



Sexual violence against men and boys

in war, conflict and migration

A manual for helpers about mental health



Toolbox



Mental Health and Human Rights Info (MHHRI) is a database that gives free information in English and Spanish on the effects of human rights violations on mental health in contexts of war, conflict, and disaster. The database contains a list of publications that describe and discuss psychosocial interventions at individual and community level. It also provides information about organisations working in this field.

This manual has been piloted in different settings and is written by a team composed of: Nora Sveaass (responsible for the project), Helen Christie, Doris Drews, Harald Bækkelund, Sara Skilbred-Fjeld og Elisabeth Ng Langdal. Plain Sense has edited and finalised the manual.

The development of this manual was funded by the Dam Foundation in cooperation with Council for mental health, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Project Mental Health. The views expressed are those of MHHRI and do not necessarily represent the policies of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Project Mental Health.



MHHRI
Mariboegate 13
0183 Oslo, Norge
Post@hhri.org
www.mhhri.org

The manual can be downloaded from our Manual website <https://www.hhri.org/GBV-training-manual/>

Content

- Tools – An introduction 5
- Tools – Human Rights approach..... 6
- Tools - Knowledge about the prevalence of sexual violence against men and boys 7
- Tools – Knowledge of trauma..... 7
- Tools – Understanding the impact of culture, gender stereotypes, guilt, and shame..... 9
- Tools – The metaphor of Window of tolerance 10
- Tools - Use of stories and metaphors when working with survivors 11
- Tools – Five stories about exposed men and boys..... 13
- Tools – Grounding exercises..... 17
 - Exercise 1: Safe Place 18
 - Exercise 2: Distinguish Past and Present..... 18
 - Exercise 3: Handling flashbacks by being attentive..... 18
 - Exercise 4: Progressive Muscle Relaxation..... 19
 - Exercise 5: Attentive Presence..... 20
 - Exercise 6: Squeeze Hug 21
 - Exercise 8: Grounding the Body..... 21
 - Exercise 9: Feel the Weight of your Body..... 21
 - Exercise 10: Noticing and reducing anger using “the window of tolerance” 22
- Tools – To be a good helper 23
- Tools –Taking care of yourself as a helper 24

A collection of tools from the handbook for helpers meeting boys and men exposed to sexual violence in war, conflict and during migration.

This toolbox is developed as a collection of the tools presented in the manual “**Sexual violence against boys and men in war, conflict, and migration - A mental health manual for helpers**”. The intention is to give you a small sized, easy to handle sample from the manual that can be translated into your own language and with a story that is applicable in your cultural context.

The handbook is developed for helpers who want to provide culturally sensitive psychosocial help and support to men and boys who have survived gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual trauma during war, conflict, and crisis situations, on the run or after arriving in safe place. The handbook places special emphasis on a culturally sensitive approach in order to meet men and boys of all ages, cultural and religious backgrounds and sexual orientation. The aim is that psychosocial support for vulnerable men and boys is strengthened and that more people in this vulnerable group receive the help and support they need, in the contexts in which they find themselves, such as asylum centres, residential institutions.

The manual can be used in different ways. It is not a therapy handbook, but can be used for organised teaching and guidance, and also for self-study, alone or in groups. The handbook contains practical exercises (for example stabilisation exercises) and role-plays that can be usefully carried out with others. This can be seen as a collection of good ideas and as a practical resource in daily work. It also provides some background knowledge that can be useful also in conversations with those concerned. The stories can be adapted to your cultural context.

The handbook explores the psychological meaning of trauma and how traumatic events can affect mental health. What are the signs of severe stress? How can these be assessed and understood? How can counsellors approach a boy or a man shortly after he has been exposed to frightening and violent experiences? How to meet him in what is hurting and how to create a safe space for supportive conversation? What forms of contact can help the survivor recover and feel better? How can one prepare and handle reporting of human rights violations, and how can the safety and rights of victims be safeguarded?

Human rights and respect are central values of the handbook.

The fact that the handbook has a clear human rights focus can also help to strengthen knowledge about human rights and how this can have an impact on practical work. The fact that the people we meet have themselves been victims of serious human rights violations and may have thoughts on how this should be handled is a good argument that we as helpers can benefit from strengthening our own knowledge of the relationship between human rights, human rights violations and providing help.



Tools – An introduction

Aim. Getting a general idea of how you can use the toolbox

We all have a toolbox we use when we work, that we have acquired through our work. You as a helper are the most important tool. We will work on more tools and skills and practice them so that they are available in situations when we need them. Our intention is to provide tools and approaches that can stabilise survivors after they have been exposed to traumatising events, help them to deal with events that trigger traumatic memories, and teach them possible ways to regain control of their lives. Our hope is that providing the survivor with some of these tools this can enable him to use these exercises in order to help him to calm a little, even when he is stressed and experiencing flashbacks. When learned, these can be effective tools that can be used in situations where few other resources or forms of therapeutic support are available. The survivor will also know more about his own reactions. We underline the importance of activating his own resources, and also to get at better overview of his rights.

Psychoeducation as a tool refers to the process of “educating” survivors about their reactions as well as certain useful reflections about life in general. We believe it is of value to offer ways of understanding the problems. The information presented is about what constitutes a trauma, why is it so painful, what are frequent and often seen reactions to this, both psychologically and physiologically, and what is the course that trauma often takes in generic terms.

This information may provide the survivor with the knowledge and ability to deal with his problems in alternative ways. Knowledge means that the survivor understands what traumatic events may do to a person, what he may expect and is aware of the reactions he may have. We believe that the more a person is aware and knowledgeable about his problem and how it affects his life and the lives of others, the more control he can have over his life, the better he can deal with and live with his problems. Psychoeducation empowers the survivor and those close to him.

We will also look at what tools the helpers feel they have themselves, what they are lacking and what they would consider useful. What is learned in the training may be regarded as useful tools in the dialogue with the survivor as well as with the community. The metaphor of “toolbox” is being used, covering different skills and ways of talking, sitting, listening, telling a story, breathing exercises etc. This booklet is intended as a supplement to your already existing toolbox.

To empower survivors is a skill/tool. The metaphor or stories can be used to empower, and many other tools that we explore can help to stabilise the survivor and assist him to feel more in control and less frightened. To do this, we need to help the survivor to connect with his senses, that is eyes, hearing etc. Being aware of his senses may help a survivor to manage danger and fear. Knowing how the brain works and why we react the way we do in traumatic events can be a useful tool. Think of other tools you can add to your toolbox.

