

Towards Wellbeing



**TAUTOKO TĀNE
AOTEAROA**

**A GUIDE FOR MALE SURVIVORS
OF SEXUAL ABUSE**

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Images sourced from Truестock: www.truестock.co.nz

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1 in 4

sexual abuse
victims in New Zealand
identify as male



At least
1 in 6

New Zealand adult
males over the age of
15 have experienced
sexual assault



34.6%

of male survivors
experience high levels
of psychological
distress



\$6.9 billion

is the annual economic
cost of sexual violence
in New Zealand

► INTRODUCTION

About This Book

Who Is This For?

You might be reading this because of something that happened to you or someone you care about. This book is here to help adult men who are dealing with the effects of sexual abuse – whether it happened a long time ago or more recently.

Every Man Is Different

There's a lot of pressure on men to act a certain way, but the truth is, every man is unique. Since everyone's experiences are different, not everything in this book will apply to you – and that's okay. Take what feels useful and leave the rest. You can always come back to it later.

You're Not Alone

It's okay to ask for help and to accept support from others. It's also okay to offer help to those who need it. Many men who've been through sexual abuse struggle to take care of themselves, but we want to remind you that you deserve support and a good life.

Ways to Live Well

We hope this book gives you some practical advice on how to live well. What that looks like will be different for everyone, but hopefully, you'll find some ideas here that work for you.

Some of the advice in this book applies to anyone, while other parts focus more on challenges that sexual abuse can bring into men's lives.

Taking a Stand Against Sexual Abuse

Maybe this is the first time you're looking for information, or maybe you've been dealing with these issues for a long time.

Either way, picking up this book shows that you're taking a stand against sexual abuse and its effects. In doing so, you're not alone – you are part of a community of men and women working to reclaim their lives.

Remember, you don't have to do this alone. If you live in Aotearoa, New Zealand, the **Tautoko Tāne Aotearoa** network can support you. Check out our website tautokotane.nz for information on people and services in your area that can help.

Tips for Using This Book:

- **Pick the right time and place**
Would you prefer to read this alone, or would it help to talk things through with a supportive friend, partner, peer worker or counsellor?

- **Set limits**
Try reading just one or two sections at a time.

- **Have a pen handy**
Mark the tips or ideas that stand out to you.

- **Take time to reflect**
Spend about 10 minutes after reading to think about what you've just read and how it applies to you. Some people find it helpful to write or sketch their thoughts in a journal.

- **Do something enjoyable afterward**
Reading about tough topics can be draining, so plan to do something fun, relaxing or energising once you put the book down. It could be:
 - going for a walk, run, or bike ride
 - listening to or playing music
 - cooking with someone
 - gardening
 - playing a game
 - reading a novel or newspaper

- going for a swim
 - anything else that helps you shift your focus and feel good.
-

- ▶ **Taking care of yourself is important – find what works best for you.**

This book is designed to provide men with practical information and support for dealing with the effects of sexual abuse. We aimed to keep it manageable in both size and detail, hoping that it offers useful ideas for taking care of yourself.

What is Sexual Abuse?

Sexual abuse, also known as sexual assault, occurs when someone engages in a sexual act without the other person's consent. This includes situations where a person is unable to give consent, such as when they are too young or not in a state of mind to fully understand what is happening. Any sexual act involving an adult and a child is considered child sexual abuse.

While sexual abuse can involve physical violence, it does not have to. It remains abuse even if no physical force is used. In many cases, it involves more subtle forms of coercion such as emotional manipulation, threats or blackmail.

Sexual abuse can include direct physical contact but is not limited to it. Forcing someone to watch or participate in something sexual against their will is also a form of abuse.

Sexual assault can happen to individuals of any age or background. It occurs when one person or group exerts power – whether physical, emotional, financial, or otherwise – to control or coerce another person. Perpetrators of sexual abuse can be of any gender or background.

For more information on sexual assault check out the New Zealand Police website: [Understanding Sexual assault and consent](https://www.nzpolice.co.nz).

For Māori, as tangata whenua, the definition of sexual abuse is both individual and collective¹ – not only an act of physical violence, but also a cultural and spiritual transgression that violates the mana of the individual and their whānau, hapu and iwi.

This definition reminds us that effective healing pathways need to address the collective physical, cultural and spiritual impacts on both the individual and their whānau, iwi and hapu.

Similarly, **within a Pasifika context**, sexual violence is understood as a violation of sacred relationships and family stability, encompassing not only physical acts but also emotional, psychological and spiritual harm, and is seen as a breach of the sacredness of family and community.

It is noted that the importance of cultural and spiritual beliefs, and relationships with and within community (family, close friends, supporters) are essential elements of our **Wellbeing Framework** (see page 15) and should always be in focus when working with all male survivors.

The support references in this publication will tend to focus on services that are available to all New Zealanders, but at Tautoko Tāne Aotearoa, we recognise and appreciate the importance of connecting male survivors to cultural and community healing services where they have particular relevance for their healing journey.

The New Zealand Context

Abuse Statistics and Impacts

New Zealand-specific research, international studies, and global meta-analyses supports the view that 1 in 6 males have experienced childhood sexual abuse in their lifetime. While the exact prevalence may vary, this statistic is widely cited and reflects the significant impact of sexual abuse on males in New Zealand and globally.

A global meta-analysis by The Lancet in 2021², research covering 200 countries over 30 years, indicated that New Zealand has one of the highest rates of childhood sexual violence against young males, estimated at 22% – more than 1 in 5.

The New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey found that 1 in 4 victims of sexual abuse in New Zealand identify as male. The survey also found that 34% of male victims of sexual abuse are experiencing high levels of psychological distress.

These studies suggest that at least 412,000 New Zealand men – more than one in six – are victims of sexual abuse and just over a third of victims – 142,500 men – are experiencing high levels of psychological distress.

Men's experience of sexual abuse is often dismissed in the context of higher rates of sexual abuse of women and a perception that men are perpetrators not victims. The reality is that men and boys do experience sexual abuse and lack of recognition and empathy means they receive less support.

It takes 18 years on average before male victims of sexual abuse contact Police or an agency. Only 31.3% report in the first three years. Homophobia and false beliefs about male victims of sexual abuse prevent many men and boys admitting to having been abused.

² Fergusson, David M., Geraldine F. H. McLeod, and L. John Horwood. 2013. 'Childhood Sexual Abuse and Adult Developmental Outcomes: Findings from a 30-Year Longitudinal Study in New Zealand'. *Child Abuse & Neglect* 37 (9): 664–74.

They fear not being believed or being judged harshly.

In 2012, the Youth'12 national youth health and wellbeing survey of 8,500 New Zealand secondary school age students found 9% of males had already experienced unwanted sexual contact³.

Of these male students, 25% reported that their last unwanted sexual experience was 'pretty bad', 'really bad' or 'terrible'. 55% were 13 years or younger at the time they were first abused.

70% of these male students who experienced unwanted sexual contact didn't tell anyone. Males were 18% less likely than females to have told someone.

Delayed disclosure is also evident in Police data. In 2022, men made up 24% of adults reporting child sexual assault to Police, but only 15% of children reporting are male.

The Youth19 survey of 7083 NZ secondary school students found sexual harm was the strongest single predictor for serious mental health distress for all genders. While victims of sexual abuse of any gender are at increased risk of death by suicide, by international standards New Zealand has very high rates of both childhood sexual abuse of males and male death by suicide. Health New Zealand data shows rates of death by suicide are more than two times higher for males than for females in New Zealand.

It is not just victims and their families who suffer. The whole community is affected when victims of sexual abuse are unable to fully participate in society, and we all bear the cost of dealing with the impacts of sexual abuse. In 2021, Business and Economic Research Limited (BERL) estimated the annual economic cost of sexual violence in New Zealand at \$6.9 billion, representing costs to victims, government agencies and communities.

3 Source: "Walk with us" Tautoko Tāne Aotearoa social investment proposal November, 2024; 'Prevalence of Sexual Violence against Children and Age at First Exposure: A Global Analysis by Location, Age, and Sex (1990–2023)'. Cagney, Jack, Cory Spencer, Luisa Flor, Molly Hebert, Mariam Khalil, Erin O'Connell, Erin Mullany, et al. The Lancet (7 May 2025)

Abuse in Care

The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions was established by the New Zealand Government in 2018 to inquire into and report on allegations of historical abuse to children, young people and adults in state care and in the care of faith-based institutions in New Zealand between 1950 and 1999.

Unfortunately, the scope of the inquiry was limited in time and to specific institutions, ignoring many other instances of male abuse (e.g. within social and sporting organisations and people in the care of family and other individuals etc.). This meant that many male survivors were not eligible to report their abuse to the Commission.

The Commission heard the accounts of more than 3,000 survivors over more than five years. The Royal Commission's final report and recommendations, publicly released in 2024, concluded that between 113,000 and 253,000 children, young people and adults had been abused and neglected at state and faith-based institutions in New Zealand between 1950 and 1999. The Commission made 138 recommendations including law changes to relevant legislation and calling for political, religious, public service, professional and care provider leaders to issue public apologies.

While the Commission hearings did much to raise the public profile of sexual abuse, their recommendations were primarily focussed on preventing future abuse and were relatively silent on assuring survivors are adequately supported following their abuse experience.

"We are called survivors, but firstly I would like to acknowledge and honour the very many who have not survived – their families and whānau – many taking their own lives, many having their lives shortened by the serious health issues related to being abused in care, many not surviving the ill-treatment. Their spirits are with us today."

– Keith Wiffin, male survivor

The Government recently announced their intentions regarding the Commission's recommendations for redress. Instead of establishing the recommended independent redress system they have opted to use an existing scheme, which most survivors would argue lacks transparency and fairness. The budget of only \$774m to be allocated in Budget25 is expected to support an average payout of \$30,000 for survivors of abuse in care, which is well below the expectations of most survivors and much less than the average paid in Australia (AUD82,000).

And the redress process for survivors of abuse in faith-based organisations remains very unclear.

"Faith-based survivors feel that they have not been listened to at all. There doesn't appear to be any prospect of the independent redress process we suggested being established, and instead, they are thrown back on the tender mercies of the very institutions that abused them in the first instance. Where is the justice? Where is the transparency."

– Murray Heasley – Network of Survivors of Faith Based Abuse

At the time of this publication, the Government was facing a legal challenge from Lake Alice torture survivor Malcolm Richards, filed with the Supreme Court in May 2025, alleging its decision not to set up an independent system – like a tribunal – is a breach of international law.

Part 1

Living Well in Your Everyday Life

"Wellbeing is not a beach you go and lie on. It's a sort of dynamic dance and there's movement in that all the time ... and it's the functuality of that movement which actually is true levels of wellbeing."

– Nic Marks

A Wellbeing Framework

In 2022, Tautoko Tāne Aotearoa launched its Wellbeing Framework as an integral part of a new Purposeful Peer Support Aotearoa (PPSA) practice model which is focussed on moving male survivors towards wellbeing.

