

Self-care

following sexual assault / abuse



Whether it happened recently or a long time ago, self-care is very important and can help you manage the short and long-term effects of sexual harm. Everyone deals with pain in their own way after trauma and your safety and personal comfort needs to be a priority. Self-care involves all aspects of yourself and can include any trusted family/ whanau member too.

Everyone copes in different ways they can after sexual harm and you will likely have your own strategies for coping to add to these ideas below:

Exercise

Exercise can support relaxation and also help your nervous system to regulate itself which in turn helps you to feel more in control and at peace within yourself. Try different types of exercise and see what works best for you eg. Stretching, weights, group classes, walking etc. The important part is enjoyment.

Food

Appetite can be disrupted after sexual harm. Choose foods you enjoy that are also nutritional as this can help with Post Traumatic Stress symptoms. Junk food, alcohol or caffeinated food although may bring momentary relief can ultimately cause extra stress for your nervous system as it tries to stabilize.

Personal hygiene

Wash your hair, use a favourite soap etc. Sometimes following sexual harm taking care of one's self can seem a big task but even if you just remember to brush your teeth you are on the right track!

Medical attention

If you need medical attention or have any concerns about your health following sexual harm do see a GP you like and trust or specialist MEDSAC doctor. We can link you in with MEDSAC if you need.

Emotional self-care

The key to emotional self-care is being in tune with yourself and this can be a bit difficult at times after sexual harm. Think about a time when you felt balanced, connected and grounded, and consider how you could incorporate any or part of those elements into your self-care plan going forward e.g. Listening to your favourite music, talking with trusted friends, family or whanau, prayer, meditation, journal writing, being in nature, inspirational quotes, being creative etc. You may want to try some new activities that bring enjoyment and keep you connected to the present.

Personal counselling

Self-care isn't always easy to manage by yourself however confidential, trauma informed counselling for survivors of sexual harm can be really helpful. Specialist sexual harm counselling can help with flashbacks, sleeping difficulties, understanding your reactions and supporting you as you move through the effects of what has happened. To speak with someone who is trained to help please call Family Action on 09 8361987 and ask for the Sexual Harm Crisis Service.

Remember, what happened was not your fault and you are worth taking care of!