Tools – Human Rights approach

Aim. To understanding how human rights principles, and the consequences of violating them can be of use in training

The manual **builds on and is inspired by the human rights framework**. Identifying rights and abuses of rights is also important in practical psychosocial work. Understanding the experiences of the survivors in terms of human rights and as a violation of rights may be creative and bring insights and can give survivors and their helpers valuable tools. Human rights values may assist us both to understand the suffering we encounter and find ways to respond to it in a respectful and helpful way.

A human rights-based approach is about empowering people to know and claim their rights and strengthening the capacity and accountability of people and institutions who are responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling rights. This means giving individuals better opportunities to participate in the decisions that affects their human rights. It also means improve the capacity of those with responsibility for fulfilling rights to recognise and know how to respect those rights, and to hold them accountable. There are some fundamental underlying principles - **these are:**

- **Participation** - everyone has the right to participate in decisions which affect their human rights. Participation must be active, free, meaningful and give attention to issues of accessibility, including access to information in a form and a language which can be understood. It is the survivor's choice whether he wants to report or not.
- **Empowerment** - means that people and societies should be aware of their rights, and that they should be encouraged to participate in the development of policy and practices which affect their lives and to claim rights where necessary.
- **Non-discrimination and equality** - means that all forms of discrimination in the fulfilment of rights must be prohibited, prevented and eradicated. The most marginalised, who often face the greatest barriers to realising their rights, must be prioritised.
- **Accountability** - requires effective monitoring of human rights norms as well as effective remedies for human rights breaches. For accountability to be effective there must be suitable laws, policies, institutions, administrative procedures and mechanisms of redress in order to secure human rights.
- **Legality** - Governments must create mechanisms of accountability for the enforcement of rights. There must be effective national and international legal measures so that the government can be held accountable if human rights standards are not met.

Think of situations in your work with survivors that do not have a Human Rights approach? How can these situations be handled differently with a Human Rights approach?

Our aim has been to present human rights in a way that seems directly relevant in the work of the helper and explain the value of human rights approach in their daily work with survivors of human rights violations. It is about creating a possibility for the survivor to take back their dignity, feel that they again are worthy humans, that they can deal with the feelings of shame and humiliation and move beyond what the human rights violations, the injustice and the trauma, have done to them.

Tools - Knowledge about the prevalence of sexual violence against males

Aim. Increase knowledge and raise awareness

Those who work in this field have found that sexual violence against men and boys is far more prevalent than generally realised. For this reason, it is important to increase awareness among all who work with boys and men, in school systems, health institutions, places of detention, barracks, and care homes. The focus on male survivors in our manual "Sexual violence against boys and men in war, conflict, and migration - A mental health manual for helpers" is not meant to diminish the attention given to female survivors. Rather, it recognises that boys and men can also be exposed to sexual violence, though we often think of men as perpetrators and women as victims.

Sexual violence against boys and men in the context of war and migration is alarmingly high. A report by UNHCR in 2017 estimated that between 30% and 40% of all adult men imprisoned in Syria had been subjected to forms of sexual violence. It found that boys as young as 10 and men as old as 80 had been sexually assaulted. A study by the All-Survivors Project (2018) found that Syrian boys and men had experienced sexual violence both at the border crossing into Turkey and after their arrival. Similarly, based on a qualitative study among aid workers and refugees in Italy, the Women's Refugee Commission reported in 2019 that a high proportion of men and boys who had crossed the Mediterranean as migrants had been subject to gross sexual assault. Save the Children Norway found in 2017 that children living in or connected to asylum reception centres were particularly exposed to violence and sexual abuse.

Our manual refers to men and boys, including LGBTQI+ persons, to take into consideration vulnerable groups who may be at risk of sexual violence in war and conflict areas and migration. The reason for focusing on this group is that they are increasingly recognised as being at risk of sexual violence, and their needs and experiences are seldom acknowledged when it comes to this type of human rights violation.

Reporting difficulties partly explain why the international community has paid so little attention to this dimension of gender violence and has so far not taken steps to prevent it and support those affected. But low awareness is also due to social attitudes to this expression of gender violence, and general attitudes to migrants and migration. Sexual violence against men and boys can cause serious short- and long-term psychological problems. Because little attention is paid to it, however, the mental health problems of male survivors of sexual violence are frequently unrecognised and consequently unaddressed.

We know that early help and support is very important for physical and mental health and rehabilitation. We also know that male survivors of sexual violence rarely report it and therefore do not receive the medical and psychological support they need. The needs of violated boys and men are particularly unlikely to be met. Only a very small proportion of vulnerable groups such as street children, trafficked, asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants receive psychological support from specialist health services in the countries in which they live. It is important to state that not everyone will experience the trauma reactions we describe in this manual. For some, reactions might not appear until years later and others might never have them.

Tools – Knowledge of trauma

Aim. To clarify 'trauma' and 'traumatic events' and their effects on people.

'Trauma' means wound. In both medicine and psychology, it refers to major physical or mental injuries, including threats to life or physical integrity. As psychiatrist Judith Herman (1992, p. 33) phrased it, a trauma is "a personal encounter with death and violence".

- The situation is overwhelming, inescapable and very frightening
- Threaten life and integrity
- Loss of control and beyond what we are prepared to deal with
- Most people will struggle with serious reactions such as intrusive memories, re-experiences, flashbacks and sleeping problems afterwards

A 'traumatic event' is one that has the capacity to cause mental or physical trauma. Faced by such an event, the immediate response of the body and the mind is to struggle for survival. Behaviorally this is expressed by the different survival strategies 'fight, flight or freeze' responses, submission or 'playing dead'.

A severe traumatic event often changes the way in which survivors understand the world around them. They may lose their sense of safety and feel vulnerable and helpless. If the event involves acts of violence and the intention to hurt, trust in other people may be lost and the survivor's interrelation world seriously disturbed. Personal encounters with human or man-made violence are considered the most disturbing forms of trauma, likely to have the most lasting impact. **It is important to emphasize that the reactions that survivor experience are normal reactions to an abnormal event. The survivor is not crazy!**

Sexual violence is a specific form of trauma because it is an extremely invasive offence that gives rise to feelings of shame, self-blame, and guilt. When it is combined with fear of being injured or killed, it is traumatic in almost all cases. Being exposed to sexual violence, and surviving rape, often triggers serious trauma reactions, and many people who are raped develop a disorder within the trauma spectrum. It is estimated that people who experience or survive such events are more likely to develop PTSD than people who are exposed to other forms of trauma.

