

Stages of the Healing Process

The decision to heal: Once you recognize the effects of sexual abuse in your life, you need to make an active commitment to heal. Deep healing happens only when you choose it and are willing to change yourself.

The emergency stage: Beginning to deal with memories and suppressed feelings can through your life into utter turmoil. Remember, this is only a stage. It won't last forever.

Remembering: Many survivors suppress all memories of what happened to them as children. Those who do not forget the actual incidents often forget how it felt at the time. Remembering is the process of getting back both memory and feeling.

Believing it happened: survivors often doubt their own perceptions. Coming to believe that the abuse really happened and that it really hurt you, is a vital part of the healing process.

Breaking silence: Most adult survivors kept the abuse a secret in childhood. Telling another human being about what happened to you is a powerful healing force that can dispel the shame of being a victim.

Understanding that it wasn't your fault: Children usually believe the abuse is their fault. Adult survivors must place the blame where it belongs- directly on the shoulders of the abusers.

Making contact with the child within: Many survivors have lost touch with their own vulnerability. Getting in touch with child within can help you feel compassion for yourself, more anger at your abuser, and greater intimacy with others.

Trusting yourself: The best guide for healing is your own inner voice. Learning to trust your own perceptions, feelings, and intuitions forms a new basis for action in the world.

Grieving and mourning: As children being abused, and later as adults struggling to survive, most survivors haven't felt their losses. Grieving is a way to honor your pain, let go, and move into the present.

Anger- the backbone of healing: Anger is a powerful and liberating force. Whether you need to get in touch with it or have always had plenty to spare, directing your rage squarely at your abuser, and at those who didn't protect you, is pivotal to healing.

Disclosures and confrontations: Directly confronting your abuser and/or your family is not for every survivor, but it can be a dramatic, cleansing tool.

Forgiveness: Forgiveness of the abuser is *not* an essential part of the healing process, although it tends to be the one most recommended. The only essential forgiveness is for yourself.

Spirituality: Having a sense of power greater than yourself can be a real asset in the healing process. Spirituality is a uniquely personal experience. You might find it through traditional religion, meditation, nature, or your support group.

Resolution on moving on: As you move through these stages again and again, you will reach a point of integration. Your feelings and perspectives will stabilize. You will come to terms with your abuser and other family members. While you won't erase your history, you will make deep and lasting changes in your life. Having gained awareness, compassion, and power through healing, you will have the opportunity to work toward a better world.

Source: The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse (Ellen Bass & Laura Davis)