

Reclaim Your Self

a manual for survivors of sexual victimization

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Introduction

Recovery from the effects of sexual victimization is possible. This manual has proven itself to be a valuable source of support and assistance to many people. We have strived to make it practical, easily read and respectful.

Very best regards to all users of this electronic manual. I welcome your comments. To the best of my ability I will reply to all email. I love to hear from you, though I cannot provide counselling.

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Is This Manual For You?

If you have been sexually abused or sexually assaulted and you are a teenager or an adult, keep reading. This manual is for you when you decide that you want to do something about the pain, depression, anxiety, frustration, panic or terror that you experience in the aftermath of your victimization experiences — whether they just happened or whether they happened a long, long time ago. Perhaps you do not see a connection between your disturbing emotions and the sexual victimization in your experience. It might be worth your while to read this manual anyway. Make up your own mind about what it offers.

How This Manual Is Organized

This manual is deliberately organized into small sections, making it easy to find the information you need when you want it. There is a logical progression to this manual, and it is a good idea to cruise through it once so that you get the drift of it as a whole. Once you know where everything is, then you will be able to find things fairly easily, as you please. After all, pleasing you is the main purpose here.

Is This Manual A Substitute For Professional Assistance?

This manual may be a substitute for professional assistance some of the time. On the other hand, it is a good idea to find the kind of assistance you need during the tougher times. For instance, if you are in danger, find help and find it fast. Am I coming through loud and clear? If you are involved in a court action against an offender, it is best to have assistance. Victim services workers, sexual assault counsellors, police officers and supportive friends are a necessity. That's a tough path to walk, so get some company.

It's also a good idea to have assistance from a qualified professional if you are being overwhelmed by disturbing thoughts or feelings. There are ways through them — that's what this manual is all about. Keep in mind that getting some good coaching is one of the most helpful things that you can do to overcome emotional obstacles.

This manual is just one resource for you — not a complete answer. Get busy and connect with the resources that will be helpful to you. Real, live people-resources are the best, and among all of the people-resources that you can have on your side, you are the best one of all. By the time you finish reading this manual, I hope that notion will be indelibly etched upon your mind. Each of the rest of us people-resources have our own ways of doing things — some of which may be helpful to you and some of which may not.

Changing Habits & The Value Of The Lazy Approach

A lot of what you will be reading in this manual has to do with changing habits — looking at things in a new or different way. There's a good reason for this, and that is the value of being creatively lazy. Most of us don't like to work hard and accomplish little. I enjoy working hard if I am really accomplishing something. Otherwise, I'd rather do nothing at all. I definitely don't like spinning my wheels. Here's the thing: We tackle most tasks in a habituated way rather than searching for the simplest, the easiest and the most elegant way to do things. There is lots of opportunity to spin wheels in the work of recovering from sexual trauma. Before jumping into a project like that, let's take some time to figure things out so that success comes as quickly and as easily as possible.

By way of illustrating the value of laziness, let's pretend that you are asked to add up all of the numbers between 1 and 100. An intimidating request? Hey, I'll even let you use a calculator if you want to! How long would this task take you? How much of your energy would you use? How bored would you get?

I assume that you would apply your learned, habituated thinking to this problem. You would probably add columns of numbers, and then add columns of sums, and so on. It would take you quite a while, even with a calculator — and, it would be a boring experience. Habituated ways of doing things are often boring, tiring and inefficient.

Let's suspend the habituated approach to this problem and seek the creatively lazy solution. The task is to find the sum of the following numbers: $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + \dots + 97 + 98 + 99 + 100$.

Notice that the first and last numbers add up to 101. Notice that the second and second-last numbers add up to 101. And the third and third-last numbers also add up to 101. No kidding.

Check it out:

That is, $1 + 100 = 101$

$2 + 99 = 101$

$3 + 98 = 101$

... and so on

In the numbers between 1 and 100, there will be exactly 50 such pairs, with each pair adding up to 101. Therefore, by multiplying 50 times 101 you will have the correct answer. (It is 5,050.) With a little creative laziness, it's no sweat. By breaking from habit, we find a method that is fast, elegant and more fun than the traditional way to add numbers that we learned in public school.

It satisfies our philosophy of creative laziness.

In solving the problem of disturbing emotions, we can use up enormous resources of time and energy accomplishing very little. It is worth it to take some time to experiment, to investigate and to break out of habituated, traditional approaches to these problems. There are methods of tackling emotional distress and disturbance which are quicker than others. Just as traditional thinking leads us down an arithmetical path of boredom and excessive expenditure of time and energy, so can traditional, habituated thinking lead us down the same trail, when it comes to solving our emotional problems. We need to get creative and very lazy.

There is no point in going after memories of traumatic experiences, if the end result is just to be able to replay the pain, again and again and again. Why bother? Our goal is the release from pain, not the ability to recreate it endlessly. In order for you to be able to do that, you need some basic knowledge and skills — the right tools for the job. You then need to have practiced with them and to have experienced success with them. Once you have done that, then you can go after the tough stuff, with confidence, skill and effectiveness. So, get lazy.

The Knowledge of Professionals

When you go to a professional for help, they use the knowledge and skills that they have learned up to that point in their experience. Is there any reason for you to not know those things too? No there isn't. As a matter of fact, you are probably better off knowing some of what they know, so you can do it yourself as much as possible.

Self-reliance and empowerment are the key words here. This manual is largely about the things that people like counsellors know and do. Understanding the theories they work from and the techniques they use is empowering. Not knowing is dependency. Right?

Sometimes professionals are much better at helping emotionally injured citizens than helping themselves. When one of you is constantly bummed out, we say that you are suffering from depression. We then try to help you with your depression. On the other hand, when we get that way, we call it burnout, and we rearrange our schedules. Sometimes we hide our knowledge

from ourselves.

So, spend some time getting through the theoretical stuff that follows. There is no need for it to remain solely in the realm of the professionals. It is more useful if you too have some basic theory and knowledge. It's easier for us too, and really, the ideal of the lazy, elegant approach is good for professionals too.

Keep in mind that this manual is only one approach. Become your own expert and use the rest of us as a support crew. In truth, we all wish that we had the right answers for every bit of human suffering — and all of us are midstride in our own learning.

This manual is the product of numerous hours with people who have been traumatized by one thing or another. Many were sexual assault victims. Some of them were offenders. Some were traumatized by other things. It is also the product of many hours with professional human service folks. I've been on the lookout for those who were getting the best results. What kinds of things did they know? What ideas did they use in their work? Why did those ideas work? How did they put them into practice? What really makes the difference?

This manual is the summation of a body of experience in which the most profound teachings came from citizens who healed themselves, sometimes in spite of my efforts. Please don't take this manual as the one true way. It isn't. On the other hand, give the ideas a fair try. *Come to your own understanding.* That's the gig here.

Shit Happens

Let's get down to basics. Shit happens. Bad or difficult things happen to all of us some of the time. As a result, we feel rotten some of the time. Sometimes we end up feeling rotten a lot of the time. Survivors of sexual abuse and assault often fall into this category.

It looks like this:



This diagram illustrates how emotions seem to work. Something happens and we feel good or bad, happy or unhappy, angry, sad, exhilarated, depressed or whatever. That is, things that happen to us, will determine how we feel. This notion is imbedded right into our language, as in: "You made me angry! or, I'm depressed because of" We believe that it is things outside of us that cause us to feel a certain way.

Now hear this: *External events don't cause emotions.*

This may seem to be a wonky kind of statement, but don't worry. An explanation is coming.

It is a darn good thing that this is not how feelings really work, because if it was, then we would be doomed to only feel good when good stuff was happening. We would be emotionally chained

to the events that go on around us. Our lives would have to magically become free of tough, shitty situations for us to be happy most of the time. That sounds like mission impossible, since as we all know, shit happens some of the time. It certainly looks like bad events cause us to feel bad. Again, this is not the case. Keep reading.

Feelings Are Like Water

Water has no shape of its own. It will always take on the shape of its container. If you put water into a cup, the water will have precisely the same shape as the cup. Water in a bathtub, takes on the shape of the bathtub. If water is flowing in a river, its shape will be that of the river bed and banks. In a wine bottle with a green tint, water will acquire the shape and the tint of the bottle.

Feelings are the direct experience of your self. Just like water, feelings don't have a shape of their own. They are your life energies, flowing through your being in every second of your life. If you push them away because they are tough or because you have learned to suppress them, then you will feel less alive than you would if you allowed them to be experienced and expressed. Of course, the kicker here is that some feelings seem to be sent from hell. They aren't, but we're getting ahead of ourselves.

Being like water, which takes on the shape and colour of its container, feelings/emotions provide a whole bunch of different experiences. These experiences have their own names: joy, love, hate, anger, frustration and despair, to name but a few of them. These emotions are your life energies taking on different shapes — the same stuff, molded and coloured into different experiences. What shapes and colours our emotional energies into depression, anger, happiness, joy, sadness, desperation, panic and terror and so on? Thoughts and thought patterns do this.

For example, “In fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.” The crew of the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria were scared silly that they would sail off the edge of the world. Their thought patterns convinced them that the earth was flat and had edges. They believed that they were in terrible danger. Even though they were in no real risk of sailing off the edge of the earth, their minds generated thought-forms which shaped and coloured their life energies into fear and panic. Major bummer.

Now, memorize this:

Feelings are shaped and
coloured by thought patterns,
not by the things that happen.

This is the cornerstone concept of this manual. Understanding how thought patterns work, and how to work with them is obviously very important in the task of recovering from sexual victimization. You are not at the mercy of what has happened to you. You are not at the mercy of

what goes on around you. You are at the mercy of your habituated thinking.

Your feelings or emotions are your life energies dressed up in the clothing of thought patterns. The unfortunate fact is that sexual trauma has a way of warping some of your thought patterns. It is these thought patterns which shape your emotional energies into disturbing feelings like depression, shame, anxiety and terror.

The good news is that with knowledgeable practice you can undo much of this troublesome thinking. Before beginning that task, let's continue filling out your theoretical base.

In the case of Chris Columbus and his crew, their faulty belief that the earth was flat became a fear-producing mechanism. Their thought patterns shaped their emotions in every moment, just as yours and mine do.

When sexual victimization occurs, traumatic thinking may occur also. It is the persistence of patterns of traumatic thinking that actively causes shame, depression and sadness to continue for months and years — *not the event itself*. Habituated, traumatic thinking patterns are the tragic result of trauma. Okay.

Therefore, if you have been sexually victimized in the recent or distant past, and you are emotionally suffering right now, your suffering is not caused by the event, but by the thinking patterns that are active right in this moment. Traumatic emotions will be re-experienced each time the traumatic patterns of thinking are activated. Try to understand this. It's the key. These thinking patterns are what we are after. So stay tuned

Thinking Becomes Habituated

Just as your approach to adding the numbers between 1 and 100 is based upon habit, so is your thinking about yourself, other people and life in general. Without even trying, our thinking falls into habits. Some thinking patterns really work against us. Better thinking can also become habituated and entrenched. That is the good news and it is what you can achieve. Better thinking in small steps is the path to release from overpowering, rotten feelings.

Mental Pollution

All of us think in habituated patterns, many of which are completely loony. We are going to look at two basic types of troublesome thinking patterns. Between them, there is a phenomenal amount of mischief and misery created out of good emotional energy. They are:

- Faulty beliefs
- Thinking errors

Both of these easily become habituated and are responsible for most of the pain and suffering in our world. They can be described in one simple term: *mental pollution* — by far the most serious kind of pollution facing us. Mental pollution is widely prevalent, actively shaping our life

energies into all sorts of chaotic, disturbing emotions. It also has a whole lot to do with determining how we behave. Once the human race sorts out the mental pollution problem, then we will be able to solve all of the other kinds of pollution problems, in pretty short order.

Certain kinds of mental pollution are part of the experience of sexual victimization. They show up as the self-sabotaging, self-injuring emotions that you may be experiencing: shame, depression, anger, and so on. This manual is an anti-pollution document. It advocates mental pollution control and mental hygiene.

A thinking error is an error of logic. Example: A common, garden variety thinking error goes like this:

"When I put you down, I get bigger, better and more wonderful as a person."

We all know this one don't we? We have been fed this piece of crooked logic by our fear-based culture since we were children. It is completely illogical and yet, it is widely used in our world.

Clearly, we don't get any larger, more competent or more wonderful in any way when we put someone down. It just doesn't happen.

These bits of mental pollution get into our heads and we repeat them, over and over. We come to believe these thoughts, but it is simply internal propaganda. Our ability to propagandize ourselves is amazing. We could teach the CIA and the old KGB a thing or two. Thinking errors are incredibly habit forming.

The Double Whammy

Let's take a second look at the process of getting upset feelings when something difficult happens — when shit happens. The common misconception is, as we have discussed, that events outside of you cause you to be upset on the inside. That false notion looks like this:

Shit happens → I feel rotten

And here's a diagram of what really happens:

Shit happens → I think in repetitive habituated patterns → I feel rotten

It is the thinking patterns which shape and contort emotional energies into the disturbing feelings: depression, despair, shame and such. Consider this: Some of the time, all of us have a bad or irritating thing happen which does not bother us at all — water off a duck's back. At other times, the least little nuisance thing will send us off into anger, despair, tantrums or mega-pouting. Get it? It is not the external event that determines our emotional states. It is the

habituated, entrenched thinking patterns — many of which are virtually saturated with mental pollution.

The difference is not in the events, but in the kind of thought patterns that are happening in that precise moment. We don't have to wait until the next life to get the consequences of our mental pollution delivered into our experience. It's instant karma, folks. No waiting on this kind of thing.

Figure it out. If a bad event happens, we not only have to deal with it as best we can, but we also get additionally punished by any active mental pollution (thinking errors and faulty beliefs) that are happening that day — the double whammy — both barrels at once — two miseries for the price of one. Since thinking errors and faulty beliefs tend to be repetitive, we end up in self-persecution, self-sabotage and self-damning, in addition to the misfortune of the difficult event.

