

SUPPORTING HOPE

*Helping a Loved One Through
Their Healing Journey*

the
younique
FOUNDATION

This book contains the copyrighted and proprietary intellectual property of The Younique Foundation.

The Younique Foundation's *Supporting Hope* book, as well as any associated products or those recommended within, are not intended to take the place of therapy. It is advised that all users of this book consider counseling from a licensed therapist in your local area.

©2017 by The Younique Foundation. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No portion of this publication may be reproduced or used in any manner without the written consent of The Younique Foundation.

First Edition.

I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become.

-Carl Jung-

Reclaim Hope. Defend Innocence.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

About the Younique Foundation

We inspire hope in women who were sexually abused as children or adolescents by hosting them at a retreat where they are uplifted by each other and learn skills that can help them find individual healing.

We educate parents and empower them to protect their children from sexual abuse while leading a public dialogue to bring the epidemic of abuse to light.

The Younique Foundation (TYF) was established as a nonprofit organization in December 2014 in Lehi, Utah. As a public charity, TYF is made possible through the kindness and generosity of many wonderful donors, especially Derek and Shelaine Maxfield who lead with vision and funding to make our goals attainable.

About the Authors

This book is the compilation of many individuals' efforts, both clinical and non-clinical under the supervision of the Clinical Director of The Younique Foundation, Gordon Bruin, MA, CMHC. Special thanks to him and his team for incorporating many years of diverse clinical experience into this book.

Contents

About The Younique Foundation

Introduction

1. Effects of Sexual Abuse Trauma
2. Trauma and the Brain
3. 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope
4. What Can I Do and Say to Help?
5. Resources for Family Members or Caregivers of Sexual Abuse Survivors

Introduction

At The Yunique Foundation, we inspire hope in women who were sexually abused as children or adolescents by hosting them at a retreat where they are uplifted by each other and learn skills, from trained and licensed professionals, that can help them find individual healing.

Most often, these retreats are amazing and life changing experiences for the women who attend. Survivors learn three really important concepts: 1) how their brains work and were impacted by their trauma, 2) what therapeutic strategies and tactics they can use on their healing journey, and 3) how important a support community is for their healing.

Many of these women have loving families and friends, like you, who want to support them in their healing journey. It's common for support systems (like you) to want to know how to best support the survivors they love. We want to help.



This short e-book will teach three key concepts that will help you better support the courageous survivor you love. It will provide you with, 1) an understanding of the effects of sexual abuse on a survivor, 2) an understanding of the traumatized brain and how a survivor may interpret things differently than you, and 3) some practical skills you can use to support a survivor in their healing journey.

Although our Foundation works closely with adult women survivors of childhood sexual abuse, these principles are universal and can help you support any survivor.

Chapter 1:

Effects of Sexual Abuse Trauma

To start, let's talk broadly about what sexual abuse is, how it affects a survivor, and how survivors often cope with their abuse. Understanding some of these basics will help you better relate to what survivors are going through, and ultimately better support them.

Supporting a survivor who is in the process of healing from childhood sexual abuse requires honesty, courage, and commitment. Your loved one didn't choose to be abused and didn't realize there would be long-term effects. Like most survivors, she probably escaped from the abusive environment during adolescence or early adulthood, and for a long time the freedom and distractions of life carried her forward, sometimes for years. She may not have realized that the growing emotional and behavioral problems experienced now are linked to her history and that one day, if she didn't find appropriate ways to heal from her trauma, she would continue to experience negative effects. But a survivor can heal, and you can be a source of great help as she progresses along her healing journey.

Definitions

So we're all on the same page, let's define childhood sexual abuse. Defining sexual abuse requires the use of graphic terms, but we feel it's important for you to understand what a survivor may have gone through.

For the purposes of this book, child sexual abuse involves another person (adult, sibling, or peer) who forces, manipulates, or coerces a child

or adolescent into sexual activity. This activity may include fondling genitals, masturbation, oral-genital contact, digital penetration, vaginal intercourse, and/or anal intercourse. It's important to note that child sexual abuse is not restricted to simply physical contact; it may include unhealthy sexual exposure, voyeurism, and pornography.

It's also important for us to define trauma. The American Psychological Association defines trauma as “an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer-term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea. While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives.”

Sexual abuse trauma occurs when a person violates someone's personal space without their consent or permission. It's an event that has a tendency to destroy trust, not only in the individual who violated the trust, but also in the world at large. It makes the world seem like an unsafe place for that child.



Effects of Sexual Abuse

Survivors of sexual abuse trauma often experience many physical, physiological, and emotional effects as a result of their abuse. Some of these effects may come and go, and some may be something a survivor experiences for the rest of their life. As a supporter, it is important for you to recognize and understand behaviors and their connection to the abuse so as to not mislabel it as something else.

Mental Health

Mental health diagnoses that are common for survivors are post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and addiction disorders.

Helpful Tip: Most symptoms and disorders can be managed through a combination of self-care, medication, and therapy. But it's also important for survivors to have the support of friends, family, and loved ones.

