



Safeline
Surviving Abuse



Information for survivors of sexual abuse

Ring us today for free confidential
advice in a safe environment

01926 408 315

Counselling
Support Groups
Library Services
Befriending
Website
Freephone Helpline:
0808 800 5005

About Safeline

Safeline is a charitable organisation providing support to survivors of rape and sexual abuse. Services are available throughout Warwickshire and Coventry for men, women and young people and also to partners, carers, parents and anyone who has been affected by this trauma.

The Extent of Childhood Sexual Abuse

It is estimated that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys are sexually abused. In more than three quarters of cases the abuse is committed by an adult the child knows and trusts. The vast majority of abusers are men but women are also capable of sexual abuse.

Childhood Sexual Abuse is any type of sexual assault of a child under 16. Sexual abuse takes many forms: explicit sexual talk; showing pornography; sexual touching; lack of privacy to bathe or undress; masturbation and sexual intercourse.



Why Do Children Stay Silent?

Children may not speak out while the abuse is going on for many reasons:

- They may have been threatened with further abuse and violence if they tell
- They may be afraid that no-one will believe them.
- They may feel partly or entirely to blame for the abuse.
- They may not be able to describe or understand what has happened to them
- They may want to protect the family or even the abuser(s), who could be either male or female

Children often feel powerless to stop the abuse. A child cannot be responsible for consenting to an act they did not understand or which they were forced into.

The abuser is always to blame for the abuse

No matter how long ago you were abused, your feelings about what happened to you are important. You have the right to be listened to, no matter what you want to say. Through speaking about your abuse you may be able to overcome any difficulties that you experience as an adult.

Being sexually abused as a child, the adult survivor may lose...

- Self confidence, self esteem and self respect
- Hope, freedom and dignity
- Physical and mental health
- The ability to trust people
- The ability to relax and enjoy life
- Their childhood

Adult survivors may cope with their past abuse by...

- Alcohol and drug misuse
- Obsessive behaviour and strict routines
- Self harming e.g. cutting, scratching or burning
- Forgetting or minimising the abuse
- Turning to God/Religion
- Breaking ties with, or confronting, the abuser
- Speaking about it and receiving support
- Fighting back e.g. speaking publicly or helping other survivors
- Working to protect children from abuse
- Writing about abuse

A lot of survivors feel the need to speak to someone about the effects abuse has had on their lives. Your feelings are as individual as you are, no two survivors will feel exactly the same. Talking to someone can help the healing process.



Information on flashbacks



Flashbacks are recollections from the past. They may be pictures, sounds, smells, feelings or the lack of them (numbness). Sometimes there is no actual visual or auditory memory.

You may feel panicky or trapped, you may feel powerless without knowing why. These experiences can also happen in dreams.

As a child you had to protect yourself from the emotional and physical horrors of abuse. In order to survive, that child remained locked inside, unable to express the feelings and thoughts of that time. It is as though we put that part of us into a time warp until it comes out in the present.

When that part comes out, the child in you is experiencing the past as if it were happening today. As the flashback happens, it is as if you forget that you have an 'adult' self available for comfort, protection and grounding. The extreme feeling and body sensations occurring are so frightening because they are not related to the reality of the present and may at times seem to come out of the blue.

We begin to think we are crazy and are afraid of telling anyone about what is happening. We feel out of control and at the mercy of our experiences.

We begin to avoid certain areas and situations that we think triggered it. Sometimes flashbacks occur during any form of sexual contact or upon seeing a person who looks or behaves and reminds you of the person who abused you.

If you are feeling little, you may be experiencing a flashback. If you are having stronger feelings than you expect to have in the present situation, you may be having a flashback.

Flashbacks are normal and are sometimes called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

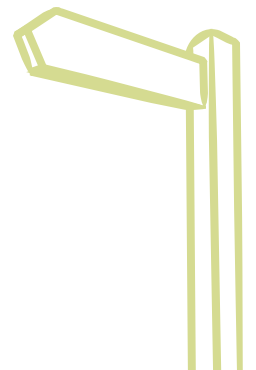
The diagnostic category for psychiatry defines Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as the normal experience of all people experiencing an event that is outside the range of normal human experience.