Loss of safety, control and trust commonly leads to depression (deep sadness, loss of the will to live, etc.) or anxiety. A personal encounter with violence and death may also haunt the survivor, who may painfully re-experience the event in dreams or daily life (also called intrusion). In the manual, we call the **reminders that cause intrusion 'triggers'**. Triggers, or trauma-reminders, are events or situations that remind victimised persons of their painful experiences and memories. Such reminders may elicit **trauma reactions** over and over again. They can be extremely distressing and create such anxiety that people are afraid to go out, see people, hear certain sounds, or do many ordinary usual things. Flashbacks are sudden, often strong, and uncontrollable re-experiences of a traumatic event or elements of that event. Survivors may feel disconnected from their bodily sensations and feel numb or may be unable to recall traumatic memories. A state of heightened arousal is also quite usual. Survivors may be on their guard all the time, startle easily, sleep poorly, be irritable, or find it difficult to remember and concentrate (called hyper-arousal).

Tools – Understanding the impact of culture, gender stereotypes, guilt, and shame

Aim. To understand how culture, gender stereotypes, guilt, and shame can inflict the situations for male survivors

Rape of men is still taboo and is rarely discussed by either heterosexual or gay men. Though the issue has been recognised more in recent times, it remains relatively unreported and in societies that still have a distinctly masculine orientation it requires great courage to admit to being a survivor of rape. Men are afraid of being seen as feminine and weak, or as gay or bisexual.

The social response to sexual violence, and to male survivors of sexual violence, varies greatly from culture to culture. Politics, religion, ethnicity, and moral codes significantly influence attitudes to survivors. Though all traumatic reactions are physically the same regardless of culture, the meaning given to violent events does vary with culture, as do attitudes to the abused and abuser.

This kind of humiliation may feel extremely shameful. In such cases, helpers therefore need to explore with a survivor how he understands and interprets what happened. Survivors may lose all confidence in women. Their self-esteem may collapse. For helpers, it is important to work only with interpretations that are meaningful to the survivor.

Shame is a central emotion that requires careful discussion. Because of their shame, male survivors of sexual violence will often withdraw. To distract from their shame, they may also overtrain, overwork, take drugs, or try to blame someone else (for example, the helper). In reaction to shame, they may direct anger, contempt and disgust at themselves, or those around them.

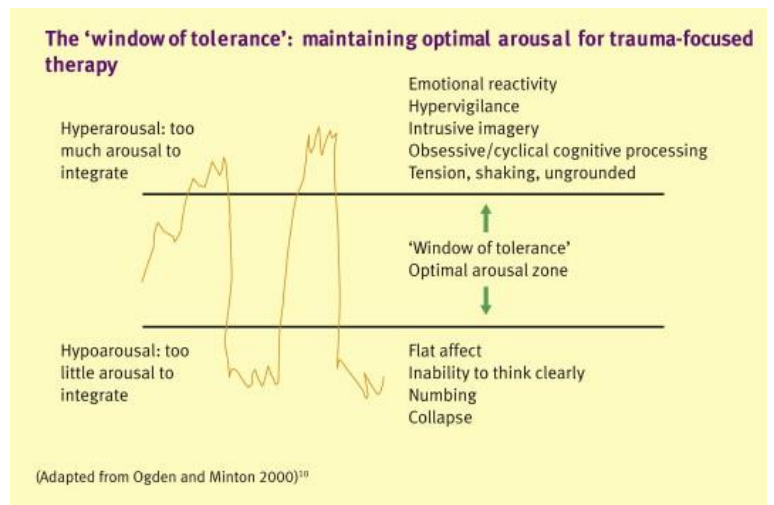
Specifically, boys and men may feel guilt and shame if they have an erection during their abuse. They may feel that this signalled to the abuser that they wanted what was done to them; that their body betrayed them; that they must have liked what happened.

Confronting and addressing this crime is complicated by male stereotypes that assume a man should be able to defend himself and that it is 'unmanly' to be sexually overpowered or humiliated. These ideas help to explain why sexual violence against men and boys has often not been taken seriously, and why male survivors of sexual abuse are stigmatised. The survivors themselves often feel extreme guilt and shame, which causes many to refrain from reporting their sexual abuse. As a result, sexual crimes that are committed in places of detention, during migration, or by combatants, are consistently under-reported and often invisible. In many societies, it is taboo for men to talk openly about their torture, and especially their sexual torture and humiliation. This makes the topic particularly difficult to address, and painful to discuss.

Tools – The metaphor of Window of tolerance

Aim. To introduce a model for understanding our reactions to stress and trauma

The window of tolerance is a therapeutic metaphor that we can use to explain trauma reactions. It is based on the idea that every person has a 'window of tolerance', an amount of arousal or feeling that he can tolerate or manage. The manual and the training provide information through which survivors can understand their trauma reactions. It also provides tools and grounding techniques that can help them to stay within their window or return to their window when they lose control.



The part between the two lines shows the level of activation. All people have a zone or a kind of window in which they are perfectly balanced – where the person is in a state of mind where he able to be present in the situation, able to concentrate and to learn.

If you are above the window of tolerance, over the upper line, we say that you are hyper-activated. This means that your activation is too high. If you are below your window of tolerance, under the lower line, we say that you are hypo-activated. This means you are under-activated; your energy is too low. Traumatic memories can trigger a flight/fight response. This is a hyper-activation reaction, where the activation is extremely high and the body is ready to flee or fight the threats. If we are frightened of something, the body reacts automatically by shutting off certain activities and reinforcing others.

We may, for example know that the heart is beating louder and faster and that we breathe faster. The body feeds blood to the brain, arms and legs. Muscles prepare for fight or flight, while activity in the brain shifts from the parts that help us think through complex problems to the parts that help us to respond to life-threatening situations. If is not possible to fight or flee, for example if you are a small, unprotected child, you will rely on the most basic survival strategy that we have – to freeze. This is the same mechanism that we see in many small animals that become totally inactive when they are attacked. This is a hypoactivation reaction in which activation falls to a minimum: you shut yourself down, become what we call immobilized. Most of us are occasionally high and low on the window of tolerance. When this happens, we often have some strategies that allow us to regulate ourselves back into the window of tolerance before the discomfort becomes too unbearable.