PTSD can include flashbacks, nightmares, or memories of the abuse that often come at unexpected times or when triggered. Survivors can feel as though they are back experiencing the trauma, including having a physiological response just like they did during the trauma. Some survivors also experience dissociation which is a state of feeling disconnected from one's own body as if watching the experience instead of actually being present. This is often used as a way to cope with the trauma while experiencing it but isn't healthy in the long term when the threat is no longer present.

Helpful Tip: Reassuring your loved one that you are there for her and will support her at such times can be helpful in healing and reducing trauma symptoms.

Many survivors experience depression and anxiety, but the intensity of depression and anxiety can fluctuate throughout her life. As she tells her story, begins to disclose more information, experiences triggers, and starts therapy, depression and anxiety symptoms may increase. The list below shows some of the common behavioral symptoms of depression and anxiety:

- Sleep problems
- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Anger outbursts
- Suicidal thoughts and feelings
- Self-harming
- Extended periods of sadness and crying
- Physical concerns — headaches, upset stomach, backache, or tight muscles
- Poor concentration
- Change in appetite
- Withdrawal
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed

Helpful Tip: It's normal for people to experience some depression in their lives, especially survivors of sexual abuse. However, if any of these

symptoms interfere with daily function, last for a significant amount of time, or put a person's health and safety at risk, it's important to consult a doctor or mental health professional.

Guilt and Shame

Some of the most common side-effects that survivors experience are guilt, shame, and blame. She may blame herself or feel guilt for what happened to her or her response to the abuse. She may have friends and family members who have made statements that contribute to this such as “Why didn't you tell anyone?” “Why didn't you just say no?” “You must have liked it since you kept going back.” “What were you wearing?” or other statements that put the responsibility on the survivor.

A survivor can carry guilt and shame into adulthood, so it's important to help them understand the abuse was not their fault. Guilt and shame often spreads into other areas of the survivor's life. A survivor will often feel guilt or take on responsibility or accountability for things that are not in their control.

Helpful Tip: It's important to be aware of statements that you make that can add to guilt and shame. Contrastly, statements you make can also alleviate the guilt and shame that survivors many times feel. In Chapter 4, we give some helpful tips about things you can do and say that will help alleviate this guilt and shame.

Relationships

Survivors of sexual abuse can struggle with relationships. This includes allowing themselves to trust others, open up, or commit to a relationship whether romantic or otherwise. They may, subconsciously,

test their partner, friends, or family to see if they'll be there for them during difficult times.

Survivors often feel powerless or helpless in their current lives because they didn't have power as a child. They may have difficulty setting boundaries, saying no, or may shut others out entirely.

Intimate Partner Tip: Intimacy and sex are often difficult for survivors. Her first sexual experience was not something she chose and occurred at a time when she wasn't able to fully understand what was happening. She experiences confusion with sexual experiences as her body may have reacted positively to a very negative abusive experience. She may be triggered during sexual experiences which can cause her to avoid them all together or have strong negative emotions. Alternatively, some survivors may engage in out-of-control or high-risk sexual behaviors.

Helpful Tip: Partners can help in this area by being patient, understanding, and allowing the survivor to communicate what she does and does not like with regards to sex and intimacy.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is another area a survivor may have difficulty. This is often a result of her abuse. She may have been told she was beautiful or special during her abuse. To have sweet things said during such traumatic experiences might have caused confusion and now in her current life when she is given compliments she isn't sure how to handle them. She's not as likely to believe others when she's told positive things about herself. She may have also been told she was ugly or "no one will ever love you/want to be with you." A survivor may internalize these words from a young age and

therefore, fail to see positive qualities in herself. As a result, survivors are more likely to struggle with having a healthy body image and positive self-outlook. This can be worked on, but will take time and requires patience from those around her.

Helpful Tip: As a support system, you can help rebuild a survivor's self-esteem by being complimentary of her many positive qualities. Don't just focus on one area, but find lots to compliment her on: her mind, her talents, her accomplishments, and yes, her beauty. Although she'll likely have a hard time accepting these compliments at first, over time they will make a difference.



Addiction

Trauma can make a survivor more susceptible to addiction. Addictions may include drugs, alcohol, gambling, shopping, pornography, sex, or food. Trauma is held in the brain and when one is triggered in some way, a survivor may seek for a way to avoid or escape from the feelings that

arise. These addictive behaviors provide pleasure or comfort quicker than other means such as deep breathing, jogging, or talking to someone. A survivor has a high risk of becoming addicted to one of these behaviors.

It's important to remember that these addictive behaviors only provide temporary relief and may require more and more to provide the same amount of pleasure over time.

Helpful Tip: Addictions can be overcome with the help of family members, a therapist, and appropriate tools such as those found in *The 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope* and the companion workbook. Again, this requires a lot of patience and encouragement from those who are supporting the survivor.

Cultural Beliefs

Virtually every culture has spoken and unspoken rules about sex and sexuality. For example, in cultures that place a high value on female virginity, a girl who has been sexually abused may feel that she has been disgraced and is now “damaged goods” whom no one would want to marry. This can lead to feelings of shame that in turn lead to further secrecy. Boys who have been sexually abused may experience shame and self-doubt. Boys who have been sexually abused by a male may struggle with a commonly-held misconception that this makes them homosexual.