Flashbacks sometimes make you feel insane because the child in you doesn't know that there is an adult survivor available to help.

What does help?

- **Tell yourself that you are having a flashback**
- **Remind yourself that the worst is over**
The feelings and sensations you are experiencing are memories of the past.
- **Get grounded**
This means stamping your feet on the ground so that the child knows you have feet and can get away now if you need to (as a child, it is not so easy to get yourself out of a situation you find yourself in).
- **Breathe**
When we get frightened, we stop normal breathing. As a result our body begins to panic because we haven't got enough oxygen. Lack of oxygen can cause the feeling of panic; pounding in the head, tightness, sweating, feeling faint, shakiness, dizziness. When we breathe deeply enough, a lot of the panic feeling can decrease.
- **Re-establish yourself in the present**
Begin to use your five senses in the present. Look around and see the colours in the room, the shapes of things, the people near etc. Listen to the sounds in the room; your breathing, traffic, birds, people, cars etc. Feel your body and what is touching it; your clothes, your own arms and hands, the chair or floor supporting you.
- **Talk to the child in you and tell them s/he is ok**
It is very important that the child knows that the adult is around to take care of her/him. The child needs to know that it is safe to experience the feelings and let go of the past.

- **Find your boundaries**
Sometimes when we are having a flashback things get out of proportion, we lose the sense of where we end and the world begins; as if we do not have skin. Wrap yourself in a blanket, hold a pillow or soft toy, go to bed or sit in a cosy place, anything that you can do to make yourself feel safe.
- **Get help**
You may need to be alone or you may want someone near you. In either case it is important that your friends and relations know about flashbacks so they can help with the process, whether that means letting you be by yourself or being there, whatever is right for you is right.
- **Take time to regain control**
Sometimes flashbacks are very powerful. Don't expect yourself to be able to do adult things immediately. Be kind and look after yourself, do something that you enjoy. Don't punish yourself, you and your inner child don't deserve it.
- **Be patient**
It takes time to heal the past. It takes time to learn ways of taking care of yourself, of being an adult who has feelings and developing effective ways of coping in the here and now.
- **Find a competent therapist**
Look for a therapist who understands the process of healing from abuse. You do not have to do it alone ever again.
- **Join a self help group**
Survivors are wonderful allies in this process of healing. It is a healing thing to share your process with others who understand so deeply what you are going through.
- **Know you are not going mad, you are healing**



Information on panic attacks

When you first experience panic, you may be confused bewildered, convinced there is something physically wrong with you. This can be a hard attitude to shake off.

Say to yourself: "OK panic attack, do your worst."

This may appear at first glance to be a stupid and irresponsible thing to say to yourself, it has the effect of taking away some of the force of the panic. It will not reach that terrifying peak.



1. Practice utter acceptance, don't fight it, let it go. In the midst of an attack this might seem impossible. Don't lose heart, it will take several attempts before you can start to look panic in the eye without turning away for safety. The paradox is, if you practice utter acceptance, the intensity and duration of panic attacks decrease.
2. Wait for time to pass. Don't hurry it. Walk away slowly from the situation if you need to.
3. Imagine you are floating instead of walking.
4. Breathe lower down, using your tummy muscles. Make the out-take of breath a bit longer than the intake of breath. Slow breathing down if you catch yourself breathing a little fast.
5. Recall a happy event or a humorous one. Your favourite comedian in concert or an enjoyable holiday perhaps.
6. Sit down – cool down. If possible sit down somewhere and close your eyes. Start slow abdominal breathing. In your minds eye, on the in breath, spell, say and picture the word **P E A C E**. On the out breath, spell, say and see the word **C A L M**. Use that vivid imagination of yours to create a pleasant backdrop for this exercise.