Let's pretend that you lost a hundred dollars. In that instance, you have to cope with the problem of losing a sizeable amount of cash and all the things you wanted to spend it on. If you also get yourself depressed or immobilized with anger, then you are experiencing the infamous *double whammy*.

Being sexually victimized is a traumatic, invasive, undeserved misfortune. The double whammy occurs because of the thinking which happens in response to this experience. When these patterns are habituated, they recreate the same emotional state every time they occur. The past does not do this to the present. Habituated thoughts in the present do this. The good news, once again, is that we don't have to be at the mercy of things that happen or that have happened. Learning how to do that is what we are after.

Realistically Speaking ...

Realistically speaking, it may not be possible to become emotionally smooth and open no matter what happens, but who would want to? That condition sounds kind of boring. The goal is to reduce an emotional disturbance that would be an 8, 9 or 10 (on a scale of 1 to 10) to a 4, 5 or 6, and then even lower, on purpose!

The realistic goal is to be able to bring yourself out of depression, at will, and to alter the depression-causing mental pollution. The goal is to stop being disabled by overpowering emotional disturbances, and to enjoy your life as much as possible, no matter what happens.

It's No Shame To Have Lice

I will admit that it has been a royal drag to have been discovering the full extent of my own mental pollution. I am still shovelling it out, and by the by, can you spare a bulldozer? *It's no shame to have lice, but it's a damned shame if you keep them.* By the same token, it's no shame to have mental pollution, but it is a damned shame to hang on to it.

Flash Bulletin: Try not to persecute yourself for having mental pollution. That is another double whammy.

It stands to reason that all of us will have an interesting collection of mental pollutants — the thinking errors and faulty beliefs that create our own personal hells-on-earth, for we live in a world noted for its dysfunction, illogic and irrationality. We cannot help but absorb some of it, and we are not usually taught the basics of mental housekeeping — it's almost unheard of. All of us know about dental hygiene and most of us practice it, brushing our teeth once, twice or thrice a day. How many of us regularly brush the mental plaque from our minds? Not a common practice unfortunately.

The mental housekeeping skills that you are going to learn in this manual are not one-time practices. As with teeth-brushing, it takes regular practice, daily, for the best results to show. It makes lousy sense to brush your teeth for a couple of hours once every month. Mental housekeeping skills are similar. A little practice daily adds up to a lot in the long run. It's the lazy way — and it is very effective.

About Memories

Memories of traumatic events are events in the present. When you remember an incident of sexual victimization, it acts like a shit-happens type of event in the present. The truth is, that memories will not go away, and as you gradually recover from your victimization experiences, they will probably become clearer and more detailed.

Fortunately, it is not the memory, but how you automatically think about the memory that causes the distress emotionally.

Accompanying a memory are all of the traumatic ways of thinking that happened when the victimization was occurring. You can't alter the past, but you can help your own thinking about the past to mature. That is the ticket.

As a general rule of thumb, it is important to deal with the memories of your victimization — to bring them up on purpose and talk about them — hopefully with someone who is tuned into that kind of thing. Professionals call this process *debriefing*.

Now, there is no point in bringing up bad memories just so that you can re-live and re-experience the bad times. It is best to hold off on this until you have developed some skills to handle the traumatic thinking patterns that are attached to the memories. Get prepared for this by developing the ability to track down and to work with common garden variety thinking errors and faulty beliefs. Practice your skills on small fare first, before going after the tough stuff.

Some support groups for survivors get stuck in re-playing traumatic experiences over and over again. Others successfully move past that stage. When you decide to go through the pain of remembering, it is better to be able to move forward, to work towards altering habituated, traumatic thinking. Recalling bad experiences can otherwise be like picking at scabs, again and again. Not much healing happens, and it is definitely not the creatively lazy approach.

You And Your Mental Set

You arrive into each moment of your life with the complete collection of all of your beliefs about yourself, other people and life in general. You also arrive into every moment with your habituated ways of thinking about what is happening. This collection of beliefs and thinking habits is called your *mental set*. You can't leave home without it.

Therefore, you do not experience life in an unbiased manner, but on the basis of how your mental set is constructed. Mental set growth is what we are interested in most of all. Let's consider how beliefs work.

A belief is something that you just take for granted, usually without even thinking about it. Take your belief in gravity for example. You take gravity for granted without thinking twice about it. When you got up this morning, did you question your belief in gravity and wonder if it would hold true for the whole day? When we believe something, we tend to not think critically about it. We usually do the opposite. We tend to automatically defend our beliefs when they are challenged.

Sexual victimization can leave you with a complex collection of beliefs, which are just taken for granted, unchallenged and possibly even unrecognized. A common one goes something like this: "I'm really a worthless piece of garbage." Suppose that you are convinced that this is true. What kind of shape will this thought create for your emotional energies? You guessed it — depression or shame. The effect of belief is increased when it is repeated, over and over again, in your mind, self-propagandizing yourself into an emotional hell.

I know a young person who had the following belief: "I'm an asshole." He would say this to himself almost every time he didn't do something perfectly. Together, we estimated how often in a day that he repeated that belief to himself — around 30 times a day. That's over 10,000 times a year! No wonder he didn't feel very good about himself much of the time.

Your mental set is the sum of all of the habituated, entrenched beliefs and thought patterns that you use. It also acts as a kind of sieve or filter. Messages from other people that are consistent with it will be easily accepted. Messages that are not consistent with it are apt to be rejected or not taken seriously.

If you think highly of yourself, you are less likely to take an insult to heart. However, if you think poorly of yourself, you will not only take a put down to heart, but support it by muttering to yourself: "Yeah, I knew it all along, no one likes me. I'm such a loser." Bingo! Your emotional energies take on the shape of those thoughts — instant downer.

Are you getting the idea that your mental set is where the action really is? Good. You are on the right track.

Your Thinking Grows Up

Many of the features of your mental set originated in your childhood, before you developed the ability to think as you do now — abstractly. Abstract thinking begins to develop in adolescence and really comes into its own in adulthood. The way you thought as a child is very different from how you think now. If you want to learn more about this, read a book on cognitive development.

I prefer to make the point by illustration.

Suppose that I made the following rude remark to you: “You are nothing but a stupid jerk!” At your current age, you might get angry or annoyed with me, but you would be able to figure out that if I call you a jerk, it doesn’t make you one. You are able understand that you are not a jerk because I say so, that I am a rude person, and that is my problem, not yours. Being able to think through that kind of situation requires an ability to reason abstractly. You did not have that ability when you were a small child.

Imagine that you are only five years old. Imagine that I said the same rude comment to you: “You are nothing but a stupid jerk!” Being a small child and lacking the ability to reason through this kind of message, you would be apt to believe it and take it completely to heart.

Childhood is a time of mental vulnerability because children lack the abstract reasoning ability of adolescents and adults. Adolescence is the transition period. Some nuisance faulty beliefs about ourselves, others and the world will become established during our childhood years, before the onset of the ability to reason as an adult. Once established, these thinking patterns will not necessarily fall away as our ability to think grows up. Such is the staying power of habits.

As we pass through our teen years, developing abstract reasoning skills, no one takes us aside for a time-out to check out the degree of mental pollution acquired during our mentally vulnerable childhood years. Some of the troublesome thinking patterns and faulty beliefs of childhood will persist in even extremely intelligent people. The good news is that it is never too late to begin the task of mental house-keeping, and helping your thinking to grow up.

Your Mental Set And Your Behaviour

The beliefs of your mental set shape and colour your emotional energies, and they do a whole lot more than that. They also have a lot to do with your behaviour. All of the ways that you act, all of the time, tend to be congruent with your mental set. In other words, you tend to stay in character.

If you believe you are a worthless piece of garbage, then your behaviour will demonstrate that belief. If you believe that you are capable, then you will express that in your behaviour. The diagram below shows the relationship between your mental set and all of the ways that you will typically behave.



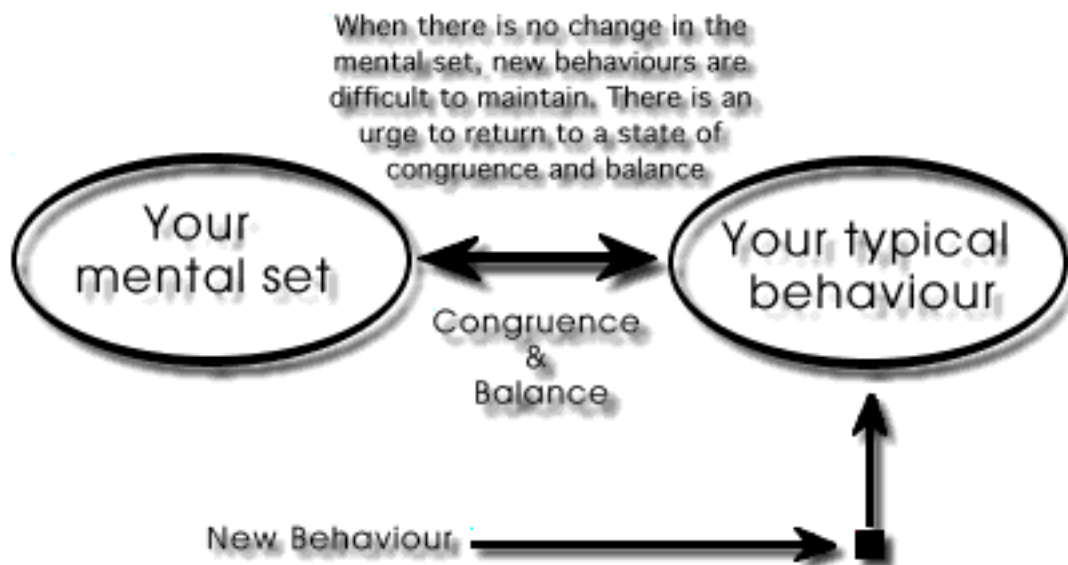
This system is standard equipment for human beings. We defend the beliefs of our mental sets, even if they are illogical. We behave in ways which confirm these beliefs — that provide the evidence for them. It can be a prison, because it is so darn convincing when we actually go out

and set up the situations to prove that our beliefs are based in reality. We try to create the evidence to fit the belief.

For example, to prove how unlovable we are, we will act obnoxiously to attract the feedback that proves it. We hang onto our thinking-feeling-behaving prison as if it were prized real estate. "I knew you didn't really care about me!"

When you try to change your behaviour, do you find that you slip back into your old habits all too often? Do you find it hard to change, even though you start out with great resolve? Here's what is going on. Your actions (behaviour) and your mental set seek balance and congruence. They are two aspects of the same thing, with your mental set being the inside view and your repertoire of behaviours being the outside view. Simply changing behaviour causes a great deal of stress by throwing this system out of balance. Stress is generated when changing a habituated behaviour. There is an automatic urge to restore the system into balance and congruence, by returning to the behaviour which fits the self-image in your mental set.

The key to change is including the mental set as well as behaviour in the change process, so that the whole system evolves, not just the behavioural part. Doing that is what this manual is about.



Your mental set, your emotions and your behaviour are interrelated. It is a very complex system. Being advocates of creative laziness, we aren't going to try to tackle the whole complicated shmeer.

What we will look for are the key threads which hold the unhappiness together. Consider it to be a guerrilla venture into mental pollution. We are going to isolate a few key thinking errors and faulty beliefs — the ones that cause most of the problems. By keeping your efforts simple and bite-sized, and by choosing the right bits of mental pollution to go after, you will progress most rapidly. As the cliché says: "You can eat a mountain of zucchini — one bite at a time."

The Truth About Your Healing Potential

In some circles, there is an idea that if you are sexually victimized, then you must suffer for the rest of your life. This is not true. You will suffer only as long as habituated, self-injuring thoughts remain free to do their mischief. When you decide to no longer just sit there and take it, then you will have begun to heal.

Can you recall a time that you were physically injured — say a scraped knee while biking as a child? Okay. Can you recall the excruciating pain of that moment? Is it difficult for you to hold those memories in your mind? Probably not. You can recall the incident and even the terrible physical pain of the moment, but you are not re-traumatized by the memory.

Let's pretend that your community severely disapproves of scraped knees, that it is considered to be an extremely shameful thing — indicating that the injured person is some kind of lowlife. You would have hidden your injury, avoided medical care and kept the knowledge of the injury a secret for years. You would have covered your injury when going out into the community and you would have experienced shame. In short, there would be traumatic thinking associated with the memory of the injury. This traumatic thinking would be activated just by the memory of the injury.

Many young children are traumatized by injuries as slight as a scraped knee. Their childlike thinking tells them that something horrible has happened. Their emotional energies then take on this shape — fear and panic. Since scraped knees are not shameful in our world, your thinking about this kind of injury has grown up with you. It has not been suppressed under a blanket of shame, fear and secrecy. If you scraped your knee today, it would hurt physically as usual, but your grown-up thinking would process the event in an age appropriate manner. You would not be panicked.

Because you've had the opportunity to allow your thinking to grow up, the fear and panic thinking has not become habituated, as far as knee scraping goes at least. Scraped knees are a temporarily painful nuisance, not a tragedy.

Being able to recall incidents of sexual victimization with only modest discomfort is a realistic goal. It is possible to downgrade sexual victimization from being a life-altering, never-ending trauma, to difficult experiences that once happened, that are not traumatic to recall. I kid you not. This is possible.

The Truth Shall Set You Free

Faulty beliefs and thinking errors remain effective, doing their damage, up until the exact moment that you truly see right through them, and with your own grown-up intelligence understand how untrue and illogical they really are. Habituated patterns may continue to recur again and again, but once you have achieved a breakthrough, you can do it again and again, with conviction, so that seeing the truth becomes the dominant habit.