Although your cultural beliefs are important, it's necessary to focus on the physical and emotional health of the survivor. Remember that the sexual abuse is not their fault and does not reflect negatively on your family or you as a family member. Seek guidance from people in your community that you trust, such as religious leaders, medical professionals, or others who will be supportive.

Chapter 2: Trauma and the Brain

Over the past 20 years, significant advances have been made to help us realize the effect that childhood trauma has on an individual. Much of this is thanks to the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study, one of the largest investigations ever conducted to assess associations between childhood trauma and well-being later in life. This study was a collaborative effort between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente's Health Appraisal Clinic in San Diego.

This study followed more than 17,000 individuals for over ten years. Members of this study underwent a comprehensive physical examination and provided detailed information about their childhood experience of abuse, neglect, or family dysfunction.

The ACE Study clearly shows that certain childhood experiences increase factors leading to illness, poor quality of life, and early death. The main result of the study showed that there is a correlation between people's early childhood experiences (including sexual abuse trauma) and how well they function in life mentally and physically.

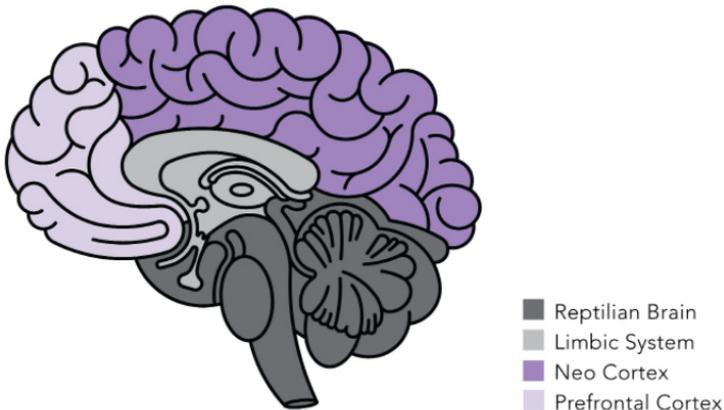
Starting in infancy the brain is in an intense learning phase as it experiences the world. If certain developmental needs are not met, the brain gets wired not to trust certain things and does what it can to survive. In order for a child's or teen's brain to develop in a healthy manner, certain developmental needs must be consistently provided, needs like:

- Love
- Safety
- Continual nurturing
- Healthy touch

If a child's or teen's environment does not consistently provide these developmental needs it can lead to improper brain development. If the world is an unsafe place for a child or teen, then their normal development can get stuck.

If sexual abuse trauma is experienced during these child and teen years, the brain can be hindered in its development. If, instead of safety and nurturing, a child or teen experiences the violence of sexual trauma, then the brain can get stuck in perpetual survival mode and see the world as an unsafe place. This is especially true when the abuser of the trauma was someone that should have been trustworthy. The misuse of power that occurs when an adult abuses a child can leave the survivor stuck in a state of fear.

When we do not feel safe, our brain will drive us toward things that can provide that feeling of safety. Often that leads us to self-defeating



behaviors or negative coping mechanisms, like addiction, which gives a sense of temporary safety or well-being.

The Two-Part Brain Model

We're going to introduce you to the science of the brain because it is critical to understanding how survivor's process information and their experiences. We recognize that this information is more technical and clinical, but it is foundational to understanding what survivors of sexual abuse go through.

Most people like to think of themselves as having one brain which is the control center for all thoughts and activities. Brain researchers describe the brain differently. They say that we actually have three separate parts of our brain that try to work together in unison to produce a positive and healthy life.

John Medina, a molecular developmental biologist and brain researcher, states in his book *Brain Rules* that our brain has three distinct parts with three distinct functions. He calls these parts the Human brain (neocortex), the Mammalian brain (limbic), and the Lizard brain (reptilian). Neuroscientists generally agree that the three-part brain is the control center for all feelings, emotions, and behaviors, both conscious and subconscious.

For our purposes, we're going to focus on just two parts of the brain: 1) The limbic system, and 2) the neocortex, specifically the front part of the neocortex, the prefrontal cortex. (The reptilian brain, though it has the important job of basic functions like breathing and heart pumping, will not be part of this discussion.)



The Limbic System and Survivors

The limbic system, or “primitive brain” as some call it, is where our instinctual drives originate and where our pleasure centers are located. These pleasure centers are extremely powerful in driving our behaviors and can easily lead to addictive, compulsive, or self-defeating behaviors unless they’re understood and managed. The limbic system has three simple but powerful directives:

1. Survive
2. Avoid pain
3. Seek pleasure

In the limbic system, the thalamus is the gathering place for sensory input. When we see something with our eyes, for example, that information goes to the thalamus, which then decides if it’s a survival situation. For many people, most of that sensory information is weeded out and never even comes to their awareness. Think about driving a car. You aren’t aware of every color, object, person, etc. that surrounds you. If the car in front of you brakes suddenly, however, you become hyper-aware.

Those red brake lights trigger the limbic system. Your heart starts beating faster and adrenaline starts pumping, preparing you for a survival situation.

