



napac

The National Association for  
People Abused in Childhood

# Healing at your pace

Booklet 6

Supporting recovery from childhood abuse

Healing at your pace

When will I feel better?  
Why do I still feel like this?  
How long will it take for me  
to feel better?  
What if I never feel better?  
Shouldn't I have grown up?  
I'm an adult now so why  
am I still dealing with  
childhood issues?  
I have already had  
counselling... but now I feel

like I need some more...  
What if nobody wants me?  
I feel like damaged goods...  
I've already tried counselling  
and it didn't work...  
Are there any support groups  
in my area?  
What shall I do now?  
I've tried everything and  
nothing has helped me...now  
what?

Healing is a process and every process takes time. How much time it takes differs from person to person. The starting point is finding what works best for you and then taking the journey towards healing at your own pace. It's not always helpful when we try to keep up with someone else's progress... because their pace isn't likely to be the same as ours.

### **You will feel better in your own time.**

We're sure you want to feel better right now but at the beginning of the healing journey you can expect to have both good days and bad days. You can expect to feel fine one day and not so fine the next.

You may feel like you are going round and round in circles. But it may be helpful to know that you're never going to be in the exact same place again because each time something happens you'll learn something new and you'll be at a different level.

We all have days when we ask ourselves why we are still feeling bad about something that happened in our childhoods. But it's perfectly normal to still be feeling the way we are feeling.

*'Childhood abuse isn't just an issue  
for children. It's also an issue for the  
adults we become.'*

# Child abuse is a trauma like no other

When we are abused it can stay with us for a very long time. It's not about being locked into our childhoods – it's about our childhood experiences being locked inside of us. The adults we become are a result of our childhoods and if our childhoods have been very badly distorted by abuse then it's little wonder that as adults we struggle coming to terms with what childhood represented for us.

Childhood abuse isn't just an issue for children. It's also an issue for the adults we become.

The feelings we have as children don't just disappear when we reach adulthood. But it's important to believe that we can feel better as we heal.

Nobody can say how long it will take any of us to feel better.

No two of us are the same. Some survivors take a few days, some take weeks or months... and some take many years before feeling better.

## Healing – there's no right or wrong

Everyone's experiences are different. Try not to focus on how long it will take - the important thing is that every step you take is in the right direction.

Sometimes it may feel like you aren't going anywhere... but you are still moving towards healing since even backward steps can bring learning.

Counselling works for many people but it doesn't work for everybody. It's worth bearing in mind that there are different types of counselling and within each type of counselling there are different types of counsellor.

Different counsellors vary considerably. Like chalk and cheese.

If you have tried counselling in the past and found that it didn't work, it may be that counselling isn't for you.

Or it may be that the type of counselling you tried wasn't right for you?

Or perhaps the counselling method was good... but the counsellor wasn't a good match for you?

If it isn't working with a particular counsellor you don't have to go back to give them a second chance.

Your counselling is about you, not about appeasing them and fitting into their way of working.

Find someone who fits with your way of working and don't give up searching for the perfect counsellor for you. They do exist.

Don't be afraid to ask counsellors whether they have had any experience supporting adults who have been abused as children, because not all of them have.

It may also be helpful to remember that it isn't a counsellor's job to tell you what to do.

It's their job to provide a safe environment in which you can explore ways to feel better.

If you've already had counselling but feel like you need some more... go for it.

# There's no limit on how much support you can have

There's nothing wrong with dipping in and out of counselling. Many people do. It's normal

Some people think that only people who are weak go for counselling. This isn't true.

**It takes real strength to be able to recognise that you could use some help.** It also takes real strength to be able to face childhood abuse.

When we were being abused we were vulnerable, so putting ourselves back in vulnerable positions (like going for counselling) can take real strength and courage.

Allowing ourselves to find safe spaces to be vulnerable as adults shows that we are no longer victims but survivors.

