

## FEELING BETTER & SELF-CARE

*Finding ways to feel better and take care of yourself is an important part of recovering from trauma.*

### Stay Connected

- Following a trauma, you may want to withdraw from others, but isolation makes things worse. **Connecting to others will help you heal**, so make an effort to maintain your relationships and avoid spending too much time alone.
- **Ask for support.** It's important to talk about your feelings and ask for the help you need. Turn to a trusted family member, friend, counselor (who has been trained in trauma & abuse), or religious leader.
- **Participate in social activities**, even if you don't feel like it. Do "normal" things with other people, things that have nothing to do with the traumatic experience. If you've retreated from relationships that were once important to you, make the effort to reconnect.
- **Join a support group.** Being with others who are facing the same problems can help reduce your sense of isolation and hearing how others cope can help inspire you.
- **Volunteer.** As well as helping others, volunteering can be a great way to challenge the sense of helplessness that often accompanies trauma by reminding yourself of your strengths and reclaiming your sense of power.

#### **REMEMBER:**

- Recovering from emotional and psychological trauma takes time.
- Give yourself time to heal and to mourn the losses you've experienced.
- Don't try to force the healing process.
- Be patient with the pace of recovery.
- Finally, be prepared for difficult and volatile emotions.
- Allow yourself to feel whatever you're feeling without judgment or guilt.

### Stay Grounded

- **Stick to a daily routine**, with regular times for waking, sleeping, eating, working, and exercise. Make sure to schedule time for relaxing and social activities, too.
- **Break large jobs into smaller, manageable tasks.** Take pleasure from the accomplishment of achieving something, even it's a small thing.
- **Find activities that make you feel better** and keep your mind occupied (reading, taking a class, cooking, playing with your kids or pets), so you're not dedicating all your energy and attention to focusing on the traumatic experience.
- **Allow yourself to feel what you feel when you feel it.** Acknowledge your feelings about the trauma as they arise and accept them. Accepting your feelings is part of the grieving process and is necessary for healing.

#### **Try this...**

*If you are feeling disoriented, confused, or upset, you can do the following exercise:*

1. Sit on a chair. Feel your feet on the ground. Press on your thighs. Feel your behind on the seat and your back against the chair.
2. Look around you and pick six objects that have red or blue. This should allow you to feel in the present, more grounded, and in your body. Notice how your breath gets deeper and calmer.
3. You may want to go outdoors and find a peaceful place to sit on the grass. As you do, feel how your body can be held and supported by the ground.

## **Stay Healthy**

*A healthy body increases your ability to cope with stress from a trauma.*

- **Get plenty of sleep.** After a traumatic experience, worry or fear may disturb your sleep patterns. A lack of sleep can make your trauma symptoms worse and make it harder to maintain your emotional balance. Go to sleep and get up at the same time each day and aim for 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night.
- **Avoid alcohol and drugs** as their use can worsen your trauma symptoms and exacerbate feelings of depression, anxiety, and isolation.
- **Exercise regularly.** Regular exercise boosts serotonin, endorphins, and other feel-good brain chemicals. It also boosts self-esteem and helps to improve sleep. For maximum results, aim for 30 to 60 minutes of activity on most days.
- **Eat a well-balanced diet.** Eating small, well-balanced meals throughout the day will help you keep your energy up and minimize mood swings. While you may be drawn to sugary foods for the quick boost they provide, complex carbohydrates are a better choice. Foods rich in certain omega-3 fats—such as salmon, walnuts, soybeans, and flaxseeds—can give your mood a boost.
- **Reduce stress.** Making time for rest and relaxation will help you bring your life back into balance. Try relaxation techniques such as meditation, yoga, or deep breathing exercises. Schedule time for activities that bring you joy—favorite hobbies or activities with friends, for example.

### **Things that can make it worse:**

*It is natural to want to find a way to make ourselves feel good, but when we do something too much it can sometimes have its own negative effects.*

- Substance abuse
- Gambling
- Eating disorders (including overeating)
- Compulsive spending or shoplifting
- Excessive working out
- Sexually risk-taking
- Cutting or self-harm

## **SELF-SOOTHING TECHNIQUES**

*Many of us have never learned how to self-soothe, how to do those often simple things that makes us feel better. Experiment with different techniques of soothing each of your five senses until you find some that are comfortable and helpful for you.*

- VISION:** Walk in a pretty part of town. Look at the nature around you. Go to a museum with beautiful art. Buy a flower and put it where you can see it. Sit in a garden. Watch the snowflakes decorate the trees during a snowfall.
- HEARING:** Listen to beautiful or soothing music, or to tapes of the ocean or other sounds of nature. Sit by a waterfall. Listen to someone chopping wood. When you are listening, be mindful, letting the sounds come and go.
- SMELL:** Smell breakfast being cooked at home or in a restaurant. Notice all the different smells around you. Walk in a garden or in the woods, maybe just after a rain, and breathe in the smells of nature. Light a scented candle or incense.
- TASTE:** Have a special treat, and eat it slowly, savoring each bite. Cook a favorite meal. Drink a soothing drink like herbal tea or hot chocolate. Let the taste run over your tongue and slowly down your throat.
- TOUCH:** Take a bubble bath. Pet your dog or cat or cuddle a baby. Put on a silk shirt or blouse, and feel its softness and smoothness. Sink into a really comfortable bed. Float or swim in a pool, and feel the water caress your body.