A traumatized brain, however, can easily misinterpret something as a survival situation when, in reality, it's not. In other words, a harmless situation can remind her of past trauma and trigger survival responses and behaviors. It's important to understand that the limbic system can't tell the difference between a past, present, or future event. To the limbic system the memory of the abuse can be just as traumatic and real as the experience itself. Protecting herself becomes all that matters.

Triggers

The word trigger is often used when talking about trauma, but many people are uncertain of exactly what that means. A trigger is something that reminds a person, or triggers a memory, of a traumatic event. Triggers are unique to each person and their specific trauma. They are most often activated through the senses of touch, smell, sight, taste, and sound. Sights and sounds are the most common triggers for people. For example, hearing a sound similar to one her abuser made, or seeing someone who looks like her abuser, can be powerful triggers.

Triggers can be seemingly harmless events, but they cause intense emotional and physical reactions in a survivor. This is because the brain has connected the trigger with the past traumatic event. As survivors encounter the trigger, their bodies may respond physically to the stress with symptoms such as increased heart rate and blood pressure, shallow breathing, trembling, and dizziness.

She may experience flashbacks, where she feels like the abuse is happening again. The trigger sets off a survival response in the limbic part of the traumatized brain, and to avoid the trigger she may 1) fight back, 2) try to escape the trigger either by fleeing the situation or by mentally

separating from the situation, or 3) physically and/or emotionally shut down.

The fight, flight, or freeze response is the brain's way of trying to keep a survivor safe from the perceived threat. Although this may provide temporary relief, it's not an effective long-term way to deal with trauma. It leads to increased behaviors to try to avoid triggers, a loss of confidence in her ability to cope with them, and increased anxiety about them occurring.

The Limbic System and Memories

The limbic system is the part of the brain where traumatic memories are stored. It's the part of the brain where fear lives and thrives. Some fear isn't a bad thing. In fact, without being able to feel fear we wouldn't be able to survive. However, when trauma occurs early in life, sexual abuse trauma in particular, this part of the brain can become wired to view the entire world through the lens of fear, even things you don't need to be afraid of.

The limbic system's job is to hold memories, respond to the world, and keep us alive. But because of the traumatic memories most survivors have, they respond to the world differently than you. If a survivor doesn't direct the limbic system down the right paths, it can dominate her life. We also know that if the limbic system is constantly unrestrained, it can rule someone's life without their fully understanding why they may feel depressed or anxious all the time.

In addition, the limbic system is where instinctual drives originate and where pleasure centers are located. These pleasure centers are extremely powerful in driving behaviors and can easily lead to addictive, compulsive, or self-defeating behaviors unless they're understood and managed. Unfortunately, the limbic system cannot distinguish between unhealthy and healthy behaviors as long as the survival need is being met.

Although we use verbal language to engage the healing process, it's essential to understand that the limbic system doesn't respond to orders and demands. It doesn't have the ability to logically evaluate and respond. That's why telling someone else to forget the past and move on or to stop feeling a certain way is no more effective than telling a two-year-old to share their favorite toy and be happy about it. It's not an easy thing to do.

Helpful Tip: The best way to approach and respond to the limbic system is to become more educated about it, understand how it works, and why it does what it does.



The Prefrontal Cortex

The prefrontal cortex, or “rational brain,” is the moral, logical part of the brain that sits above the limbic system. It's located in the very front of the brain, just behind the forehead. This part of the brain is in charge of abstract thinking, thought analysis, and regulating behavior. It's the braking system that stops us from acting out on all of the cravings or compulsions that originate from the limbic system.

This area of the brain also governs social control such as suppressing emotional or sexual urges. It's where our sense of right and wrong comes from. It also mediates between conflicting thoughts and predicts the probable outcome of actions or events. The prefrontal cortex is responsible for deciding on actions. Many refer to it as "the higher brain" or "the conductor." This is where qualities like consciousness, intelligence, and personality originate. However, this part of the brain is easily manipulated by the limbic system.

Getting the Two-Part Brain to Work Together

The core issue in restoring trauma survivors to healthy living is to create a balance between their prefrontal cortex and their limbic system. With proper training the two-part brain can become integrated. Without training the limbic system can overpower and override the prefrontal cortex (the rational brain).

She can "white knuckle" it for a period of time through sheer willpower, but when the limbic system interprets certain circumstances as a threat to survival or well-being, it becomes more anxious and desperate. Learning to manage these feelings in a healthy way is what her healing journey is all about.

Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt provided a good analogy to describe the two-part brain using a child riding an elephant. The child represents the prefrontal cortex and the elephant represents the limbic system. Although the elephant is much bigger and appears more powerful than the little child, the child can train and direct the elephant. When the child and elephant trust each other, they become a powerful team.

The process is the same for survivors of trauma. As the prefrontal cortex becomes more familiar with the limbic system, trust can be built between the two parts of the brain and healing expedited.

If the brain experiences trauma as it is developing, the limbic system remembers it. Our current understanding of brain development teaches us that the limbic system develops long before the prefrontal cortex does. This makes sense, as it is the limbic system's job to keep us alive. In addition, memories, particularly traumatic memories, are stored for future use to keep us out of danger.