Tools - Use of stories and metaphors when working with survivors

Aim: to understand how and why the manual employs stories and metaphors.

We use stories to describe experiences of sexual abuse and their consequences (trauma reactions). The stories describe how traumatic experiences engender strong psychological reactions. They are stories, but they are based on clinical experience.

When working with people who are under extreme strain, stories can throw light on what a survivor has experienced without obliging him to relive that experience. They describe a different person's experiences and thoughts, but in terms that are recognisable and seem probable.

They can also convey experiences, thoughts and feelings that are difficult to explain or discuss.

It is very important to choose an appropriate metaphor. Always consider the survivor's background. For example, the next metaphor of the bathing duck and the wooden raft might trigger migrants who crossed the sea in an open boat.

The dragonfly

The dragonfly metaphor can help a survivor understand his situation and perhaps improve it. The two wings of the dragonfly symbolise the past and the future. Between the wings represents the present. The survivor can gradually become more present (here and now) and gain more control over his life and his personal resources. The dragonfly's eyes symbolise his ability to look beyond his traumatic experiences and see hope for the future. By this means, and by remembering good memories from his past, the dragonfly learns to use his wings again to fly. Survivors too should be free to determine their life and move in the directions they want.

The dragonfly metaphor is in four parts: (1) Life before the abuse; (2) The abuse; (3) When the survivor experiences triggers and flashbacks; and (4) When the survivor understands trauma reactions, learns to deal with them, and gradually gets better.

In the first part, the past is represented by his kind grandfather, the sound of the river where he grew up, etc. The future is represented by his desire for education, to obtain a good job, to travel, etc. The dragonfly lives in the present, between past and future.

This first part shows that the dragonfly is in a good place, has good memories of the past and hopes and plans for the future. His legs are well planted on the ground, he is stable. It also shows what is taken away from him when he is abused; and that, as he recovers, he will be able to remember what has been good and will be able to plan again for the future. It is true, of course, that not everyone lived a happy life before they were abused; almost all, nevertheless, can recall good and important memories.

The second part shows the dragonfly just after he has been abused. He no longer has hopes or plans, and has lost faith in the future. He no longer feels safe: his legs are no longer solidly on the ground. The dragonfly has become thinner, his wings droop.

The third part focuses on the dragonfly's triggers and flashbacks. His wings have changed. He still has no plans for the future and no longer remembers his past before the trauma incident. In this part, his feelings are hidden behind the hurt he has experienced.



Then a transformation begins. He still experiences triggers and flashbacks: bad memories flood the dragonfly's senses. When he hears someone running behind him, it takes him back to the moment when he was assaulted. But he learns how to help himself to be more connected to the present (the here-and-now).

The fourth part shows the dragonfly finally getting better. He has learned to be in the present, and to deal with his emotions and with triggers and flashbacks. His legs are closer to the ground. He can talk about past, future and present. The dragonfly is now able to fly long distances and confront the future and feels pride because he has already overcome many challenges.

The dragonfly story has a happy ending, which should be a point of discussion with survivors. Let them reflect on their own hopes for the future. They are not dragonflies, so these must be realistic.

Minefield

The minefield metaphor can be used to illustrate reactions to danger and fear. In a minefield there are dangers everywhere, but you do not know exactly where they are. When you cross it, your concentration is intense, the tension extreme. It is only when you have crossed the field and are safe again that you feel the reactions. This metaphor captures the experience and reactions of people who have lived under constant threat. While their life is in danger, they have little room to feel; but when the danger has passed, they are flooded by intense fear and other emotions.

Bathing ducks

Imagine a pool. Down in the depths, you see a duck struggling to swim to the surface. It is stuck (bad memories). You swim down, find the weeds that have entangled it, and free it (conversation, grounding exercises). The duck swims upwards. It is naturally buoyant. It will float to the surface as soon as it is "set free".

Wooden raft

Imagine a man far out at sea on a flimsy wooden raft. The waves hit him, sometimes big waves, sometimes small ones. He floats further and further out but continues to paddle with his hands towards the shore. The effort is exhausting.

Now imagine that the man has oars to row with. He can make better progress and the waves are easier to handle. Imagine too that he has a friend on the raft who rows with him and shows him how to row well. Working together they gradually approach the shore.

Tools – The stories about exposed men and boys

Aim: We tell these stories for the survivor to be able to understand his own experiences and reactions. Some survivors may find it difficult to open up and tell their own story. But to receive help and assistance, they don't necessarily need to share their story. They can recognise their own trauma and reactions through the stories presented here.

Metaphors, stories or images can amaze, inspire or open up new thoughts. They are simple ways and effective tools for teaching and learning as well as therapy. Metaphors and stories contain an implicit meaning. They allow people to go beyond the direct narrative of what they have experienced: they create spaces of imagination that help us see what we have not yet seen, through which we can understand the world better and give our experiences meaning. They help us switch between insight and experience and understand our own reactions and experiences. They show us how things are, how things are connected and can be understood. Because they exist outside us, not inside, they can assist us to talk about issues we find difficult to discuss explicitly.

To make it easier for the helper and the survivor to talk about the difficult topic of abuse, you can use metaphors and/or one of the five stories based on different real people. They have qualities and characteristics that you as a counsellor can recognise from your own work, and that the victim will also be able to relate to. The stories of the five boys and men are the common thread of the handbook, which means that we use their experiences and reactions to explain and interpret when we give examples of different concepts, theories, observations, reactions, tools and approaches. First, we take the part of the stories that shows the background and context, with a focus on the trauma handles and what has happened/is happening. We also emphasise that often it is not a single experience, but perhaps several experiences over time and in a pressured life situation that together make up the trauma. In the stories that follow, particularly difficult events and experiences are highlighted. In this toolbox we tell the story from a Nepalese context. It is important that you choose a story that you believe resonate with the survivor you work with.

THE STORY OF PREM, 15 years old, Nepal

- Experienced several serious losses, including the death of his father in an explosion.
- Experienced abuse by step-father.
- Escaped and was trafficked to sell sex in the big city.
- He was rescued by an organisation and resettled in a centre. He feels guilt for his mother, concern for his younger siblings, but has lost faith in his mother and stepfather. He experienced shock reactions after his father was killed
- Is depressed, sad, unable to eat, solitary, passive.

