

Survivor Self-Care Guide

SUPPORT FOR YOUR HEALING JOURNEY

Welcome!

Dear Survivor,

We're glad you found this booklet and are reading it now! First, we want you to know that ***you are not alone***. There are people who believe in you and want to support you in your community. You deserve to feel safe and cared for. You are not to blame for what you have experienced, and violence and abuse is never the survivor's fault. We hope the strategies and resources in this booklet offer you comfort and support for your personal healing.

There are many ways to feel, cope, and heal after experiencing sexual assault or an abusive relationship. Each person's experience, needs, and process are unique and valid. Feel free to use from this booklet what resonates with you. And, remember that experiences of violence and abuse do not define who you are as a person. You are a whole, beautiful person worthy of being treated with love, dignity, and respect always.

With care,

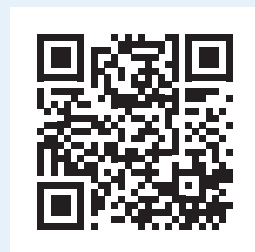
Survivor Advocacy Services at WWU

How to Use This Guide

Take a few minutes to think about where you would feel most comfortable exploring this booklet. This might be in your own private space, such as your bedroom, a favorite spot outside, or a quiet space in the library. Maybe you want to make yourself a favorite cozy beverage or put on some soothing music. Be sure to set aside some time for this, so you do not feel like you are rushing to class or other commitments.

We are all worthy of being treated with love, dignity, and respect.

If you are experiencing or have experienced, relationship abuse, sexual violence, stalking or harassment, you are not alone and support is available. Visit: ***cwc.wvu.edu/survivorservices***



Prioritizing Your Needs

“You do not just wake up and become the butterfly—growth is a process.”

—Rupi Kaur, *the sun and her flowers*

Self-care can be a helpful coping strategy and is a critical part of any healing journey. Self-care is about taking care of yourself in ways that feel best to you and focusing on your own health and well-being. It can be challenging at times to practice self-care, especially if we have been made to feel that we are not worthy of love and care. Prioritizing our own needs is a way of practicing self-love and self-care and can remind us that we do have choices in what happens next.

When practicing self-care, it can help to start with our basic needs. We can ask ourselves: How am I sleeping? Have I had water today? Have I eaten a meal? Have I moved my body in a way that feels good to me? Have I allowed myself to rest or taken a few moments away from a screen and noise? It might not be possible to take care of all our needs at once; it’s okay to start with one and work your way up.

What is one thing I can do **today** to take care of my basic needs?

What are three things I can do **this week** to take care of my basic needs?

Self-Care Strategies

5 mins

- Write down 3 things that you're grateful for today
- Write down 3 things you love about yourself
- Write a list of all your favorite things to do when you're feeling sad
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15 mins

- Go out in nature and make a conscious effort to soak in the sounds, smells, and beauty around you
- Journal out your feelings and emotions
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30 mins

- Create a playlist filled with songs that make you feel empowered
- Cook a new recipe
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1 hour

- Spend time with a loved one
- Get creative: Write a poem, draw, paint, dance!
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Understanding Trauma

“Tears are a river that takes you somewhere ... Tears lift your boat off the rocks, off dry ground, carrying it downriver to someplace better.

—Clarissa Pinkola Estés

Our bodies automatically respond to threat or danger in ways that are meant to protect us and help us survive, such as the fight, flight, freeze, and fawn responses. This is our body and mind’s way of trying to keep us as safe as possible in unsafe situations and relationships.

Trauma affects everyone differently, so some of these descriptions might fit your experience and some might not. After experiencing violence or abuse, you might feel anger, numbness, fear, grief, worry, and other emotions

that might feel confusing or scary. You might also experience guilt or self-blame, difficulties paying attention, and physical sensations such as headaches, shakiness, feeling tired and achy, and low energy. You might also be more “jumpy,” experience panic, or have trouble sleeping. Trauma can also change our beliefs about ourselves, other people, and the world.

These reactions can be intense, but they are normal responses to extreme stress and experiences of violence, abuse, and harm. Coping

strategies and accessing support can help manage these reactions and feelings, and they often fade with time.

Sometimes mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) develop after trauma, but experiencing trauma does not mean you will develop PTSD or other mental health concerns.

If these symptoms do not go away after a month, are significantly impacting your life, or you want to understand more about what you are experiencing, support is avail-

able through the WWU Counseling and Wellness Center by calling 360-650-3164 (select option 1 after hours).

