

# SELF-CARE AFTER TRAUMA



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# Self-Care After Trauma

A traumatic event affects the whole person. Self-care is about taking steps to feel healthy and comfortable. Whether the traumatic event happened recently or years ago, self-care can help you cope with the short and long-term effects of the event.

As you recover, it's important to pay attention to your physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well being. As human beings we are able to respond to most of life's challenges, but there are events that exceed our immediate ability to cope. We must be gentle with ourselves and take the time to heal.

After a traumatic event, people sometimes fear that they will never be the same again. Remember that all significant events in our lives will cause some level of "change" (think getting married or having a child). Experiencing a traumatic event will impact you.

It is important to recognize this and to accept the healing process. Remember there is no "right" or "wrong" way to respond to a traumatic event. Nor is there a right or wrong way to move through the resulting impact on you. There is not a pre-set timeline for recovery. Pay attention to your thoughts and your emotions. Listen to your body and your spirit.



# Emotional Self-Care

Emotional self-care means different things to different people. But most of us think of emotions as being how we feel within ourselves. General emotions include feeling happy, sad, scared, or lonely. However, emotions are rarely that simple and can be very confusing. Sometimes it is hard to identify a feeling. Sometimes there are so many emotions at once it is overwhelming. The key to emotional self-care is being in tune with yourself. Accept the emotions you are feeling. If you feel angry about what happened to you, that's okay. Accept the feeling, but don't focus on it.

Write your feelings down to help identify them. Write in a diary to express your emotions. Talk to a friend, Elder, or to a professional. The act of "venting" your emotions is vital to identifying your emotions and for healing. One emotion may be a mask for deeper emotions. Anger is a common masking emotion. If someone feels and displays anger, it may be hiding deeper emotions like fear, grief, or guilt. These emotions make us feel more vulnerable and may be harder to accept.

# Mental Self-Care



The term “mental” usually refers to the thinking part of our being.

After experiencing a traumatic event, it is common that our thoughts are very focused on the details of the event. People complain of not being able to stop focusing on the event and details of it automatically “replay” in their minds. This is a normal and necessary part of moving through the resulting traumatic impact of the event. All human beings have this “event review” hard wired into our brains; it is there for survival in hopes that we can understand the event and prevent it from happening again.

It is important to remember that your brain looks backwards after the event. You may notice warning signs now, but don't punish yourself for not seeing them then, and there may not have been any warning signs that you could have recognized. Don't fight the automatic replay. It is necessary for you to process the event and the resulting trauma. Give yourself permission to know that you have examined the event to the best of your ability. Don't beat yourself up for how you managed yourself during the event. No one wants a traumatic experience and we are not usually prepared for them. We respond the best way we can at the time.

# Spiritual Self-Care

Traumatic events can impact us in a way that we cannot fully describe. Sometimes people feel like they are living in a dream, or feel they are outside of their body. Culturally, this feeling is described as a “loss of spirit”. Our Elders will tell us that this means that our spirit has been frightened by the traumatic event and we should be patient and nurturing with ourselves to allow our spirit to return to us.

Sometimes a ceremony is needed to call our spirit back. Psychologically, this feeling is referred to as “disassociation”. This is an uncomfortable feeling, but in most cases, it will fade over time. Sometimes when bad things happen, we can question our faith in our creator and our faith. This is normal. It can be helpful to talk to others who have a similar faith to you. You can also talk to your faith leader.





# Self-Care for Survivors

Sexual assault is a crime that can make victims feel as if they are somehow responsible for the crime. They are not! Even if the victim knows their abuser, accepted gifts, or agreed to any part of the abuse (usually due to fear, threats, confusion), the victim is not responsible, and it was still a crime.

Abusers spend time thinking about how to get the potential victim to participate in their crime so that it is easier to make the victim keep the secret. Child sexual abuse perpetrators will work hard to make their child victim keep the secret. This in itself will make the child confused and feel guilty.

A full-page background image featuring a dirt path winding through tall, golden-brown grass in the foreground. In the background, there are dark evergreen trees and a vast, dramatic sky filled with large, white and grey clouds. Sunlight breaks through the clouds, creating a bright, ethereal glow. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

# of Sexual Assault

Sexual abuse is a very personal crime. It involves our body and very private aspects of our bodies. Feelings of guilt and shame are common in sexual abuse survivors. It is important to remind yourself that the shame or guilt does not belong to you. It belongs to the person who committed the crime.

# Physical Self-Care

After a trauma, it's important to keep your body healthy and strong. You may be healing from injuries or feeling physically drained. Good physical health can support you through this time. Give yourself permission to limit activities or rest more often if you are injured or are feeling drained.

Sleep is important to help you heal, but sleep may be difficult for you right now. That's normal. Try deep focused breathing. Go for a walk. Eat a good diet. Be cautious about turning to drugs or alcohol to calm yourself down. Too much will just interfere with or delay the healing process.



# REACH OUT TO SEEK HELP

## KUU-US INDIGENOUS CRISIS LINES:

Youth/Kids:

**1-250-723-2040**

Adults/Elders:

**1-250-723-4050**

Toll Free:

**1-800-588-8717**

## SUICIDE PREVENTION:

**1-800-SUICIDE**

OR:

**1-800-784-2433**

## Northern BC Crisis Lines

24/7 Crisis Line:

**1-888-562-1214**

## MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS LINES:

**310-6789**

No Area Code - simply call that number

## Texting Crisis Lines

Youth/Adult:

**text HOME to 686868**

## Kids Help Phone

**1-800-668-6868**

There are non-crisis Carrier Sekani Family Services mental health and addiction recovery supports available for children, adults, and families in our member communities and in the urban communities of Prince George, Vanderhoof, Fort Saint James, Fraser Lake, and Burns Lake. Please check with your health centre or call the Health and Wellness Program at 250-567-2900 for more information.



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