Tools to Help

Fortunately, there are tools that survivors and loved ones can use to help minimize the effects of triggers and learn to effectively cope with them without having the limbic brain activate the fight, flight, or freeze response. As a family member or friend of a survivor, it's important to remember that their triggers and responses are not about you personally. The key is to communicate and plan with loved ones about what you can do to help prior to a trigger response occurring. Once a person's limbic brain is fully activated in a fight, flight, or freeze situation, they will not be in a position to discuss with you about what they need.

Although every survivor is an individual, there are some strategies to cope with triggers that are frequently used with success. Discuss with the survivor what works best for her. Strategies are reviewed in detail in the *Reclaim Hope Workbook*, and it may be useful for you to go over them together. Remember that using these tools takes practice, and they are most effective when the trigger is first encountered, before the limbic brain has taken over.

Chapter 3:

5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope

Given the effects of sexual abuse and the impact of trauma on a survivor's brain, it is important to remember that your loved one is on a healing journey. Healing is possible, but it will take time.

Our 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope provide a road map for survivors to follow and are a way to face reality with confidence, courage, and hope. As a support system, you can help survivors you love implement these important tactics.

The five strategies are:

- Awareness
- Acknowledgement
- Power Through Surrender
- Mindfulness
- Faith

In the clinical profession, these evidence-based strategies are referred to as “best practices.” To be considered a best practice a particular principle, philosophy, or method has to pass the test of time and the scrutiny of research. Drawing on years of clinical experience, we are confident that we are introducing you to some of the best material available. With that in mind, no single best practice works for everyone, so don't worry if one practice doesn't work for the survivor you love. Simply encourage her to try a different one.

The 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope aren't necessarily meant to be used in order. At times she may need one more than another, or need to change the order in which she utilizes them, but they all work together.

We'll provide brief summaries of each strategy in this chapter with a few practical ways you can help a survivor implement them in their healing journey. But it's important to remember that many survivors shy away from moving forward in their current lives. It's easy for them to think, "This is just the way I am and I can't change that." It's challenging to face past trauma issues, but it's critical that they do so in order for healing to take place.

As much as we'd like to take over a healing journey for someone we love, we simply can't. A survivor has to accept responsibility for their healing journey, and that can be very difficult. The abuse was not their fault. They didn't choose it, so why should they be responsible to fix it? It's not fair! Those sentiments are understandable. But regardless of what others have done, a survivor has the power to choose how they'll respond. Their healing journey is their responsibility. You as a support system can make this easier and help them, but you can't do it for them.



In addition to the following strategies presented in this chapter, we strongly encourage those who have been sexually abused to seek therapeutic help from licensed mental health professionals.

Strategy 1: Awareness

Awareness is becoming more grounded in the now, in the present moment. It means learning how to develop a healthy relationship with time. Those who struggle with sexual abuse trauma may spend a significant amount of time in either the past or the future as opposed to staying focused in the present moment.

Helping survivors learn to be aware of their body's feelings and sensations puts them in touch with their present self. A great way to do that is through grounding techniques.

Grounding refers to helping a person mindfully stay in the present moment and focusing on the outward world instead of overwhelming internal emotions and triggers. Grounding can involve both physical and mental aspects. Grounding techniques restore balance and allow her limbic system and prefrontal cortex to talk to one another. This leads to Awareness which puts a survivor in a position to make a conscious choice, allowing her to choose how she'll act and respond in any given situation. Becoming aware of the present moment will help her get out of crisis mode so she can move forward in a productive way.

Here is a list of a few things you can try to help ground a survivor. The two of you should agree upon a few of these tactics before the triggers come. If you wait until the moment one is occurring, it may be too late.

- **Deep Breathing:** Deep breathing is one technique that seems so simple, but is in fact extremely effective. It helps the survivor become calm and centered and promotes the prefrontal cortex to remain in control. Deep breathing involves inhaling

through the nose, holding the inhale for several counts, and then exhaling through the mouth. It's important to make sure the exhale is longer than the inhale.

- **Physical Observation:** Physical observation helps her focus on where her body is at the present time. It includes things like feeling her feet on the floor or how the texture of a chair feels under her hands. You can use anything that brings her focus to actively feeling something physical.
- **Mental Focus:** Mental focus involves bringing attention to aspects of her environment. It could be focusing on finding five things that are a specific shape in a room or naming as many cities as she can think of. It could involve envisioning a calm, safe place and engaging all her senses to notice everything she loves about the place.
- **Senses Observation:** Another thing you can do is to help a survivor focus on one of her senses and name all the things that she is aware of because of that sense. For instance, if you choose hearing you can help her focus on each individual sound around them.
- **Color Observation:** You could also choose a color and have a survivor locate every single thing around her that has that color. She can even do this while you're driving. You'll be amazed at the things that pop out.

