

## **THE HEALING PROCESS**

Survivors often ask: Is healing possible? The answer is **YES!** But remember that recovery from abuse is not something that happens overnight: It's an ongoing process which requires courage, support, and commitment. It also involves feeling a lot of pain along the way.

What are the stages of recovery? Below are some of the stages of healing often experienced by survivors. These stages are not necessarily experienced in a "one after another" way. There may be some stages missed altogether, whilst you may seem to spend a long time apparently "stuck" in another. Nevertheless the overall process remains recognisable.

### **THE STAGES**

#### **❖ The Decision to Heal**

This happens when you recognise the effects of sexual abuse in your life and make an active decision to heal. You choose to heal and are willing to accept the changes that go with it.

#### **❖ The Emergency Stage**

When you first begin to deal with your abuse you may feel that your life has been thrown into utter chaos. You may feel obsessed with abuse issues, and even feel that you are going crazy or kill yourself. Whilst this is an extremely distressing time it's important to remember that it is only a stage and will not go on forever – and is also a part of the process of healing.

#### **❖ Remembering**

Many survivors have spent years trying to put memories of their abuse "to the back of their mind" – so the process of healing inevitably involves an aspect of remembering both incidents and feelings. Remembering can involve memories, flashbacks, or even physical sensations felt in your body at the time of the abuse.

#### **❖ Believing It Happened**

Survivors may doubt their own memory, feelings, perceptions of the abuse. Or they may deny that it was really "that bad". Coming to believe in the reality of the abuse and that it really hurt you is an important part of healing.

#### **❖ Breaking Silence / Secrecy**

Most adult survivors kept the abuse a secret in childhood. Being able to tell a trusted human being about what happened and how you feel is a powerful healing force.

#### **❖ Understanding That It wasn't Your Fault**

As a child you may have believed that the abuse was somehow your fault. An important part of healing is placing blame where it belongs - directly on the shoulders of the abusers.

#### **❖ Getting In Touch With Your Own Vulnerability**

Many survivors have lost touch with the child within themselves – their own vulnerability. Many men and women talk about "being afraid to be vulnerable". But getting in touch with these feelings can be strength not weakness and can help survivors become more open, and to feel the full range of their feelings.

#### **❖ Trusting Yourself**

The best guide for healing is your own inner voice. Learning to trust your own thoughts, feelings, and perceptions forms a new basis for action in your life.

#### **❖ Grieving and Mourning**

As children being abused, and later as adults struggling to survive, most survivors haven't felt their losses, but grieving is an important way to get in touch with your pain, let go, and move on.

#### **❖ Anger – the Backbone of Healing**

Anger is a powerful and liberating force. Whether you need to get in touch with it, or have always had plenty to spare directing your rage squarely at your abuser, and at those who didn't protect you, is pivotal to healing.

#### **❖ Forgiveness**

Sometimes it's said that you have to forgive your abuser to heal. This is not true. It is not necessary for you to forgive the person that abused you. What is important is self forgiveness: That you forgive yourself for any past actions you feel ashamed of; or any negative behaviour you may have used in coping with your abuse.

#### **❖ Resolution and Moving On**

Resolution comes when feelings begin to stabilise and you begin to feel like a whole person. You are able to make some of the changes that you want in your life, develop positive relationships and explore your potential as a human being.

**But remember: Healing is not about reaching a specific point in time or any one individual goal. There is no such thing as the finishing line where healing is concerned. The abuse happened and affected you deeply. That will never change. But you can, over time, reach a place of resolution where you can get on with your life.**