

Various hints

Hint series – Adult Survivors of Child Abuse - Cowra Support Group

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Looking for drama when there is none

(July 2012)

... a common trait between a few of us to look for drama when there is none. We discussed how as young people being abused we were always on our toes trying to avoid the next abuse session ... somehow. We were always on our toes looking for what could go wrong next. We seem to carry this behaviour as adults – *what will go wrong next ??*

When life seems to be smooth sailing, it feels so awkward we fear *what will go wrong next*. We seem to find it difficult to live life without threat or dramas. It seems more uncomfortable when it is smooth sailing. As part of our healing we need to breathe deeply and learn how to accept and enjoy smooth sailing. Our bodies and souls are not really meant to endure constant tension.

Taking charge of our health

(July 2012)

Another topic was physical health and our tendency to feel real pain or real symptoms when there is no real physical ill-health. Whether a need to be cared for, or physical muscular tension in the back bringing about digestive spasms etc, only trained mental health and medical professional can help us through that. It is worthwhile however disclosing our background to our GPs as we all know that mental and physical health are all linked. It will help us to help our GPs look at us in a holistic fashion – not just bits of our bodies separately. We must take charge of our health by helping them help us. Food for your thoughts

Maybe coping but still human

(August 2012)

One of our members raised the issue of grieving and being resourceful. How we can appear to be so strong ‘Oh, you will cope’, ‘I am not worried about you’ when beyond appearance of strength our weakened self in times of grief or hardship still needs support. It is hard to reach out in those times, but it feels so nice when someone offers a little bit of care.

Maybe if we did not show such a hard face, well oiled machine façade, we would get more people keen to offer help or show some care in times of hardship. Food for thought.

Ways to stop negative self-talk

(October 2012)

We agreed we commonly or near constantly engage in negative self-talk.

Although understanding the reason underlying such negative and consuming activity is important, it does take time.

In the meantime it is important to know how to switch off the negative self-talk from time to time to relieve the pressure and enjoy a better life.

Try and find an activity which requires all your focus so that the mind is not allowed to engage in negative self-talk. Obviously it depends on your interest and your level of expertise.

For some it could be reading and playing music if your reading ability is poor and you need to focus a lot to achieve a reasonable level of competency. For others, it could be singing, painting, sewing or knitting a difficult pattern, writing lines with your left hand if you are right-handed, writing backwards *sdrawkcab*, reading upside down, teaching yourself to do things with the left hand you are good at with the right hand (any activity really.... as long as it is challenging enough to consume all of your mind's attention).

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Forgiving or not forgiving

(November 2012)

Some members are not religious and some are. We discussed forgiveness as what it meant to us regardless of religion. We seemed to agree that if the process of forgiving is about freeing us from the emotional burden of what others have done to us, then not forgiving would hurt us and definitely affect our health. Food for thought as to which path each one of us will now take.

Other thought on forgiveness...

Anonymous quote: "Forgiveness is letting go of the idea that you could have had a different past". This could translate into: Whatever life threw at us, we grew in the person we are – stronger, richer. We can't undo what was done so we need to embrace our richness, use the available support, and help ourselves to gain greater strength and health to live a better life.

No longer the pleasing type

(December 2012)

Putting oneself first is a new mind set, you do not have to please everyone around you at the cost of you.

Losing friends

(December 2012)

Losing friends because you suddenly stand by personal boundaries that you never had before. Losing those friends is **not** sad, it is empowering. These were not real friends. They did not have your best interest at heart, only theirs. You will make real friends.

Coping at Christmas

(December 2012)

Much discussion around the feelings brought about by Christmas: some refusing to take part in what seems to be an excuse to get drunk. Some of our members also attend Alcoholic Anonymous and do not need to get involved in drinking sessions. Christmas is also a time for family reunion. Given that child abuse often involves family or close friends, such reunions bring back unwanted memories or feelings. Some cope by distancing themselves, not taking part. It is never too late to start taking care of OUR emotional needs.

Looking at problems in a different light

(March 2013)

Tackle what you perceive as a problem as an opportunity for growth.

Finding a soul mate for a genuine intimate relationship

(April 2013)

For single survivors who want to get involved in a genuine intimate relationship and do not know where to start – given the difficulty with trust and intimacy – we discussed the value of joining an interest group on a theme you are really fascinated about such as Birds, Art, Gardening, Land Care as you are more likely to be connected to people already in tune with you.

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Trying to stop cutting one's wrists

(May/June 2013)

A coping skill to try and stop cutting one's wrists is to wear strong plastic wrist bands such as those provided by Beyond Blue, Diabetes Australia etc. Each time there is a need to feel the pain, slap the wrists with the plastic bands instead. If one band is not enough, add more. (*This technique has been successfully used by one of the survivors who was regularly cutting herself*)

When pleasing takes over respecting, and affects friendship

(August 2013)

In our attempt to be accepted we try to please others. In our attempt to please to be accepted we forget that others also have personal boundaries they would like respected. Let's become aware of such boundaries and respect them too in the same way as we would like ours to be respected. Over time we realise that people become more comfortable being around us as we give up a little bit of that urge to please and do it all ourselves, sometimes even in a compulsive manner – such as insisting to do the dishes at a friend's place.