Example: Some people experience pleasure or cooperate with their sexual victimization. Based upon these experiences, they falsely conclude that they are to blame and that they are some kind of sick, whacked-out, scum-of-the-earth, unlovable type of person. When they have come to a truer, more realistic, well informed understanding of sexual victimization they are naturally

much less troubled emotionally. In the wonderful aha!!-moment during which they see through their own self-blaming and self-shaming, they become free of these insidious notions, at least until the next time that the old thinking reappears. However, the pathway to deliverance has been walked once, and it can be walked again and again, as the erroneous thinking gradually becomes defeated. That is the gig. The truth shall set you free.

The methods of doing this are straightforward, but require practice. I am sure that you understand this. You did not ride a bicycle perfectly the first time that you tried it, did you? Naturally, it took several tries and a lot of practice to get past the shaky, uneven stage. You practised even more before you were able to safely navigate in traffic. Ditto for the following method. Practice doesn't make perfect, but it does make accomplishments happen.

Remember the golden rule of truth-seeking: *Don't assume what it looks like before you find it.* Be open to discovering something new. You are able to make up your own mind anyway, that is something that cannot be taken away from you.

Uncle Albert's Method

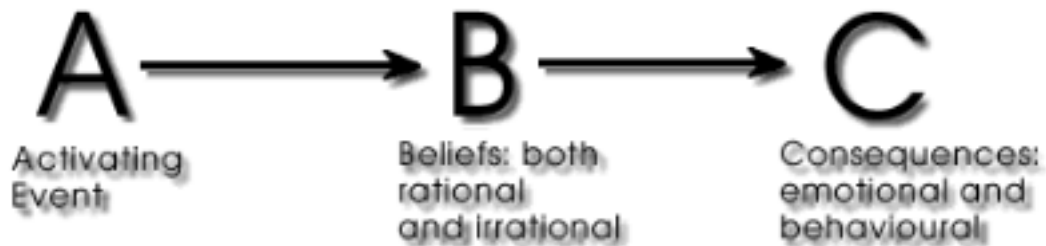
Albert Ellis is at this moment an elderly, professional Helping-Dude living somewhere in the USA. In the 1950's he developed the following way of helping people deal with their mental pollution — though he didn't call it mental pollution. He called it having irrational beliefs. His approach is called *Rational Emotive Therapy*. Albert Ellis's method goes as directly as possible to the roots of emotional distress, the actual thinking errors and the faulty beliefs that are active in the present moment. It is a method that relies upon you to develop the ability to observe your own thinking, tracking down the erroneous bits in order to challenge and to dispute them. It is based upon the notion that your greatest asset is your ability to expand your understanding.

In the rational emotive way of looking at emotional distress, anything that triggers habituated thinking and feeling is called an activating event. Makes sense, doesn't it? An activating event can be anything that happens: an insulting remark, a conversation, a smell, a memory, a shouting match, bad news, good news, the time of day, the weather — anything at all.

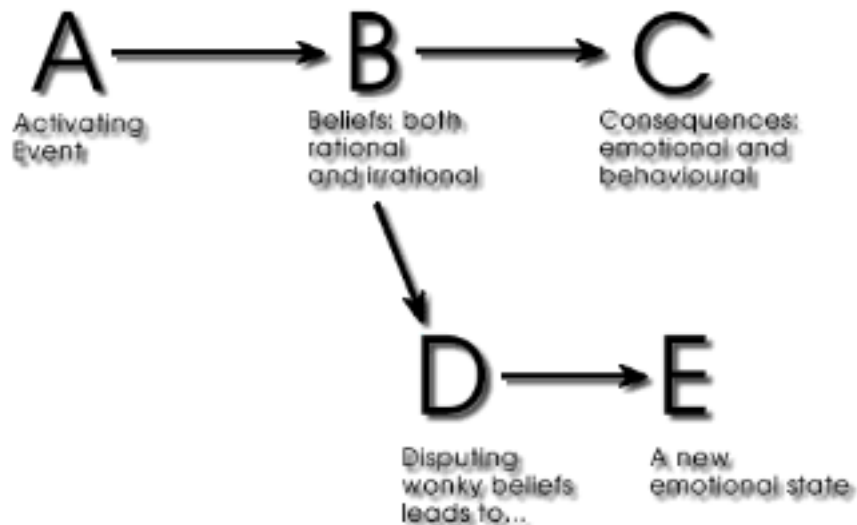
The activating event triggers some of your habituated thinking patterns — thinking which conforms to your beliefs — your irrational or faulty beliefs, and your realistic, reasonable, rational beliefs. When your thinking patterns kick into gear — presto! — your emotional energies are given their shape in that moment. What wonderfully responsive beings we earthlings are! Here is the gist of Albert Ellis's method:

1. You notice that you are upset, disturbed, depressed, angry, frustrated, scared or whatever.
2. You watch your thinking, so that you know what emotion-shaping thoughts are going around in your noggin. (This skill takes some time to develop, since so much of our thinking is automatic and habituated — it just happens without our awareness of it.)
3. You identify the irrational, faulty beliefs and the crooked logic.
4. You debate, dispute and argue with the faulty beliefs and thinking errors. You insist on reliable evidence. You dispute your habituated, wonky notions vigorously — you do not just sit back and let them pummel you.

5. In the instant that your disputing and debating begins to take effect, your emotional state will change. Of course it will. Your emotional energies have just been given a different thought-shape to flow through! Good work.
6. Reach over your shoulder and pat yourself on back.



The above is Albert Ellis's famous ABC diagram. Does it look familiar? (See The Double Whammy.) Where do you think I got the idea? From Uncle Albert of course. The next diagram shows this process including the disputing of faulty beliefs which when successfully done, leads to a new improved emotional state.



Here is the main point — memorize it:

Emotions are shaped by thinking.
Emotional disturbance is resolved by re-thinking

Honour Your Feelings

You are getting the idea that troublesome, disturbing feelings are caused by thinking. On this basis, you may begin to censor some of your difficult emotions because you have an idea that they are based upon sloppy or crooked thinking. You also may be censoring feelings because they are no fun — shame for instance is a common candidate for censorship, and shame certainly is no fun.

Alert: Try not to censor your feelings.

Your feelings are your direct experience of your self — your life energies. Even if they are all dressed up into the shapes of panic, depression, disgust or shame, try not to censor them. Suppressing your own life force is not a good idea. It will make you sick and eventually turn you into Mount St. (your name).

When you push your feelings away, it will be difficult for you to get to the roots of your tough-to-live-with emotions — your thinking. And pushing your feelings away is actually throwing the baby out with the bath water. You really want to help your emotional energies to get out of the confinement of habituated thinking. So don't censor your feelings.

For you who have been sexually victimized, the experience of emotions may be difficult. Be gentle with yourself. In the victimization experience, your rights were severely trampled by the person who assaulted you. You have a right to all of your feelings. "I shouldn't be feeling like this!", is a thinking error that is begging for demolition. Of course you should be feeling whatever you feel. You arrived into this moment with your life energies intact and flowing. You bring your thinking patterns with you into this moment — they create your emotional experience of right now.

If you have a garden, then you know that you have to let the weeds grow big enough so that you can get a firm hold on them, in order to yank the little blighters out by the roots. Much the same thing here with the faulty beliefs and thinking errors.

Honour your feelings. Find ways to get them out on the table — through talking, writing, screaming at a friendly tree, crying, laughing, giggling hysterically, listening to music, painting, playing music, singing, dancing or though relaxing, calming yourself and resting. Honouring your feelings means experiencing and expressing them as fully as you can without getting arrested or tromping on someone else's rights. It is the first step, which once taken, allows you to do the rest of the work.

Here's a clue: Saying, "I'm a jerk, or You're a jerk," is not a feeling statement. It's a position statement — an opinion — a value judgement. Feelings statements often start with: "I feel . . ."

Bummer feelings are an opportunity, not a sign of failure. Period. If they aren't out in the light of day, how the heck are you going to track down the thinking that shapes them?

Affirmations Anyone? Maybe ...

It may sound as if this manual is asking you to replace troublesome thinking with positive statements to yourself — positive rather than negative thinking. This is true, but . . .

Making positive statements to yourself and repeating them is called affirmation. Here are some sample affirmations: “I am worthwhile, no matter what I have done, I am OK. Everyday I am getting better and better in every way. I am content to be me.” And so on. Get the picture?

Affirmations work for some people, some of the time, and sometimes they make things worse. Suppose that I believe that I am a scumbag. Suppose I practise the following affirmation: “I am worthwhile. I am worthwhile. I am worthwhile. I am worthwhile.” The idea here is to have thoughts in my head that will shape my emotional energies in a positive manner. But, do I sincerely believe them? Not necessarily. In fact, I just might generate stress and eventual discouragement as this affirmation collides with my entrenched faulty beliefs.

Affirmations will not necessarily convince me that my faulty belief is as loony as a penguin with a Gucci bag. Clearly understanding the untruth of a faulty belief is the thing we are after, not more mindless repetition.

Past Event Cause Misery Today - NOT!

At the risk of being repetitious, I am going to re-state the good news. Past events, such as incidents of sexual victimization, are the occasions in which traumatic thinking gets started. The continuation of those patterns of self-injury are the cause of emotional distress in the present. Sexual victimization is not the only source of self-defeating beliefs and thinking, but it does act as a kind of mental poultice, activating and strengthening much of the mental pollution that is already present. These patterns of thinking are then applied to the whole range of experiences of your life.

These self-sabotaging mental processes are not written in stone and you can free yourself from them. There is a way out. The way out does not depend on the external events of your life, be they good or bad in your assessment. The way out is in re-thinking and upgrading the obsolete positions that you have taken about yourself and your life.

Common Garden Variety Faulty Beliefs

We understand that Chris Columbus & Co. tortured themselves with fear and panic because of a faulty belief that they would sail off the edge of the world, but what about you and I? What faulty beliefs do we carry with us? Here are some of the usual ones. How they work in relation to sexual victimization will be discussed further along.

Should Statements

Let’s suppose I say to you: “You should do better. You should handle your life better. You should take care of yourself better. You should get the dishes done. You should . . .” Is your automatic response to tell me to take a flying leap at a rolling donut, or something to that effect? That would be mine too! And no wonder. It is disrespectful for me to assume such a better-than-thou position. It’s also illogical of me to assume that it is my job to run your life for you. The word should implies a self-appointed, superior, ruler-of-the-universe status — a very wonky notion.

We often use should statements on ourselves as well as others. Should statements cause emotional distress when they are applied to one's self, as in:

- I should have
- I should be more
- I shouldn't be
- I shouldn't do

Should statements may also mean:

“I should and if I don't, then I'm an enormous let down!”

In this instance, the emotional distress will be greater — obviously. The “I'm-an-enormous-let-down” part is a superb way to shape emotional energies into bumme feelings. Instant karma. Service with a frown.

Should statements mean that life has absolutely gotta be the way I say, OR ELSE IT'S HORRIBLE! They are powerful emotion-shaping thoughts.

Should statements are a form of what is called absolutistic thinking — thinking which is rigid and possibly even fossilized — thinking that characterizes the phenomenon of the closed mind. Yikes!

There are many common variations of should statements. Here are three popular ones:

- I gotta be . . . (or else I'm no damned good.)
- I have to be . . . (or else I'm no damned good.)
- I must be . . . (or else I'm no damned good.)

Let's take a quick look at a typical should statement, and then dispute it.

“I should have handled myself better than I did.”

Or in other words, “I gotta be perfect, in most important things, or else I'm a lousy failure.”

Don't take my word that this is a cockamamie position to take. Kick it around, dispute, debate and seek reality.

Here are the big questions: “Do I know anyone who is perfect in most important things? Is this possible? Might I meet someone who is perfect? Is it possible for even one of the billions of humans on this planet to handle things perfectly most of the time?” No. Of course not!

Here's the next question: “Why do I think that I could be perfect when no one else is able to be so? Am I the Queen or King of Perfection?”

In disputing, we challenge our wonky beliefs, and hold them up to the light of day rather than just passively letting them clobber us. We seek the aha!-moment in which we see right through them — knowing their falsehood.

Should-ing, must-ing and gotta-be-ing are very hard core mental pollutants. Should statements are also applied to other people and to life in general, and their emotion-shaping effect can be

much the same, as in:

- “She has to agree with me on most important issues, or else”
- “Things must work out the way I want, or else I can’t stand it.”

Should-ing is also called the *Tyranny of the Should’s*, or *must-eration*.

Awfulizing Statements

Awfulizing statements say that something is so horrible that it is impossible to cope with it. In repeating them in our heads, they become a pernicious form of self-propaganda, which soon results in self-defeat. For example: “When she or he doesn’t show love and approval towards me, it’s so awful. I just can’t stand it.”

The first problem with this statement is that it immediately shapes good emotional energy into an avalanche of anger, depression or frustration. The second problem is that it is based upon the faulty belief that your emotional well-being depends upon someone else’s approval.

These statements create emotional distress. Why just sit there and take it? Debate, dispute and argue towards more enlightened points of view, until you actually understand, all by yourself, what is so illogical about them. Awfulizing is extremely habit forming, and requires a patient, persistent approach to see through it. Be gentle with yourself. Be lazy. Do just a little bit of work, and do it daily. Fuller understanding will come.

Example: We habitually think: “I can’t stand this!” The truth in many instances is this: “I can stand this, but it is a nuisance.” The problem with I-can’t-stand-it statements is that they are emotion-shapers. They say: “This is a catastrophe!”, when there isn’t one.

When you can downgrade an “I-can’t-stand-it” to a “this-is-just-a-pain-in-the-butt”, you will have made progress. You will have taken some habituated thinking to the cleaners.

Awfulizing is known by other names and terms, such as: making-mountains-out-of-molehills, catastrophizing and exaggerating.

A common awfulizing exaggeration uses the words *always* or *never*, incorrectly and inaccurately. Emotions will follow these whacky thoughts: “You never say a nice word to me!”; “You always forget to take out the garbage!”

Most of the time, the truth is not never or always, but sometimes: “You sometimes don’t say a nice word to me.” “You sometimes forget to take out the garbage.” When we convince ourselves that these exaggerations are true, we will naturally feel as if they are true. Normal everyday language is littered with these distortions — so are feelings.

