



Survivor Guide

Created by our ***Client Led Advisory Group***

Developed *by survivors for survivors*

Survivor Guide



You may be reading this because you were sexually abused. Below is a definition of child sexual abuse from Psychologist and lecturer Christiane Sanderson from the University of Roehampton. Christiane has over 26 years of experience in working with child sexual abuse and sexual violence, and she has written books on the subject.

Childhood Sexual Abuse

“Childhood sexual abuse is the involvement of dependent children and adolescents in sexual activities with an adult or any person older or bigger, where there is a difference in age, size, or power, in which the child is used as a sexual object for the gratification of the older person’s needs or desires, and to which the child is unable to give informed consent due to the imbalance of power or any mental or physical disability. The excludes consensual activity between peers.”

Christiane Sanderson

Counselling Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

We hope the information in this guide helps you to make some sense of how you are feeling and to encourage you to seek support if you haven’t already done so. You don’t have to go through your trauma alone - there are people who want to help and support you. You may not feel that you will be believed – perhaps you weren’t believed in the past, but **you will be believed** in the present.

What's Happening to Me?



Many children and adults bury away their pain as they feel there is nothing they can do about it. If you have been abused and haven't told anyone, perhaps it's because you didn't feel you could trust anyone with the information, you may have been too young to speak about it, or you couldn't put it into words. Perhaps you felt threatened or too frightened, felt guilty, responsible or perhaps you felt ashamed or were afraid of not being believed.

As a Survivor, it is important for you to recognise that the feelings you may be experiencing eg. blame, guilt and shame, are part of being a victim of a personal violation and can result from the grooming process. Many Survivors report the following and more. Read through the list and tick or think about the ones that you feel might be relevant for you ...

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Addictions | ☐ Guilt |
| ☐ Agoraphobia | ☐ Interpersonal problems – lack of trust |
| ☐ Anxiety | ☐ Low self-esteem, low confidence |
| ☐ Blame yourself for abuse | ☐ No self-worth |
| ☐ Eating Disorders | ☐ Phobias |
| ☐ Fear | ☐ Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) |
| ☐ Fear of medical procedures | ☐ Relationship problems |
| ☐ Fear of abusing own children | ☐ Sexual problems |
| ☐ Feelings of persecution | ☐ Shame |
| ☐ Flashbacks | ☐ Substance abuse (alcohol, drugs) |

Blame

Regardless of what has occurred childhood sexual abuse is **never** the fault or responsibility of the individual experiencing it. **Don't Blame Yourself – it was not your fault.**



If you imagine that you wake up one evening and find someone has broken into your home - your safe sanctuary. How would you feel?

You may feel some fear, some anger that someone had violated your home – your safe sanctuary, that they had taken your possessions or belongings. You may possibly be outraged that they broke into your home. You will probably call the Police to report the crime.

You would possibly tell others about the break-in - this violation of your safe sanctuary, and others would feel empathy and understanding for you and tell you how sorry they were that this had happened to you.

They would show your compassion and understanding as you had been the victim of a crime – something someone committed against you that wasn't your fault.

However, when abused many people tend to blame themselves. They don't speak to others and they hold this trauma within themselves burying their pain and distress. They may feel that it was their fault, or that people might think they deserved it in some way, or that people wouldn't understand or believe them.

Childhood sexual abuse is a personal violation. This is a crime committed against you - something which was done to you by someone else.

It is absolutely not your fault.

Self Harm

Survivors often experience self-harming behaviours, particularly when you may have felt unable to express feelings such as rage, guilt, sadness or when you are remembering details of the sexual abuse/rape. Healing from the effects of sexual abuse often involves painful and difficult memories resurfacing.

Whilst self-harming is often through alcohol and drug misuse, it can also be many more actions - from cutting, burning, biting, pulling hair out, eating disorders, over exercising - these can all be described as self-harm. The reasons for each are very individual.

Some people may cut their arms to feel physical rather than emotional pain. Some people may cut so that they can feel cleansed when they see blood. For others it might be to punish rather than relieve. If you decide to engage with Break the Silence they will help you to look at past coping mechanisms and enable you to find less harmful ways of dealing with your pain.

Night Terrors

Night Terrors are a sleep disorder that often affects people who have experienced a trauma. In dreams there may be certain events being re-lived or perhaps a horrendous nightmare.

