything wrong.







08

SUPPORTING SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT A FRIEND OR LOVED ONE?

Sexual violence refers to any kind of unwanted sexual activity or contact. This includes words or actions of a sexual nature forced upon a person without their consent. It is a deeply harmful activity that causes lasting damage, both physical and psychological.

- | | | | |
|----|----------------------------|----|---------------------------------|
| 01 | Tell them you believe them | 04 | Be understanding |
| 02 | Listen & Offer Support | 05 | Non-judgmental |
| 03 | Don't Blame | 06 | Let them make their own choices |

NATIONAL 24-HOUR HELPLINE 1800 77 88

If someone you know has experienced rape or any kind of sexual violence, you can call the National 24-Hour Helpline for support and information. Our telephone counsellors provide free and confidential support to people who have experienced sexual violence, as well as those working with and supporting victims/survivors. You can also find further information and resources on our website: www.drcc.ie

FINDING YOUR WAY AFTER SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Finding Your Way after Sexual Violence is an online guide to options and supports after sexual violence in Ireland. It provides information on accessing a Sexual Assault Treatment Unit, reporting to the Gardaí, and navigating the courts and legal process. The guide is for anyone in Ireland affected by sexual violence, including victims and survivors, their supporters and others engaged in these systems. To access Finding Your Way after Sexual Violence, go to: www.drcc.ie/fyw

WE-CONSENT

Whether you are a parent, caregiver, partner or friend, the We-Consent Resource Hub contains resources around supporting others impacted by sexual violence. Go to www.we-consent.ie/resource-hub



INTERPRETER SELF-CARE

WHEN IMPACTED DURING A SESSION

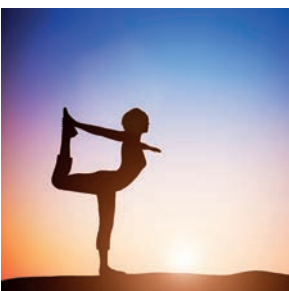
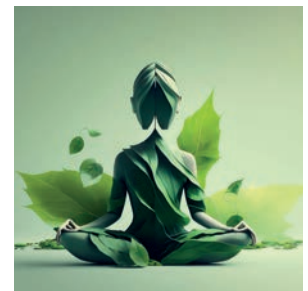


USE YOUR THINKING

Have some thoughts prepared in advance, based on what you know about how you are sometimes affected, e.g., "This person is safe now"; 'All I need do is fulfil my own role'; 'I am not in danger'.

USE YOUR BREATHING

The quickest, most effective way to settle our nervous system is through our breath. One long slow breath can settle a rush of emotion or nausea. During a break, take three slow breaths right down into the belly to calm agitation and ground you.



USE YOUR BODY

Notice how your body is responding: are you tightening? holding your breath? what sensations do you feel?

Ground yourself by pressing your feet into the floor, feeling the back of the chair supporting you. Most of us resource ourselves a lot with our hands, spoken language interpreters can for example hold their hands over their belly to protect and support themselves with the sometimes-visceral impact of hearing descriptions of violence.

USE IMAGERY

Have some images you can think of briefly to steady you: a place, person or pet you find comforting and steadying. There may be an image in the room you can glance at briefly to resource yourself. Or if on the phone, try doodling.



USE OTHER RESOURCES

For example, you may be supported by a piece of jewellery you can touch to connect you with the supportive person who gave it to you, or the place it comes from. A scarf you wear can give you an extra covering and something to touch and ground you.



10

VICARIOUS TRAUMATISATION

MANAGING TRAUMA

The following resource is primarily aimed at people who work with the public & who may need to work with or assist those traumatised by rape or sexual abuse. However, it may also be useful if you are supporting a friend or loved one in the aftermath of sexual violence. It is intended to help you recognise and understand the possible knock-on impact that providing such support may have on you personally, and how to deal with that.

Encountering the stories of victims of rape or child sexual abuse is stressful and traumatic. In the course of your work, you may hear or read details of horrific abuse, and of the pain, sometimes lifelong, experienced as a consequence.

As you witness the stories and the impact of trauma, you may experience a traumatic response yourself. It is worth reflecting on how working with trauma may be traumatising for you.

Research indicates that those who listen to stories of trauma are highly vulnerable **to Secondary Traumatic Stress** or **Vicarious Traumatization**. Reactions are similar to those of clients, but to a lesser degree. Vicarious Traumatization impacts on the cognitive, emotional, behavioural, spiritual, interpersonal and physical level. These of course overlap with each other.

IMPACTS OF TRAUMA

COGNITIVE

loss of concentration; confusion; lowered self-esteem; trauma focus; self-doubt; disillusionment; intrusive thoughts; intrusive disturbing imagery

PSYCHOLOGICAL/EMOTIONAL

powerlessness; anxiety; guilt; anger; numbness; depression; feeling emotionally depleted or overwhelmed; hypersensitivity; flashbacks; nightmares; panic attacks

BEHAVIOURAL

needy; impatient; irritable; withdrawn; moody; disturbed sleep, disturbed eating; negative coping behaviours (drinking, smoking, substance misuse)

SPIRITUAL

questioning meaning of life; loss of purpose; lack of self satisfaction; hopelessness; loss of faith; focussing on the negatives in humanity

INTERPERSONAL

withdrawn; loss of interest in intimacy or sex; mistrust; isolation from friends; intolerance; irritability; loneliness; impacts on parenting and other relationships; impact on feelings re gender and sexuality

PHYSICAL

shock; sweating; rapid heartbeat; breathing problems; impaired immune system; aches and pains; weight changes