Gotta-Have Statements

Gotta-have statements express the belief that I gotta have something or someone, or else I cannot be happy. They tell me that “I gotta have or I really need your affections or approval, or else!”

Let’s suppose that you have a close friend who deserts you or ignores you. Let’s pretend that you fill your head with need statements, gotta-have-or-else statements. You are now in a major bind, having convinced yourself that because of what has happened, life is hopeless.

Consider this: If your happiness and well-being really depends upon your friend's affection and approval, that this is a law of the universe, then how come you actually had some happy moment before you knew your friend? Do you see how this works? By learning how to debate and dispute these cockamamie beliefs, it is possible to downgrade a catastrophe to a disappointment that is not emotionally disabling.

Look around you. People are doing this all the time. Relationships begin and end. Friendships are won and lost. People recover from this. They recover faster and more thoroughly when they clear up their self-injuring thinking as soon as they can. Of course, some people will torment themselves mercilessly for ages — becoming full-time citizens of DoubleWhammy City.

Human Worth Statements

Human worth statements are based upon the faulty belief that we have the god-like status to rate humans beings, ourselves and others. They are also based upon an error of logic, which goes like this:

“Since I (you) have done a lousy thing, I am (you are) a completely lousy person.”

Or, try this one:

“Since I have made some mistakes, I am one huge mistake.”

The illogic of this kind of thinking means that if I have a pimple on my nose, then I am, as a person, one complete pimple. It means that if my behaviour has some blemishes, then all of my behaviour is blemished, and that I am a blemish. Because I haven't handled everything in my life perfectly, does that make me a complete washout as a person? Human worth statements sometimes act as filters. Non-blemishing evidence is filtered out and ignored.

For example: “I am a loser.” In truth, there is no such thing as a loser. All of us lose at some things, some of the time — but never all the time.

Destructive self-worth statements are often tied in with “I-gotta-be-perfect” thinking which is equally loony.

By now, you have begun to realize how much mental pollution there is in our world. Mental pollution is rampant — in some circles it is out of control. The fashion industry, for example, really counts upon the rest of us making absurd human worth statements to ourselves. For instance, if your body or wardrobe doesn't conform to their standards, then you are definitely a sub-standard human. How about the messages from TV commercials: If I drink a certain brand of virile beer, or drive a virile car, then I will never be impotent. Good grief.

Here is a list of common garden variety faulty beliefs:

- I gotta have the approval of the main people in my life — all the time.
- I gotta do most things well, or I'm no good.
- I can't stand it unless things go the way I want most of the time.
- Life must be fair to me most of the time.

- Anyone who treats another person unfairly is a completely worthless person.
- If I can't depend on others, then I can't be happy and life is horrible.
- Human value can be rated.
- I am at the mercy of past experiences. There is no way out of this trap.
- I cannot change the way I feel. It all depends on what happens to me.
- When other people are unhappy, I can't be happy.
- If I don't spend a lot of time fussing over problems, I will never be able to solve them.
- I gotta be perfect in my efforts to solve my problems.
- I can't stand it when other people don't see things the way I do.
- Walking away from problems is easier and is less work than facing them.

Working On Mental Pollution

In preparation for working on the thinking patterns and faulty beliefs that create your emotional misery, remember the principle of creative laziness. Take some time to consider the following points. Together, they describe a strong beginning position. Come back to them regularly. Find your own words to state them to yourself. Above all, seek your own understanding. Look for real evidence.

As you have been reading this manual, you have likely had some moments of hope and of positive regard for yourself. Take note that this could only have happened if your thinking had actively shaped your emotional energies at that very moment of time. See. It works just like that. Instant karma. Now that's evidence! So consider the following recommended position statements:

1. If I am upset, it's my own habituated thinking that is doing it, and I am the only person who can do something about my thinking habits, no matter how these habits may have started.
2. If I am all bunged up emotionally, then I am likely saying things to myself that are not completely accurate or that are based upon faulty beliefs about myself, others and life in general. I am jumping to conclusions and ratings of human worth out of sheer habit.
3. It will be better when I (not, I should) consider another point of view about what is going on. It is very possible that I have made some thinking errors and hold some whacky, faulty beliefs.
4. It will be better when I (not, I should) debate, dispute and challenge my thoughts and beliefs, so that my own understanding grows to fit reality a

little bit better, rather than fitting my habituated ideas.

5. So what if I have some mental pollution. Who doesn't? It's just habit thinking. I can deal with it, step-by-step and day-by-day.

Empowerment Through Knowledge

Another excellent way to combat mental pollution is to become well informed. As a victim of sexual violence, it's a good idea for you to get informed about sexual victimization, because it will bring tremendous benefit to your emotional and mental well-being.

For example, it is a common belief that sex offenders act the way they do because that can't control their urges. This isn't true, and it is very helpful for victimized people to know this.

Here's why: Typically, sexual offenders demonstrate lots of control, rather than a lack of it. They use trickery, deceit, coercion and manipulation. Their offences are usually planned and mentally rehearsed in advance. This knowledge is useful to victims who somehow continue to believe that it's their fault. Really understanding why it is not your fault is better than trying to believe that it isn't, just because others tell you so. Got it? Correct knowledge can help to free you from incorrect thinking.

So, for this reason, a good knowledge base is an item for your shopping list. Knowledge about sexuality, victim issues and characteristics, sexual offences, legal issues, and sex offender characteristics can undermine self-injuring thinking and believing.

Legal Abuse Versus Human Hurt

Sexual victimization is an emotional-mental well-being issue, and a legal-criminal matter. These two aspects don't always fit together very well. They are sometimes incompatible with one another. What is sexually victimizing in a legal sense and what is humanly hurtful can be two different things.

When citizens report sexual victimization, certain types of professionals (child protection workers, police officers, crown's counsel, etc.) are legally required to investigate the allegations, to find the proof, the convincing evidence, that it has or has not really happened.

Courts of law consider the evidence supporting a criminal charge of sexual violence. They have rigid rules about what can be presented as evidence in a trial. These rules may not appear very sensible to us some of the time.

Courts pass judgement and assign consequences to those who are found guilty. Courts of law say to the offender: "You're guilty (or not guilty)".

What they really mean is something different. They mean this:

"As best we can determine, solely on the basis of the evidence presented within our tight-assed rules about acceptable evidence, and abiding by the exact wording of our laws, our

interpretations of the wording of these laws, and in spite of, or because of any unconscious biases on our part, you're guilty (or not guilty)."

Thus, when it cannot be proven in court, a sexual offender will be found not guilty, even when he really did the criminal deed. This is not the only complication you need to be aware of. Here's a few more.

The Legal System and the Principle of Consent

Laws about sexual violence are generally based upon the *principle of consent*. This principle means that it's just fine if two people have sex, as long as they both say okay. If both people do not give consent, then its definitely not okay, in fact, it's a sex crime.

The principle of consent translates into laws about having sex without your consent, against your will, because of force, fear, physical assault, threats and so on. In Canada, children are considered to be unable to give consent if they are younger than 14 years old. Legally, a child who is 13 years, 364 days old is in a different category than those who are 13 years, 365 days old (not counting leap years). Cross that line and suddenly you are considered mature enough to be able to give consent. What a difference a day makes.

Defining laws which can cover any situation in which there is an absence of consent, has been very troublesome for our lawmakers. For example, if one person is shit-faced drunk, is she or he capable of giving consent? What does consent mean when one human is much more manipulative than another? Even when there is an obvious difference in social skills and intellectual ability, as in the case of the sexual victimization of a mentally handicapped citizen, the legal system has problems.

Finding effective wording for laws about sexual violence is really a tough assignment, and one that is unfinished business in our society. There has been lots of revision to these laws in the past, and we can expect more in the future.

The law and the legal system are imperfect. They will not necessarily be able to account for what has happened to you in real life. Until the verdict and the sentence are given, you cannot know the result of a court action. So here's a thinking error to dispute:

"I cannot heal, if the person who sexually victimized me is found not guilty by the court"

That statement is simply not true.

Time Is On Your Side

Even in cases that boil down to the victim's word against the offender's word, and even when the legal system is imperfect, there can be successful prosecutions of sexual offenders. Since there is no law saying that you must bring forth your complaint within a certain amount of time, you can do this at any point in the future. There is no statute of limitations on the reporting of sex crimes in Canada. In our country, there are court actions happening, concerning sexual victimization that occurred decades ago. Sometimes old evidence is kind of shaky, and sometimes it isn't, but remember this: Time is on your side.

You don't even have to charge the person who sexually victimized you. When you decide to use the legal system, your main job is to provide information to the police and the crown counsel

(district attorney in the U.S.). They consider your information and bring charges if they think they have a solid case. That is their job, not yours. Your job, if you want it, is to provide information.

There are lots of details for you to consider. Use the expertise available. Why not start with your friendly neighbourhood victim services worker or sexual assault counsellor? Get the information. Take your time. Think about it. Take care of yourself. The most important thing is that you feel good about yourself. The second most important thing is to stop sex offenders. Time is on your side.

Investigations

Investigations into allegations of sexual victimization are usually done by child protection workers, police officers or both. It's a task which is mandated to them — legally they have to investigate all such complaints, and they cannot get out of that responsibility.

The activities of investigation are a force which runs into an opposing force — *the force of the secrecy-maintaining mental and emotional states of victims, offenders and people associated with both of them*. Statutory (legal) responsibilities and psychological realities can collide with the victim sitting in the middle.

The secrecy-keeping mental and emotional state of victims is a genuine dilemma for investigators and for victims. (A dilemma is a predicament with two undesirable choices.) On one hand there is the responsibility to investigate. On the other hand there is the risk of re-traumatizing the victim.

Ask the average citizen to describe in graphic detail her or his most recent sexual experience. You will run into the *privacy-keeping* mental and emotional state of the citizen. You will be told mind your own beeswax. This is small potatoes indeed compared with the *secrecy-keeping* state of victimized citizens.

Investigations are also at odds with psychological realities because sexual victimization can be traumatic to the extent that the ability to remember is impaired. Remembering with any accuracy may simply not be possible. The victim may be immobilized by fear of the offender and his friends, by shame, depression, or by fear of what their own friends and family will think of them.

It is true that thinking patterns shape all of these emotions, however, they are there for a darn good reason — that is exactly what sexual victimization does. Sexual victimization traumatizes thinking patterns and the emotional energies. That's how it works. It is not something that any of us are immune to. Therefore — no blame for feeling badly.

Investigations and court proceedings can be traumatic all by themselves. This is called secondary victimization. In the face of this, some victims will recant — say they were mistaken, or that they made it up. If you have done this, check out this thinking error:

"Because I changed my story, I'm a worthless person who will never be believed again."

If this is your thinking, get off the mark and dispute this self-damning, illogical position. Here's a sample counterposition — work to understand it as clearly as you can:

"I am not worthless, I am mixed up emotionally and having a pretty rough ride. No wonder. It's

no crime to be feeling this way. It's what happens to victims of sex crimes. It's a normal response to a tough gig. Lots of people out there are finally starting to understand what we are going through. It is a good idea to get in touch with some of those folks. I am obviously doing my best to take care of myself. Am I supposed to handle this kind of thing perfectly? Really? I felt trapped, with only one alternative available. Okay. The other alternatives are still there when I am ready. The doors to healing are not closed. They are always open."

Doing effective, caring investigations into sexual victimization is a specialty, and its body of skills and knowledge is constantly being revised, updated and upgraded. My hat is off to investigators who take the time and trouble to develop skills and practices that are sensitive to the special needs of victims of sex crimes.

Sexual Offenders and Sexual Offences

Having reliable knowledge about sex offenders is important. This section will sketch out some of the basics. The big idea here is for you to know for certain, to truly understand that you are not to blame, so give consideration. Self-blaming and self-shaming are a normal kind of mental pollution afflicting victims. Accurately understanding offenders will help to dissolve this.

Trickery, Lies, Manipulation, Head Games, Threats, Bribery, Intimidation and Violence

It's a common idea that a sex offender has an uncontrollable sexual urge, and that he (or she) was just so horny that he was compelled to do what he did to you. This is simply not true.

Sex offenders try to be very careful about what they do, after all, not getting caught is very important to them. Their strategies for committing sexual offences are thought out well in advance, in most cases. They hone their skills in sexual and non-sexual areas. Their skills are trickery, lies, manipulation, head games, threats, bribery, intimidation and violence. They tend to be pretty good con artists. In order to commit a sex crime and to also get away with it, a complex, sophisticated set of skills are developed by the offender.

Much of their success depends upon you believing that it is your fault. This helps to ensure that you will keep silent. Some sex offenders use threats of violence, intimidation tactics or assault to accomplish this end. They will choose what works for them.

Suzie (not her real name), nine years old, was sexually assaulted by a fifteen year old male baby-sitter, Jake (not his real name either). She did not tell her parents about it and it didn't come to light until an eleven year old girl was placed in the home as a foster child. She too was sexually assaulted by Jake, but she blabbed to her social worker.

Suzie's folks, the child protection worker and the police told Suzie that it wasn't her fault, yet she remained depressed and withdrawn. She was convinced that it was her fault, even though the important, big people in her life consistently told her that it wasn't. In her mind, she had concluded that if they ever found out that it really was her fault, then she would be rejected. This was a major double whammy for her.

How did this come to be? Why was she so convinced of her guilt — so convinced that fear and shame became powerful secrecy-maintaining forces within her, even when the facts of the sexual assault were in the open?

We see this self-faulting thinking, time and time again, with victims of all ages. It helps to keep victims silent. It is one of several influences that helps to maintain a victim's silence. Fear of speaking openly about victimization is normal. It is tough on the victimized person, but it is normal. The sex offender's strategy of trickery, lies, manipulation, head games, threats, bribery, intimidation and violence helps to create secrecy-maintaining fear.