The wellbeing framework is a careful integration of six health and wellbeing constructs⁴ that together provide a common focus on the five essential wellbeing pou shown in the diagram on the opposite page.

The PPSA practice model is wellbeing focussed and helps male survivors to identify and improve the particular aspects of their health that can enhance their recovery journey. The hopeful intention of the PPSA approach is that as male survivors deal with the more problematic aspects of their wellbeing, they will have the energy and confidence to adopt a more holistic approach that brings more of the five pou into an integrated focus – a journey towards living well.

Building a Strong Foundation

“Wellbeing is the combination of feeling good and functioning well; the experience of positive emotions such as happiness and contentment as well as the development of one’s potential, having some control over one’s life, having a sense of purpose, and experiencing positive relationships.”

– K Ruggeri

In this section, we’re going to explore some simple, everyday things you can do to boost your overall health and wellbeing. Think of this as creating a solid foundation to support a healthier lifestyle.

⁴ The framework integrates two indigenous health models (Māori – Te Whare Tapa Whā and Te Wheke), three western models (World Health Organisation [WHO] ‘quality of life’ framework, Seligman’s ‘wellbeing’ construct, the Myers/Sweeney model of ‘wellness’) and the New Zealand Mental Health Foundation’s ‘five steps to wellbeing’ model.

Our Wellbeing Framework:





Here are the key topics we'll cover.

Key Areas for your Wellbeing:

- **Staying Connected**
Build and maintain relationships with family and friends.
- **Eating Well**
Nourish your body with healthy, balanced meals.
- **Exercise**
Stay active to improve your physical and mental health.
- **Relaxation**
Find ways to unwind and recharge, whether through hobbies or downtime.
- **Mindfulness**
Practice being present in the moment to reduce stress and enhance wellbeing.
- **Sleeping Well**
Prioritize good sleep habits for better rest and recovery.
- **Helping Others**
Engage in acts of kindness and support to enhance connections and fulfillment.
- **Living by Your Values**
Align your actions with what truly matters to you for a fulfilling life.
- **Making Change Happen**
Set realistic goals and take steps towards positive change – towards wellbeing.
- **Ideas About Being a Man**
Explore and redefine what masculinity means to you.

These tips are beneficial for everyone, not just men coping with the effects of sexual abuse. If you find some of the later topics overwhelming, we recommend revisiting this section on building a strong foundation for support.

Having a secure foundation means focusing on realistic goals and prioritising what matters most. If your basic needs, like getting enough sleep and managing daily stress, aren't met it can make other challenges feel even tougher to handle.

While addressing these basics won't eliminate the tough situations you face, it will help you feel more prepared and in a better mindset to tackle them.

Staying Connected

“Whoever is bringing out the best in you, stay connected to them.”

– Unknown

Connecting with others positively impacts your overall wellbeing. Feelings of depression can thrive in isolation, so it's important to maintain relationships. Knowing that people care about you can make it easier to take care of yourself.

Make an effort to spend time with others and avoid isolation. When meeting face-to-face isn't possible, smartphones and the internet can help you stay connected. You may have different people in your life with whom you share varying levels of connections:

- someone you enjoy having coffee or drinks with
- a friend you share a meal with
- a buddy you like to hang out and relax with
- a person you trust and can share your thoughts with, maybe about reading this book.

Remember, it's okay if not everyone knows everything about you. Focus on nurturing relationships that uplift you and consider stepping back from ones that feel draining right now.

It's important to avoid the relationships that risk exposing you to old habits and behaviours you are trying to leave behind. These people may provide you with a short-term distraction, but they are not the true friends and supporters that will always care about you and your future.

Eating Well

“Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.”

– Hippocrates

Eating well is all about nourishing your body and mind with the right nutrients while enjoying the meals you prepare. Aim for five servings of vegetables and two servings of fruit each day and stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water.

More people are embracing cooking these days, and it's now more socially accepted for men to enjoy being in the kitchen than in past generations.

Here are some simple tips for eating healthily:

- Start your day with a healthy breakfast.
- Avoid mindless snacking or opt for healthy choices like fruits and nuts if you do snack.
- Plan quick and easy meals for your busy days.
- Use your freezer: prepare 2-3 meals at a time and store them for later.
- Have fun cooking! Try experimenting with new foods and recipes (there are thousands to explore online).

-
- Take advantage of seasonal produce.
-
- Make mealtime enjoyable – turn off the TV and focus on your food.
-
- Invite a friend over to share a meal or even to help with cooking.
-
- Eat slowly and savour each bite.
-
- Listen to your body and stop eating when you feel full.
-
- Consider growing your own veggies, fruits, or herbs for added satisfaction.
-

For more information about eating well check out The New Zealand Nutrition Foundation healthy eating for adults.

Exercise

“Exercise is the key not only to physical health but to peace of mind.”

– Nelson Mandela

Exercise is closely linked to positive mental health. It can boost your mood and increase your energy, helping you tackle life’s challenges more easily. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity each day. If daily activity isn’t possible, try to exercise regularly. You can even break your exercise into smaller sessions of at least 10 minutes.

Everyone has different preferences when it comes to exercise. Some might enjoy team sports, while others prefer individual activities. Whether you like competing or prefer a more social vibe, it’s important to find what you enjoy.

Here are a few options to consider:

-
- **Team Sports**
Great for those who enjoy collaboration and competition.
-
- **Individual Sports**
Perfect if you like working at your own pace.
-
- **Fitness Classes**
Classes like yoga or Tai Chi are excellent for relaxation and fitness.
-
- **Walking**
A simple walk is one of the best ways to stay active.
-

If you’re unsure what you’d enjoy, try different activities until you find what fits you. Partnering up with a friend can also make exercise more enjoyable – you can motivate each other to stay active, even on tough days.

Tips for Exercising

Besides structured workouts, there are many simple ways to stay active in your daily life. Here are a few suggestions:

At Home:

-
- Walk around while talking on your mobile phone.
-
- Do some stretches or sit-ups while watching TV.
-
- Use commercial breaks as a chance to do quick household tasks.
-
- Try energetic cleaning, gardening or weekend projects.
-
- Park farther away from the supermarket to add some extra steps.
-

At Work:

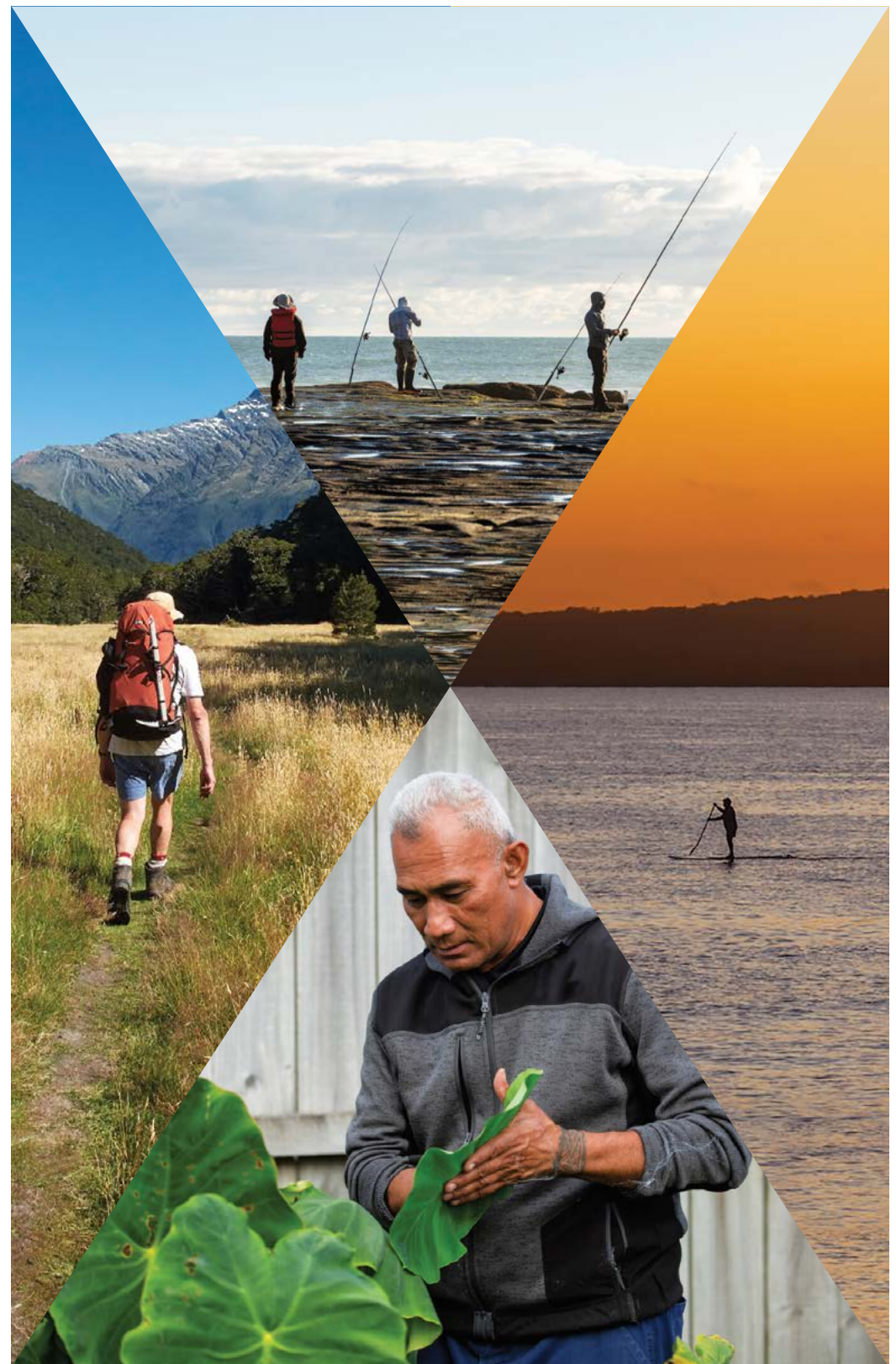
- Keep your walking shoes handy and move whenever you can.
- Park farther away from the office.
- Get off public transport one stop early to walk a bit.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Walk up the escalator instead of standing still.
- Take a longer route to the printer or photocopier.
- Enjoy a lunchtime walk or plan a post-work stroll with a friend.
- Walk to a colleague's office instead of sending an email.

Relaxation and Quiet Time

"Rest when you're weary. Refresh and renew yourself, your body, your mind, your spirit. Then get back to work. Your calm mind is the ultimate weapon against your challenges. So, relax."

– Ralph Marston/Bryan McGill

Relaxation exercises are short, focused routines designed to help you slow down your breathing and relieve tension. Learning how to take a few moments for quiet time – not focused on accomplishing a task – can help you recharge and feel refreshed.