We share this information about the impact of trauma to normalize why you might be feeling the way you are feeling and to validate that it is okay if you are having a hard time right now. You do not have to cope with this alone. There is support available. The coping strategies shared in this booklet can also provide some relief to you now.



Your Support System



You deserve support. Having a support system is so important during the healing process. Below are some questions to help you determine who your support system is and their capacity for supporting you.

Who are the people that I enjoy being around? That make feel good?

Who can I go to when I am struggling and need someone to talk to?

What is something I can say when I am in need of support?

What are the boundaries of those in my support system?

It's important to check in with people to see what their capacity is for supporting you and any boundaries they may have (for example, can they take that 12am phone call?)





Grounding Techniques

“I want survivors to know that healing is possible. I’m grounded in joy; I’m not grounded in the trauma anymore.”

—Tarana Burke

After trauma, it is normal to experience flashbacks, anxiety, and other discomforts. Grounding techniques can help with these symptoms by turning attention away from thoughts, memories, or worries and refocusing on the present moment.

We can use a movie theater metaphor to describe this experience. When a person is reminded of a traumatic memory, dissociates, or has a flashback, it can be like watching a “mental” movie. Engaging with a grounding technique can help the individual step out of the movie theater into the daylight and into the present environment. Remember, you are in control of your movie and can use grounding techniques to show it!

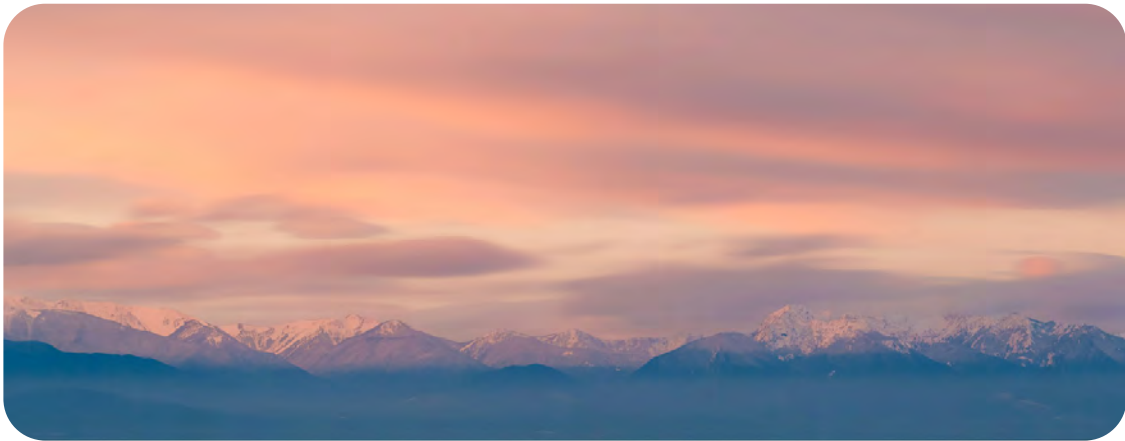
Below are some common grounding techniques you might find helpful.

Technique #1: Spot the Rainbow

Look around and find all the colors of the rainbow in your environment: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple. Name them in your head.

Technique #2: Body Break and Breaths

Do a quick body scan. Notice if you have any tension or pressure anywhere in your body (e.g., tight shoulders). Take three deep belly breaths, and on the exhale, focus the breath toward this tension you are noticing. Do this for all your tension points. Then, give your body some thoughts of gratitude (and maybe a big self hug) for carrying you through this life.



Technique #3: My 5 Favorite Sense Stimulations

Trace your non-dominant hand on the following page—yes, like we did in elementary school! On each of the fingers you drew, write and/or draw your favorite thing to:

- Look at (see)
- Listen to (hear)
- Feel or cuddle with (touch)
- Smell with your nose
- Taste with your mouth

Now, really think about those sense stimulations. Pretend you are engaging with them right now. For example, really imagine the scent of your favorite cookies from Grandma, or pretend you are hearing birds singing in the background. What do you notice?

For an extra-supportive grounding experience, find items that represent or reflect these favorite senses of yours. For example, your favorite type of candy or gum, or your favorite perfume, or a picture of your pet you love to snuggle with. Get creative with your favorite sense stimulations and create a small, tangible container of them to carry with you.

My 5 Favorite Sense Stimulations Exercise

Refer to Technique #3 on the previous page for instructions.



Experiencing Joy, Safety, Comfort, and Connection

Coping and healing do not need to be your only priorities. You deserve to do things that bring you joy, fun, peace, and fulfillment, and to be surrounded by people who support, believe, and uplift you. That is an incredible act of self-care!