Prem lived with his family in a village surrounded by hills. His father had a small shop near the market. Prem's mother always encouraged Prem to study and to help his father in the store. He was very close to both his parents.

War became part of their everyday life. The children went to school, the adults worked, the market bustled with people from all over the area. Every afternoon, Prem's father came from the store, and they sat down to eat and talk about the day, the store, the market, and plans for next day. Prem dreamed of becoming a successful businessman.

One day Prem and his father went out to look for some herbs that grew in bushes on the outskirts of the city. About five hundred metres from his home, Prem's father suddenly screamed "Watch out!" and there was a gun shot. Prem's father had been shot by a rebel-sniper. Prem was all alone in the field with his dead father. He felt a great pain in his chest, his feelings were confused, and he did not understand what had happened.

After this incident, Prem and his family went through a very difficult period both financially and socially. Prem was plagued by nightmares and flashbacks about what had happened to his father. Every night he dreamed that his father came from the store, suddenly there was an explosion, and his father disappeared. An enormous anxiety gripped him; he felt scared, he tried to look for his father, but could not find him. He was overwhelmed by frustration and sadness. Every night Prem woke up screaming. He no longer wanted to eat and stopped meeting his friends. He did not want to go to school. His dreams of becoming a trader like his father evaporated. Overwhelmed, he did not want to think about his future anymore.

After a while, the mother remarried. Prem was initially happy to have a new father. But his new stepfather came into his room when he was asleep and abused him sexually. Night after night. His nightmares and traumas, which had weakened for a while, reappeared. Prem again felt desolate, sad and distant, and this time his mistrust affected his relationship with his mother. He preferred to be out of the house and was late going to the market. When it got dark, Prem was afraid to go home but did not know where else to go. His mother saw his pain but did not understand the cause; he thought the old trauma had returned.

Prem decided run away. He remembered that some of the older boys in the market had spoken of a man who could help him leave the village and find a job in the big city. Early one morning, Prem stole some money from his stepfather's savings and took the bus to the big city many hours away. When arriving in the big city, Prem was approached by a man took him to a small hostell in the city. Prem was told to do cleaning and after a while it was expected that he also served the male customers by doing sexual activities with them.

Prem worked in the city trafficked and then he was rescued by an organisation and was placed in a safe house. A nurse gave him a medical examination. The abuse he had suffered was not mentioned.

At the safe house, he was perceived to be a very scared and shy boy that no one could reach; he especially did not want to talk to male employees. Prem kept to his room and stayed in bed most days.

After a while Prem started to attend school. But he did not talk much, looked no-one in the eye and sat by himself at lunch. During lessons, he seemed distant and unconcentrated. At night he continued to have nightmares. When he woke up screaming, he turned on the light and calmed himself down, but he kept his eyes open, sitting in his bed in the stillness of the night. Prem looked nervous every time someone approached him, and if someone came too close, he quickly walked away. In the classroom, his feet were in constant movement, and he often stared out of the windows without paying attention to his teachers.

When Prem returned to his room, he felt lonely and sad. Sometimes he thought of his mother, which made him cry in silence. One day, when Prem tried to walk around the safe house, he saw a group of young people talking and wanted to hang out with them. Then he heard the voice of an older man, which reminded him of his stepfather. He stood paralysed for a few seconds, then fled to his room.

Subsequently, an employee of the safe house knocked on his bedroom-door and gently invited him for a walk. She started to spend more time with him and gradually Prem began to settle in the community.

Prem 15 years old, Nepal – how tools help

Having lost his father and been sexually abused by his stepfather, Prem flees to a large city and from there is helped/saved by an organisation. Struggling to adapt in his new environment, he experiences several traumatic reactions, including mistrust of others, nightmares, flashbacks, dissociation, anxiety, and depression. To deal with these trauma reactions, the helper can:

- Provide psychoeducation for better sleep hygiene.
- Teach grounding exercises
- Help Prem to reassert control over distance and his life.
- Explore the BASIC-Ph model, with an emphasis on physical activity.
- Use the metaphor of the Window of Tolerance.

Prem did not talk much, looked no one in the eye, and ate alone at the centre. He preferred to be at peace by himself. At night he had nightmares, and some nights woke up screaming. He would turn on the light, calm down a little, and sit awake through the night.

A helper at the centre saw all this and invited Prem on regular walks to chat. At first, Prem was reluctant, but the helper explained that daylight and movement would help him to sleep. When he tried it, he found it was good to get out. They talked about how he could change the stories in his nightmares and do grounding exercises, such as the Safe Place exercise. When he woke at night, the exercise create a safe environment in his mind.

The conversations went better when they walked in the fresh air rather than sat in the office. Because Prem's personal boundaries had been invaded by his stepfather, Prem needed to decide

himself how close the helper should be. When they walked, it was easier for Prem to regulate his distance from the helper.

He talked to her first about missing his father. Eventually, he talked about his guilt about his mother and his anxiety to know how she and his siblings were. They decided to write a letter to his mother, to tell her that Prem was safe. Writing the letter made Prem feel less helpless. He felt he could have some influence. He had begun to trust the helper, who learned the story of his abuse when Prem explained to his mother why he had left home.

After they had talked about what happened to him, Prem told the helper that he became nervous when someone came too close to him because it triggered bad memories. He would walk away. In the classroom, he said he often had restless legs and difficulty sitting still. At other times he stared out of the window without being able to pay attention to what the teachers said. To help him manage his agitation and dissociation, the helper taught him some grounding exercises. She explained that other boys in his situation reacted the same way and that these responses to very painful experiences were normal.

The helper showed Prem the Grounding the Body exercise. He pushed himself back in his chair and reminded himself that he was in the present and not in danger. They also explored the window of tolerance, which helped Prem understand the difference between being under- and over-activated. Slowly but surely, he became better acquainted with his reactions and began to understand why he reacted so strongly.

When the helper learned that Prem used to play football, she arranged for him to participate in football training with some of the other boys at the centre and gradually he began to settle into the social community. The centre also possessed exercise equipment and he started weight training, coached by members of the staff. Through these physical activities, Prem became more confident of his body. He felt he was "taking his body back", re-owning it. Since the abuse, he had no feeling that it was his body, he felt his body had been taken from him and he felt no pride, joy, or clarity about his boundaries. He recovered the physical memory of being strong and resilient that he had before. As he gradually regained his skills and learned to control his reactions, he began to be able to concentrate better at school. His taste for education and hope in the future revived, which motivated him further.