7. Wobbly and weak legs. A supply of glucose tablets or honey can be used to overcome brief spells of weakness due to panic. This is a temporary measure and no substitute for proper nutrition.
8. **HELP!** I am panicking, gone blank and can't think how to cope! In the white heat of panic it's easy to forget the things you know you should do to cope.
9. Write down your coping strategies on a card that will fit into your pocket, wallet or purse. Alternatively, record them onto your phone in a calm and precise manner. Some people keep a familiar object in their pocket to hold onto when they are panicking. It may be a good idea to practice these strategies when you are not in a panic state.
10. Anticipatory anxiety begins with the thought of doing something that you feel is beyond your limitations. The "what if" thoughts start to appear in your mind. "What if I panic like last time I did this?" The anxiety can build to a tremendous level before coming into contact with the feared situation. This anticipatory anxiety is nearly always well in excess of anything the actual situation presents. So instead of saying "what if", say "so what". Allow body sensations to pass over and pay them no respect however rational or irrational they may be.
11. Saying to yourself "its no big deal", I don't care about these feelings" and "I'm definitely NOT going to die" helps unmask the anxiety enabling you to face it and not fear it so much. This allows the disturbing body sensations to calm.

Visit your doctor and ask them to give you a full check over. They will most likely confirm it is stress related. Be honest with them and tell them how upset this has made you feel.

For your own peace of mind this is important. Much time can be wasted convincing yourself you have every known illness in the textbook.

If your doctor is unsympathetic, ask to see another doctor. Reassurance is important. Ask the doctor what to expect, get them to explain in plenty of detail until you fully understand. The more you know about panic the less power it has over you. A wise doctor will spend some extra time to put a sufferer's mind at ease and can save lots of torment whilst waiting for more specialist help.

About counselling

Safeline's counselling service is for people who have been affected by sexual abuse or rape at any time in their lives whether it has happened to you personally or to someone close to you. The service is available to men, women and young people who live in Warwickshire and Coventry.

Will counselling help me?

Counselling offers an opportunity to talk in confidence and to reflect upon anything causing you distress. Counselling does not guarantee instant cures but it provides you with time and space to look at what you are feeling and experiencing, with an impartial, non-judgmental listener. A counsellor will not tell you what to do but will listen carefully to what you have to say and work with you towards a better understanding of your situation and feelings. You will probably find that this brings some relief. You may then be able to make changes in your life. Counselling may also help you come to terms with what you cannot or do not wish to change.

Why do people come for counselling?

It is not abnormal to have emotional difficulties and it is healthy to want to talk about them. People come to counselling for a number of reasons. You may not be able to attach a label to the way you feel but if you know things are not right, counselling may help.

Who runs the service?

The service is run by Safeline. The counsellor will have, or be training towards, an appropriate counselling qualification and will have undergone specialist OCNCE accredited training in the area of sexual abuse and rape. Safeline is a member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy and adheres to their Code of Ethics.

How much will it cost?

The Counselling service is free of charge. However, Safeline is a charity and donations are gratefully accepted and will help towards the running costs of the counselling service.

How do I access the service?

Just call us, contact details are on the back of this booklet, and we will arrange an appointment to meet you. This is an informal meeting and

an opportunity to discuss whether counselling would be appropriate to your needs and therefore, is without obligation on either side. The meeting is called an assessment and lasts for about an hour. If appropriate for your situation, arrangements will be made for you to have counselling sessions.

Confidentiality

What is discussed within a counselling session will remain confidential between the counsellor and yourself. The counsellor is required to have a personal supervisor who monitors the quality of their work. The process of this supervision is conducted in a way that ensures confidentiality. Confidentiality will be explained fully when you meet your counsellor.

The Independent Sexual Violence Advisory Service

Although there is no pressure to report your abuse to the police, if you do wish to pursue this route Safeline has a trained specialist who can provide personal support from the point of crisis and throughout the legal process.



About Safeline support groups

Safeline support groups are a good way to help you share the way you feel with others who have experienced similar issues. Groups help you relate to others, can provide mutual encouragement and reduce the feelings of isolation often experienced by survivors.