Jake had followed a typical offender's strategy — one which has been used on victims of all ages. It has many variations. Perhaps you will see some similarity with your own experiences. Perhaps you have a lingering sense of responsibility or self-blame about what has happened to you. Don't back off from that awkward feeling, bring it out. Let's put it to the reality test, to see if you really are so blame-worthy.

In the case of nine year old Suzie, Jake's strategy had successfully arranged for Suzie to believe that she was responsible for the sexual assault. This ensured her silence and his safety. These were definitely not the actions of someone with uncontrollable urges. These were the actions of someone very much in control — and capable of thoughtful, detailed planning.

Understanding how sex offenders function will help you to reclaim your self from the bonds of false responsibility — by understanding your innocence.

One Sex Offender's Strategy

The following offending strategy was used against Suzie. It is a common strategy, with many variations. It is not the only strategy used by the offenders in our midst, but it is a darn good illustration of the fact that sexual offences are premeditated, predatory acts of manipulation, deceit, intimidation and careful planning. They are not usually acts of sexual impulsivity. Understanding this will help you to know that you are not responsible for your victimization. You were manipulated into a vulnerable position and your vulnerability was exploited. You are without blame.

Step 1: Identify the potential victim. Assess vulnerability and opportunity.

The offender will identify the potential victim well before initiating a sexual offence. Offenders use sexual fantasies and day dreams to rehearse possible offending scenarios. When these fantasies are accompanied by masturbation, the inclination to proceed with the offence will be strengthened.

Few people realize that they have been chosen as a potential victim during this beginning stage. Personal appearance is not a factor in victim selection. Appearing to be provocatively or seductively dressed is not the issue. The potential victim is selected because she or he is seen by the offender as vulnerable, and because the offender sees an opportunity to offend without getting caught. Do you get this? The problem exists with the offender, not with you.

Vulnerability and opportunity to offend are the main reasons for selecting a victim.

Sexual offences are primarily a crime of power — of domination. The desire for control, power and domination is the numero uno motivator. Sexual gratification is a lesser consideration. The sense of power comes not only from the violent act itself, but from the charge that comes from manipulating and controlling another human being throughout the whole process — very serious

mental pollution. In the sex offender, the desire for domination and power becomes linked with sexual gratification.

The vulnerability of the potential victim is evaluated by the offender. The offender will consider whether the victim appears to be in dire need of attention, affection, acceptance or approval, to determine whether these needs can be exploited. The offender will observe who is close to the potential victim, to evaluate the risk of getting caught or exposed. Gullibility and naivete are considered. Offenders will assess whether there is opportunity to safely isolate the potential victim and to commit a sexual offence, undisturbed. It is a manipulative powerplay, right from the beginning.

The fantasy life of the offender is the forum for offence planning. The details are worked out, and contingency plans are made. Again, the potential victim will usually be aware of none of this. Deception is the name of the game.

Jake saw Suzie as a shy, quiet child. At nine years old, she was sometimes withdrawn and lonely. He saw her as mentally and emotionally vulnerable, and he was right. He saw opportunity — her parents were often out of the home socializing. It was easy for him, being a family friend, to offer his baby-sitting services. He presented himself as clean, articulate, sincere, mature and reliable.

Step 2: Establish positive rapport with the potential victim.

Offenders aren't necessarily strangers who appear out of the blue to commit the crime. Many offenders know their victims socially, or are members of their family. The opportunity for ongoing contact is already established in these instances. Offenders take advantage of opportunities to interact with the potential victim in order to assess vulnerability and to evaluate the opportunity to offend.

Some victims blame themselves for not realizing the con job that they were being subjected to: "I should have seen it coming. I should have known better." Have you blamed yourself in this manner?

Let's debate the thinking mistakes that are behind this self-blaming. For starters, it assumes that you have a level of ability to handle life, that borders on perfection and being able to read minds. It also assumes an ability to know the future. Is this reasonable? It further assumes that you are responsible for someone else's actions.

It is not only children who are taken to the cleaners by accomplished con artists, but teenagers and adults too. The manipulative skills of the average sex offender are sophisticated. Who among us cannot be conned? Certainly not moi! You? Really? Kick that thinking error around the block a few times until it leaves you alone. You aren't responsible for the calculating, deviant maneuvers of a sophisticated con artist. You do the best you can — just like the rest of us. Armed with understanding, you will do better in the future.

Offenders using this strategy will flatter, pay special attention, and generally do what can be done to be seen as wonderful and attentive by the potential victim. That is their objective during this stage of the offending strategy.

Step 3: Test the victim.

The offender will now test the vulnerability and defense responses of the potential victim. At this stage, actual victimization begins.

In the case of Suzie, Jake had prepared for this stage by spending time with Suzie, by playing with her, making her feel special — stage managing things so that she anticipated his visits eagerly. He then introduced the idea of playing house, which they did, initially in an appropriate manner. Suzie enjoyed these activities and participated enthusiastically. Jake then tested Suzie. He brought in adult videos to watch with her, having her sit beside him and cuddle — “Let’s play mummy and daddy.” He engaged her in kissing, assuring her that it was part of the game. Suzie’s victimization had begun for real.

Suzie began felt uneasy about what was happening. She enjoyed the closeness, the attention and some of the physical sensations, but she also felt that she was doing something bad. She continued to participate — trapped into cooperation by her baby-sitter. She did not find it easy to stand up to Jake. He was banking on that. Suzie’s participation in the game convinced her that she was to blame for what happened next.

Sex offenders may test victims with off-colour jokes, getting physically too close for comfort, by touching, or by making suggestive remarks. They may try intimidation, persuasion or guilt-tripping to get the victim to take risks or put themselves into vulnerable positions — just to see how they will react. Have another drink. Loosen up. Don’t be such a prude. You’re hurting my feelings. The offender wants to find out how to control the victim, and to experiment with ascending stages of control. Accidentally touching the victim’s body is common — accidentally on purpose that is. If confronted, there will be a ready excuse: “I was just kidding. It was an accident.”

When the victim does not stop the action, it is a signal to progress. If possible, the victim will be engaged in sexual foreplay. This is seen by the offender as license to offend. It can be mistakenly seen by the victim as cooperation in the criminal act that follows. This leads to enormous guilt. That’s the con. Many offenders manipulate a victim into sexual situations in which they are suddenly out of their depth. Embarrassment and fear of rejection combine to ensure silence or ineffectual protest. The offender is now in charge.

Step 4: Isolate the victim.

When the offender is assured of being able to control the victim, the offence is simply a matter of isolating the victim. Here again, the victim may not even realize the danger, having been conned into a false sense of security, or being so fearful of rejection and embarrassment, that danger signals are ignored.

Jake was able to isolate Suzie with no difficulty. She was his captive in the baby-sitting situation.

Physical isolation is arranged in parked vehicles or empty homes — any place that provides security for the offender. Psychological isolation is arranged through the testing phase. Many offenders are excellent at improvising.

Step 5: Victimize

Victimization takes many forms. Everyone handles these situations in the best way that they can. It is traumatic in every sense of the word. It can be so traumatic that the victim goes into shock and cannot do anything but submit. Some people mentally and emotionally retreat from the psychological and physical violence. They watch the assault from outside of their body. This is called detaching, dissociation or splitting. Children will often use this kind of retreat from the horror of the moment.

Some people cooperate with their victimization — it is a means of survival, often misunderstood by themselves and others, to mean that they wanted the assault, or that victimization has not occurred. It can leave the victim confused, uncertain and prone to shame and secrecy. To make matters more difficult, the relationship between the victim and the offender may be one of love or affection, as well as victimization. Some children who have been sexually abused by a parent experience this love-fear-shame-hate confusion. It makes for a secrecy-maintaining mental set.

Sexual victimization occurs when an offender has achieved a measure of psychological and physical control. The average person of any age is truly unprepared for this. There is no such thing as a perfect way of handling it. Whatever it was that you did to get through those horrifying moments — good for you. Really.

Suzie remained silent and non-resistant when Jake sexually assaulted her. Nothing in her previous experience had prepared her for this. She froze. That was the very best that she could do.

Step 6: Ensure secrecy.

An offender's biggest fear is of being exposed — of being caught and held accountable. Threats, violence and bribery may be used, but there are trickier methods too.

Jake chose a trickier way. He simply carried on with Suzie as if all was well and normal. In doing so, he created in her a sense of disbelief about what had happened. Combined with her state of shock, the sexual assault was like a dream to her. He continued to give her special attention, to stick to the established routines and rhythms of the baby-sitting job. By doing so, he communicated this: "Everything is normal."

Suzie took refuge in the normalcy which returned as quickly as the horror had come. Jake's manipulative prowess had succeeded. She kept the secret.

Offenders try to convince themselves that nothing deviant has happened. They often lie easily and with conviction if confronted. Soon after Jake was convicted with sexual assault against Suzie, he said this: I thought I was in my girlfriend's house.

Step 7: Re-victimize.

Repeated victimization of the same person by an offender does happen. Child sexual abuse literature often documents the repeated victimization of a child by the same offender. So do our newspapers — almost every day.

Sex offenders do not usually stop offending on their own. They surely don't ask for help very often. It is a mistake to think that a sex offender will stop offending all by himself or herself. The

tendency is to continue — even after being caught when the opportunity arises. If not caught, stopped and given specialized treatment, the average adolescent sex offender will commit 380 sex crimes in the course of a lifetime, according to a recent study.

Re-victimization can become a ritual. The offender will signal the beginning and the end of the victimization event by certain gesture, voice inflection, or other behaviour. These signals separate the victimization experiences from the rest of life, which will proceed without disruption.

Children are especially vulnerable to re-victimization. Rituals of entrance and exit from the victimization episodes will support their sense of unreality about the abuse, and will increase the likelihood of splitting, of having a clear mental boundary between two different worlds. The offender may be like two separate people to the child victim, for example, daddy and monster.

Disclosure Fear & Secrecy

Secrecy and sexual victimization go hand in hand. Some of the reasons for this have been described, but let's try fill out the picture. Victims find themselves under tremendous secrecy-maintaining pressure — a fact which is poorly understood in our society, even by some investigators of sexual victimization. If you have been sexually victimized, then you know about this from your personal experience.

Fear of speaking openly about sexual victimization plays havoc with sexual assault investigations. The statutory (legal) side of abuse and the human side can be two opposing forces. Fear of speaking openly bottles victims up inside of self-injuring thinking and feeling patterns. It prevents the traumatic thinking from growing up. It blocks healing and recovery. It is called disclosure fear.

Fear of talking about what has happened to you (disclosure fear) is understandable. Pay attention here. If you have been suffering from disclosure fear, relax already — you're normal. Honour your feelings.

Honour your fear. It's just your life energy dressed up in thought habits. They can be overcome. It is what happens to human beings who are sexually victimized. It is surmountable. The first step in overcoming disclosure fear, is to understand how the secrecy thing works. The second step is disputing the fear-creating thoughts, at least until they are not immobilizing you. The third step is finding the right person to speak with.

The recipe for secrecy-maintaining has three ingredients:

1. External circumstances: people and systems
2. The secrecy of the victimization experience
3. Internal factors: the victim's mental set

Identifying your fears and naming them, is a good idea. It sets the stage for undermining the fearful thinking.

External Circumstances: People & Systems

You live in the world with other people. Secrecy-maintaining is affected by the way people around you think and behave. Your fears may be based upon the way some people really act. On the other hand, you may also have been catastrophizing yourself into silence and isolation. You may have filtered out the sources of support that you have, or that could be available to you. The secrecy of victimization requires more than re-thinking to resolve it. It requires sharing with another human being. It requires naming the victimization out loud.

Fear that disclosures may not be proven

You are on the cutting edge of history. Yes you are. Sexual victimization has been a part of our world for ages — an unpleasant fact which has been coming clear just in the last few years — recent history. You are part of the élite company of individuals who are breaking silence, interrupting the cycle of abuse, and bringing it into the open.

In doing this, you are coming face-to-face with the crapped up thinking about sex and sexual victimization that pollutes our world. As you change, you help the world to change. Those who thought that talk of the sexual victimization epidemic was the hysterical raving of burned out human service workers are being silenced by the flood of truth from people like yourself. You are all a potent force of change and healing. You are part of something bigger. Pioneering is tough work.

Complicating things is this: Proof of victimization — solid, legal evidence (forensic proof) is hard to come by in many cases. When you come out with your unfortunate news, the result may be that the offender will be charged with a criminal act. He or she will usually fail to admit guilt.

Most sex offenders will lie. In some cases it is difficult to prove that an offender is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. Remember that it is not your job to investigate criminal code violations. You are not responsible for the success or failure of the legal system. You are responsible for your own life and your healing. Convictions do happen even when it is a victim's word against an offender's word.

Fear that family & friends will not believe you

In spite of themselves, some of the people around you will probably be helping to sustain your fear of disclosure. They may very well be wonderful people. Sexual victimization isn't something that the average person can speak about comfortably. It is something about which the average person is very uninformed. The let's-just-get-on-with-life-and-skip-this-part attitude of others, will do you no favours.

If you share the same family or the same social circle as the person who sexually victimized you, there will be individuals in that circle who doubt your word. This is called *denial*. You may be called a liar.

Another thing that will happen is called minimization, which means to make small. It means that while some people may doubt your word, others may treat it lightly, as a small misunderstanding, or they may hold you to blame, partially or totally. "Boys will be boys." "You must have done something to give him the wrong idea." "You're gorgeous — what's a guy to do." "If you didn't protest, you must have wanted it." Some people will try to ignore

your truth.

For example, you might expect that the mother of a child who has disclosed sexual abuse by his or her father will automatically side with the child. This doesn't always happen. Sometimes the non-offending parent will side with the offending parent, but not the child. Within the life and the mental set of the non-offending parent, there are reasons for this behaviour. Nonetheless, it is a cruel, rejecting shut-down experience for a child. This may have happened to you. Now that you are no longer a child, and you have the ability to think in adult ways, you can overcome this shut-down thinking that has silenced you. You can overcome the rejection.

