

Fact Sheet



Practical Strategies for supporting a client following sexual assault/abuse disclosure

Increasing Support

Generally, the more social support someone has the faster they recover from the trauma. Unfortunately, trauma (particularly complex) has an adverse effect on our ability to form and maintain healthy, positive, stable relationships.

Look for opportunities to increase the quality and/or quantity of the client's connections with groups, family, friends, teachers or supportive others.

Minimising Triggers

Identify the triggers and help the person understand their reactions – normalise these reactions with them.

Where possible, minimise the triggers:

- Look at work, home, school environments and identify possible changes that can be made
- Alert relevant people if necessary so they are able to plan ahead

Make a plan as to how the client can manage being triggered:

- Identify an 'escape route'
- Identify somewhere to go that they feel safe (or someone to go to)
- Identify preferred grounding techniques they can use to lower anxiety/distress
- Make a plan with the client to re-integrate into normal routine as soon as they are able

Managing Distress

- Diaphragm Breathing
- 3/6 Breathing (breathe in for 3 seconds and out for 6 seconds)
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation (flex and relax for each part of the body)
- Safe Place Visualisation
- Mindfulness – Headspace or Smiling Mind
- Affirmations



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Self-Soothing Strategies Using the 5 Senses

- Vision – pictures, sunset
- Hearing – music
- Smell – perfume, incense
- Taste – favourite treat
- Touch – hug someone, pet an animal

Cheer Leading Statements

Encourage the client to develop some statements to say to themselves when times are tough or when they are in a difficult situation. It is important for them to continue to say nice things about themselves in these situations.

Examples:

- I'm okay
- I'm a strong person
- I CAN so this
- Everything will be okay

Building a 'container' for trauma memories and thoughts

It is important to help clients to be able to temporarily put away intrusive thoughts and memories that may come to mind at inappropriate times. Container skills will enable clients to put the thoughts away at times and think about them when it may be more appropriate.

Steps to take:

- Encourage client to imagine a container to 'put' memories of trauma in;
- Help them create/visualise this container;
- Practice putting memories away into the container;
- Suggest they use this container before sleep;
- Let clients know that it may be appropriate for them to access the 'container' of memories when they attend counselling

Grounding Techniques

Mental

Mental Grounding techniques involve focusing your mind, examples include:

- Describing your environment in detail
- Play a 'categories' game with yourself
- Describe an everyday activity in detail (i.e. washing up)
- Imagine something nice
- Say a safety statement
- Read something, saying each word to yourself aloud
- Use humour
- Count to 10 or say the alphabet very slowly

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Physical

Physical Grounding techniques involve focusing on your senses, examples include:

- Run cool or warm water over your hands
- Grab tightly onto your chair as hard as you can
- Touch various objects around you
- Dig your heels into the floor
- Carry a grounding object with you
- Jump up and down
- Notice your body
- Stretch
- Clench and release your fists
- Walk slowly, noticing each footstep
- Eat something, describing the flavours
- Focus on your breathing

Soothing

Soothing techniques involve talking to yourself in a very kind way, examples include:

- Saying kind statements
- Think of favourites
- Picture people you care about
- Remembers words to an inspiring song, quotation or poem
- Remember a safe place
- Say a coping statement
- Plan a safe treat for yourself
- Think of things you are looking forward to in the next week

Getting Physical

Excess adrenaline and cortisol is in the system which is not being discharged when physical fight/flight system is not activated. Physical activity will discharge these chemicals and help calm the person.

Examples:

- Walking
- Running
- Gardening
- Wii Sports
- Trampoline
- Sports – basketball etc.
- Dancing
- Pacing
- Stretching
- Moving Furniture
- Yoga

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