For those who have experienced trauma, including sexual assault, finding ways to relax may be challenging. You might have developed habits of being alert and on guard as a means of staying safe, which can make it difficult to let your guard down. The first step is becoming aware of when you are tense; your body and mind may have become so accustomed to being vigilant that you don't notice it anymore.

It's important to recognize that it can feel unsafe to relax at first, but with practice, you can learn to identify places and moments where you truly are safe. There are significant health benefits to easing that constant tension.

Tips for Relaxation

Learning to breathe deeply and relax your body can enhance your ability to rest and recharge.

Here's a simple relaxation exercise focused on breathing and muscle tension:

- 1 **Find a Safe, Quiet Spot**
Sit comfortably in a chair or on the ground, making sure not to slouch.
- 2 **Ground Yourself**
Place your feet or hands firmly on the ground, feeling its solidness.
- 3 **Hand Position**
Gently clasp your hands together in front of your stomach, just below your belly button.
- 4 **Notice Your Breathing**
Pay attention to your breath's pace and depth.
- 5 **Take a Deep Breath**
When you're ready, slowly inhale through your nose for about 5 seconds.

- 6 **Grip Your Hands**
While you breathe in, squeeze your hands, as if they're pulling in opposite directions. Engage the muscles in your arms but stop if it causes any pain and try again with less pressure.
- 7 **Exhale Slowly**
Gently breathe out through your mouth, releasing the air smoothly over about 5 seconds.
- 8 **Continue the Cycle**
You can repeat this process until you feel calm and centred.

▶ Repeat steps 5-8 three or four times.

For more relaxation exercises, check out the following sources:

Mayo Clinic

"Do what you love. Almost any form of exercise or movement can increase your fitness level while decreasing your stress. The most important thing is to pick an activity that you enjoy. Examples include walking, stair climbing, jogging, dancing, bicycling, yoga, tai chi, gardening, weightlifting and swimming. And remember, you don't need to join a gym to get moving. Take a walk with the dog, try body-weight exercises or do a yoga video at home..."

Harvard Health

"Any type of exercise will help. Many people find that using large muscle groups in a rhythmic, repetitive fashion works best; call it 'muscular meditation', and you'll begin to understand how it works. Walking and jogging are prime examples. Even a simple 20-minute stroll can clear the mind and reduce stress. But some people prefer vigorous workouts that burn stress along with calories. That's one reason ellipticals are so popular. And the same stretching exercises that help relax your muscles after a hard workout will help relax your mind as well..."

Mindfulness

“Be where you are; otherwise, you will miss your life.”

– Buddha

You may have come across the term “mindfulness”. While it’s connected to relaxation, there are some important differences. Mindfulness is all about paying attention to your thoughts and surroundings in a way that often goes unnoticed. It helps you step back from negative thoughts and feelings that can be overwhelming.

Practicing mindfulness is valuable at any time, not just during tough moments. You can easily incorporate mindfulness into your daily routine – like practicing mindful walking or savouring your tea or coffee. By consciously using mindfulness throughout your day, you boost your awareness and gain a greater sense of control and choice.

One common challenge men face when trying to practice mindfulness is the pressure to “get it right” or the feeling that they don’t quite understand it. It’s normal to have moments of doubt and distraction during your practice. Simply acknowledge those thoughts and gently return your focus to your anchor (more on that next).

Another challenge is that mindfulness contrasts with the idea that men should always be “do-ers”. Noticing thoughts without feeling the need to judge or change them can be difficult. When you notice that urge, just acknowledge it, and then focus back on your anchor.

A Short Mindfulness Exercise

Here’s a simple mindfulness exercise for you to try:

-
- 1 Anchor to Your Breath**
Start by focusing on your breath. Think “in” for the inhale and “out” for the exhale. Your breath is your anchor – return to it whenever you need.
-

-
- 2 Notice Your Thoughts**
When a thought, feeling or sensation arises, take note of what’s grabbing your attention and label the experience without judgment.

 - 3 Observe Without Judgment**
Approach each thought with an open, curious attitude. Don’t categorize them as good or bad – just observe them as they come and go, like leaves floating down a stream.

 - 4 Let Them Drift**
Allow your thoughts to fade away naturally. You don’t need to push them aside; simply let them pass to make room for the next thought.

 - 5 Return to Your Breath**
After noting each thought, gently bring your attention back to your breath, repeating “in” for the inhale and “out” for the exhale.
-

Try practicing this for about 5 minutes to start. As you become more comfortable, you can gradually extend the time.

For more ideas and links related to mindfulness, check out Healthify Te Puna Waiora and the New Zealand Mental Health Foundation.

Sleeping Well

“Sleep is an investment in the energy you need to be effective tomorrow.”

– Tom Roth

Getting a good night’s sleep is essential for recovering from the day and preparing for the next. Quality sleep helps you think more clearly, handle challenges better and feel more energized.

While many people say 8 hours of sleep is ideal, the most crucial part of sleep occurs during the first 5 hours, which is when you experience deep sleep. Regularly getting less than 5 hours of sleep each night can lead to negative effects on your health.

Stress can interfere with your ability to sleep well, creating a cycle where anxiety about not sleeping makes it even harder to relax. Worries about having nightmares can also hinder your ability to fall asleep.

Poor quality deep sleep can lead to:

- daytime tiredness
- difficulty concentrating
- increased irritability
- muscle and bone aches
- a weakened immune system, resulting in frequent illness
- longer periods of depression.

Tips for Sleeping Well

To improve your sleep, consider establishing a consistent bedtime routine. Here are some helpful suggestions:

-
- **Set a Sleep Schedule**
Go to bed at the same time each night to regulate your body's internal clock.
-
- **Relax Before Bed**
Spend 30 minutes doing something calming before sleep. While watching TV or playing video games may seem relaxing, they might not help you prepare for sleep. Instead, try reading a book, doing relaxation exercises or taking a warm shower.
-
- **Create a Comfortable Sleep Environment**
Invest in quality sheets and pillows for added comfort.
-

-
- **Mind Your Intake**
Avoid drinking large amounts of fluids right before bed and try not to watch the clock.
-
- **Wake Up Consistently**
Get up at the same time every morning, even after a tough night. Resist the urge to sleep in.
-
- **Start Your Day Actively**
Consider doing something invigorating in the morning, like a brisk walk, run or bike ride.
-

If you have long-term sleep issues, it can be challenging to change your habits. It may be time to seek help from a professional, such as your doctor or a counsellor who specializes in sleep problems. If your situation is serious, there are sleep clinics that offer intensive treatment options.

Helping Others and Helping Yourself

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

– Mahatma Gandhi

Sometimes, we can overlook the fact that we have valuable contributions to make. Interestingly, helping others can significantly improve our own wellbeing. Recent research in neuroscience shows that engaging in acts of kindness and cooperating with others activates and strengthens certain areas of the brain, which enhances our overall sense of happiness.

When we help others, it changes how we perceive ourselves and the world around us. The more others see you as a capable and skilled person, the more you begin to see yourself that way as well.

However, it's important to ensure that you are helping others out of a genuine desire to contribute, rather than out of obligation or habit.

For some men, accepting help becomes easier when they can also participate in helping someone else. You can put this into practice in various ways, whether it's:

- volunteering with a local organization
- offering assistance to a friend or an elderly neighbour
- making space to listen to someone who is going through a tough time.

As you help others, take a moment to recognize the conscious choice you made to offer your support and reflect on how this aligns with the type of person you want to be.

Living by Your Values

“To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.”

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Coping with challenging experiences – such as memories of sexual abuse, anxiety and depression – can be draining. It might feel like all your energy goes into just getting by. To better equip yourself to deal with these difficulties and the challenges of life, investing time in identifying your personal values is crucial.

Your values serve as a guide or compass, influencing who you are, how you react in various situations and where you wish to go in life. When you have a clear sense of purpose and follow your values you're less likely to feel overwhelmed or thrown off course during tough times.

Our values can be shaped by our upbringing, cultural influences, religious or spiritual beliefs, or personal ethics. You might value traits such as being calm, honest, considerate, creative, thoughtful, reliable or simply doing your best.



Regardless of their origins, our values represent our vision of how to live a fulfilling life. When we act in alignment with our values, we tend to experience a greater sense of purpose and meaning in our lives.

Tips for Identifying Your Values

We often hold our values without being fully aware of them; we don't typically think about and name our values in a structured way. By identifying our values, we create a helpful guide for our life.

Take some time to reflect on the following areas and try writing or expressing a sentence or two about what matters most to you.

Consider the kind of person you want to be and how you'd like to act in these areas:

- **Family/Whānau Relationships**
Caring, supportive, and respectful.
- **Cultural Influences**
Participating in cultural practices that honour our heritage, traditions, and understandings of who you are.
- **Parenting**
Loving and a good listener.
- **Friendships**
Honest, reliable, and "being there when needed".
- **Work**
Hardworking, acting with integrity and being efficient.
- **Education**
Open-minded, well-informed and doing your best.
- **Recreation and Leisure**
Fun, relaxing and seeking positive life experiences.

- **Spirituality**
Considerate, tolerant and compassionate.
- **Community Involvement**
Committed, giving back and connecting with others.
- **Health and Wellbeing**
Prioritising quiet time, variety and generosity to others.

As you reflect on these areas, you might identify small steps you can take to align more closely with your preferred way of living. This approach does not mean you won't face challenges or uncomfortable feelings; it simply emphasizes the importance of calming and centring yourself while acting according to your established values.

Making Change Happen

"Open your arms to change, but don't let go of your values."

– Dalai Lama

Change often doesn't occur in a neat or organized manner. Transforming unhelpful habits or developing more positive patterns requires focus, effort and repetition.

Here's a basic map to help you track your progress:

- 1 **I Don't Know or Want to Know**
You don't recognize a problem or feel the need to change. Attempts by others to persuade you are usually ineffective.
- 2 **I'm Thinking About It**
You begin to see that there's a problem you want to control. You evaluate the pros and cons and share your thoughts with others.

-
- 3 **I Want to, I'm Getting Ready**
You're ready to change and take action. Encouragement from others can help strengthen your motivation.
-
- 4 **I'm Doing It**
You're actively taking steps to change your behaviour and/or environment in your own way. Others can help by recognising your positive changes.
-
- 5 **I'm Staying on Track**
You've made and maintained change for a few months. While there may be occasional setbacks, you know how to stay committed and not get derailed.
-

When pursuing change, remember that **safety** is a foundational element for building a supportive and successful path forward.

Ideas About Being a Man

"It takes more courage to reveal insecurities than to hide them, more strength to relate to people than to dominate them, more 'manhood' to abide by thought-out principles rather than blind reflex. Toughness is in the soul and spirit, not in muscles and an immature mind."

– Alex Karras

Every man has his own unique experiences and beliefs about what it means to be a man. Gender plays a significant role in our personal identity, alongside other factors like cultural background, physical abilities or disabilities, sexual orientation, religion, family dynamics and where we live.

While every man is distinct, many face common social pressures regarding how they should behave, feel and think. These pressures can affect how men respond to various situations in their lives.