**We are the ones who are now in control.**

Allowing ourselves moments of vulnerability will, more often than not, help us to deal with the raw emotions... which in turn enables us to heal.

**The hope of healing is always there.**

Even if we feel like we have tried everything and nothing has worked.

Just because something hasn't worked in the past doesn't mean it won't work in the future.

*"Now I know I am a survivor. I don't feel so ashamed and alone. I know that I can now talk to others who have had similar experiences in childhood and I can understand them as they understand me."*

# Be determined about your healing

No matter how long it takes... **keep trying.**

No matter how many times you have to try the same methods... keep trying.

We all have moments of feeling frustrated about not getting anywhere.

When we find ourselves in those moments it can be useful to focus on what it is we are frustrated about.

Writing down the specific things we want can be eye opening.

Sometimes what we want is the impossible.

We can't cure the whole world in a day...  
...but we can make parts of it better bit by bit.

We can't heal other people.....but we can work on healing ourselves.

**We can't change the fact that the abuse happened...  
...but we can change the impact it has on us today.**

We have survived. Now let's aim higher.

Let's aim not only to survive, but to thrive. Let's take our attention away from the impossible task of changing the past and onto the attainable mission of changing our present and future.

## Bit by bit

Many people talk about survivors being 'damaged goods'.

Adult survivors of child abuse have been hurt in very significant ways.

We have shown incredible strength and resilience to get through what we have been through. We aren't 'damaged goods'. We are wounded humans. We are unique.

The abuse doesn't define who we are. Though sometimes our true selves can get buried underneath the rubble; the debris and destruction left behind by the abuse.

Let's see the rubble for what it is. It doesn't belong to us and we don't have to stay beneath it.

Let's start throwing the rubble off and letting our true selves out from under its weight.

Let's be determined to see all of the rubble cleared no matter how long it takes.

One piece of rubble at a time. Bit by bit.

## Low self-esteem

### **Bit by bit.**

We could start with the piece of rubble called 'low self-esteem'.

All forms of abuse make children feel bad about themselves and these feelings are carried well into adulthood.

Low self-esteem weighs us down and tries to deflate us and stop us from being all we can be. So let's throw it off by starting to work on feeling better about ourselves.

Building our self-esteem doesn't always happen naturally so we may need to take small steps to steadily build it back up.

### **Bit by bit.**

One way of doing this may be to recognise times when we say negative things about ourselves and start replacing them on purpose with positive things.

This may be challenging but it's worth it.

For example, if we have a habit of saying  
'I hate myself' we could start saying  
'I love myself', or even 'I like myself' or  
'I am OK with me'.

Even if it feels uncomfortable and false at first, we have to start somewhere when removing the rubble.

We can learn from others who have gone before us and see that we'll start believing the nice things we say about ourselves over time.

It may also help us to recognise the positive things that we already do.

We can congratulate ourselves for managing even seemingly small things like smiling at someone or cooking a meal.

Every positive thing we say about ourselves or do for ourselves will help to remove low self-esteem.

Removing the rubble is sometimes easier with others alongside us.

Team work helps share the load and encourages us to never give up.

It may be worth talking to your GP to find out if there are local support groups or other support services for survivors. When we are able to run support groups, we post details of these on our website.

Whatever you decide to do, remember that one of the keys to healing is to do now what is right for you.

We're not here to tell survivors what to do. We're here to assure survivors that healing is possible.

Many survivors who make up their minds to heal receive the support they need and gradually start to feel better.

As you go through your healing journey, try to look after your basic needs of healthy living. Diet, exercise and sleep may be difficult when you are stressed but are always important.



## The next step is down to you

### **What do you want to do right now?**

Your healing needs to be taken at your pace so do what feels right.

If it feels right to put this away for a bit, then that's fine.

If you want to look into further support, then that's fine.

If you want to talk to somebody... that's fine.

### **This is your life and you're the expert of your life, nobody else.**

Take control and do next what you want to do next.



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[napac.org.uk](http://napac.org.uk)

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