Strategy 2: Acknowledgement

The second Strategy to Reclaim Hope is to allow the survivor to Acknowledge the truth about her actions, no matter how difficult that might be. Acknowledgement consists of four major parts:

1. Acknowledgement helps her accept where she is on her healing journey. She recognize her truth and what she needs to do to heal. As long as she represses the truth she is fundamentally at war with herself. Suppressing core feelings is both psychologically taxing and physically exhausting.
2. Acknowledgement helps her know that although it isn't her fault that the abuse occurred, it is within her power to get the help she needs to heal.
3. Acknowledgement allows her to courageously take a look at the past traumatic events in her life, the effect they've had on her, and know that she can change.
4. Acknowledgement is the key to behavior change. It isn't a one-time thing, but an ongoing process. She has to continually Acknowledge where she is and know where she needs to be.

Helpful Tip: Journaling and talking to a therapist are two strategies in particular that can help a survivor recognize her truth.



Journaling

For many survivors, the best place to start when dealing with past trauma is to write or journal. During the beginning stages of recovery some things may be too difficult to verbalize. Journaling is a safe place for her to find out where she really is, emotionally. As she writes, she may come across truths that she wasn't previously aware of. She'll be able to explore these realizations alone before bringing them out into the open. As a supporter, you can encourage a survivor to try journaling. You should also respect their privacy if they choose to journal about things that they do not want you to read.

Talk Therapy

Some survivors have never had the experience of trusting or feeling safe with another person. A place to start may be with a licensed therapist who specializes in treating trauma survivors. A survivor may feel the need to verbalize their experience to a trusted therapist or someone else.

One of the purposes of therapy is to create an environment of safety where missed developmental needs can be re-established. Survivors of trauma have learned to be very resilient, and, with proper help, can take that power of resilience to move beyond the trauma and pursue a life with power and direction. Generally, professionals are very good at helping survivors do this.

Strategy #3: Power through Surrender

Power Through Surrender is knowing what to fight, and more importantly, what NOT to fight. As it relates to healing from sexual trauma, the concept of Surrender is a paradox. A paradox is a statement

that leads to a conclusion that seems senseless and logically unacceptable. If our goal is to empower and strengthen survivors, then why would we talk about a concept that seems to be contrary to that? When survivors understand this powerful concept of what and when to fight, it can empower them and help set the course for a better life.

Surrender teaches a survivor to identify their trauma voice. Instead of labeling their triggers as being a part of them, “I feel like drinking right now,” or “I feel like burying my pain in eating,” surrender teaches a survivor to identify that voice as IT and label it independently. “There IT is. My trauma voice is trying to help me cope by encouraging me to drink.” Or “There IT is, my trauma voice is trying to bring me pleasure by wanting me to over-eat.” Surrender labels the trauma voice and then encourages a survivor to replace that coping behavior with an alternative behavior.

So a survivor finds Power Through Surrender by recognizing the reality that a triggering thought may come and she manages the triggering thought by:

1. Grounding themselves in the present. See Awareness.
2. Recognizing IT (the trauma voice).
3. Letting IT be.

It may look something like this, “Oh there IT is, my trauma voice is telling me to go drink some alcohol. It’s just doing its job trying to help me avoid pain. I’ll get a glass of water instead.”

Helpful Tip: As a supporter, the best thing you can do is assist a survivor in identifying the trauma voice. You’ll want to talk about this concept together and then figure out an effective way for you to help as triggers come. For example, if you notice a survivor you love is struggling with an urge to use a substance, you can help them identify the urge as IT.

Strategy #4: Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the ability to focus on empowering thoughts and feelings while choosing to co-exist with non-productive thoughts and feelings. Through Mindfulness survivors have the power of choice. Can she choose to be a certain way regardless of what is happening in the outside environment? The answer to that is a resounding yes.

One of the greatest examples of this concept comes from Viktor Frankl, a prisoner of war in a concentration camp during World War II. He had all his freedom, possessions, and loved ones stripped from him. Despite his horrible situation, in his book *Man's Search for Meaning* he wrote, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way...between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom."

Awareness and Mindfulness are similar, but with one distinct difference. Increased Awareness of moment-to-moment living is meant to help you recognize triggers or negative thoughts. Mindfulness is used on an ongoing, everyday basis to train and strengthen your prefrontal cortex to reduce the frequency and duration of triggers, traumatic thoughts, and traumatic memories.

Mindfulness training is not some mystical process, but a very practical, everyday method for how to focus or direct thoughts. When certain negative thoughts or cravings come into a survivor's thoughts, the prefrontal cortex is responsible to do something with them. This is where individual choice comes into play. This is the place between stimulus and response and where there is power to make a choice.

Survivors have the power of choice to take charge in spite of the trauma she's experienced. She cannot change the past, but she can

learn to manage it. In saying this we in no way wish to minimize what a survivor has been through, but we know how strong she can become as she is empowered with knowledge and choice. Mindfulness will teach her to clearly distinguish between the past, present, and future, allowing her to choose.



Learned Helplessness

When individuals are sexually abused as children, they can mistakenly come to believe that they will always be a victim to someone bigger and stronger. They can start to feel powerless over events in their life. It's a normal response. But she can break out of this mindset and create a life she may never have dreamed of.