Nevertheless, he sometimes has difficult periods. He alternates between feeling anger towards the stepfather and blaming himself for being too trusting. He needs advice from the helper about what he is and is not responsible for, and how to distinguish between people who wish him well and people he needs to guard against. After talking to the helpers, Prem agrees what information will be passed to the housing association he will be transferred to, so that staff there can be understanding and helpful as he works out who he can trust.

Prem is gradually becoming more and more concerned about what his father and mother wanted for him. This motivates Prem to make a success of his schooling and integrate well in his community.

Tools – Grounding exercises

Aim. To understand the importance of stabilizing techniques, grounding exercises, and practice.

Stabilization - to help the survivors to return to their window of tolerance.

- An approach that helps to handle trauma-related reactions
- We want you to teach the survivor how to stabilize herself
- Grounding is a stabilization method for handling strong emotions of fear or flashbacks, when a memory 'takes over' and is experienced as if it happens here and now.

Grounding is an important therapeutic approach for handling dissociation or flashbacks and reducing the symptoms of anxiety and panic. It is important to practice the exercises again and again until the skill becomes automatic and can be called on even during moments of distress. The aim of grounding is to take the survivor out of whatever traumatic moment he is remembering and return into his window of tolerance. Using them, the survivor can reorient his awareness, and focus his attention on the present rather than the past.

Grounding exercises can help a survivor to reconnect:

- With the present moment in time.
- With the here and now.
- With his body and reassert personal control.
- To the safe context of the room in which he is.

They:

- Ground the person by anchoring his body, enabling him to connect to reality.
- Focus on breathing, increasing his awareness of the here and now.
- Relax, creating calm.
- Strengthen the body and waken it from numbness and weakness.

The exercises focus on the five senses that anchor us to our bodies and our surroundings. We need to check whether the survivor feels different and better afterwards. This implies that we also have to do a "scan" before we start the exercise. Since every person is unique, we need to make the tools and exercises as helpful as possible by adapting them to the needs of each survivor.

To discover the effects of these grounding exercises, we can ask these guiding questions:

- What happens in your body? • What happens to your feelings? • What happens to your breathing?
- What happens to your thoughts? • What happens in your heart?

Allow the survivor to decide where you (as helper) can sit, and how close you should be. Establish an escape route for him by suggesting that, if he prefers, you can continue later.

Explain to the survivor that, when he practises grounding exercise, he must make sure to:

- Pick a moment that is peaceful and safe.
- Be calm and ready to learn something new, practise over and over again for some time.

Always remember to invite the survivor to participate in a grounding exercise. Let it be an open invitation. If he does not feel ready to participate in an exercise, respect his wish.

This section describes useful grounding exercises.

Exercise 1: Safe Place

This exercise can help survivors to calm down, subdue overactivation, and find a more balanced emotional state.

While doing this exercise, you can choose to keep your eyes open or closed. 1. Think of a place that makes you feel calm and safe. It may be a place you've been to once, or a place you've seen in a movie, or heard of. It can be at home with yourself or with someone you know, or a place in nature. You can also create a place in your imagination. 2. The place must suit you and your needs. You can constantly adapt it. No two people are alike: this is *your* place. 3. It is a private place that no one else knows about or can find without your permission. You choose it and you decide whether you want to share it with others or not. The place should shut out all the stimuli of the present that are overwhelming and should be comfortable and richly equipped for all your needs. Everything is here that you require to be comfortable. 5. Visualise this place in your imagination and imagine that you are there. Take time to imagine it in detail: its colours, shapes, smells, sounds. Imagine the sunshine, feel the wind and the temperature. Notice what it is like to stand, sit or lie there; feel how your body is in contact with it. Feel what it's like when everyone is safe, everything is fine. In your safe place you can see, hear, feel, smell and feel exactly what you need to feel safe. 6. You can go to this place whenever you want and as often as you want, and just by thinking about it you will feel safer and more calm. 7. You might want or need more than one place. Work on this step by step. Notice what each memory or emotion needs.

Exercise 2: Distinguish Past and Present

This exercise can help survivors to calm down and deal with overactivation.

Recall a mildly unpleasant incident, when you were a little anxious, restless or ashamed. What do you notice in your body? What happens in the muscles? What happens in the stomach? How does your breathing change? Does your heart rate accelerate or decelerate? Do you become hotter or colder? If there are changes in temperature, do they occur everywhere or in specific parts of your body?

- Now turn your attention back to the room you are in. Notice the colour of the wall. Notice details of decoration. What is the temperature? What do you smell?
- Does your breathing change when your attention changes?
- Now try to pay attention to your current surroundings while remembering the mildly unpleasant event. Can you keep your attention on where you are physically now, while remembering the event?
- End this exercise with your attention focused on your current surroundings.

Exercise 3: Handling flashbacks by being attentive

This exercise can help survivors to calm down and deal with overactivation.

[Example]

Right now, I feel _____ (Insert the name of your feeling you have, often fear).

My sensations are that I am _____ (Name three bodily sensations.)

I remember _____ (Give one source of trauma, give no details.)

At the same time, I look around at where I am now: in _____ (Write the current year.)

In _____, (Write your location now.)

I can see _____, (Describe things you see now, in the place you are in.)

Therefore, I know that _____ (Name the trauma again) is not happening now.

Exercise 4: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This exercise can help survivors to reduce their overactivation and find a more balanced emotional state.

When you are scared or anxious, your body becomes tense. This can cause symptoms such as pain in the neck, shoulders, back, tight jaw, tension in the arms and legs. To train yourself in progressive muscle relaxation, tighten specific muscle groups and then release them. Focus on the feelings of tension and then the feelings of relaxation in each muscle group. You should exercise one part of the body at a time: head and face, neck and shoulders, back, abdomen, pelvis, arms and hands, legs and feet. Find your pace.

Instruction: Sit or lie down in a place that is quiet and feels safe. Make sure you will not be disturbed. Tighten and release the tension in each muscle group twice. Allow a short pause between each cycle. When tightening a muscle group, hold the tension for approximately five seconds and relax for approximately ten seconds.