Below you will focus on making a list of the activities, places, people (or pets) that bring you joy, safety, comfort, and connection. It's okay if your list is short. Do your best to add a few examples to each section, no matter how small the activity or task might seem to you.

Joy

List activities you typically enjoy and/or outings/events you have looked forward to before. Examples: Play a sport or move your body, take in the beauty of nature, play a game or watch a movie with friends, create art or a playlist, spend time with your pet, read a favorite book series.

Safety and Comfort

Think of your favorite things, activities, and places that feel safe to you. Examples: Watch my favorite movie or play a video game. Read my favorite book in a cozy blanket. Take a warm shower and use my favorite scented products. Cook my favorite meal or make a cup of herbal tea.

Connection

Examples: Set up a FaceTime call with a loved one I miss, go to a club meeting, attend class today, plan to see a friend, reach out to a helpline, or join a support group.



Self-Love Affirmations

“Love heals. Heals and liberates.”

—Maya Angelou

Below are affirmations you can read when you need extra encouragement:

I am doing the best I can today.

I am healing, even when it is hard.

My experience is valid and my voice matters.

My feelings are valid, even when I don't understand them all.

My needs are important.

I am worthy of love and respect.

Safety is a human right.

I deserve to make my own decisions.

It is okay to ask for help and to receive support.

I am not defined by what I experienced; I define who I am.

My existence is important.

I am a whole, unique, and beautiful person; I am worthy of joy.

Add Your Affirmations!

Add three of your own affirmations below. You can write them on sticky notes and place them somewhere you can see each day or take a picture to save on your phone.

1

2

3



Support Resources

You do not have to do this alone—you are worthy of care from others and support is available, including:

WWU Survivor Advocacy Services

cwc.wvu.edu/survivorservices | 360-650-7982

Advocates believe you and are available to listen and support you in your choices. You decide what you share with them and you are in control of decision making. With the support of an advocate, you get to determine what safety, support, and healing mean to you. Advocates can also confidentially discuss your reporting, legal, and medical options on and off campus.

WWU Counseling and Wellness Center

cwc.wvu.edu | 360-650-3164 (select option 1 after hours)

Seeking support from a therapist can be helpful when you have experienced violence and trauma, particularly when the experience is impacting your daily life and relationships with others and yourself. Depending on your current needs and goals, the WWU Survivor Advocate can help you connect to a therapist/counselor. The Counseling and Wellness Center also offers group support for survivors—visit ***cwc.wvu.edu/groups*** for more information.

24-Hour Helplines

[cwc.wvu.edu/survivorservices#24hour](https://www.wvu.edu/survivorservices#24hour)

Reasons to call a 24-hour helpline:

- You are not feeling safe in your relationship or your home. Advocates can help you think through a safety plan.
- To learn about options and resources and think through your next steps.
- To feel connected/supported.
- To talk to someone who understands the impacts of violence and abuse.
- To support a friend, family, or community member who is/has experienced violence.

Medical Options

[studenthealth.wvu.edu/
healthcare-after-sexual-assault](https://studenthealth.wvu.edu/healthcare-after-sexual-assault)

Your safety and well-being are important to us. If you have experienced sexual assault or physical violence, medical care may be an important next step.

The **WWU Student Health Center** is here to support you with important medical care after sexual assault. Visit their Healthcare After Sexual Assault page (see URL listed above) for information about support through the Student Health Center as well as information about forensic exams offered off-campus.

Legal and Reporting Options

Deciding to formally report an experience of violence, abuse and/or harassment is a deeply personal decision. WWU Survivor Advocacy Services believes that only you should make the decision and that you deserve support throughout your decision making. Survivor advocates can talk through your reporting options and the process.

Information about protection orders and reporting to law enforcement and/or the **WWU Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance (CRTC) Office** can be found at: cwc.wvu.edu/survivorservices#faqs

You do not need to make a formal complaint to receive supportive measures through Western, which can include getting an extension on an assignment and adjusting work schedules or living arrangements if needed. Visit the CRTC website at crtc.wvu.edu to learn more. **Please note:** CRTC is not a confidential resource.



Reflection Page

COUNSELING AND WELLNESS CENTER



Information provided by the WWU Counseling and Wellness Center. To receive this booklet in an alternate format, email cwc@wwu.edu. To learn more about our services, scan the QR code or visit cwc.wwu.edu. AA/EO. Rev. 3/24.