Many people who were victimized as children report attempts to communicate about their abuse — attempts which failed due to the denial and minimization of others. In fact, I have not met anyone who, as a child, did not try to let somebody know. Very often, the child was not heard.

Denying the word of children and accepting the word of adults is also a problem for the court system. It sometimes looks like a built-in bias against children. Then there is the court process itself. It's a system built on pitting rival views one against the other. Bad news for children. It is tough on all victims.

Regardless of your age at the time of your victimization, some people will believe you. Some will not. This may happen. Stay tuned — it is a surmountable obstacle. Hear?

Fear of the consequences of disclosure

What will happen when I speak openly about my victimization? is the question. Using habituated, traumatic thinking to leap to conclusions creates the immobilizing fear. Making a tough road tougher is a double whammy.

Here are some of the consequences of disclosure that are feared by victimized people:

Violence from the offender or his friends — “If I tell, he might kill me or my family. His friends might beat me up. He might tell the whole town that I'm a lying bitch.”

Family rejection or rejection by friends — “They will hate me. They will be disgusted by me. They will think I'm evil.”

Causing harm to the offender — “Daddy might go to jail. He might kill himself if I tell. Everyone might hate him.”

Not all victims, particularly children, want their offenders put into jail. Children don't want to be victimized, and some of them love their offending fathers or mothers.

The Secrecy of the Victimization Experience

The nature of the victimization experience itself reinforces secrecy. Victimization causes denial by the victim — often confused with deliberate lying. “Why did you wait so long before you spoke out? You must be negligent or lying!” says the offender's lawyer or the ill-informed investigator.

Lying and denial may look very similar to some legal folks, but psychologically, they are worlds apart.

Now hear this: *Denial by the victim is a healthy response*, only causing problems when it becomes habituated to the point of stalling the inner healing drive. It functions very much like the scab which forms naturally over a scrape on your elbow. It is protection. It is natural. It is healthy. It is a necessary first step on the healing trail.

The thing that separates sexual victimization from other forms of victimization is the sex part. There is skin contact, genital stimulation, pain, fear, and even sexual arousal. That's right. Sexual arousal, mixed with other conflicting, confusing emotions and body sensations, occurs in many victimization experiences. If this happened to you, it definitely doesn't mean that you are warped or sick in any way. It doesn't mean that you wanted to be victimized. It means that the sensory nerves of your genitals and your body as a whole are working the way they were designed.

Sexual stimulation is an intimate, extremely private, personal experience. The traumatic invasion into this naturally private area will result in a desire for secrecy. Secrecy-maintaining is not the same thing as the willful withholding of evidence.

In the re-victimization experience, the separation of the episodes of sexualized violence from the regular flow of normal life can become pronounced, and will support secrecy automatically. When other family members are denying the sexual abuse in their midst, the secrecy-maintaining forces can reign supreme for years. So, if you have broken the secrecy condition or are even contemplating doing so, I salute you and your courage.

Getting through a re-victimization experience means that you have had to develop ways of shutting off the experience, escaping out of your body perhaps (detaching, dissociating), and getting by in any way that you could. Secrecy is a by-product of this habit-forming survival strategy. No blame.

Secrecy-maintaining is built into the sexual victimization experience.

The Victim Mental Set / The Survivor Mental Set

Your mental set, prone to secrecy-maintaining as it may be, is not your enemy. It contains all that you need to find your way out of the secrecy thing, the self-shaming, guilt, depression or any other affliction. Obviously. You have the ability to think independently.

In recognizing that thoughts and beliefs have contributed to secrecy-maintaining, you become capable of breaking this bondage. You become capable of disputing the habituated thinking that has kept you silent. You have no control over the thinking and behaviour of people around you, nor of the legal system. You do have power over your own thinking. You have the ability to expand your understanding. You have the ability to challenge, dispute and debate — to mature your mental set.

The difference between a victim and a survivor is this: The victim has not held a single belief up for scrutiny, nor has he or she even considered challenging anything. The victim is someone who is passively at the mercy of self-defeating thinking, all of the time. The survivor has made an effort, at least once, to take action.

I doubt if you are still a victim. If you had not crossed the line into being a survivor, you wouldn't have picked up this manual. Therefore, you were a survivor before you started reading it.

Being a survivor is like learning to play the guitar. Once you learn your first chord, you are a guitar player. You can only get better from that point. You can't get worse. Being a survivor doesn't mean handling your victimization experiences or your life perfectly. It means being actively involved in your own healing, when you choose to be. As the saying goes: The first step is as important as the last in the hundred mile journey.

I'm Depressed

Depression is like running a race up to your knees in molasses. It's exhausting — every step of the way. At its worst, it involves suicidal thinking. If you are depressed read this section very carefully. Depression is one of those things that become so familiar that they seem normal. Hear this: The natural human state is happiness and vitality. Human beings are like a cork. A cork can be held under water, but when you take the weight off, it bounces to the surface immediately. We humans are like that too.

Depression is largely the result of mental pollution — faulty beliefs and thinking errors. This view is subject to some disagreement from the medical community, but I have to say that I have come across exactly zero depressed people who were not able to alleviate some of their depression by tackling their thinking, regularly and persistently. Some eliminated most of it. This is the truth.

The medical view is that depression is caused by wonky levels of certain neurotransmitters. Whoa! Heavy term. Neurotransmitters are biochemicals that help transmit signals across the tiny spaces (synapses) between your nerve cells. Medical researchers say that some depressed people have low levels of a neurotransmitter called serotonin. Anti-depressant medication boosts the serotonin levels — and does a few other things as well. However, medication doesn't do doodley about the habituated thinking that also causes depression. And thinking can generate depression — all by itself.

There may be a physical basis for some depression, but in every such instance, there are also thinking patterns which create depression — thinking patterns which can handle the job with or without wonky neurotransmitters. If you suffer from depression, it is worth your while to weed your mental set of as much of this mental pollution as you can. Thinking patterns are a significant factor — you can count on it.

Depression-creating thinking is habit forming. You know that all ready. Sorting it out and thinking your way through it will be most successful when you make a daily habit of disputing the depression-causing beliefs — even when you are not depressed. In fact, it is a good idea to do the work when you are not depressed as well as when you are depressed.

Being physically worn out, tired or malnourished (on one of North America's typically non-nutritious diets of fast food) affects your ability to think clearly. When you are exhausted you are more vulnerable to depression-causing thinking habits. Keep that in mind.

According to psychologist Paul Hauck, three types of depression-causing thinking are:

1. Self-Blame
2. Self-Pity
3. Other-Pity

Self-blame

Self-blame happens when you think that something about you, usually something you did, is so terrible that you become worthless in your own eyes. Self-blame is being convinced that, I'm a worthless piece of garbage, or something to that effect. Depression results when this unquestioned notion about yourself generates repetitive thinking — self-propaganda.

Remember that some of these crooked ways of self-rating started when you were a mentally vulnerable child — unable to think abstractly. You had, at that point in your life, no way of understanding that it is impossible for any human being to behave perfectly. Self-blaming makes this harebrained assumption. This belief sits behind the misery of some very depressed people. So, something you have done is so imperfect that you have rated yourself into the cellar. Behold the emotion-shaping power of your thinking.

Secondly, you may have performed the following feat of illogical thinking: Because of a handful of very imperfect moments, I am a complete write-off. Recall that this is the same bogus logic that would conclude that I am a total pimple because I have a pimple on my nose.

Self-blame can become habituated to the point that it becomes a position statement — a stance that you take, which you defend in the face of all contrary evidence. It's just thought habits, nothing more. Your ability to think and to understand is the way out.

Self-pity

Self-pity, also known as the pity-parlour, is the act of singing the repetitive refrains of: "Poor me. Everything about me and my life is so terrible. Nothing goes right. Everything goes wrong. Poor me. I'm helpless. No one loves me." Behind these habituated thoughts lurk beliefs/position statements that really beg a good working over.

Pity-parlouring is guaranteed to produce depression. That's its job. Remember, it is not things that happen on the outside of you that shape emotional energies into depression. Only thoughts can do that for you. Thoughts can be inaccurate.

Pity-parlour thinking poses constant, automatic arguments which promote depression. Automatic, habituated arguments are not known for their enlightenment or their accuracy, but for their inaccuracy and absolutistic positions: "I can't stand this. It always bad. Nothing ever goes right." I'm getting depressed just typing this. I know these lines. Once upon a time, I wrote an entire chapter in the book: "Recreational Pity-Parlouring Made Simple."

Pity for others

Pity for others is the third main type of thinking that leads to depression. Pity for others is not the same as respecting others or being attuned with their experience. That's empathy.

Pity for others is this kind of thinking: “She is having such a bad time, that I cannot be happy. If I care about her, then I’ll have to be sad too. If I don’t get sad, then I don’t really care about her. What’s happening to her is so terrible that I can’t stand it.”

Anti-Depression Arguments

To become depressed, you have to dress your emotional energies in the clothing of self-recrimination, self-persecution and such. Typically you will be presenting yourself with arguments and evidence which verifies your self-defeating position. So, good news. You already know how to argue. It may be habituated argumentation, but it is argumentation nonetheless. There is no fence-sitting in this game. You are either dissolving depression-shaping arguments or you are making them. It’s one or the other. Let’s check out a few examples.

Note: We do not suppress the depression in this approach. We bring it out, so that the thinking shows itself. We honour the emotional energies no matter what costumes they are wearing. We take the truth-seeking approach. We ask: “Is it true that I am such a bag of buffalo bagels? Am I really so worthy of damnation?”

We do not assume the answer before investigating. Assuming the answer to a question before getting to it is a standard thinking error, highly prevalent amongst those of us who have generated high octane depressions. Try not to assume your horribleness. Investigate with an open mind.

I’ve done something so horrible

Sexual victimization creates thinking that is applied to other life experiences — thinking that continues to reach the mistaken conclusion again and again: “I’m a rotten person.” Sexual victimization can leave a healthy human being feeling lonely, isolated and emotionally needy. In that state, she or he will experience a dire need for attention, affection and acceptance, and will say lots of I-gotta-have statements and negative human worth statements. A self-damning mental set will result in behaviour which confirms it. This is a vicious circle and a double-whammy to boot.

For instance, you may have engaged in self-abusive behaviour. You may have used this behaviour as conclusive evidence of your worthless nature. Danger! Thinking error!

Example: Sexual arousal or genital stimulation can become linked with satisfying a dire need for attention, affection and acceptance. This is a common leftover effect of sexual victimization — Sex means I’m a somebody. The victim then looks for affection, acceptance and attention using sex as The Answer. The sex doesn’t really make the grade as a needs-meeting device though. In fact, it might even magnify the sense of degradation and of humiliation.

We have learned that many adolescent prostitutes have sexual victimization in their backgrounds. Makes sense, doesn’t it? Other victims report episodes of promiscuity. The deepest, darkest secrets of some victims have to do with their own actions — subsequent to their victimization. They hold themselves to blame because they actually did these so-called horrible deeds. No one else did. No one made them do these things. They call themselves by these erroneous names: tramp, whore and slut. Sometimes other people may use these inaccurate put-downs to refer to these citizens. Mental pollution is all over the place.

The realistic goal is to be able, with conviction, to say these two words: “So what!” It’s called accepting yourself. Easy to say, but it can be achieved by expanding your understanding. Don’t stop reading now.

Some victims of child sexual abuse report having used objects to masturbate with, or having had dogs lick their genitals — usually during an extremely isolated, depressed, lonely period. This is used as evidence of their horribleness — sometimes for years afterwards. They are anything but horrible. In fact, the real, live people who have shared this kind of secret with me are among the heroes and heroines in my life. The courage and honesty required to participate in these conversations is inspiring.

The task is to find the unchallenged position statements that are at the root of the guilt, shame and self-hate. The goal is to fully understand that these position statements are unsound, illogical, wonky, nonsensical and invalid — and then to relish the truth: “I am innocent, I did the best I could. I’m not a lousy person because I wasn’t a picture of perfection. That idea is crap. I know that now.”

It isn’t the event or the behaviour that causes the deep shame. It is the thinking that goes with the memory of it. Let’s look at some possible thinking errors and faulty beliefs that might be happening.

“I must be perfect. I am capable of being so perfect that not only can I handle sexual victimization perfectly, but also the entire aftermath of it.” Does this sound familiar?

“I have masturbated with an object or had a dog lick my genitals, therefore I am a horrible, sick person, worthy of nothing. Period. Absolutely. Unquestionably. For sure.”

“I have had all kinds of sex with many different people. I let myself be used sexually. I must be a slut.”

These statements ignore this truth: There is health in that kind of behaviour. At every point in life, we humans try to meet our needs. Some days we do this well, and some days we are unsuccessful. That is exactly what you do too. You try to take care of your needs. That is what is behind it all. Again and with feeling: You try to take care of your needs. That’s healthy. Period. You did the best that you could in tough, complicated circumstances. You did as good as a whole lot of other people in the same boat. Some of those needs meeting attempts may not have worked well, but through trial and error, you are learning. That’s being human.

Self-damning statements also ignore the fact that those experiences are normal for many victims. Sexualized behaviour is a part of the victim experience for many people. No one is prepared for the victimization experience and all that comes with it. The mental set of a human being takes an enormous wallop during sexual victimization. Do you believe that you are somehow more able to cope than the rest of the human race? Did you ride a bicycle perfectly the first time you tried? Why do you think that you could have handled victimization perfectly, when it is a much heftier challenge than bicycling. Challenge shame and guilt. Think it out. Read. Get informed. You are not shameful.

If you understand this intellectually, then you have begun. Deeper understanding comes with taking time, regularly, to re-think your position statements. Sooner or later you will have an aha!!, and the self-blaming pattern will crumble. Take the time to argue, debate and dispute these looney assumptions about your behaviour and your worth. Many people do these things, even

when they haven't been victimized. You don't have the market cornered at all. Most people are too ashamed to acknowledge these private experiences though.