- Start by focusing on your hands. Tighten your fists, feel the muscles tighten for five seconds, and relax for ten seconds. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Do the same thing again.
- Turn to the arms. Pull your forearms towards your shoulders. Feel the tension in the muscles of your upper arms for five seconds, then release; relax for ten seconds. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
- Tighten the triceps (the muscle on the underside of the arm) by stretching your arm straight out and fixing your elbows. Feel the tension in the triceps (five seconds), then let go, relax your arms. Focus on the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat. When your arms are slack, just let them lie next to you, or let them rest on your armrests.
- Concentrate on the face. Tighten the muscles in the forehead by raising the eyebrows as high as you can. Feel the tension in your face and eyebrows, hold and release. Concentrate on the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
- Open your mouth as wide as possible. Hold. Relax. Repeat.
- Focus on the muscles of the neck. Bend your head to your chest. Turn your head slowly to the left, return to the centre line, then put your head back as far as it will go. Return the head to its normal position. Then bend your head to your chest again. This time, turn your head to the right, return to the centre line, then put your head back as far as it will go. Return the head to its normal position. Because the neck often concentrates a lot of tension, repeat this exercise slowly and thoroughly. Throughout, notice the difference between tension and relaxation.
- Focus on the shoulders. Raise them, as if to touch your ears. Hold and feel the tension and let go. Notice the sensations of tension and relaxation in the shoulders. Repeat.

- Focus on the shoulder blades, pulling them backwards as if they could touch each other. Tense them and relax them. Notice the difference. Repeat.
- Stretch your back by sitting very upright, tightly, then let go. Relax. Repeat, focusing on the different experiences of tension and relaxation.
- Tighten your buttocks. Hold and then release the tension. Repeat.
- Hold your breath. Pull in your stomach, tighten it, let go. Repeat and feel the difference in the stomach.
- Focus on the legs. Stretch them, feel the tension in the thigh muscles, hold, and then relax. Feel the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
- Straighten your legs and point your toes back towards you. Feel the tension in your legs; then feel the relaxation when you let go. Repeat.
- Finally, focus on your feet. Point your toes down as far as you can and feel the tension in the muscles of your feet. Tighten and release. Notice the different sensations when you tighten and relax the muscles in your feet.
- Now do a mental scan of the whole body and look for tension that is left. If a muscle group is still tight, return to this area again.
- Now imagine that relaxation spreads throughout your body. The body may feel warm, a little heavier, safe, relaxed.

Exercise 5: Attentive Presence

This exercise can help survivors to calm down and get anchored in the here and now.

- Sit in a comfortable position. Sit with your back straight and let your shoulders relax.
- Choose whether you want your eyes open or closed. If you have your eyes open, try to let your gaze focus approximately half a metre in front of you.
- Notice how the body feels against the surface: feet on the floor, thighs against the seat, etc.
- Notice your breathing. Feel your breath enter and leave your lungs. Choose whether you want to focus on the air in your nostrils or the air in your lungs. Breathe in; breathe out.
- Keep your attention on your breath and follow it in and out.
- Notice what thoughts are flowing through your head. What feelings do you have? Acknowledge the feelings. What are your bodily sensations right now? Feel for any tension or discomfort.
- Every time you notice something else entering your consciousness, notice it ("greet it"), and kindly but firmly bring your attention back to your breath.

Try as well as you can to see your thoughts as mental events, perhaps by naming them. Accept all thoughts, images and feelings that arise. Try not to push any thoughts away or become involved in them. Leave them alone and concentrate on your breathing. If your attention is distracted one hundred times, your only task is still to return to your breathing. If you have thoughts like "I can't do this very well" or "this was weird", notice them and return your attention to your breathing. If you need the help of a picture, imagine that your consciousness is the sky and that thoughts, feelings and sensations are clouds moving across it. For some, it will be difficult to focus on breathing. It is possible to choose another focus, such as looking at an object, listening to a sound, or repeating a specific movement (for example, walking).

Exercise 6: Squeeze Hug

This exercise soothes people who are upset. It can help a survivor who is in a state of 'freeze' (numb) to concentrate on the here-and-now. Cross your arms in front of you. With your right hand hold your left upper arm. With your left hand hold your right upper arm. Gently squeeze and pull your arms inwards. Hold the clamp for a while. Find the right pressure for you right now. Hold the tension and let go. Then squeeze again for a while and release. Stay there a moment.

Exercise 7: Reorientation to the present

This exercise is helpful for a survivor who is a state of 'freeze' (numb). The helper assists the survivor to use their senses to re-orient themselves in the present and feel safe. The helper says:

- Look around and name three things you see.
- Look at one thing (a thing, a colour, etc.). Tell yourself what you see.
- Name three things you hear.
- Listen to a sound (music, voices, other sounds). Tell yourself what you hear.
- Name three things you can touch.
- Touch something (different textures, different objects).
- Tell yourself what you know. Notice your state of mind.
- Do you feel that you are more present in the room or less present after doing the exercise?
- Do you feel calmer or more energetic?

Exercise 8: Grounding the Body

This exercise can help a survivor to subdue his overactivation and find a more balanced emotional state. It can also help a survivor who is in "freeze mode" to re-enter the tolerance window.

Sit on a chair. Feel your feet touch the ground. Tread the ground with your left foot on, then your right. Do it slowly: left, right, left. Do this several times. Feel your contact of your thighs and buttocks with the seat of the chair (5 seconds). Notice if your legs and buttocks now feel more present, or less. Slowly extend your spine and notice if it affects your breathing (10 seconds). Move your attention towards the hands and arms. Clasp your hands together. Do it in a way that feels comfortable for you. Clasp your hands and feel their strength and temperature. Unclasp them, take a break, and clasp your hands again. Release and rest your arms.

Now focus on the eyes. Look around the room. Find something that tells you that you are here, in this room. Remind yourself that you are here-and-now, and that you are safe. Notice how this exercise affects your breathing, presence, mood and strength.

Exercise 9: Feel the Weight of your Body

This exercise helps survivors who are in "freeze mode" to focus on the present. It activates muscles in the upper body and legs, which gives a feeling of physical strength. When we are overwhelmed, our muscles often go from extreme tension to collapse; they change from a state of active defence (fight and flight) to submission. The muscles become abnormally relaxed (hypotonic). When we are in contact with our own strength and can control our posture, it is easier to master our emotions and cope with reactions to previous experiences as well as feelings of being overwhelmed.