Some common expectations include:

-
- **Dealing with Problems Alone**
The belief that men should handle challenges independently.

 - **Always Being in Control**
Feeling the need to maintain control in every situation.

 - **Limiting Emotional Expression**
Only showing a narrow range of emotions.

 - **Never Admitting Vulnerability**
Avoiding any admission of weakness or needing help.
-

At times, these qualities can be beneficial. In emergencies or high-pressure situations, the ability to stay calm and composed is highly valued. Whether in fields like emergency services, the military or certain corporate roles.

However, the problem with these societal expectations of "being a man" is that they can be very limiting. They might lead men to isolate themselves and become hesitant to share what they're going through. These pressures can also cause men to be overly self-critical, leading to feelings of inadequacy.

Unfortunately, these societal pressures can lead men to evaluate and judge themselves in unhelpful ways. Men might become hard on themselves for feeling "tricked", for "not fighting hard enough", for "not being able to cope", or for "not measuring up" – when what they really need is understanding and encouragement.

Unrealistic expectations like "man up", "push through" and "just get on with it" can leave men feeling they must face problems alone. This mindset can create the belief that asking for help with personal issues, difficult thoughts, or feelings is a sign of weakness. Yet, in many aspects of life, men naturally seek advice and support.

For example, if your car has a problem you can't fix, you'd take it to a mechanic or consult a friend with automotive knowledge.

As men, it's important to recognize these expectations and ensure they don't limit our choices or hinder our willingness to seek support necessary for building the life we want.

Questions to Consider:

- Are there times when you feel especially conscious of expectations about how you should handle situations as a man?
- Do you ever find yourself questioning whether these expectations truly reflect who you are or what's best for those around you?
- Have you ever taken actions that were best for you, even if they went against traditional ideas of "being a man"?

Part 2

Coping with Sexual Abuse and Living Well

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

– Lao Tzu

"You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step."

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

In this section, we will focus on common challenges faced by men dealing with the effects of child sexual abuse or adult sexual assault. We'll discuss various issues and provide practical tips for coping with each one. The topics covered include:

- **Recent Sexual Assault**
Understanding and addressing the impact of recent experiences.
- **Expectations and Making Changes**
Exploring the pressures and changes that can arise after trauma.
- **Shame**
Navigating feelings of shame and their effects.
- **Tactics of Abuse**
Recognising and understanding the methods used by abusers.
- **Clergy Abuse**
The impact on spiritual and religious beliefs.
- **Physiological Reactions and Sexuality**
How abuse can affect physical responses and sexual health.
- **Separating Sexuality from Sexual Abuse**
Understanding the difference between healthy sexuality and the trauma of abuse.
- **The 'Victim-to-Offender' Myth**
Debunking harmful beliefs about abuse survivors.
- **Trust, Intimacy and Relationships**
Building and rebuilding trust in relationships.
- **Flashbacks**
Coping with intrusive memories and triggers.

- **Nightmares**
Addressing sleep disturbances related to trauma.
- **Panic Attacks and Anxiety**
Strategies for managing anxiety and panic.
- **Deciding to Tell**
Considerations for disclosing experiences of abuse.
- **Suicidal Thoughts**
Recognising and addressing feelings of despair.
- **Self-Harm**
Understanding self-harm and finding healthier coping mechanisms.
- **Alcohol and Drug Use**
Exploring substance use as a means of coping and its consequences.
- **What Am I Feeling?**
Identifying and processing emotions related to trauma.
- **Parenting**
Navigating the challenges of parenting while coping with abuse.
- **Justice**
Understanding avenues to seek justice for the abuse experienced.
- **Prosecuting Those Who Commit Sexual Offences**
The legal process and considerations for pursuing justice.
- **Compensation**
Exploring options for seeking compensation for the impact of abuse.
- **Celebrating Life**
Finding moments of joy and celebration in the journey of healing.

Recent Sexual Assault

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

– Carl Gustav Jung

While often overlooked, rape and sexual assault can happen to adult men as well as boys. The following information is especially for men who have experienced sexual assault recently – within the last few days, weeks or months. If this does not apply to you, feel free to skip ahead.

Medical Treatment

It's important to seek medical attention after an assault. You have the right to bring a support person with you if you need to go to the hospital. You can also decide whether to have a forensic medical examination, which involves a doctor collecting medical evidence that could be used in prosecuting the offender(s). Keep in mind that there is a time limit for collecting forensic evidence after the assault, so it's best to seek help as soon as possible.

If you're unsure about what to do, you can talk to a peer worker, counsellor or advocate from a sexual assault support service.

If you're unsure about what is involved in a medical examination you could check out the guide published by Medical Sexual Assault Clinicians Aotearoa (MEDSAC) called Getting specialist medical help after sexual assault. (Available on their website: medsac.org.nz.)

Legal Options

You have the right to report the assault to the Police, but no one should pressure you into doing so. Making a police statement usually requires providing detailed information, which can be distressing and may re-trigger traumatic feelings.

However, in recent times the NZ Police have adopted a more supportive stance in respect of reporting sexual assault by allowing relaxed pre-interviews away from the police station and enabling follow up more formal interviews without any commitment to prosecute.

Whatever your decision in respect of reporting your assault to police, we strongly advise that you consult with, and seek the support of a peer worker, counsellor or advocate from a sexual assault support service. Having these people by your side can be incredibly supportive during the reporting process, whether or not you choose to make a formal statement and progress prosecution.

(For more information check out the section on Justice on page 82.)

Coping with Trauma

"You are not your trauma. You are not
your pain. You are not your fear."

– Unknown

Experiencing extremely traumatic events can leave you feeling like your world has been turned upside down. You may have faced a life-threatening situation that was completely beyond your control.

Sexual assault can trigger a range of physical and emotional responses, along with unwelcome thoughts that seem to come out of nowhere. You might experience feelings and physical sensations that are new and overwhelming.

Common responses after such trauma can include:

- severe pain or shock
- tremors in your arms and legs
- stomach issues, such as nausea or loss of appetite
- constipation or diarrhea
- nightmares or sleeplessness
- headaches or dizziness.

It's also possible to feel detached or "spaced out" as a coping mechanism. Some may experience flashbacks where intrusive memories of the assault resurface unexpectedly.

These reactions to trauma are often classified as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). To be officially diagnosed with PTSD, certain criteria must be met and only a qualified professional – like a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist – can provide this diagnosis. It's important to note that the term "disorder" can be misleading; these reactions are normal responses to extraordinary situations. Everyone's experience is different, and not everyone will have all or any of these symptoms.

Remembering that these reactions are natural responses to trauma can help you understand your feelings better and keep overwhelming emotions at bay.

Try to Restore Some Normality and Control

"The pain of trauma can be the catalyst for personal growth, leading us to discover inner strength and resilience we never knew we possessed."

– Judith Lewis Herma

After experiencing trauma, the world that once felt safe may now seem dangerous and leave you feeling insecure. To regain some sense of control and choice in your life, it can be helpful to gradually bring parts of your routine back to normal. Reestablishing a sense of routine may take time, but you can start with small actions. Consider:

- taking a walk
- practicing breathing exercises
- making a favourite meal.

As you take these steps, make time to acknowledge that you are actively working to regain control of your life. Recognising these achievements, no matter how small, is important.

Seek Support

It's common to feel the urge to isolate yourself after such an experience. However, reaching out to someone about what you're going through can help reduce feelings of loneliness. It's comforting to know there's someone looking out for your wellbeing and helping you with daily tasks, like ensuring you're eating properly.

Be gentle with yourself during this time. It might take a while to return to a routine and that's perfectly okay. This delay isn't a sign that you're doing something wrong; instead, it's a natural part of the healing process after the overwhelming and confusing experience of sexual assault.

Tips for Regaining Control

Take your time and avoid placing unrealistic expectations on yourself. Restoring a sense of normalcy can take time, and it's important to remember that the feelings and physical sensations you may be experiencing are common responses to a traumatic event. They do not mean you are "going crazy"; instead, you are processing a deeply distressing violation of your personal integrity.

Here are some activities that many people find helpful in regaining control:

- **Exercising**
Physical activity can be a great way to release tension and boost your mood.
- **Studying**
Engaging your mind in learning can provide a helpful distraction.

- **Reading**
Books can transport you and offer a break from distressing thoughts.
- **Working**
If you're able, immersing yourself in work can help restore a sense of purpose.
- **Drawing or Painting**
Creative expression can be therapeutic and a way to process emotions.
- **Listening to Music**
Music can soothe and uplift your spirits.
- **Playing Sports**
Physical games can be enjoyable and provide social interaction.
- **Writing**
Journaling or writing can help clarify your thoughts and feelings by getting them out of your head.

Additionally, some people find strength in simply talking with their close friends, peer worker or counsellor, or using meditation, spiritual practices or prayer.

If you're struggling with flashbacks or nightmares, be sure to refer to the pages that follow for more strategies.

This concludes the section specifically addressing recent assaults. However, the information provided in the rest of this book remains relevant, whether your experience is recent or from the past.



Expectations and Making Changes

“The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new.”

– Dan Millman

Picking up this book may be a sign that you're ready for significant changes in your life. You might have a feeling that this journey won't always be easy and that it may involve some struggles along the way.

On the other hand, you might feel that things are already challenging, and you're eager for change to happen as soon as possible. There can be a strong sense of urgency – thinking, “I'm ready, let's get going!”

However, it's crucial to stay realistic about how much can change and the pace at which changes can occur. Remember, you can improve your life one step at a time.

Trying to figure everything out all at once can become overwhelming and frustrating. It may feel like you don't have control over anything in your life. During these times, it can be helpful to focus on small things you can control – like your breathing or deciding what to eat for dinner. While these decisions may seem minor, they can have a significant impact.

Making changes requires focus, effort and practice. Take things one step at a time and be kind to yourself in the process.

Impacts of Child Sexual Abuse

“Child abuse casts a shadow the length of a lifetime.”

– Herbert Ward

There is no one-size-fits-all way that individuals are affected by child sexual abuse; everyone experiences it differently. However, it is well-established that sexual abuse can have profound effects on a person's life.

Some common impacts reported by men include:

- **Feelings of Guilt and Shame**
Many may struggle with self-blame and feelings of inadequacy.
- **Mental Health Issues**
This can encompass difficulties such as depression, anxiety and PTSD.
- **Overwhelming Emotions**
Some might experience flashbacks, dissociation, emotional numbing or hyper-arousal.
- **Physical Health Changes**
This can manifest as decreased appetite and weight loss, along with body image issues.
- **Suicidal Thoughts and Self-Harm**
Engaging in high-risk behaviours can also occur.
- **Relationship Challenges**
Trust issues and difficulties in forming or maintaining relationships are common.
- **Sexual Difficulties**
Sexual health and intimacy may be adversely affected.
- **Sleep Issues**
This can include insomnia, nightmares and night terrors.
- **Substance Abuse**
Some may turn to alcohol or drugs, or develop addictive behaviours such as overworking.
- **Physical Health Problems**
Overall physical health may also decline.