Groups are available for women, men, young people, partners and carers and are available throughout Warwickshire and Coventry.

The following are things you might be asking yourself before deciding to come to a group.

How long does the group run?

The groups run in blocks of twelve sessions usually with a break for main holiday periods.

Getting to the group

If you have trouble with transport, Safeline may be able to help you get to and from the Group. We may even be able to help with childcare costs in some cases.

Who runs the group?

Each group is run by two experienced facilitators. You can talk to the facilitators before the group begins and they will explain what goes on and answer any questions you may have.

What happens in the group?

On the first session, you will be invited as a member of the group to agree boundaries to ensure the smooth running of the group and to keep yourself safe. In the following weeks you will cover topics such as how to create your own support system, developing coping strategies, how to respond to crisis and how to ask for help.

What is expected of me?

Every member is equal and valued. Being in control of your recovery can be scary at first and we support and nurture each other so you are not alone. We only expect you to work at your own pace and be supportive of others if you are able to do this.

What if people think I'm making it up and don't believe me?

We all at one time or another have the same feelings and we will believe and accept you.

Will I have to talk and tell everything about myself?

You can say as much about yourself as you want, there's no rush.

Will we talk about our abuse?

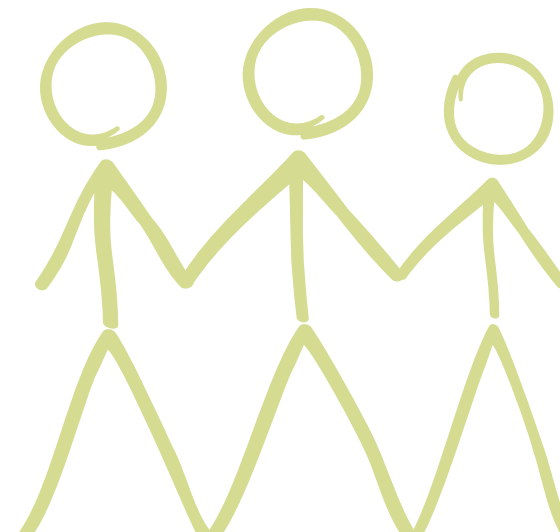
Sexual abuse is not a taboo subject. We talk openly within our group but if you don't want to talk about it, that's ok too. If things get too much, remember the group belongs to you and so you have the right to speak out and be supported.

Is it all hard work?

Our groups are often full of laughter, we have evenings out and times when we bring food in. We celebrate our achievements.

How do I access the service?

Just call us, contact details are on the back of this booklet, and we will arrange an informal no-obligation assessment appointment. This is an opportunity to discuss whether a group would be appropriate for you and whether we can offer you a place.



Other services offered by Safeline

- Support groups
- Counselling
- Freephone helpline
- Website with moderated self-help forums
- Befriending and mentoring
- A lending library
- A quarterly newsletter
- Training and workshops
- Young people's and schools services
- Holistic therapies
- Specialist local dentistry service
- Self-help resources
- Support for those wishing to report their abuse to the police

Other Information booklets available include

- Information about Safeline
- Information for family, carers and friends
- Information for young people
- Ritual abuse
- Self-harm
- Surviving rape
- Information about Dissociative Identity Disorder
- Becoming a Safeline volunteer
- Men's services

Useful reading

Sanford, L

"Strong at the Broken Places: Overcoming the Trauma of Childhood Abuse"
Virago

Bass, E & Davis, L

"The Courage to Heal: A guide for Women Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse"
Heinemann

Ainscough, C & Toon, K

"Breaking Free: Help for Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse"
Sheldon Press





For more information or an informal chat
please contact us at:



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- Nuneaton & Bedworth Safer Communities Partnership
- Lloyds TSB Foundation for England and Wales
- BBC Children in Need
- Warwickshire County Council
- Stratford-upon-Avon Town Trust - a registered charity
- Home Office
- The Coalfields Regeneration Trust