The terror and fear can cause you to wake up screaming or shouting, your body may be rigid with fear and you might be paralysed with terror. The night terrors will also cause high levels of distress and may feel like a panic attack.

Insomnia

Stress from a traumatic event can often lead to a variety of sleep problems. When the body is overstimulated, the brain is flooded with neurochemicals that keep us awake such as epinephrine and adrenaline, making it difficult to wind down at the end of the day. The neurochemicals remain present in

the brain and can interrupt your normal sleep cycle. The result can be bad dreams, and daytime fatigue caused by sleep disturbance.

Coping Strategies

Many people affected by trauma develop coping strategies that may have unintended consequences on their physical and/ or emotional well-being such as self-harm, addictions to or dependency on drugs (both prescription and recreational drugs) and alcohol can be misused. These coping strategies may numb emotions and blank out memories that are distressing however, they don't necessarily deal with the underlying issue of trauma and can contribute to more issues.



Be Kind to Yourself

Please care and be kind to yourself. Something bad may have been done to you but don't deny yourself pleasure, or punish yourself. Try to care for yourself by treating your body with respect and kindness – help yourself to heal.



Flashbacks

Flashbacks are vivid memories in which a person feels they are re-experiencing past events. The flashback produces a vivid recollection or picture of this incident and includes the intense emotional reaction and physical pain experienced at the time and visual, auditory and tactile memories of the rape/abuse itself.

At times, you may experience such intense flashbacks and it may feel as if the abuse is happening again. Flashbacks are one of the ways in which blocked-off feelings and memories can surface.

Dealing with Flashbacks

Remind yourself that this isn't happening now, even if it feels like it. You are remembering something that may have happened years ago. Try to breathe slowly, focus on your breathing and ground yourself. Re-orientate yourself to the present by becoming aware of your surroundings. Identify what triggered the flashback and write it down. Remind yourself that you are not in that situation, try to calm and reassure the part of you that is frightened.

Triggers

Triggers may involve general reminders of childhood and/or trauma. A trigger is anything that reminds you of the abuse or brings up feelings associated with the abuse. Triggers often operate out of our awareness and can come through any of our senses. Identifying your triggers may, in itself, lessen the effect they have on you.



After the Flashback

Flashbacks can be emotionally and physically exhausting. Take time to recover. Rest and be kind to yourself.

Don't Despair – Help is Available

Although you can't change the past, with time, care and support you can make sense of what has happened to you and work towards a better, brighter and healthier future.



It can be hard to find the courage to seek support. Break The Silence will make the process as simple as possible for you. You will have access to professionally qualified Counsellors and Break The Silence offer a range of professional support options for you to choose from.

There is no fee or charge for the services as funding is secured to cover the costs of services through local authority contracts, trusts and foundation grants and awards, fundraising activities and donations to the charity.

The service is completely confidential and personal information held is done so securely and in accordance with Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) data protection regulations.

Break The Silence also provide two professional support and information sessions for partners and family members of Survivors (13+).

You will be believed...

- ✓ Become less isolated as you deal with the secrecy and shame of the abuse
- ✓ Join other Survivors who possess the courage to give voice to their suffering
- ✓ Create the possibility for receiving help and compassion and to feel liberated
- ✓ Participate in ending child sexual abuse and sexual violence by breaking the silence that sustains it
- ✓ Acknowledge the reality of the abuse.
- ✓ Gain awareness of your feelings – the child that you should have been
- ✓ Open yourself up to healthy relationships
- ✓ Can view your experience and yourself from the perspective of an understanding supporter
- ✓ Become a model for others who have survived abuse.
- ✓ Make changes that promote inner pride and strength
- ✓ Situate yourself as a person in the present as past issues are dealt with

You can refer yourself to Break The Silence for professional support when you feel ready. Don't allow other people to pressure you to seek help - you will know when the time is right. When you do engage with Break The Silence, if at any time during the process you feel you need to take a break, you can. As an organisation established by a Survivor for Survivors, you will be supported on your recovery journey in a way that meets your individual needs.

Client Journey



The journey through counselling will go at your pace and Break The Silence will treat you with respect, dignity and courtesy. You will not be judged and you will be believed.