Complex Trauma

“When all you know is fight or flight, red flags and butterflies all feel the same.”

– Cindy Cherie

The term “Complex Trauma” is used to describe the intricate mix of impacts that sexual abuse can have, though it is not currently classified as a formal diagnostic category. Complex Trauma acknowledges the interpersonal nature and developmental effects of child sexual abuse, particularly as it happens during critical stages of a child’s development when they are learning about safety, trust, identity and how the world works.

It’s understandable that this type of trauma can make it challenging for both children and adults to feel in control of their emotions, thoughts and actions. Individuals may struggle to develop a sense of self-worth and integrity – to see themselves as unique, whole and deserving individuals – or to experience nurturing relationships.

Impacts can vary from person to person which is why it’s important to seek and receive the information and support you need and deserve.

Trauma-Informed Care and Practice (TICP) Principles

In recognition of the significant effects of complex trauma, many providers of sexual abuse support services are acknowledging the importance of a TICP model. This approach emphasizes several key principles, including:

- **Creating a Safe and Supportive Environment**
Ensuring that spaces feel secure and welcoming.
- **Prioritising Individual Choice and Self-Determination**
Empowering individuals to make their own decisions.

- **Understanding Impacts and Triggers**
Increasing awareness of how trauma affects individuals and what may trigger certain responses.
- **Enhancing Support Resources**
Providing tools and strategies to help individuals manage the effects of trauma more effectively.
- **Focusing on Recovery and Strengths**
Adopting a recovery-oriented, empowering approach that highlights individual strengths.
- **Building Trust and Collaboration**
Developing respectful and collaborative relationships between individuals and service providers.
- **Establishing Purpose and Hope**
Helping individuals find a sense of purpose and fostering hope for the future.

As you work to address the impacts of abuse and improve your wellbeing, remember that you are not alone. These principles can also guide friends and professionals in collaborating effectively with you.

Post-Traumatic Growth

“The paradox of trauma is that it has both the power to destroy and the power to transform and resurrect.”

– Peter A. Levine:

While no one wishes for abuse and trauma to occur, there is growing research in the field of Post-Traumatic Growth that explores how people can respond positively after experiencing trauma.

Some men who have survived abuse report various forms of growth, including:

- [greater appreciation for life](#)
- [enhanced empathy for others](#)
- [a commitment to building closer, more intimate relationships](#)
- [an increased sense of personal strength](#)
- [a re-evaluation of life priorities and aspirations, including a dedication to addressing injustice.](#)

As you navigate the negative impacts of sexual abuse, consider whether you are already taking steps to improve your life and contribute positively to the lives of others. These efforts also deserve recognition and appreciation.

Connecting with the Body After Trauma

“As long as you keep secrets and suppress information, you are fundamentally at war with yourself ... The critical issue is allowing yourself to know what you know. That takes an enormous amount of courage.”

– Bessel A. van der Kolk

As humans, we naturally respond to threats or dangers with physiological and neurological reactions. The most common survival responses are known as “fight”, “flight” or “freeze”. When someone experiences prolonged trauma, these responses can become ingrained, leading to a state of ongoing heightened arousal, agitation and hyper-vigilance (being constantly ready to fight or flee); or they may feel disconnected and dissociate from their body (the freeze response). While these bodily responses can be useful in the short term, they can linger longer than necessary.



Recent research emphasises that the body “remembers” trauma and keeps the score, highlighting the importance of body-focused interventions. For some men, engaging in these body-focused practices may initially feel strange or uncomfortable, as society often teaches men to control their bodies rather than connect with them. The ideal scenario is for the mind and body to work in harmony, creating a feedback loop of awareness and response.

Here are some exercises to consider for reconnecting with your body:

- **Yoga, Pilates, or Tai Chi**
These practices promote mindfulness and body awareness.
- **Mindfulness Exercises**
Focus on bodily senses and physical sensations to enhance awareness.
- **Relaxation Techniques**
Engage in body awareness exercises to help calm the mind and body.
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation**
Gradually tense and then relax different muscle groups to release tension.
- **Tapping and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)**
These techniques can help process trauma and reduce stress.

As you explore different ways to calm yourself and reconnect with your body, pay attention to what decreases and increases your stress levels. For some, directly addressing physical discomfort can feel overwhelming; if that's the case, consider trying a different approach that feels more manageable. It's important to find techniques that resonate with you and help you build a positive relationship with your body.

Shame

“Shame hates it when we reach out and tell our story. It hates having words wrapped around it – it can't survive being shared. Shame loves secrecy. When we bury our story shame metastasizes.”

– Brene Brown

Shame can be an incredibly powerful and overwhelming emotion. Many men may feel that they were somehow responsible for the abuse, that they should have seen it coming or that they could have prevented it. The sexual nature of the abuse often intensifies these feelings of shame. Recalling the actual abuse can lead to feelings of being “dirty” or confused and shame can manifest physically as blushing or fatigue.

Shame can also prevent men from speaking out about their experiences. It's profoundly unfair that the person who has been abused is often left with feelings of shame. It's important to remember that the abuse was not your fault and that you are not responsible for what happened to you.

While shame can serve a purpose – alerting us that a situation is dangerous or undermines our sense of integrity – it's essential to understand its context. Some individuals feel shame when reflecting on how they could have avoided the abuse which is a natural thought process. However, it's crucial to differentiate between wishing you could have done something to prevent the abuse and feeling responsible for it.

To illustrate this point, consider how you might advise a child going to the park to play with friends. Offering safety tips is about empowerment, not about placing blame. You would not hold the child responsible for the harmful actions of an adult who might hurt them. Similarly, it's important to recognise that the people who perpetrate sexual violence and abuse are the ones responsible for their actions, not the victim/survivor.

Tactics of Abuse

“To those who abuse: the sin is yours, the crime is yours, and the shame is yours. To those who protect the perpetrators: blaming the victims only masks the evil within, making you as guilty as those who abuse. Stand up for the innocent or go down with the rest.”

– Flora Jessop

A helpful exercise to combat feelings of shame is to examine the tactics used by those who commit abuse. While this may be difficult to confront, it can clarify where responsibility for the abuse truly lies and help you understand where the shame rightfully belongs. This exercise can be particularly beneficial for men who were abused as boys or teenagers, as well as for those who experienced sexual assault as adults.

The tactics of abuse refer to the actions, words or threats used by the abuser to carry out the abuse and keep it concealed. These tactics might include manipulation, offering “special gifts” or using “tricks” to make you feel as though you were to blame or at fault for what happened.

With time, it can be easier to recognize these tactics for what they are. For example, an adult may convince a child that they will get in trouble if anyone finds out about the abuse. As an adult reflecting on this, it's clear that this is a manipulative tactic and not the truth; however, a child may not have the capacity to understand that.

As you look back on your experiences, be cautious not to use your current knowledge to judge the decisions you made in the past. Take time to recall the context: consider your age, your physical size or maturity at the time, what information you had or didn't have about sex, and what support systems were available to you.

When reviewing the tactics of abuse, aim to adopt a compassionate and understanding attitude toward yourself. Acknowledge the actions you might have taken to survive under such circumstances.

Abuse in Care

“I want to again acknowledge the survivors for their exceptional bravery and for sharing their stories. I share your dream for the next generation where every child, young person, and adult is loved, is safe and is cared for in a manner that supports their growth and development to becoming a thriving contributor to our society. I will never lose sight of what you have endured to bring the truth to life.”

– Christopher Luxon, Prime Minister of New Zealand

The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions was established by the New Zealand Government in 2018 to inquire into and report upon allegations of historical abuse to children, young people and adults in state care and in the care of faith-based institutions in New Zealand between 1950 and 1999.

The many male survivors who bravely told their stories to the Commission were successful in making public the horrific abuse suffered by many boys and men in the care of church and state-controlled organisations.

For male survivors who were not able to share their story with the Royal Commission, which concluded with their final report in 2024, the Government established the Survivor Experience Service – a confidential “listening” service that facilitates access to support and historical records that may help male survivors to document their historic abuse.

A major concern relating to the Commission hearing process was the potential for re-traumatization of survivors, many of whom were required to re-tell their stories multiple times. A concern that remains in relation to how the processes to gain redress may operate to evidence the abuse suffered by survivor-claimants.

We recommend that, if for whatever reason, you decide that you want to tell your story, you should seek advice and support before making a final decision. (Refer to Deciding to Tell on page 71.)

Clergy Abuse: Spiritual and Religious Beliefs

“Human life is sacred and inviolable. Every civil right rests on the recognition of the first and fundamental right, that of life, which is not subordinate to any condition, be it quantitative, economic or, least of all, ideological.”

– Pope Francis.

Sexual abuse by clergy members and within faith communities, along with the failure of religious organizations to properly report these crimes or handle allegations fairly and compassionately, has had a profound impact on individuals, families and communities.

For many, spiritual and religious beliefs provide a sense of purpose and belonging, offering valuable support and encouragement during challenging times. However, when sexual abuse occurs within these religious contexts it can completely shatter a person's faith and trust, often leading them to distance themselves from a particular church, group or organized religion.

Individuals who experience sexual abuse in religious settings face unique challenges. Some boys and men may choose not to disclose their experiences out of fear that it would distress their religious family members. Additionally, the shame and guilt associated with same-sex sexual contact, along with the fear of being disconnected from their faith community, can be leveraged by perpetrators to keep victims silent.

Many religious traditions promote the concept of “forgiveness” as a pathway to healing. For some, the act of forgiving can be empowering, offering a sense of personal strength.

However, for others, the idea of forgiving those who committed such acts of abuse can feel disrespectful and unacceptable.

Faith, religion and spirituality can be deeply personal journeys of discovery. If you're interested, it might be beneficial to seek out someone who can support you without pressure as you explore how you might incorporate faith and spiritual practices into your life.

Physiological Reactions and Sexuality

“Our bodies can react to sex-related stimuli, even if we don't experience sexual desire or attraction ... physiological responses like arousal can occur independently of subjective feelings of wanting or liking.”

– Emily Nagoski

If a man develops an erection or experiences arousal during the time of an assault, it can create even more reluctance to discuss the sexual abuse. It's important to understand that these physical responses do not indicate that the man wanted to be sexually abused in any way. Some individuals who perpetrate abuse may manipulate a boy or man to induce arousal then wrongly use this as evidence to claim the abuse was “wanted”.

It's essential to recognize that we cannot always control how our bodies react especially in stressful situations. A boy or man might develop an erection as an involuntary response to fear or physical stimuli. These physiological responses say nothing about his desires or sexuality.

Physical arousal can lead to considerable confusion for many men. Some may feel aroused when recalling the abuse which can prompt worries about what this means for them.

Unfortunately, the experience of sexual abuse can significantly impact one's sexual intimacy.