When saving the world is too big a task

(September 2013)

We have hurt so much and still hurt so much at times (depending on where we are on our journey to recovery) that we would like to stop the hurt for all, we feel we want to *save the world*. Many thoughts were shared including:

- It is too big a task and our focus must primarily be on our own self. As we get better our positive influence on others around us will exponentially improve society.
- Use our hurts to grow our love around us
- Keep believing in humanity but be wary that society as a whole is fairly comfortable and may not want to change!

About getting other survivors to seek help or change behavioural pattern

(October 2014)

'Some people are never ready however many times they are propped'. This is another reminder for us to take care of our own self and be wary of our tendency to try and save the world.

Be careful not to push the ones you love, away from you

(December 2013)

by continually expressing the feelings that you are 'not good enough', or 'not loveable'. Be respectful of their feelings too and their need to love you as you are – whether you think you are not loveable is irrelevant, let them love you the way you are.

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If only we could stop hurting the people we love...

(December 2013)

Each time our loved ones trigger us, we tend to over-react. Extreme reactions hurt them too. If only we could stop hurting the ones we love... this applies to all relationships, not just survivors'. This is an inevitable part of growing together.

For survivors though it can reach greater levels of emotions. Overtime as we are recovering from our childhood abuse the over-reactions will lessen. And we will be able to discuss, explain, make amends, and understand each other better. This will strengthen our relationships; this will make our extreme reactions, not so extreme, not so unpredictable. Such understanding of each other will make our love even greater.

Cry if you feel like crying

(December 2013)

Shedding tears is part of the body releasing whatever emotions or tension needs to be released. It is a natural process which needs to occur. Let yourself go with the flow of tears.

Understanding the role and effects of your medicine

(December 2013, February 2014)

Become aware of the effects of the medicine your doctor(s) may prescribe. Hence the need to discuss all side-effects and options with your GP with the idea of avoiding medicine if at all possible, or else taking the path of less damage. If you agree to the benefits of taking such drugs, and you are aware of the side effects such as gain weight, and addiction, never attempt to take yourself off such drugs without the support of your health professional. As with any addictive drug, if you wish to come off them, you need to be ready psychologically, physically, and go very slowly. Take care.

Consolidating relationships

(January 2014)

A discussion on the importance of valuable relationships which work both ways. The acknowledgement that relationships where we are doing the constant chasing and never hear from the other party are probably not very healthy and valuable. A need to 'stick to valuable relationships' and nurture them.

Becoming aware of your own triggers

(January 2014)

If you feel you get triggered too often, and you can identify your triggers, try and keep a list of what triggers you. Use the list to avoid the situation if you know you are not ready to live through a similar situation. If nevertheless triggered try to put it in the perspective of the present – where the situation is different, where the risk of being hurt (as a child can be hurt) is less, where a less emotional reaction might be more appropriate. You will probably need professional support or guidance to process what triggers you and eventually cross it off the list, in the meantime, this hint might be of some use. It takes practice and discipline but a worthwhile activity to list your triggers if it helps you react in a more appropriate way.

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Building up our confidence – the way we dress

(March 2014)

We discussed the topic of the way we dress and present to others and one of the female members put it in those words ‘When I am well dressed and wear make-up, I feel vulnerable’. We discussed how this feeling of vulnerability is what drives some of us to avoid dressing well and looking attractive. Maybe we can find a way of dressing well in situations where we know it is safe – maybe with friends, or families – so we can build our confidence up.

Sharing suicidal thoughts

(April 2014)

Following the news that one member of our community known to the group committed suicide, we discussed suicide, suicidal thoughts, and acting on such thoughts.

We shared the reaction and the potential actions taken by the partner and close family in such situation and how it may be very appropriate to seek help and shelter in an institution such as Bloomfield (Orange, NSW) in times of crisis... ‘held away to protect the kids and oneself’.

We shared how in that particular case the survivor ‘held away’ was not feeling abandoned as the family was very supportive and used to visit most days and even bring a picnic lunch to enjoy with the survivor. Love and support were still very present but safety for the kids and survivor were paramount. The stay was only for the period of crisis whilst other measures and counselling were getting organised.

It pays to share your suicidal thoughts to protect yourself and your loved ones.

About Depression and Medication

(April 2014)

ABC interview on Life Matters:

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/lifematters/surviving-child-abuse/5282264>

If the cause of depression is not dealt with, medication will not heal it.

Quoted from the interview from the ABC radio with Dr Kezelman (CEO of Adults Surviving Child Abuse; www.asca.org.au); and initiator of the trauma guidelines and health practitioner trauma training.

This means that medication such as anti-depressant may play a part in a plan to heal from depression. However the cause of the depression is what needs to be dealt with.

Experimenting is empowering

(June 2014)

‘Experimenting is empowering. Trial and error is empowering – experimenting with recipes, wax and painting, candle making, recycling meal tin container into decorative stars’

Learning to say ‘No’

(June 2014)

‘Society has a lot of expectations which can run ourselves down if we do not feel strong enough to say No!’