PREVENTION

- Clearly define your role and responsibilities and its boundaries. You are not responsible for the client's experiences or distress or for solving the client's problems or meeting all of his/her needs or concerns. You are responsible for fulfilling your limited role in a caring and professional manner.
- Prepare for the day's work. Arrive a little early, and give yourself some moments beforehand. Try not to be rushing to an appointment, or focussed on other demands. Take a few minutes to clear your head.
- Take on the protection of your professional role, reminding yourself that this work is important to you and that you will do it with seriousness and concern, but that your own private life is separate from this.
- During a session, notice what happens for you, in your thoughts, images, emotions, and physically – sensations, movement, impulses. If you feel sick, light-headed, very emotional: ground yourself by noticing yourself sitting in the chair, the floor under your feet; take some deep breaths, and try to loosen your body - you could be sitting in a tense pose for a couple of hours if you are not aware.
- Take regular breaks and try to do something quite different during them, even for a few moments.
- Allow time for debriefing between one contact and the next.



- After a session, take a few moments to register how you are feeling and to let go of, shake out the session. Stretch and loosen your body, which may be holding some tension and trauma. Particularly those working on the telephone need to stretch and release tension in the shoulders and neck consistently through their shift.
- At the end of a day, take a little time to finish your day's work, being conscious of putting away files or materials, of locking up as a way of leaving the day behind. As you reach the outer door, consciously offload.
- The journey home can be used for unwinding and to make a transition between work and personal time.
- When you reach home, it is useful to have a routine to mark the transition from your working life to your home life, routines that differentiate them: showering, changing clothes, consciously leaving work behind, and taking on your personal life. The more conscious you are of offloading through your evening routine the more effective it will be.
- Limit your exposure where possible by seeing clients/reading documents for a limited time daily. Limit your exposure to traumatic material outside of work, eg TV, newspapers, social media. Consciously seek out the opposite to trauma: well being, recovery, goodness, joy.
- Communicate with the rest of the team about how you are feeling about the work, and draw on them for support.
- Provide yourself with as many opportunities as possible to enjoy activities which are fun, and make a conscious decision to link in often with the 'decent people' in your own life. Help yourself to maintain balance by taking part in activities that give you joy and pleasure.
- Be careful about rest and nutrition and monitor your alcohol and cigarette intake, which can increase beyond what you would wish when under pressure. Make sure you eat well: take your lunch break. Stress can cause us not to care what we eat, or to eat more junk food than is good for us. Listening with attention can be physically demanding: consider how you can relax physically and care for your back by stretching and easing out regularly.
- Exercise is a great release and will also allow an outlet for the energy which can build up when we are dealing with issues that cause us to feel anger or powerlessness. It also allows us to feel the competence, energy and power in our bodies after a period of absorbing a sense of powerlessness. It allows the fight or flight impulse that we may have experienced and truncated during a session to move through. It is very important to exercise when working with trauma.
- If you find you are bringing the thoughts of work home with you and that they are intruding on your personal life, address this in a supervision setting.

- It is important to maintain your social networks: stress and exhaustion can lead us to limit our social contact: positive contact will be especially necessary while you are doing this work. You will need to remind yourself about the positive aspects of the world by taking part in activities that give you joy and pleasure.
- Stress can cause us to spark off with family members or friends. Monitor on an ongoing basis whether the work is impacting on your relationships. If it is, this is a sign of a need for increased supervision and self-care. Bottling it up is a recipe for later explosion. You need ongoing supports and outlets.
- Do not be surprised or self-critical if this work impacts on your relationship with your own children, for example, you may find yourself feeling very over-protective. Seek support if necessary so that the effect does not become adverse.
- Be careful when travelling: take a moment at the start of the journey to become conscious of the road and the traffic. A person involved in intense work can be distracted on the journey to work or to home, and may speed, go through traffic lights etc.
- Don't be surprised if this work affects your own feelings about sexuality, or your own sexual life. Sometimes people experience flashbacks to images while engaged in sexual activity. Again, if this becomes a concern, seek support.
- Be careful not to offload onto your partner, sister, friends: they didn't choose to do this work. Or perhaps they also work in this field, and both of you need to be careful not to add to the other's trauma by sharing too much.
- Doing this work will impact on you personally. There may be times when you need space to consider and process this impact. Be open to the idea of counselling as a resource to you.



DISTURBING IMAGES

Images are very powerful stimuli, some creating intense emotional and physical responses. We may put them out of our minds, but they can re-emerge in dreams, often in upsetting ways. Powerful images once viewed or imagined become part of our life experience.

- Learn not to allow yourself to imagine people you care for, especially children, in the situations being described. Watch out for this later in the day: you may suddenly realise that on the way home you have spent ten minutes imagining this being done to a child you love; this is too traumatic and it is possible to learn not to do this.
- Don't take responsibility for what happens in your dreams. Our worst nightmares are, quite literally, played out in our dreams. But do seek support so as to off load the emotional impact if necessary.
- Use imagery to help you deal with intrusive images: watch as the image gets smaller and smaller, goes out of focus, or is placed in a container.

- Speaking about these images does rob them of some of their power. Professional support, external to your team may be necessary: a time and place where you can describe and express all that you are experiencing and feeling and offload.
- New information about the functioning of the human brain is emerging at an extraordinary pace. For example, research suggests that playing Tetris shortly after viewing violent images may greatly reduce their impact in relation to flashbacks and retention of the images. Keep up to date, what you discover will help you.

DUBLIN RAPE CRISIS CENTRE IS THERE FOR ANYONE AFFECTED BY SEXUAL VIOLENCE, INCLUDING THOSE SUPPORTING OTHERS.

CALL THE NATIONAL 24-HOUR HELPLINE 1800 77 8888 FOR NON-JUDGMENTAL INFORMATION & SUPPORT.





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