Take masturbation for example. Even though we now know that is a normal behaviour, practised by most people, who admits to it? The world is not very grown up some days is it? Do not take its weird should's and should not's as a model of rational thinking.

A Sample Dispute

Shirley (real name not used), in her mid-thirties, believed that she was evil. For many years, this was a position that she held about herself. She had been physically abused, sexually abused and mentally tormented by her father from infancy until she left home. There were many real life experiences which contributed to this self-injuring belief.

To Shirley, evil meant being worthy of punishment and hate. Naturally, her thinking and her behaviour expressed this in self-mutilation, suicide attempts, disregard for basic self-care skills and a constant repetition of self-hate statements. Among the reasons that she had for proving to herself that she was evil, the one that seemed to carry the most weight had to do with something she had done, not what had been done to her.

Shirley was able to say this: "I'm evil because of what I have done." This was a beautifully clear statement. At first, Shirley was unable to say what it was that she had done that provided such convincing evidence that she was evil: "If I tell you, then you will think that I am evil too."

These two beliefs sealed Shirley into a personal hell. From them arose many other thoughts that were based upon the blind acceptance of these positions. Her emotional energies were therefore warped into depression, despair and self-loathing.

The question was: How can she successfully dispute these beliefs? What kind of challenges can they be put to?

The first step was to insert two ordinary words in front of Shirley's belief statements. The words are: "I think."

The position (belief) statements now read:

"I think — that I'm evil because of what I have done."

"I think — that if I tell you, that you will think that I am evil too."

These statements were written on paper and said out loud, to slow down the thinking process, and to get them out into the open so that they could be checked out. We did not jump to the conclusion that these beliefs were false. We simply accepted them and agreed to investigate them to see if they were true, or whether they might be false. Why not? What was there to lose? Nothing fancy here.

Adding the words, "I think", to her beliefs statements brought forth the concepts that Shirley had been learning to work with, the concept that thinking shapes emotional energies, and the concept that habituated thinking may be offside logically and factually. Adding the words, "I think", in front of the belief statements links the beliefs to the learning. It says: "Hey! These are only thoughts. They aren't necessarily facts."

The first belief up for scrutiny and challenge was: “I think that if I tell you what I have done, then you will think that I’m evil.” While there was no way to actually prove that I wouldn’t think that Shirley was evil, naming the fear out loud and discussing it, provided enough safety to enable Shirley to take a risk. She is, after all, a very brave person. And naming and discussing fear ain’t a bad idea.

Shirley filled in the missing details: “I think that I am evil because I once had a dog lick my private parts and I got aroused.” With the full statement out on the table, the disputing could begin in earnest. The gig in this instance is to search for the kind of arguments that make sense to the individual. It was Shirley’s thinking that was most important, not mine. Her own expanded understanding was the goal. We tried several approaches to debating her position.

Here is one disputation that made sense to her: She is 35 years old, which means that she has been living for about 13,000 days. (We actually did the arithmetic.) On about ten of those 13,000 days, she did the so-called evil behaviour — for only a few minutes at a time. Therefore, on 0.077% of the days of her lifetime, for about 0.6% of the time in each of those days, she has performed evil deeds. Okay. At this point, Shirley began to chuckle, even though she had not yet addressed the issue of whether this kind of behaviour is truly evil. The spell of wonky, habituated thinking had been broken.

The thinking error behind her self-damnation was: “If I have done some bad things, then I am badness personified.” (“If I have a pimple on my nose, I must be a pimple.”) The power of catastrophising, combined with a thinking error and influenced by the I gotta be perfect or else belief was thwarted.

Once the belief-bubble had been popped, Shirley was receptive to hearing some accurate information about sexual victimization and sexualized needs-meeting behaviour. She was relieved to know that she was not the only person in history, or in her community, to try to meet needs in these unsuccessful, but completely understandable ways. It is a common type of sexualized symptom of unresolved sexual abuse. Nothing more, nothing less. Certainly it is not cause for damnation. It isn’t perfect, but it is a genuine attempt to meet needs — maybe not the best way, but she did figure that much out already.

She figured that out years ago!

The only problem was the shame and guilt.

A belief of many years bit the dust with a few minutes of work — defeated by courage and re-thinking. The emotional energies flowed instantly into the new thought configuration. Yes! The habituated thoughts did return to pester Shirley, but their impact was watered down by her enlarged understanding. She worked to develop her ability to recognize and to challenge her unrealistic thinking when it did show up.

Regular mental housekeeping is a good habit to develop.

A Reminder

Sexual victimization can leave you wondering what you really feel. Surviving the intimate invasion of a sexual assault activates your natural coping methods. As such, you may have put a

lot of distance between yourself and some of your emotions. Good for you. You are functioning in a healthy manner. You may find it difficult to feel some of your emotions. This is normal. Let's put it into perspective.

Preparing for the return of your emotions, especially the tough ones is the first step. The best place to practice is in daily life, by handling the mundane issues a little differently. Re-thinking the beliefs and the habituated thinking connected with routine frustrations and anxieties, is good preparation. Discovering that you too can diffuse anxiety and frustration, anger and depression in situations that are not ultra-difficult is a good way to develop confidence and ability.

Think of it this way: If you scrape your elbow, you do not have to instruct your body to form a scab and get on with the job of healing. Your job is to keep the wound clean and to give it some air. Being traumatized by sexual victimization is much the same. You have formed a psychic covering over the wound, naturally — without instructing your mental set to do so. Your job is to keep the area clean — by talking about it when you are able and by doing some routine mental house-keeping.

Taking care of yourself in this manner will create the conditions in which your emotions (and the thinking associated with them) will surface, in their own time and according to your own inner healing schedule. Pay attention to how this works for you. You can trust your nature.

If you are a gardener, think of it this way: You have flowering plants in your garden. A bud is very small, hard, knobby thing with a flower hiding inside. Would you help the flower to bloom by prying the bud open? No, of course not. You would respect the plant's inner schedule and support this with water, light and nutrients. Ditto for you.

Have I made the point? This is another reminder of the creatively lazy approach to healing.

Honour Your Feelings - Revisited

Hate and anger are two emotions that you may encounter on your path. Being sexually victimized is one of those experiences in which it may be unsafe to express those emotions at the time of the victimization. In healing and recovery, you may experience these emotions again.

Resolving the thinking behind these emotions can happen only after they have been given the respect and honour that they deserve — that you deserve. This is done by finding ways to express them, safely, without dumping them all over anyone who comes near you. That may happen too — it sometimes goes with the territory — particularly if you bottle up your anger and hate.

Speaking of bottling up emotions, Maggie (not her real name) believed that hate is a sin. She felt hate towards her abusive father, but bottled it and corked it. Knowing that she felt hate only served to convince her that she was a worthless human being. "Hate is a sin. Because I hate my father, I am sinful and worthless. I should forgive him. I can't forgive him, therefore I'm evil." These are the thoughts that Maggie identified.

Having learned that these are just thoughts, that thoughts shape good emotional energy, Maggie was able to engage in challenging and disputing her ban against feeling hate and anger. Here is how she did it:

“Maybe hate is a sin and maybe it isn’t, but it is what some sexual abuse victims feel. I feel that way. Who are these people who have the nerve to speak for God and say that I should be able to be so perfect that I can handle my victimization perfectly. How can they speak for God? What nerve! What pretention! Maybe I will forgive one day and maybe I won’t. Who speaks for God and says that God cannot understand what happened to me? God can handle what has happened.”

In this manner, Maggie gave herself permission to experience her own life energies in whatever form they presented themselves.

Sorting out anger- and hate-making thinking is something that happens after the anger and hate have been validated — given the space to unfold, to be expressed and to be respected.

Forgiveness can happen too, but usually when the healing process is more advanced. It is not something to strive for immediately. It will come in its own time, as a result of the maturation of your thinking — and when the time is right, you will know it. Forgiveness is your choice and no one else’s. You have been sexually victimized. If you choose to get to the point where you are able to forgive your offender, you will find that the route to that point involves expressing, honouring and healing your emotions first.

Uncensored Thoughts and Feelings

One excellent way of expressing thoughts and feelings is to write a letter (one that you will not mail) to the person who sexually victimized you. In this exercise, the thing is to be completely uncensored — to let it all out in whatever language works for you, regardless of any thinking errors. It’s an exercise in honouring your feelings and naming what has happened to you. Many people find it helpful.

Here are two samples, with the names changed to respect the privacy of the writers. Both individuals have allowed their letters to be used. Thanks team! The first letter has been written by an adult survivor of child sexual abuse. She writes to her father. The second letter was written by a thirteen year old girl who was raped by an older teenaged boy. Notice that both of these courageous individuals have not censored their thoughts and feelings.

*Dear Dad,
I think you are a bastard. You ruined my life. I never got to feel what it was like to have my first kiss. I never got to choose who I slept with the first time. You took it all away from me. The kids at school used to tease me and I felt like a dirty filthy rag. You hurt me so bad I couldn’t stay in my body. You beat me, you moulded me. You showed me you had the power. The power to take a baby and rip her heart out, bash her around a bit, enter any opening she had in her body including her eyes and ears. You licked me all over and it made me feel like a repulsive whore. You told me I was so good in bed that you’d have me there all the time. What a pig. What a Fucking Pig. So maybe you were abused. Why I’m still alive I don’t know! You were a disgrace to mankind. I’m still awfully afraid of you but sometimes I feel like taking a gun and blowing you away then laughing Ha Ha Ha no that’s too good for you I think you should be torched and slowly pull your fingernails out first one by one pour boiled wax over you.
Your Daughter
Linda*

Dear Jailbird,

Tommy I am writing to you because I want you to know how much you hurt me and my family that night in the country you knew what was gonna happen you son of a bitch you had no right to do anything you lieing pice of shit you did so know my age everybody told you, the night you parked up the road and you never said a fucking word of what you were planning. Oh what did you do pay the Judge off how I looked had nothing to do with it fuck I guess I should have listened to Samantha. She had the right idea how you are with girls. So how many did you rape so far prople all the town. And you knew I was a virgen at the time well just thought I'd let you know that I don't think it will be safe for you to come back. I am not afraid of you and if you pull that trick on anybody else I hope you rot in jail ya sorry son of a bitch all you are is a losser and a user and that is all you will ever amount to. I would rather die then to see your ugly face around here anymore. I probly would die by looking at your ugly fuckin face. You know what I hope that you don't come back. I'll probly feel sorry for you axcuily I won't. I'll laugh at you then I'll get my dog to shit on your ugly face it might be an improvement man. I wish so hard I can make you feel the same way you made me feel you made me feel like nothing and you know what I am not something I am a somebody and I will always be somebody weather you like it or not there are shit fucken better then you. I hate you for ruining my life . You allmost runed the most wonderful that that could ever happen to me.

Mary

By taking this kind of safe opportunity to puke your guts out (excuse the language, but it fits) on paper, you are honouring your feelings, no matter what they are. Rather than making the emotional pain worse, this relieves it. It breaks the secrecy spell and opens the door to further healing. Both of the writers of these letters were refreshed and happier at the end of the writing exercise. The ban against feeling was broken. This opens the door to more easily working with self-defeating thinking.

Detaching and Dissociating

Detaching and dissociating are words which describe the act of mentally (and therefore emotionally) leaving the present moment and of becoming distant from it. It can be experienced mildly as a subtle feeling of being separated and apart from everyone and everything around you. It can be experienced more dramatically as actually being outside of your body and looking on. Others may speak with you and you will not respond, though you may know that they are speaking. You are elsewhere. People around you may have difficulty with this, especially if it appears to happen right out of the blue. Some people will take it as evidence that you are mentally ill. You may be treated in a devaluing manner as a result of this. Again, mental pollution is popular.

You may suffer from this thinking error: "Because I detach, I must be a helpless, useless, whacked-out person." Let's dispute that one right away. First of all, congratulations on having an emergency exit. Are you aware that this kind of escape hatch has been used by a whole lot of sexually victimized people? Many of them were victims of sexual violence as little children. You may have developed this means of escape way back then. And good for you too.

The problem is this: Your emergency exit has become habituated and you may be using it when you don't really need to. Are you still at risk of being victimized? No? Then you do not really need it these days. The development of the emergency exit is not only because of trauma, but also because of the re-victimization process, in which a child's normal life gets split mentally from the abusive episodes. The habituation of this process evolves naturally and there is no blame for it. It's a survival device and it probably saved you from more severe mental, emotional and physical pain than you know. So far so good?

Now that the detaching has become automatic, you will doubtless be finding it somewhat inconvenient, inappropriate or downright embarrassing. Get on with the job of disputing any self-downing thinking that goes with this. It is a fact of your life — for the time being anyway. Why do a double whammy and feel bad about it too?

It is essentially this kind of problem: Let's suppose that you want to cross a lake, so you get a canoe and paddle yourself across. Let's suppose that you want to take a hike on the other side of the lake. Will you bring the canoe along with you on the hike? No you won't. The canoe was a useful vehicle for crossing the lake, but it will be an unnecessary burden for hiking. No big crime — just inconvenient and a lot of extra work. Your emergency exit once was a necessity. Now it is in the way.

As well as accepting the fact that your escape hatch routine has become habituated and is no reason for self-damning, there may be more that you can do. For instance, recall that memories of trauma are only difficult when the thinking that comes with them is troublesome. Your detaching is likely provoked by some kind of habituated stress-making thinking that gets triggered in the here and now. When you think something like: "I can't stand this. This is really horrible. Help! I can't handle this!, I have to get out of here!", you may trigger the habituated emergency exit routine. Good bye. Off you go.