For some men, it can lead to an increased interest in sex or specific sexual acts, while for others, it may create feelings of being overwhelmed or uncomfortable with sexual contact leading them to avoid intimacy and isolate themselves.

If you find that sexual thoughts, reactions or difficulties are distressing or bothersome to you, it may be beneficial to seek support from a trained counsellor who understands the complexities of sexual assault and sexuality. This professional can help you make sense of your feelings and experiences.

Separating Sexuality from Sexual Abuse

“Sexual abuse is never a reflection of a person’s sexuality, but rather a reflection of the abuser’s character.”

– Unknown

Homophobia and confusion surrounding sexuality can add layers of distress for men who are speaking about their experiences of sexual abuse. For instance, if a man was sexually abused by another man, he may worry that people will label him as gay and discriminate against him or that they might view his sexuality as inherently abusive. If he identifies as gay, he might fear that others will think he deserved the abuse or that the assault somehow caused him to become gay. On the other hand, if he was abused by a woman, he might be concerned that people won’t take his complaints seriously assuming he should just “be okay” with it.

It’s critical to understand that sexual assault is an act of power and abuse, and it is not related to sexuality or masculinity. Being abused is not a reflection of the victim’s identity or any other personal trait – just as being a victim of theft isn’t caused by having “psychological issues with money”. Like any form of violence, sexual abuse results from the choices and actions of the perpetrator.

Given the societal homophobia and confusion around sexuality, it may be helpful to take some time to explore and reflect on your own sexual preferences and choices. You might consider discussing these feelings with a partner or a qualified counsellor/therapist. Together, you can identify how you enjoy expressing affection and your sexual energy in positive and fulfilling ways.

The “Victim-to-Offender” Myth

“... research evidence tells us that being sexually abused does not cause someone to sexually offend and that the majority of boys who are sexually abused do not go on to commit abuse.”

– C. Boyd & G. Foster

A prevalent myth is that men and boys who have been sexually abused will go on to perpetrate sexual abuse themselves. The reality is that the vast majority of boys and men who experience sexual abuse do not become offenders. In fact, many are deeply horrified by the idea, having firsthand knowledge of the distress abuse causes. Some go on to become advocates, speaking out against sexual violence and abuse.

This “victim-to-offender” myth can have significant impacts on men’s lives. The belief that they are somehow “infected” or “contaminated” can lead to unfounded fears of harming children even when there are no conscious thoughts or intentions to do so. As a result, some men might take extreme measures to limit their interactions with children or avoid certain relationships altogether.

The fear of being perceived by others as a potential “abuser” becomes a major barrier that prevents men from speaking out about the sexual abuse they endured. Additionally, if a child, at the time of their abuse, acted sexually with other children or was pressured into sexual situations, they may struggle with added concerns about “becoming an abuser”.

It's vital to remember that these reactive behaviours, often resulting from coercion or trauma, are entirely different from the deliberate actions of an adult who chooses to commit abuse.

If anyone – regardless of whether they have been abused – experiences sexualized fantasies about children or has worries about potentially harming someone, it's important to seek help from a qualified counsellor or health professional as soon as possible.

Trust, Intimacy and Relationships

"Sexual trauma dramatically reduces our range of expression, leaving us with fewer words, less tolerable access to touch, and more tenuous relational bonds."

– Holly Richmond

Men who have experienced sexual abuse may face similar pressures as all men, such as the expectations of self-reliance and handling problems on their own. However, there can also be additional challenges related to trust and closeness in relationships stemming from their experiences of abuse.

Trust is often manipulated as a tactic of abuse, particularly in cases of child sexual abuse.

Such a profound betrayal can lead to the belief that trusting others or forming close connections is dangerous. Given this experience, it's understandable to feel cautious.

While being careful and discerning about whom to trust is important in certain situations, it can also hinder intimate relationships with those you truly care about.

If you desire to feel closer to the people in your life, know that it may take time and patience, but building intimacy is possible. Remember, intimacy is a shared journey that requires participation from both partners.

Many men report struggling with several challenges related to this feeling of betrayal, including:

- **Reluctance to Trust**
Hesitancy to allow others to get close.
- **Misinterpretation of Care**
Viewing any expression of care or attention as a sign of sexual interest or an intention to manipulate.
- **Feelings of Vulnerability**
A heightened sensitivity to feeling exposed or defenceless.
- **Wariness of Sharing Personal Information**
Hesitation to open up about personal thoughts and feelings.
- **Discomfort with Touch**
Feeling uneasy about gentle touches or any physical contact that hasn't been explicitly agreed upon.
- **Challenges with Sexual Intimacy**
Difficulties when it comes to sexual closeness.

These challenges can lead to unsatisfying relationships for both partners. Many men may feel frustrated that they struggle with intimacy, but recognising these issues is the first step toward addressing them.

Building trust and connection takes time and it is important to seek support if needed.



Trust and Intimacy

“Trauma is much more than a story about something that happened long ago. The emotions and physical sensations that were imprinted during the trauma are experienced not as memories, but as destructive physical reactions in the present.”

– Bessel van der Kolk

It's crucial to understand that it's not trust itself that leads to sexual abuse, but rather the misuse of trust. In fact, children need to trust adults to thrive and survive. If you were abused, it was not because you trusted someone; it happened because that person violated that trust.

Intimacy extends beyond just sexual closeness. It encompasses sharing special and significant moments with close friends and loved ones. Intimacy can grow through connections with a friend or partner by spending time together, playing, discussing ideas (even when you disagree), sharing parenting experiences, supporting family members and enhancing each other's spiritual lives.

This kind of relating is profoundly different from abuse, where one person's desires and needs take precedence while the other person's wishes are disregarded. Intimacy is built on mutuality, equality and negotiation.

To foster intimacy in your relationships, it can be helpful to have open conversations with your partner or friends about what brings you together.

Consider discussing the following questions together:

- ---

What kind of relationship do you envision?

- ---

What things bring you closer to others and what actions push you away?

- ---

Are you aware of your partner's or friends' likes and dislikes?

- ---

What strengthens the connections in your relationship?

- ---

How close do you and they want this relationship to be?

- ---

What time and effort are you willing to invest in developing intimacy?

- ---

How might you start to nurture intimacy in this relationship?

Taking some quiet time to reflect on these questions can help you and your partner build a stronger, more intimate connection.

Flashbacks

"Flashbacks take us into a timeless part of the psyche that feels as helpless, hopeless and surrounded by danger as we were in childhood. The feelings and sensations you are experiencing are memories that cannot hurt you now."

– Pete Walker

Many men who have experienced sexual abuse may encounter flashbacks. Flashbacks are intrusive memories or fragments of memories from past events whether recent or long ago. They can be jarring, painful and distressing, lasting anywhere from a few brief seconds to extended periods filled with vivid detail.

Flashbacks can manifest in various ways, including:

- **Visual**
Seeing images or scenes from the past.

- **Auditory**
Hearing sounds or voices related to the event.

- **Emotional**
Experiencing the feelings you had during the incident.

- **Physiological**
Noticing physical sensations tied to the memories.

- **Sensory**
Responding to smells, tastes or touch linked to the abuse.

One of the most confusing aspects of flashbacks is that they may feel as if you are reliving the situation. If the flashback relates to a time when someone was sexually abusive towards you, it can be particularly distressing.

Flashbacks are often triggered by current experiences or events. Triggers can be very specific such as a certain smell or sound, or more general like going through a personal crisis.

While flashbacks can be unwelcome and overwhelming, they can sometimes provide important information and emotions that help fill in gaps in your memory.

Some men have described flashbacks as offering the "missing piece of the jigsaw", helping them understand what happened, especially when their memories are foggy or unclear.

If you are struggling with flashbacks, it may be beneficial to seek support from a counsellor or therapist who can help you navigate these experiences and develop coping strategies.

Tips for Dealing with Flashbacks

When a flashback occurs, it can be helpful to try to bring yourself back to the present moment. Here are some strategies to consider:

1 Reconnect with the Present

Focus on your surroundings. Deliberately and slowly notice what you see, hear, and touch right now. Feel the chair you're sitting on or the fabric of your clothes and describe the textures to yourself (e.g. rough, smooth).

2 Focus on Your Breathing

Slow down your breathing. Take deep breaths in and out, counting to 5 as you exhale. Aim to breathe deeply into your diaphragm to help relax your body.

3 Ground Yourself

Remind yourself that you are not in the place where the original event happened; you are here, in this moment. Some people find it helpful to ground themselves by touching an item they currently wear, like a watch, wristband or piece of jewellery that they didn't use back then.

4 Ask Reflective Questions

Engaging with certain questions can help bring you back to the present:

- How old am I now? Where do I live or work?
 - What options do I have now that I didn't have then?
 - Who can I ask for support and encouragement?
 - How do I enjoy spending my time?
 - Where do I want to focus my energy right now?
-

Using these strategies can help you navigate through flashbacks and foster a sense of safety in the present.

After the Flashback Has Passed

► Be Kind to Yourself

After experiencing a flashback, it's important to practice self-compassion. You might feel the need to rest or distract yourself for a while. Consider engaging in activities that help you relax, such as:

-
- taking a nap

 - enjoying a warm drink

 - listening to music

 - watching TV

 - playing a computer game

 - gardening

 - spending some quiet time alone.

Offering supportive and encouraging words to yourself can be much more helpful than criticising or evaluating your response to the flashback.

Identify Your Triggers

When you feel safe and steady again, it can be beneficial to reflect on the flashback and try to identify any triggers.

Consider these questions:

-
- What was happening when the flashback occurred?

 - Where were you? Who was around? What were you feeling, thinking, smelling, hearing or sensing at the time?

 - Does this relate to a specific event in your past?

Identifying your triggers can help clarify your reactions and make them less confusing. While you may still get triggered by certain things, understanding them will empower you to process what's happening and guide you back on track more easily.

If you find it helpful, you might want to explore these questions with a peer worker or counsellor. Attempting to address them alone, especially when you're feeling unsteady, might not be beneficial. It's okay to seek support and take your time in working through this.

Nightmares

"Nightmares are like bad dreams, they can be scary and upsetting, but they are not real and can't hurt you. Dreams, both good and bad, are just your mind processing thoughts and emotions."

– Unknown

Nightmares can be similar to flashbacks; except they occur while you're asleep. They may serve as vivid reminders of the abuse you experienced and can leave you feeling just as unsettled, confused, and distressed as flashbacks do. However, while flashbacks usually involve recognizable memories of actual events, nightmares can be less concrete in their content.

Nightmares might depict scenarios that represent your trauma in some way and their meaning isn't always clear. They can seem strange or bizarre yet leave you with strong feelings of fear, isolation or disorientation. You might also find that they trigger feelings of shame or anger related to the abuse.

Like flashbacks, nightmares can seem to come out of nowhere making you feel out of control. In addition to their emotional and psychological impact, nightmares can have physical effects such as sweating, an increased heart rate or difficulty breathing. If nightmares occur regularly, they can also create anxiety around sleeping.