In the 1960s, Steven Maier of the University of Colorado collaborated with Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania to show how animals learn helplessness when repeatedly placed in situations where they can't get free. The researchers placed dogs in locked cages and repeatedly shocked them. After administering many different courses of electric shock, the researchers would open the door of the cages and then shock the dogs again with the clear expectations that the dogs would run

out of their cages to safety. What happened stunned the researchers. The dogs sat there and took the punishment.

When another group of dogs was placed in the same situation, without the history of being shocked beforehand, they immediately ran out of the cage for safety. The researchers concluded that the first group of dogs learned helplessness because nothing they did made a difference. After electroshock, the researchers would literally have to drag the dogs out of the cage.

Fortunately, the end of the research project provides hope. The dogs could be taught how to get out of the cage. The 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope are a system that can teach you to begin this process of becoming free and getting you out of the cage of past experiences.

When you use Mindfulness to strengthen your prefrontal cortex you can find your way out of the “cage” that your memories and triggers have built for you.

Helpful Tip: Mindfulness training is not some mystical process, but a very practical, everyday guide on how to focus or direct thoughts. When certain negative thoughts or cravings come into a survivor’s thoughts, the prefrontal cortex is responsible to do something with them. This is where a survivor’s individual choice comes into play.

We want survivors to clearly understand that they have the power of choice to take charge of their life in spite of the trauma they’ve experienced. They cannot change the past, but they can learn to manage it.

Try some of these tactics on your own and then together with your survivor. Seek to understand their experience as they do them. There are explainers on our resource page at yuniquefoundation.org/resources.

- Guided imagery
- Meditation
- Trauma-sensitive Yoga

Strategy #5: Faith

Faith, defined for this purpose, consists of two components: 1) planning for a bright future, and 2) believing in something greater than yourself. This can be a religion, a moral code, science, or any other belief a survivor may have in something bigger than herself. Faith in a force or belief can change the way she views the future. The previous strategies are all focused on teaching a survivor what to do with her thoughts. Faith is the act of moving forward based on her belief that wholeness and healing are possible, even if it's difficult to think so.

Faith provides the long-term road map that keep us going in the right direction.

Change is a process, which is ongoing and never really ends. Sometimes things can change quickly, and other times change happens slowly. The most important thing is the direction one is moving in. Healing from sexual abuse is not something that happens overnight, and some individuals may work on it through their entire life. However long it takes, becoming whole is possible. Peace comes as survivors consistently progress toward wholeness.

Faith is the belief that it's worth a survivor's effort to keep trying. It's also the action to act on what she believes, because someday she'll get there.

Helpful tip: Future vision statements and vision boards can help put goals and ideals in a more concrete format that allow survivors to reach for daily goals.

Help a survivor be successful in reaching their daily goals. As their support system, do just that, support them, encourage them, and help them succeed.

As survivors continue their healing journey, you should understand the Law of Incubation. The Law of Incubation says that for every seed that is planted there is an incubation period – an undetermined amount of time that the seed needs to establish itself. Far too many people give up on the process of change and recovery because they are impatient with the progress they are seeing. Please remember that when it comes to healing and recovery, survivors are restructuring pathways in the brain. Just because she doesn't see immediate results it doesn't mean the change isn't happening.

As their support, be patient and steady.

Chapter 4: What Can I Do and Say to Help?

There are many things that you can do to help your loved one. In this chapter we will discuss some of the dos and don'ts of supporting the survivor you love.

Lists of Things Not To Do and To Do

Don'ts:

- Don't demand every detail of the abuse.
- Don't try to play detective.
- Don't try to solve problems for her.
- Don't tell her what to do or try to take charge.
- Don't try to excuse or minimize what the perpetrator did.
- Don't criticize, blame, shame, or judge.
- Don't make promises you can't keep.
- Don't push her into hugs, intimacy or physical contact.
- Don't insist she tell others.
- Don't force her to have a relationship with the perpetrator or make her forgive him/hers.
- Don't lean on her if you are struggling to cope with her past trauma.

Dos:

- Show respect, not pity.
- Be aware of your own feelings and actions.
- Reassure her you are there for her.
- Keep her confidentiality.
- Empower her to make her own decisions.
- Be a good listener.
- Communicate.
- Allow her the space and time she needs.
- Ask what you can do to help/support her.
- Validate her feelings.
- Only use touch that she feels safe and comfortable with.
- Recognize that people respond to trauma in different ways.

Although it may be difficult, try not to make what happened to her about you. It's normal for you to have feelings about the trauma, but be aware of how your behaviors and responses may contribute to her struggle.

Trauma survivors were once powerless as someone decided to engage in sexual activity with her before she was ready. One of the best things you can do now is to help her feel empowered. Be there to listen as she talks, but allow her to solve her own problems. You may not be able to understand her feelings fully or what she went through or is going through, but you can validate her feelings. Even if you don't agree or understand, a survivor's feelings are hers and she has a right to feel the way she does. Everyone responds to trauma in different ways.

Lists of Things Not To Say and To Say

Do NOT say:

- It was your fault.
- That was a long time ago, get over it, forget about it, or forgive and forget.
- Why didn't you tell me (or someone) sooner?
- Why didn't you run away, fight, leave?
- It's not that big of deal. It happens to a lot of people.
- You must have liked it since you kept letting it happen.