Check this out: While off and away, you still have the ability to think. So relax. Briefly enjoy the sense of safety, and begin purposeful thinking. Challenge the awfulizing. Recognize that you are safe and that you can actually handle what ever is going on. Explain this to yourself. It may be unpleasant, but it is not so tragic really. Challenge the I-can't-stand-its. Work gently towards understanding that you are able to stand whatever it is, even though it may be a royal pain in the butt. Allow yourself to come back. Explain to yourself that it is safe out there. It's just another case of habit thinking — no big deal. Keep the internal chatter and challenge going. Compliment yourself on your return. Buy a hamburger or a yogurt shake. Treat yourself.

In this manner, you can develop some control over your comings and goings. You don't have to just be at the mercy of these habituated escape processes. You can work towards becoming an expert traveller between states — with more control over it. Hey, some of us meditate for years and we still cannot do that kind of thing. Medication might also be helpful with this if it is a big concern.

The need to be perfect, the awfulizing and the panic creation can be worked on when you are in a good mood. Take the opportunity to rehearse your realistic thinking so that when you next detach, you will know your lines. Enjoy yourself. Radical idea.

As your thinking matures, you may be able to live without the emergency exit for longer and longer periods. Don't worry. If you want it, it will still be there. On the other hand, as the quality of your emotional life increases, you may not want the great escape anymore. Give it some thought.

Panic Attack!

Panic attacks (also known as anxiety attacks) are no fun. They are scary as hell and demoralizing. They provoke depression-creating thinking, particularly the self-pity and self-blame kind. They are, however, just habituated thought patterns and they are common to people who have been sexually victimized.

In order to have thought patterns which cause panic, you must first have had moments of real panic in your life. Secondly, you must not have had the opportunity to allow the panic thinking to mature. The secrecy-maintaining pressures will have helped to do this.

Sexual victimization very often causes panic when it is happening. This leaves the individual with the panic thought-form established in his or her mental set. Unless it is attended to by re-thinking, it may become habituated. When a person, particularly a child, is re-victimized again and again, the panic thinking can become a very persistent habit.

Panic thinking can be activated by very modest disappointments, or it may sometimes seem to appear out of the blue. You can tell a panic attack from reality-based panic because it happens when there is nothing really worth panicking about. If you just fell into the ocean and you can't swim, you might panic, but that is more reasonable. There is justification for the panic, even though panic isn't a good idea even in that situation. Panic attacks don't match up with what is really happening on the outside of you. They happen on the inside. They are a real experience, involving real feelings which need to be honoured rather than damned.

If you suffer from panic attacks, you will have developed means of coping with them. You may resort to beer, bingo, or drugs. You may find that music helps to get you through it. You may use crisis lines, crisis counsellors, psychiatric wards, medication or food. You may find friends to be with or to phone, places to go to or place to avoid. Somehow, you manage to get through these tough moments. Hear this: Right on! Continue to do these things if they work for you. It's how you are taking care of yourself.

On the other hand, since some of these coping methods cost you in other ways, and since the panic attacks still continue, why not begin to also work with the panic-creating thoughts forms themselves? Alcohol or drugs may work for you some of the time, but they have an unfortunate cost to them in the long run — a cost to your bank account, relationships, health and well-being. These coping devices may be useful in the short run and it is not a good reason for a self-inflicted guilt trip, since you are just trying to take care of your needs. However, give some consideration to what follows.

Panic can be overcome, since it is just habituated thinking. This kind of thinking is in your noggin for a very good reason. Any healthy, normally functioning human being would have it after being sexually victimized. No blame.

Panic attacks come and go. No panic attack lasts. You have a perfect track record for having your panic attacks give up and go away, sooner or later. Remember. They never last.

Thoughts move very quickly during a panic attack. The first thing that you can do is to slow down your thoughts. Breathing slowly can help to do this. Soothing music can help too. Stopping to write down your thoughts, uncensored, as they happen, can slow things down. Experiment with ways that will do this for you. How can you challenge, debate and dispute thinking that is moving at the speed of light?

Once you have managed to slow down your thinking, look for common garden variety faulty beliefs and attack them vigorously. Keep up the criticism of these faulty beliefs. Become a royal pain in the butt to them. Strive to find a larger understanding. The truth will set you free. Talk to yourself nonstop. Challenge, dispute and debate the habituated thoughts that say: “This is horrible. I can’t stand this. Help! Something terrible is happening.”

With practice, the habituated thinking will have problems maintaining its momentum. Continue to use your normal escape/coping methods if you need them, but keep an eye to the next time that you and your panic thinking can have a wrestling match. All it takes is persistence. I’m sure you have lots of that.

Anger

Anger, like all emotions, is good life energy dressed up in the clothing of thoughts. Habituated anger-creating faulty beliefs and thinking errors shape emotional energy into anger at the drop of a hat. Before tackling these, let’s get a few points clear.

In sexual victimization, emotions are often suppressed. The bottling and corking of emotions can become habituated — continuing long after the victimization has stopped. Consider that secrecy-maintaining has not only kept you from talking to others about what has happened to you, but has also prevented you from thinking and feeling in a full, free and satisfying manner. Denial and secrecy-maintaining will do that.

As your healing takes place, there will likely be some anger-creating thought patterns surface. These will shape and colour your emotion-al energies into anger, immediately. You might find yourself being cranky, irritable or explosive. You may have periods of seething anger. You may lash out at innocent by-standers in your life — your children, your spouse, your colleagues, your friends or anyone who gets in your way. Your ability to tolerate frustration may have done a disappearing act.

If this is happening to you, congratulations. You are no longer suppressing your anger. You are standing up for yourself. Now, there is a price tag attached to dumping your anger all over everyone around you — at the very least you’ll start losing popularity contests. I recognize this, but it is critical for you to realize that that troublesome behaviour has health inside of it. It’s a good idea to find ways of showing anger that don’t have such a high price tag — but don’t condemn the anger. Find other ways to honour it and to get it out. And yes, this is another reminder about honouring your emotions.

Not all anger is a problem. Some of it releases and focuses the energy needed to stand up for ourselves and to do difficult things. On the other hand, outrage, temper tantrums and the verbal abuse of others may wreck your good relationships, preventing you from enjoying life. That’s the kind of anger to sort out.

Emotional energy gets shaped into anger by absolutist positions — common, garden variety faulty beliefs. Anger can be directed outwards at others, or inwards at yourself. Anger can be directed towards life in general, especially when it isn’t fair to you or someone you care about. In all three cases, it usually comes in the form of I-can’t-stand-it statements and ones that begin something like this:

“You should . . .”

“You must . . .”

“They must . . .”

Or, the ever popular, “Life must be fair.”

Here’s the wonky thing about these statements, the thing that makes them so irrational. They are demands that people or events act the way you say, just because you say so. It assumes that you are the ruler of the universe or something like that. It assumes that you are in such an exalted position that you are able to control others. Arguing with these positions until you can see and understand their illogical foundations is often enough to bring anger down a few notches. It’s that simple. It just takes practice and repetition. Shit happens some of the time. We do our best to deal with it, but to expect it never to happen is not being realistic. The best bet is to dispute irrational demands that it never happen.

Due to the secrecy-maintaining aspect of sexual victimization, it is a good idea to develop ways to express anger that are constructive, that don’t make your life miserable — the letter writing exercise for example. When dealing with others, saying, “I’m angry because you didn’t do the dishes!” is more helpful than saying, “You’re a jerk!”

Sharing angry feelings, talking about them, screaming them at an understanding fence post, walking them around the block, and writing them down, are all good ideas. For some of you, giving the police information about the criminal offences against you is a useful and helpful angry expression. Healing yourself can also be a wonderful focus for your anger. Remember. Honour your anger first. Then track down the thinking that keeps it at a hard-to-live-with level. The emotional energy that has been locked up can be yours again.

Keep Learning

Grab your library card or visit your local bookseller. Keep learning. Your librarian can order books from libraries all across the country if your library doesn’t have the ones you want. This manual is just a quick tromp through a few of the basics, so continue to feed your mental set with rich ideas and thought-provoking material. For symptom management you may wish to give medication a trial run, or two. Each of you is different. Remember that it is all your choice.

Below are some suggestions. There are lots more out there.

Overcoming Depression, P. A. Hauck, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1973.

Overcoming Frustration and Anger, P. A. Hauck, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1973.

How To Stubbornly Refuse To Make Yourself Miserable About Anything — Yes Anything!, A. Ellis, Carol Publishing Group, New York, 1988.

Assessment and Treatment of Adolescent Sex Offenders, G. P. Perry & J. Orchard, Professional Resource Press, Sarasota, Florida, 1992.

The Multi-professional Handbook of Child Sexual Abuse, T. Furniss, Routledge, London and New York, 1991.

Reclaim Your Self

In Tibet, way back a few hundred years ago, there lived a guru named Milarepa. Milarepa was renowned for his wisdom and his mastery of yoga. Milarepa's most promising pupil, Gambopa, was training to be a teacher like Milarepa. He desperately wanted to know everything that Milarepa had to teach. Milarepa would say: I've taught you everything but the one, most profound teaching. Unfortunately, you aren't ready for it yet. Needless to say, Gambopa was disappointed with Milarepa's words.

Finally, the day came when Gambopa was setting out to travel over the Himalaya Mountains to teach in India. Milarepa had not yet taught him the most profound teaching. Gambopa pleaded, but Milarepa only said: Sorry. You aren't ready for it yet. It's so profound that you wouldn't understand it.

Sadly, Gambopa trudged up the mountain path, leaving without having learned the most profound teaching. Suddenly he heard a faint shout from behind. There down in the valley was his teacher, Milarepa, waving his arms. The wind carried Milarepa's final words to Gambopa:

“The most profound teaching is to practice.”

This manual is noteworthy by what is not in it. It is short and it is incomplete. If it has jostled some of your thinking about yourself, then it has done its job. You are on an adventure in change and healing. You can succeed. I know this because my teachers have been people like yourself who were sexually victimized. They proved that healing and recovery can happen — even when I doubted that it was possible. I no longer doubt.

Find people to share with and to work with. Healing work is easier with company. During some stages it is best to have coaching from a good counsellor. During the dark moments of victimization there was always someone looking out for you. That someone is you. Go ahead. Reclaim your Self.

Bill Davidson - Professional Biography

27 years of experience working with troubled children and youths / 15 years family work experience / 12 years experience working with survivors of sexual victimization / 7 years experience working with adolescent sexual offenders / 17 years experience as a trainer / 17 years supervisory experience / multi-disciplinary community based approach / experienced in cross-cultural settings (NWT, BC, Alberta) / served on Board of Canadian Child Welfare Association and several local boards / organizer for two successful conferences / conference presentations.

Review of Reclaim Your Self

by John Butcher, MSW, RSW

(Reprinted with permission from “Perspectives”, Vol 15 #9, September 1993 - BC Association of Social Workers. When he wrote this review, John Butcher is the director of the Lax Kw'allams Family Counselling Centre, Port Simpson, BC. He has worked extensively with survivors of

sexual victimization.)

Reclaim Your Self is an 83 page self help guide for survivors of sexual abuse. I have found this manual to be very useful both as an adjunct to on-going therapy, and in helping survivors with the decision of whether on-going long-term therapy is necessary. The author, Bill Davidson, has over 20 years experience in working with survivors, perpetrators and families where sexual victimization has occurred. He is a firm believer in individuals' power to heal, in some cases, without therapy.

As a result, this manual goes to great efforts to de-mystify the thought processes, feelings, thinking patterns, fear, secrecy, depression and anger, commonly experienced by people who have been sexually victimized. The negative stigma attached to these feelings is fully explained, resulting in a lessening of the debilitating effect on the person, e.g. "as your healing takes place, there will likely be some anger-creating thought patterns surface", "your ability to tolerate frustration may have done a disappearing act", "if this is happening to you, congratulations, you are no longer suppressing your anger".

However, the manual does not stop there. It gives concrete examples of how to deal with these emotions. One individual was caught in the double-bind of believing that hate is a sin. Like many survivors who hold strong religious beliefs, she was unable to honour her feelings of hate towards her abuser, having been told that she must forgive him. Through challenging this belief she was able to handle her situation this way; "who are these people who speak for God and say that I can handle my victimization perfectly, maybe I will forgive one day and maybe I won't, who speaks for God and says that God cannot understand what has happened to me? God can handle what has happened."

This manual is easy to read and is organized in small sections, with logical progression. A table of contents makes them easy to find for reference. It is written with the effective combination of knowledge, humour, empathy and common sense. While intended as a self help manual, the author effectively outlines situations where professional assistance is strongly encouraged, and where to find these resources.

If you are looking for a scholarly study based primarily on research and theory, then this manual is definitely not for you. However, if you are in search of a tool both you and your clients can use, this manual more than fits the bill.

Note From the Author — December 2005

Many people who have written to me about Reclaim Your Self have said that they felt that it was written to them personally. Perhaps this is because it was written as a farewell gift to a small group of individuals with whom I had been involved in a coaching role. All of them were working to overcome the effects of sexual victimization. I wrote to them personally in this manual. That was in late 1992. I was leaving their community with my family to live and to work in another one.

This manual has been on the web in html form since 1996. My son, Aaron, put it there for me. Since that time I have received hundreds of emails and have done my best to reply to each one. It has been inspiring to hear the stories of so many courageous individuals. It has been gratifying to have added something helpful to their lives. I am so very grateful to have heard from them.

Since late November 1995 I have not worked due to the sudden and dramatic onset of a

psychiatric illness — a rapid-cycling bipolar disorder. Hi ho. I get some relief with medication — it took several years of experimentation with a good doctor to get the best combination and dosage of meds. There have been several hospitalizations. And while medication mutes some of the neurologically-based upheaval, I am still left with a lot of wonky thinking, hence, I take my own medicine, the ideas and practices outlined in this manual. It is both an irony and a blessing.

With the support of my family and friends, my life continues and is productive on a part-time basis — in between the more exciting episodes. Currently I'm working on a huge embroidery project called "Flying Carpet". It's 30 by 50 inches and will be solidly covered with stitching when it is finished. One stitch at a time. One breath at a time. One day at a time. We all move forward together.

Be You!

Bill

December 2004

