



## How to cope

People who undergo traumatic events such as childhood sexual abuse and sexual or physical assault can experience a range of complex feelings. Experiencing these feelings can be extremely overwhelming and some people worry that they are going crazy. You are not going crazy. It is important to understand that these intense feelings are a normal reaction to traumatic experiences like sexual assault or childhood sexual abuse that are not normal.

Your energy may be reduced while you are recovering emotionally from the trauma so it is important not to be too hard on yourself.

There are things you can do to help you recover from sexual assault. You do not have to be on your own. You may like to contact a Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) in your region, for assistance from experienced counselor/advocates or talk your doctor about referral options.

**Note:** Please consult with your doctor if you have concerns about your health. It can be helpful if your doctor knows about any traumatic experiences you have had. The Victorian CASAs can assist with names of doctors who know about the effects of sexual assault and trauma.

## Counselling & support groups

### Counselling

Sexual assault counselling provides an opportunity to talk about how you are feeling and to find ways to feel better. This can help you gain more control in your life.

It can be hard to seek help particularly as many survivors blame themselves for what has happened and may be fearful of being further blamed or judged by others. Men may find it particularly difficult to ask for assistance as social pressures reinforce the idea that men should be strong and deal with issues on their own. This may prevent men from seeking help and can lead to crisis.

Looking after your health and getting support is positive and healthy for women, men and young people. The Victorian CASAs offer free confidential counselling by experienced, professional counsellor/advocates who can assist in the recovery process. We can also assist with referrals to private practitioners with experience in sexual assault counseling. If you are finding it difficult to cope, the Sexual Assault Crisis Line is available after hours.

In counselling at a Victorian CASA you have the right to:

- ◆ Be listened to and believed
- ◆ Have your needs and decisions respected
- ◆ Ask questions about the counsellor's knowledge and beliefs regarding sexual assault
- ◆ Ask the counsellor about their qualifications and experience
- ◆ Change counselor or cease counselling if you are not comfortable
- ◆ Choose a female or male counselor
- ◆ Have what you tell the counsellor kept private unless:
  - ◆ There is a serious risk to your or someone else's safety
  - ◆ The counselor is required by law to provide information in court cases. (This happens occasionally).



## Support groups

Joining a support group can help you feel better about who you are and to understand that what you are experiencing as a result of being sexual assaulted is normal. Recognising that others have had similar experiences helps break down feelings of isolation, shame and loneliness. Groups provide learning opportunities to express feelings and develop greater trust in other people. They can be a powerful way of overcoming barriers to talking about sexual abuse and assault.

## Other things that might help

- ◆ Talking to someone you trust
- ◆ Art therapy
- ◆ Making or listening to music
- ◆ Dance therapy
- ◆ Getting away from everything (time to reflect, relax and rejuvenate)
- ◆ Being with friends and/or family who are supportive
- ◆ Having a bath
- ◆ Relaxation techniques (yoga, meditation, massage, music)
- ◆ Being by yourself
- ◆ Physical activity (playing sport, walking, swimming, dancing)
- ◆ Doing a course
- ◆ Drawing and writing (journaling thoughts and feelings)
- ◆ Going to a place you like
- ◆ Joining a group
- ◆ Watching movies/TV
- ◆ Pets
- ◆ Support groups
- ◆ Balanced diet (avoid overusing drugs, caffeine, sugar, alcohol and nicotine)
- ◆ Doing things for fun and enjoyment
- ◆ Keeping away from people and situations that make you feel bad about yourself