The same strategies that help with flashbacks can be effective for coping with nightmares. There are two main parts to consider: the first is the immediate work of calming or grounding yourself right after a nightmare, the second is exploring the meaning of the nightmares more deeply.

What You Can Do If Nightmares Persist

If you find that you can set aside a nightmare in the morning and focus on what matters to you, that's great. However, if a nightmare lingers or becomes particularly disruptive, you might find the following exercise helpful:

- 1 Choose a Nightmare**
Select an unpleasant dream or nightmare that does not directly replay a distressing event. Write it down.
- 2 Detail the Nightmare**
Write the nightmare in as much detail as possible. As you recount the dream, change the ending to something more positive or appropriate for you. Remember, this is your choice, and you can stop writing or thinking about the dream at any time.
- 3 Rehearse the New Version**
Get to know this new, preferred version of the dream. Try rehearsing it each night for about 5–15 minutes before going to sleep.
- 4 Practice Relaxation**
After you've rehearsed the new version of the dream, engage in a relaxation exercise you're familiar with to help you fall asleep peacefully. If you happen to wake up during the night, it can be beneficial to repeat the relaxation exercise, focusing on deep and slow breathing.
- 5 Gradually Address Other Nightmares**
Once you feel comfortable with the changes you've made to this unpleasant dream, you can choose to work on another nightmare that is slightly more intense.

Ensure that you gradually increase the intensity and don't tackle more than two nightmares in one week. Remember to take care of yourself during this process; you want to promote healing, not overwhelm yourself.

Panic Attacks and Anxiety

"Sometimes the most important thing in a whole day is the rest taken between two deep breaths."

– Etty Hillesum

A common challenge for individuals who have experienced sexual abuse is intense anxiety which can manifest as panic attacks. These attacks often involve distressing physical symptoms such as difficulty breathing, shaking, or tightness in the chest combined with thoughts that induce feelings of dread or fear (like the belief that something terrible is about to happen).

This combination of physical and psychological experiences can create a vicious cycle that is difficult to break. Many find themselves worrying about having more panic attacks which can lead to increased anxiety and so on. This situation can feel overwhelming and may lead some to feel as though they are "going crazy".

Tips for Dealing with Panic Attacks:

- **Recognise the Signs**
Learn to identify the signs that a panic attack is beginning.
- **Acknowledge What's Happening**
When you notice these signs, remind yourself, "I know what is happening; it's just a panic attack."

- **Reassure Yourself**
Remind yourself that you've gotten through this before and that you will get through it again.
- **Engage Your Sense of Touch**
Focus on the feel and texture of your chair or clothing. This grounding technique can help bring your attention back to the present.
- **Hydrate**
If possible, get yourself a glass of water. Avoid asking someone else to get it for you; this gives you a sense of agency.

You can also apply some of the tips used for dealing with flashbacks and nightmares. When you find yourself in a calm and safe environment, take some time to explore your triggers.

Deciding to Tell

"Owning our story and loving ourselves through that process is the bravest thing that we will ever do."

– Brené Brown

For some people, keeping the abuse a secret might have once felt like a matter of life and death. The abuser may have made threats to hurt them or their loved ones, which made the decision to stay silent the safest option at the time.

If you have already attempted to share your experience in the past and the response was not supportive or helpful, it can be understandably difficult to muster the courage to tell someone else.



Who Can You Tell?

Finding someone to share your experiences with can be beneficial, but it's important to approach this decision with care. Not everyone in your life may be prepared or able to hear your story, and even friends or family members you generally get along with may not provide the support you need.

Here are some questions to consider as you think about who to confide in:

-
- **What am I looking for from this person?**
Consider what you hope to achieve by sharing your story.

 - **What kind of response would I like?**
Think about how you would like them to react.

 - **What signs tell me that this person can listen and understand?**
Reflect on their ability to be supportive and empathetic.

 - **What are my worries and concerns?**
Identify any fears you have about sharing your experience.

 - **How might I prepare them for what I'm about to say?**
Consider how to introduce the topic with them.

 - **How can I take care of myself and manage my expectations of this person?**
Remember to set realistic expectations for their response.

 - **How can I take care of myself after sharing my story?**
Think about how you will keep yourself safe and feeling positive afterwards.
-

Taking the time to think through these questions can help you decide the best person to talk to about your experiences.

Unfortunately, sexual abuse is a deeply secretive issue which means you might need to educate your supporters about how to provide the best help along the way. Some people may genuinely want to support you but might not know what to do.

Let them know that simply being there to listen or to accompany you can be incredibly helpful; this can relieve pressure for both you and them. You might consider sharing this book or other resources found at the back of this book to help them understand your experience and how they can assist you better.

Your Decision on Sharing Your Story

Remember that it is entirely your choice whether, when and how much of your story you want to share. If someone presses you for details that you're not ready or willing to provide, it's okay to let them know you're not comfortable discussing that at the moment.

If you're uncertain about what someone else is thinking, don't hesitate to ask them. Their silence might be due to uncertainty about how to respond rather than judgment.

Sharing your experiences of abuse isn't necessarily a one-time event; it's often a process. This process may involve a lot of contemplation, hesitations and "checking out" how people respond to you.

After Sharing Your Story

It is important to think about what happens for you after sharing your story. Have a plan for dealing with the feelings of shame and distress that can follow the relief of sharing.

This can be a challenging time especially if you find yourself alone and with no-one to be with or talk to, or without any activities to focus your mind.

It is also important to think about the impact of your story on the person you are sharing it with, particularly if they are a partner or a close friend. They may have lots of questions that you may not be capable of dealing with at this time.

Think about a support plan for them. Perhaps the support of a peer worker or counsellor who knows your story can provide the context and understanding that will help them appreciate your situation and how to be supportive.

Suicidal Thoughts

"When you feel like giving up, just remember why you held on for so long."

- Hayley Williams

Thoughts of suicide are unfortunately common among men who have experienced sexual abuse. These thoughts can range from fleeting fantasies to more detailed plans. Even if your thoughts seem like "just" passing ideas or fantasies, it's important to talk to someone about how you feel. The more detailed your thoughts about suicide, the more crucial it is to seek help.

It's essential to remember that thoughts and actions are not the same. Suicidal thoughts can be your mind's way of expressing that you're unhappy with your current situation. The important thing is to talk with someone who can help you improve your circumstances.

- ▶ **Be Persistent: Don't hesitate to reach out for support until you find the help you need.**

Finding Help

If you think you might harm yourself or are considering suicide, it's vital to seek help as soon as possible.

Here are some steps you can take:

-
- **Reach Out to Someone You Trust**
Share your feelings honestly, including your thoughts of suicide.

 - **Contact your local Tautoko Tāne service centre**
(refer to back page).

 - For immediate and urgent support:
 - **Call Emergency Services**
Dial 111 for police, ambulance, or fire assistance.
 - **Contact Lifeline**
Call 0800 543 354 (or free text 4357) for immediate support.
 - **Visit a Hospital**
Go to your local hospital emergency department or have someone take you there.
-

▶ **Remember, you are not alone, and help is available.**

"It isn't weak to ask for help. It's like using a flashlight when you are lost in the dark."

- Unknown

Self-Harm

"If you can sit with your pain, listen to your pain and respect your pain – in time you will move through your pain."

- Bryant McGill

It's important to understand that when someone engages in self-harm, it is not always an attempt to end their life. Self-harm can be a way to express and manage the physical and psychological pain you may be experiencing. Many people find that feeling physical pain seems easier than confronting intense emotional or psychological distress. Others may use self-harm as a way to feel something when they feel numb.

Self-harm can be controlled and deliberate, often aimed at causing pain or injury. Some forms of self-harm, such as overworking, overtraining or taking extreme risks, are less visible and can be easily hidden.

Over time, self-harming behaviours can escalate, leading to an increased tolerance and desire for pain. In some cases, this can result in permanent injury or disfigurement.

The challenge is that while self-harm may provide temporary relief, it often only works for a short period. Ultimately, it's important to seek effective long-term solutions that enable you to move forward with your life.

Learning techniques to tolerate and manage distress can provide healthier alternatives to self-harm. The relaxation and mindfulness exercises included in this book may be beneficial for you. Other helpful strategies can include:

-
- **Writing or Drawing**
Expressing your thoughts and feelings creatively.

 - **Talking with Someone**
Sharing your experiences with a trusted friend, peer worker or a counsellor.

 - **Setting and Achieving Small Goals**
Taking steps to create a sense of accomplishment.

 - **Staying Healthy**
Engaging in physical activity and maintaining a balanced lifestyle can help reduce distress.
-

Alcohol, Drugs and Self-Judgment

"I am not defined by my relapses, but by my decision to remain in recovery despite them."

– Anonymous

Deciding to stop or reduce your use of alcohol or drugs can be a positive step towards better health. However, it's important to recognize that many people use these substances as a way to cope with uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. When you remove the numbing effects of alcohol and drugs, memories can resurface with intensity, which can make the journey challenging, especially if you feel like there's nothing else to rely on.

► **Remember to leverage your solid base of support!**

If you have a significant dependence on alcohol, you may need medical assistance as your body adjusts to the change.

The process of stopping alcohol and drug use can be complicated by negative self-judgments.

Some common thoughts people may have include:

- "I'm too damaged to get through this."
- "I'm not strong enough to handle it."
- "I'm really losing control/going crazy."
- "It's easier not to feel all this."
- "I wanted to feel better, but all this is making things worse."

Some men have found it helpful to question these self-judgments. Asking yourself, "Is this judgment useful for me right now?" can be a constructive approach. You might also consider, "Do I want to spend time thinking about this?"

If your answer is no, it's best to let go of that judgment and focus on activities that are beneficial to you at this moment.

Remember, these judgments are not absolute truths about who you are; they are simply ideas and pressures that many men encounter. It's perfectly acceptable to decide that certain judgments are not useful for the life you want to live.

What Am I Feeling?

"Feelings are much like waves, we can't stop them from coming, but we can choose which one to surf."

– Jonatan Mårtensson

When someone asks, "How are you feeling?" it can sometimes be challenging to know how to respond. This isn't because men lack feelings – of course, we don't.

When reflecting on experiences of sexual abuse, common emotions include sadness, shame and confusion. These are natural responses to being treated unfairly and criminally. However, it's also understandable to want to avoid such intense emotions. Distraction, numbing or avoiding feelings can be strategies to cope with intense emotional pain, helping to prevent the feeling of being overwhelmed.

One emotion that many men are quite familiar with is anger. While anger can be a powerful motivator for taking action against injustice, it can also lead to aggressive behaviour and may sometimes mask deeper, uncomfortable feelings.

Find more information and tips on managing anger on the Tautoko Tāne Aotearoa website in the section For Survivors > Managing Difficulties > Dealing with Anger.

Many men report that, eventually, these difficult emotions find a way to demand their attention – often at a moment of crisis. Furthermore, when shutting down emotions becomes a habit, it can hinder the ability to experience positive feelings or any sense of joy in life.