Many Break The Silence Clients have reported that they never spoke out about their experiences as they felt ashamed, that somehow they believe it was their fault or because they had a bad experience elsewhere. It is important to say that this personal violation is a trauma that happened to you, not because of you.

Break The Silence have worked with Clients who may have boxed away their trauma, or not even been fully aware of what happened. Clients often speak of relationships being an issue - they could be unable to start or maintain a relationship, be in other abusive relationships or simply struggle to feel an emotional connection with others. This is common for Survivors.



As people cope by boxing away their traumas, or letting it out by different behaviours, some people also don't really understand what happened in their childhood. This can be as a result of how your memory processes a trauma. It may be fragmented, it probably won't be in any sort of chronological order and at times you might have viewed it as not making sense.

When this starts to seep out, it can have triggers such as sounds, smells, visual images or memories that are intrusive and you have no control over or they could be flashbacks where you feel that you are re-living the experience as it feels it is happening now. Again, these are very common for people who have been traumatised.



In counselling you might start off feeling that things are getting worse as more memories open up and you may find your mood initially gets worse.

However if you stick through the process, once you are able to process the trauma, you may find great benefit and better able to deal with the overwhelming emotions you experience.

Who Are Break The Silence?

Operating since 2004, Break The Silence provide a range of tailored, professional support options in North and East Ayrshire for people affected by childhood sexual trauma.

Options for support include; one to one professional counselling using qualified psychotherapists, outreach counselling, couple support, group activities, and family support and information.

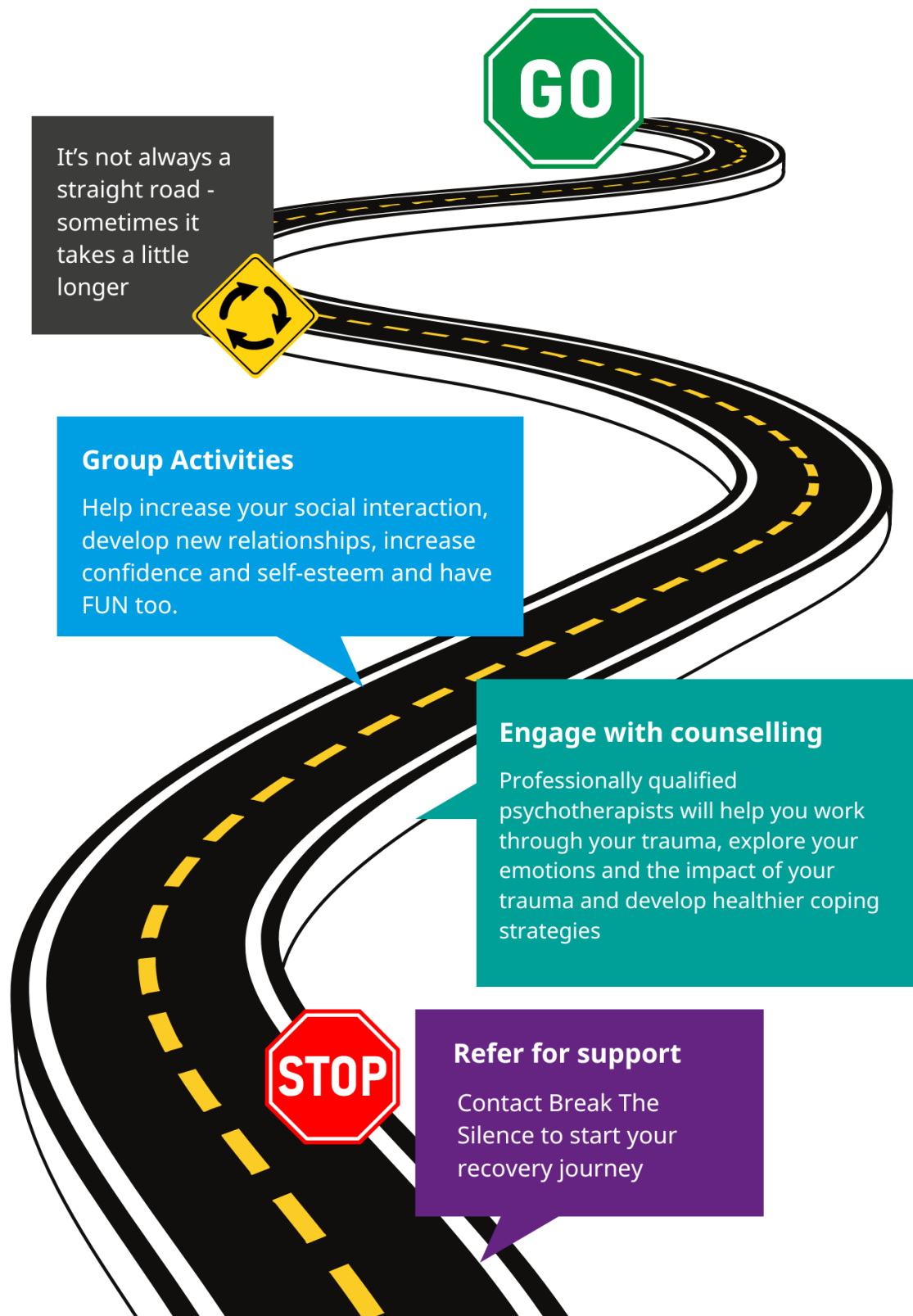
All support is designed to assist Survivors to work through their trauma, move forward and improve their social well-being and psychological health, enabling and supporting Survivors to achieve an attainable standard of living, health and family life.