Do say:

- I believe you.
- I'm sorry this happened to you.
- It wasn't your fault.
- Thank you for telling me/trusting me.
- I'm always here if you need to talk.
- How can I help/support you?
- This doesn't change how I think/feel about you.

Many survivors experience more trauma when their loved ones don't believe them about the abuse. Believing a survivor is one of the most important things you can do even if it doesn't make sense to you logically. As previously mentioned, a survivor will often blame herself and feel shame for what happened. Being reminded that the abuse was not her fault will help to decrease these beliefs.

Sometimes a survivor just needs someone to listen. This is best done without interruption and without asking "why" questions. Validating

her feelings whether you agree with them or not is also beneficial. Remember the abuse did not happen to you so it is important to listen without placing judgement or telling her how she should feel or what she should have done.

The above statements should help dispel feelings of shame and blame for the victim and establish trust and support instead. A survivor should never be made to feel guilty for something that was not in her control.

Intimate Partners: Pushing your loved one too quickly for physical affection may cause triggers and damage your relationship. It is important to remember that your loved one was pushed into sexual activity unwillingly and at a young age when they could not fully understand what was going on. It is not that they are pushing you away, although it may feel like that, it is that they are trying to separate what happened sexually as a child versus their current sexual life. This is not an easy process and needs patience and understanding.

Communication is key to a healthy sexual relationship. Listen to what your partner says, and respect where she is. Ask what she feels comfortable with, be aware of touch that can be triggering, and again, be patient. This will benefit both of you. If it is difficult to talk about one on one, then going to counseling together may be a good place to start. You, as the support system, may need a little help yourself. Trauma can impact the entire family/friend group.

Chapter 5: Resources for Family Members or Caregivers of Sexual Abuse Survivors

Supporting a survivor of sexual trauma can have the positive effect of developing a level of emotional closeness that perhaps you have not experienced before. However, it is also hard work, and can result in emotional, mental, and physical depletion. You can become so focused on the person you're assisting, that you neglect your own needs. If you do not practice self-care to replenish yourself, stress, anxiety, and depression can build. It is important to be aware of these risks and find ways to either prevent or minimize them when you realize they are happening.

Just as it is important to maintain your own health as you care for a survivor, it is also important to preserve relationships with other family members, including partners or children.

The information and resources listed below will be helpful:

- It is important for both of you to practice good self-care during this difficult time.
- Be patient and compassionate with your loved one and yourself. Remember, there is no timetable for experiencing specific emotions and recovering from trauma.
- Avoid putting pressure on them to engage in activities they aren't ready to do yet. This may result in you feeling helpless and defeated.

- Maintain your daily routine of life as much as possible, do not allow the trauma to define your relationship.
- If someone you care about is considering suicide, learn the warning signs, and offer help and support. For more information about suicide prevention please visit the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline or call 800.273.TALK (8255) any time, day or night.
- To search for your local sexual assault service provider, visit <https://centers.rainn.org>.

You can call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at:

800.656.HOPE (4673) or visit the online resources listed below and receive confidential support. Share this information with friends and loved ones.

Online support for family members or caregivers of survivors:

- <http://www.supportforpartners.org/>
- <http://www.dabs.uk.com/information/guidance-for-partners-of-survivors-of-childhood-abuse>
- <http://www.familylife.com/articles/topics/marriage/>
- <http://www.pandys.org/secondarysurvivors.html>
- <http://www.rcm-usa.org/PDF%20Files/An%20Open%20Letter%20to%20Spouses.pdf>
- <http://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/wounded-attachment-relationships-of-survivors-of-childhood-sexual-assault-0627135>

Smartphone Applications for education about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Self Care for Support Systems:

- ACT Coach
- Belly Bio Interactive Breathing
- Calm
- Happify
- LifeArmor
- Moving Forward
- Operation Reach Out
- PTSD Coach
- Virtual Hope Box

Books For Friends, Family, and Support Systems:

- *Trust After Trauma* by Aphrodite Matsakis
- *Allies in Healing : When the Person You Love Was Sexually Abused As A Child* by Laura Davis
- *The Body Keeps the Score* by Bessel van der Kolk
- *Family Fallout : A Handbook for Families of Adult Sexual Abuse Survivors* by Dorothy Beaulieu Landry
- *Ghosts in the Bedroom : A Guide for Partners of Incest Survivors* by Ken Graber
- *When You Are the Partner of a Rape or Incest Survivor: A Workbook for You* by Robert Barry Levine
- *Helping Her Get Free: A Guide for Families and Friends of Abused Women* by Susan Brewster

- *What About Me? A Guide for Men Helping Female Partners Deal with Childhood Sexual Abuse* by Grant Cameron
- *When Your Child Has Been Molested: A Parents Guide to Healing and Recovery* by Kathryn B. Hagens
- *If He is Raped: A Guidebook for Partners, Spouses, Parents and Friends* by Alan W. McEvoy
- *Little Girl Lost: One Woman's Journey Beyond Rape* by Leisha Joseph