Tips for Making Sense of Emotions

“Instead of resisting any emotion, the best way to dispel it is to enter it fully, embrace it and see through your resistance.”

– Deepak Chopra

Creating space, time and room for all of life's emotions can be very helpful. It's important to remember that emotions aren't inherently good or bad. Instead, it's about being able to tolerate and experience a wide range of emotions as part of living life fully.

You might feel ready to take some risks by allowing yourself to truly notice what you are feeling. This can be quite challenging, especially at first, because it may seem like things are getting worse. You might start to notice feelings that have been buried or ignored for a long time.

This is why having a reasonably solid base of support is essential when doing this work. Without that foundation, it can be difficult to experience distressing feelings without getting thrown off track.

As you become more accustomed to these feelings, you'll gradually realize that you can cope with them. Over time, the intensity of these feelings may lessen and you might even discover that you can experience other, more positive emotions in a different way.

Parenting

“My father didn't tell me how to live. He lived and let me watch him do it”.

– Clarence Kelland

Becoming a parent can be a challenging experience for anyone, and men who experienced sexual abuse as children often face additional pressures.

There are key moments that can trigger difficult thoughts and feelings, such as finding out about a pregnancy, the birth of your child and when your child reaches the age at which you experienced abuse. Difficulties may arise from memories of the abuse, concerns about your parenting abilities or both. Additionally, you may have fears about your child's vulnerability to abuse.

Some men worry that they might harm or abuse their children, which can lead them to limit their involvement in tasks that require close physical contact, like bathing or changing diapers. Unfortunately, this can result in missed opportunities to participate in important moments of their child's development and life.

It's important to remember that parenting is a demanding and often overwhelming experience for most people. Despite these challenges, many men – including those who have experienced sexual abuse – find ways to be caring, protective and nurturing parents and grandparents.

Take some time to reflect on the type of parent you want to be. Parenting skills aren't innate; they can be learned. There are resources available to support you on your parenting journey, such as Parentline New Zealand.

Justice

“Male survivors often don't report abuse due to societal pressures, internalized beliefs about masculinity, fear of not being believed, and the stigma associated with being a victim, leading to silence and difficulty accessing support.”

– Ministry of Social Development (MSD) Research

Sexual abuse is a serious crime

Unfortunately, it's still true that the vast majority of individuals who commit sexual offenses are never convicted in court even if charges are brought against them.

However, there have been significant advancements in how our legal systems address crimes of sexual abuse and you have every right to pursue prosecution through legal channels.

Prosecuting Those Who Commit Sexual Offenses

It is very common for survivors of sexual abuse to delay reporting the incident to the Police. Thankfully, the law acknowledges this, allowing for past incidents of child sexual abuse to be reported and investigated, even if they happened many years ago.

Deciding whether or not to report sexual abuse to the Police is ultimately your choice. A helpful first step can be talking to a friend, peer worker or counsellor who will not pressure you either way but will support you in thoughtfully considering the reasons for reporting or not reporting your experience.

Most police departments now have specialist officers who are trained to understand the emotional aspects of coping with the reporting process. As part of their job, these officers will ask you for details about your experience which may include specific aspects you have tried hard to avoid thinking about for years.

Giving a Statement to the Police

More recently, New Zealand Police have relaxed their reporting processes by allowing more informal interviews outside a police station and more formal follow up interviews without any obligation to proceed to prosecution.

However, providing a statement to the Police about sexual abuse can often still be an exhausting and painful experience. It's common to feel a sense of depression or distress afterward.

Having realistic expectations about both the process and the potential outcomes is crucial. It's also essential to have a strong support team in place to help you through this challenging time. Surrounding yourself with supportive friends, family, your peer worker, counsellors or other professionals can make a significant difference in coping with the emotions that may arise during and after the process.

Compensation

“We would say that no survivor to date has received adequate compensation for the harm that has been done to them and say that unapologetically.”

– Sonja Cooper, Shine Lawyers

Accessing compensation for the impacts of sexual abuse can be a complex and challenging process. We strongly recommend that you seek appropriate professional advice to determine what compensation options may be available to you, how to access the most relevant options, and the likely costs and outcomes.

While the amount of compensation obtained will rarely feel like it comes anywhere close to adequate, it can help with the cost of things like counselling, safety measures or other expenses related to recovering from sexual abuse.

Prosecution reparation

In New Zealand, a court can order a person convicted of sexual abuse to pay compensation, known as “reparation”, for emotional harm or property loss caused by the crime. (Refer to Justice section on pages 82-83.)

In deciding how much reparation to order, the judge will consider how much damage, loss or cost the person has suffered because of the offending, as well as the offender’s ability to pay.

Government compensation

You may be eligible to access government funded compensation schemes.

For government funded options, the agencies to contact are:

-
- For claims related to sexual abuse:
 - **Accident Compensation Commission**
Claims related to a resultant and diagnosed mental health injury like depression or PTSD.

 - For claims related to abuse or neglect in care or custody:
 - **Ministry of Social Development**
Claims related to care, custody or guardianship with Child Youth and Family on or after April 1, 2017.
 - **Oranga Tamariki**
Claims related to state care on or after April 1, 2017.
 - **Ministry of Education**
Claims related to state schools or institutions.
 - **Ministry of Health**
Claims related to state-run hospitals or healthcare facilities.
-

Private compensation arrangements

You may also choose to pursue private institutions (e.g. educational and religious organisations) to secure compensation payable with respect to abuse suffered in their care. These arrangements can vary widely and are often dependent on the quality of advocacy, including the affordability of expert advice, and the ability (and willingness) of the organisation to pay.

For more information about compensation options:

- ▶ **Contact a local Tautoko Tāne service centre.**
(Refer to page 89.)

Revenge

"The stupid neither forgive nor forget; the naive forgive and forget; the wise forgive but do not forget."

– Thomas Szasz

When abusers do not face court or are found not guilty, it can lead to immense frustration and anger. It is absolutely valid to want those who commit sexual offenses held accountable and for the injustice of the abuse to be recognized by the courts, which represent society's values. When this doesn't happen, thoughts of revenge and retribution may begin to arise.

Many men may feel pressured to take matters into their own hands and seek revenge against their abuser(s). However, revenge can often become confused with a sense of justice, and this usually does not lead to positive outcomes. Pursuing revenge may result in further violence or abuse, heightened frustration and in extreme cases, lead to legal repercussions for those who choose this course of action.

Confrontation

Some individuals may feel the need to confront the person who committed the abuse, seeking acknowledgment of their actions and an understanding of the impact of their behaviour. However, experience shows that this kind of confrontation is only beneficial when it is carefully planned with professional support.

For a confrontation to be constructive, the abuser must be open to acknowledging their crime and willing to take steps towards accepting responsibility, such as admitting their actions to the Police and undergoing counselling.

If the abuser is unwilling to admit their wrongdoing or listen respectfully to those who have experienced abuse, such confrontations can exacerbate feelings of distress, anger and powerlessness.

"The Best Revenge is to Live Well"

It's important to keep in mind the bigger purpose behind thoughts of justice, revenge and similar feelings: the goal is to live a satisfying and fulfilling life. Focus on your own priorities and what you truly want for your life.

Hope and Celebrating Life

"Don't sit around and wait for life to define you. Get up and define life. Lead by example. Leave your mark on everything you do so others who are lost can follow your trail."

– Joe Ryan

Despite the abuse you have experienced and the challenges it may have brought, it's worth recognising that you are still here. Not only are you present, but you are actively taking steps to build the life you want – not one dictated by your past experiences.

Take some time to acknowledge your achievements. What are you proud of? What makes you feel good about yourself?

Your accomplishments could include:

- ---

building meaningful relationships

- ---

parenting successfully

- ---

achieving success in your work or studies

- ---

excelling in sports or hobbies

- ---

helping someone else

- ---

standing up against injustices, no matter how big or small.

Celebrate anything that reflects the life you aspire to create for yourself, based on your own values, beliefs and preferences.

Onwards – Towards Wellbeing!

“In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there’s something stronger – something better, pushing right back.”

– Albert Camus

“Though no one can go back and make a brand-new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand-new ending.”

– Carl Bard

Tautoko Tāne Aotearoa

Tautoko Tāne Aotearoa was formed in 2015 as a federation of 11 member organisations that together provide the only national network of support services for adult male survivors of sexual abuse. Each member organisation operates as an independent charitable trust with local leadership (governance and staffing) that enables a localised service response to the 11 regional communities we service.

The federation is bound together by a shared common purpose **“enabling the wellbeing of male survivors”** and compliance with national operational standards (policies and protocols) that assure the quality of our support services.

In 2022 we launched Purposeful Peer Support Aotearoa (PPSA), a new wellbeing focussed and multi-sector peer support framework that provides the lived experience anchor for our wrap around support services, which also include counselling, social work, specialist support and (developing) cultural healing practices. The deliberate alignment of this framework with Mātauranga Māori principles and practices reflects our strong commitment to working in partnership with the indigenous people of Aotearoa.

Looking for support?

If you are a male survivor seeking free ongoing support, including referrals to counsellors and other health professionals, talk to a Tautoko Tāne service centre near you.

Te Tai Tokerau 0800 672 888

Kaitiaki | Whangārei | Kaikohe

Tāmaki Makaurau 0800 448 484

North Shore | Central Auckland
South Auckland | West Auckland

Waikato 0800 044 334

Kirikiriāroa | Te Kūiti | Te Awamutu | Taupō

Bay of Plenty 0800 106 500

Whakatāne | Tauranga | Rotorua

Taranaki 0800 357 892

New Plymouth | Hāwera | Waitara | Whanganui

Tairāwhiti 0800 120 072

Gisborne | Te Araroa | Wairoa

Hawkes Bay 0800 368 342

Hastings | Napier

Wellington 0800 118 104

Central Wellington | Lower Hutt | Porirua

Nelson 0800 044 334

Nelson | Motueka | Greymouth

Otago 0800 676 656

Dunedin | Milton | Balclutha | Oamaru

For IMMEDIATE & URGENT support, the following services provide free 24-hour, 7 days a week, support:

Need to Talk?

Free call or text 1737
to talk to a trained counsellor at any time

Lifeline

Call 0800 543 354 or free text 4357
for counselling and support

Samaritans

Call 0800 726 666
for someone who will listen

Depression Helpline

Call 0800 111 757 or free text 4202
to talk to a trained counsellor

Youthline

Call 0800 376 633 or free text 234
or email talk@youthline.co.nz
for youth, whānau and friends

Specialist sexual assault therapeutic medical services

Find your local clinic at www.medsac.org.nz
Hours and availability vary

▶ FEEDBACK

Tautoko Tāne Aotearoa welcomes feedback from male survivors and their family/whānau and supporters, and support service providers to improve this publication.

Please email your suggestions and ideas to:
towardswellbeing@tautokotane.nz