Break The Silence was founded by Kate Short, a Survivor of childhood sexual abuse as she wanted to help others.

Kate had a vision to establish “a centre that was easily accessible, offered a holistic approach to meet the needs of Survivors, all genders, their partners and their families. It would offer a range of support services in one place to address many issues, not just one. It would be welcoming, non-threatening and safe. It would be *Break the Silence*.”



Kate Short, Founder



Am I Eligible for Support?



Break The Silence provide support for residents in East and North Ayrshire (aged 13+). In addition we can provide support for people who were abused/neglected as children while living in care in Scotland as we are the pan-Ayrshire provider in partnership with Future Pathways.

Childhood sexual abuse issues can affect family members as well as the victim. Finding out that a family member has experienced sexual abuse can have a devastating effect and they may experience overwhelming feelings of distress, anger and guilt. We offer to see any family member or partner over 13 years of age who feels they need to speak to someone. These sessions are also funded and therefore there is no fee. Sessions are limited to 2 appointments.

Break the Silence welcomes people of all genders without prejudice and supports equality and diversity. However, we are unable to support people who have a charge, conviction or committed any sexual offence.

Where Can I Get Support?



Break The Silence provide support either online through video call, telephone, or by text or email. We also provide support through our outreach programme across East and North Ayrshire from the following locations:

- ✓ North Ayrshire clinic -Woodlands
- ✓ East Ayrshire clinic – North West Area Centre

If you have a specific challenge or barrier preventing you from accessing support please do get in touch and we will try to find a way to help break down the barrier.

How Do I Refer Myself for Support?



You can refer yourself or a friend or family member (with their consent) for support by telephoning us on **01563 559558** or you can use our on-line referral facility by visiting our website: www.breakthesilence.org.uk

Staff and Volunteers at Break The Silence understand that the first step to accessing support is often the hardest. Be assured that when you contact us you will be treated with courtesy, dignity and respect.

Once you have referred yourself for support, our administration team will review appointment availability and contact you within 5 days to schedule an information session (please note this may be longer in peak/holiday periods).

What Happens when I call - what can I expect?

1. Phone or online enquiry to Break The Silence regarding accessing support for childhood sexual abuse for self, family member or through a third party (referral partner) with consent.

2. Provide basic information to our admin team member who will provide some information about our support services and ask if the caller wishes to make a referral for support.

3. Provide detailed information if a self-referral or on behalf of a family member, or through an organisation, the caller will be asked to provide;
Client Name, Date of Birth, Address, Contact No, Email address
Preferred contact method, how they heard about Break The Silence
Advise us of any additional support needs
Reason for referral: Preferred location for support, Preference for Male/Female Counsellor, Other Relevant Information

If referring on behalf of someone else, you must ensure that you have the individual's consent to do so.

4. Schedule an information session through communication from Break The Silence using the individual's preferred communication method. Date, Time and location of the Information Session will be confirmed.

5. Schedule first counselling appointment through communication from Break The Silence. Preferred communication method will be made to confirm your first appointment.