



H.E.R.O.[®]
HIDE. ESCAPE. RUN. OVERCOME.

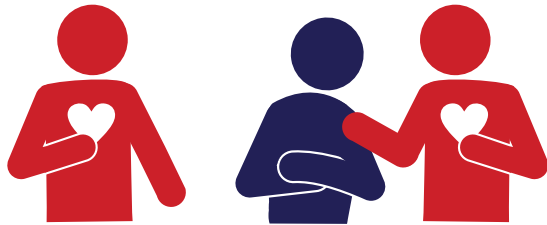


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Helping a Loved One Recover from Trauma



Many survivors of violence suffer from anxiety, depression, and PTSI (Posttraumatic Stress Injuries). Left untreated, these varying (but related) manifestations of psychological distress can become overwhelming and lead to feelings of hopelessness, a loss of control, substance abuse, and in extreme cases, suicide. By implementing the following strategies, you can help a survivor overcome the effects of traumatic stress:



Lend support

Sometimes, a person affected by trauma simply needs to be with someone else. Be patient and be kind. Trauma recovery is not a linear process and there are highs and lows. Understand that some days may be better than others.

Get Permission

You should always ask a survivor for permission before encouraging them to talk about a traumatic event or offering them advice. Similarly, ask for permission before comparing their experiences to your own.



Downplay stigma

Clinically, post-traumatic stress syndromes are referred to as a "disorder" – the "D" in "PTSD". And while this verbiage may be effective for clinicians, it can be extremely detrimental for patients. By classifying something as a "disorder", we are telling patients that there is something inherently and permanently wrong with them. Psychological injuries are just that – injuries. For the vast majority of patients, they can heal with proper treatment and should never be considered a defining characteristic.

Get help

Although some cases of traumatic stress may be worse than others, survivors should always seek professional clinical help. Left untreated, the symptoms of post-traumatic stress can develop into mental illness and lead to suicide. Therapies like CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) can help survivors cope with their symptoms and learn to adopt positive thought processes. Other therapies, such as EMDR, have been found to aid in recovery. Additionally, survivors may benefit from medication that can help ameliorate some of the physiological symptoms accompanying traumatic stress. Take the time to seek out trauma-informed therapists and clinicians experienced in treating traumatic stress and its effects on the brain.



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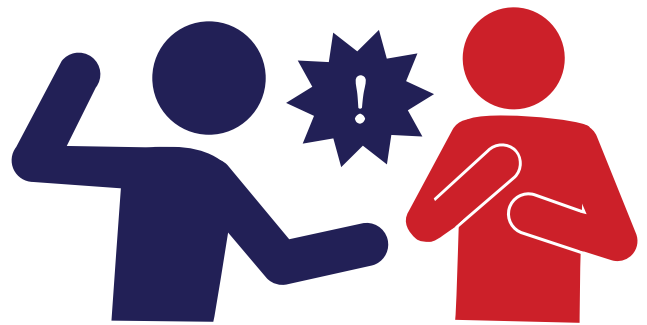


Avoid clichés

Telling someone to “just get over it” or “put on a happy face” will often make them feel worse and invalidate their pain. Survivors aren’t simply in a bad mood – they’re experiencing a physiological surge of “survival” chemicals in a counter-productive cyclical process. Instead of giving trite advice, patiently listen and don’t discount their struggle.

Be patient

Survivors will often repeat details of a traumatic incident over and over again. It’s important to listen and not tell them to “move on” or “stop living in the past”. Also, understand that survivors may exhibit unusual anger that is often directed at friends and family. Remember, all behaviors are the manifestation of feelings. Practice “radical curiosity” by looking past behaviors and try to understand the feelings motivating them.



Be aware

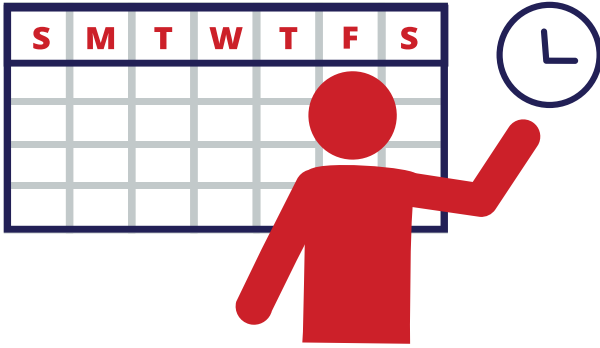
Survivors may experience flashbacks triggered by sights, smells, sounds, or some type of internal trigger (such as hunger or thirst). Try to understand triggers and help your loved one avoid them. During a flashback, your loved one may be disconnected from reality and experience intense panic. Often, flashbacks and panic episodes can occur during sleep. Provide a calming presence and a sense of reassurance by explaining that they are not in danger and the fear will pass. CBT therapy is critical in helping survivors understand panic and flashbacks and how to defuse these types of acute psychological distress. Additionally, mindfulness techniques and deep-breathing exercises can help alleviate panic attacks. Strong odors (such as mint or citrus) can also help a survivor return to reality.



Show love

People experience affection in different ways. If a survivor enjoys long walks, make an effort to accompany them. If they love to cook, make a meal together. Know your loved one’s favorite activities and gestures and go out of your way to make them feel appreciated and understood.





Encourage routine

By helping a survivor get back into a routine, you can help them re-acclimate to a sense of normalcy. Schedules provide both adults and children with a sense of control over their external environment. Try to stick to structure and avoid big changes without advance notice. Often, leaving the house can be a huge challenge for a victim of trauma. Encourage them to make small steps toward normalcy every day. And remember, be patient! Some days will be worse than others, and that's ok.

Get connected

Survivors often feel misunderstood and alone and begin to withdraw from normal activities, friends, and family. Encourage them to find a group they can relate to. This may take the form of a sports league, a church group, or a meeting of like-minded survivors. Some may prefer to talk to others about their challenges while others may not. Everyone is different and processes trauma in their own way.



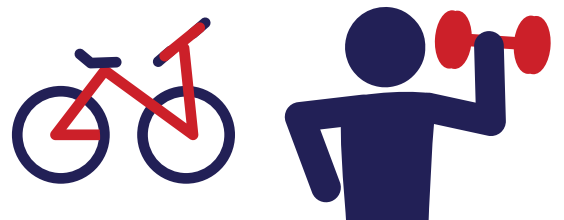
Avoid negativity

Avoid online chat groups or websites that encourage self harm and/or advocate negative coping mechanisms. Youths are particularly vulnerable to harmful online influences - make sure to monitor their Internet activities closely!



Be healthy

Encourage survivors to eat healthy, exercise regularly, and avoid alcohol and drugs. Physical exercise can help a survivor burn off excess adrenaline and create a positive, goal-seeking mentality.



Don't quit

Recovery from a traumatic incident can take days, months, or years. Again, recovery is not a linear process and may feel like two steps forward and one step back. This is to be expected - stay the course and make sure to manage your own stress in healthy ways.