- Make yourself comfortable in a sitting position.
- Place your feet on the ground and feel the sensation. Pause for five seconds.
- Feel the weight of your legs. Feel that sensation for five seconds.
- Raise your feet gently and slowly, left foot then right foot, left, right, left, right.
- Feel your buttocks and thighs where they touch the seat of the chair. Feel the sensation for five seconds.
- Feel your back against the back of the chair. Stay in that position and notice and difference in how you feel.

Exercise 10: Noticing and reducing anger using “the window of tolerance”

As a survivor, your anger and frustration can sometimes be caused by very real and inescapable problems. Not all anger is misplaced, and often it’s a healthy, natural response to these difficulties. Often, the most helpful thing to do is not to focus on finding the solution, but rather on how you handle and face the problem.

Here, the “window of tolerance “can be useful. The area between the two lines shows the optimal activation level. All people have an area or window where they are in balance, where their state of mind allows them to be present, concentrate, and learn new things.

If the person is above the window of tolerance, above the top line, we say he is overactivated. This means that he cannot cope.

Escape and fight are survival responses and are examples of overactivation. The heart beats harder and faster, breathing is more rapid. More blood flows to the brain, and brain activity suspends complex processing and focuses on the threat. The body is highly energised.

What helps getting him into the window and dealing with anger varies from person to person, and situation to situation. If he can approach it with his best intentions and efforts and make a serious attempt to face the anger head-on, he will be less likely to lose patience and fall into all-or-nothing thinking, even if the problem does not get solved right away.

If he is going above the window, and experiencing a fight-response, he can practice visualizing the “window of tolerance” when he feels the anger arising. In advance, you as a helper and the survivor can make a plan of what he can do to get back into the window.

Some examples can be:

- Removing himself from the situation and go for a walk or a run to achieve a shift in mental and physical state.
- Slowly counting backwards from 10 and focusing on his breathing.
- Doing a grounding exercise, for example see **exercise 4, called Progressive Muscle Relaxation**.
- Having a squeeze ball available for channelling the negative energy.

Tools – To be a good helper

Aim. Being aware of your qualities as a helper

What does it mean to be a good helper? Be aware of the tools you as a helper already have.

Consider the following questions:

- What are the qualities of a good helper in your context?
- How can you support without the survivor having to tell his story
- Do men and women help in different ways?
- What can you say about yourself as a helper?
- What do you do when you meet a survivor who is overwhelmed by emotions – by sadness, shame, guilt, anger, anxiety or numbness?
- Is it sometimes difficult to help a survivor? What makes it difficult to help?

When working with survivors

- Listening, respecting and acknowledging painful reactions
- Communicate that you «see» him
- Let the survivor own his “own” story
- Create safe place
- Stabilizing by being here and now oriented
- Grounding exercises
- Relaxation and energising exercises
- Psycho-educational approaches

Elements that help a survivor talk about traumatic events

- Emphasise that he is free to talk or not, and he can stop whenever he wants.
- Especially if he is easily overwhelmed when he talks, or struggles to find words, he may find it easier to write his story, or draw it.
- Help him to use the past tense (“he hit me”) rather than the present tense (“he hits me”), to emphasise that what happened is past. When you summarise at the end, do so in the past tense. “You told me that two years ago you experienced ...”
- Help him to organise his memories and structure his story. Trauma memories are often chaotic and incomplete. It can help to create a timeline and establish factual anchor points. “Where did this happen?” “When did this happen?” “How long did this last?”
- Do not ask him to describe thoughts or feelings or sensory experiences from the trauma event in detail. Details can be very triggering. They may be important in trauma treatment but are not necessary to tell.
- Respond when the survivor blames himself or expresses shame. Say that his reactions are normal, that he did what he could to survive, that you do not think he has reason to feel guilt. Emphasise at the end of the conversation that you do not think badly of him because of what he has said.
- Be empathetic. Do not hesitate to say that his experiences sound painful and difficult but try to avoid reacting strongly emotionally yourself. Make clear at the end of the conversation that you can cope with what he has said, though it hurts to hear it.

Tools –Taking care of yourself as a helper

Aim. Being aware of secondary traumatization and why/how to take care of yourself

Taking care of yourself as a helper

Talking to survivors of trauma also affects the helper. For all helpers, empathy is an essential aspect of good help. This is also a source for **compassion fatigue, vicarious traumatising or secondary traumatic stress (STS)**. How are helpers to manage their own stress? Early recognition and awareness are crucial to be resilient to these symptoms. Awareness of this is important for workers in areas of conflict and disaster, and in extreme environments such as these, people may be more vulnerable to secondary traumatising.

We also know that professionals under this kind of stress may be at risk to perform less efficiently and not perform as they would normally do. Even large organizations that have the resources and knowledge about this particular kind of stress may have reduced capacity to deal with or take care of the affected personnel. As for local helpers, there may often not be any support or resources at all to deal with this. On HHRI's thematic page for helping the helpers we have gathered links that can be useful for all persons engaged in this kind of important but heavy work.

Warning signals that can occur after a prolonged period of time on a job.

- Wounded ideals and cynicism
- Feeling unappreciated or betrayed by the organization
- Loss of spirit
- Grandiose beliefs about own importance
- Heroic but reckless behaviours
- Neglecting one's own safety and physical needs (not needing breaks, sleep, etc.)
- Mistrusting colleagues and supervisors
- Antisocial behaviour
- Excessive tiredness
- Inability to concentrate and Inefficiency
- Symptoms of illness or disease
- Sleep difficulties
- Excessive use of alcohol, tobacco or drugs.

It is important to **develop strategies to cope** with situations that might cause vicarious trauma-reactions. What helps you to take your mind off your work or your thoughts? How can you rest your body as well as your mind? Does an activity inspire you or put you in a better mood? If you find it useful, you can also use the grounding techniques that you teach survivors. Helpers who have been personally exposed to GBV have additional reasons to be stressed. At the same time, their experience can give them a special understanding of the hardships and vulnerability of survivors, and this should be recognised and valued. Like survivors, helpers need support groups. If possible, meet regularly with other helpers to discuss your experiences and feelings, or do things together. If there are too few helpers in your area to create a support group, find friends and other people you trust with whom you can share your feelings without breaking the confidentiality of the survivors you are helping.