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Slowing down the breathing to feel more and react less

(June 2014)

If you ever become aware that your breathing is too quick or that you even stop breathing in situations where you may feel scared or vulnerable, try and breathe with your diaphragm (ie inhale whilst blowing your stomach like a balloon and exhale whilst flattening it).

Slow down the breathing to slow down the anatomy.

Slow down the breathing and for some of us it means that we feel more. We stay more in the present. We are less reactive.

Let's not be paranoid

(June 2014)

The world around us does not work to great standards. In everyday life it is very common to deal with professionals working well below professional standards.

When this happens, put it in perspective. Let's not be paranoid: it is not about you. It is the unfortunate reflection of a substandard world. Work with these professionals to find a solution to whatever problem you may now be facing because of them.

Experiencing healing

(July 2014)

The following are quotes from the group. What they feel or experience as they heal:

- *'As I am changing for the better, people are starting to respond positively, I feel vulnerable.'*
- *'Learnt behaviours are difficult to undo but it can be done.'*
- *'Do not kid yourself: isolation is necessary as we process emotions and try and make sense of events, but relationships are the only way to heal. You can't heal in isolation.'*
- *'We need relationships so we get triggered and heal by reviewing our wounds.'*
- *'It is hard to get out of your comfort zone.'*
- *'It is scary to change.'*
- *'We all have different coping mechanisms.'*
- *'Be in the moment as much as you can.'*
- *'The cold stillness that always stays inside you'* – shared by some but not necessarily all. Some shared their ups and downs hence their cold and warm moments and low and high spirit. We are all different and over time the cold waters are warmed by warmer currents.
- *'The only safe thing I can do is not to talk to them'* (abusive parents) – we all have to find safe ways to cope with life and they will evolve over time as we too change and heal.
- *'What do they want in return?'* when someone is genuinely, constantly nice to us and we have difficulty accepting it. It is difficult to trust others.
- *'When I take time to breathe deeply, I feel more. During intimate moments I often have to remember to breathe, slow myself down, and stay in the moment.'*

About giving people space or taking space

(September 2014)

'I will be here when you're ready'. Quote of a friend awaiting the flow of tears and the emotional storm to go pass as one remembers the loved one who just passed away. Allowing the person to be themselves when they are ready.

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We need time, sometimes a great deal of time, to process feelings and discussions charged with emotions. Take the time. Allow yourself the space you need to.

About trying to change someone else's behaviour

(September 2014)

We reminded each other that we cannot control someone else's behaviour. We can only try to change our own.

In the event of someone close affecting us greatly in a negative way, if avoidance is not an option, seek professional help or appropriate support if needed eg Mental Health Line for carers or families of someone with a Mental Health issue.

Understanding, not justifying

(November 2014)

'Understanding [the background of our perpetrators or the community] is not justifying'.

Making sense of what happened to you might help you heal. Understanding however does not justify the actions of the perpetrator. What happened to you is still inappropriate.

About acknowledging all our needs

(December 2014)

The realisation that no matter what age, the kid inside us may still seek from our parents what never got given then eg a meaningful hug, some explanation to make sense of situations of the past. If you ever have that need, no matter what age, if you can fulfill the need, brace yourself and make the step forward to getting what you feel you need.

'It felt awkward as I needed to tell him I loved him and I needed to be in his arms as a child seeking a hug s/he did not remember to have ever had. It was a difficult decision to satisfy my need and worry about showing perceived weakness. After all it was only a hug and some tears. Noone was falling apart. The hug did happen and so did the tears; I still remember the intensity of the moment, but now I don't need it anymore; I got the hug I so longed for.'

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Dealing with nightmares

(November 2014)

Nightmares vs night terrors (*night terrors defined as strong reaction when abruptly disturbed from a deep sleep* as opposed to nightmares where you emerge naturally but very disturbed).

The discussion went on sharing how to deal with nightmares and some hints emerged:

- Try and rationalise it. What started it off?
- Develop diversionary behaviours which work for you in order to distract your thoughts and break the cycle. It might be seen as escapism but at least gets you through the night.

About acknowledging our thoughts and controlling our behaviour

(November 2014)

When sexually abused, often by a loved one, anger, fear, love, and sexual arousal (to list only a few of the emotions) got felt all at once.

Later in life, when placed in a friendly context, we feel we have to have sex to please or thank the nice person.

Let's acknowledge the way we think, let's not judge ourselves for thinking that way – in a way, let's be gentle on ourselves - but let's control our behaviours and not give in: We do not have to have sex each time we feel someone is nice to us. But we can note how we feel and realise it is inappropriate and little by little, train ourselves in thinking that one can be friendly without seeking sex. One may love us without seeking sex.

All these feelings which used to come all at once can be felt separately, we need to learn to untangle the knot of these feelings; we need to learn to feel them separately, learn to recognise them separately, and for each situation, learn to deal with them appropriately. Challenging but worthwhile.

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