

**Excerpt from**

**Dealing with the Effects of Trauma—A Self-Help Guide  
SMA-3717 Updated 11/02 Pages 7-9**

**The Healing Journey**

Begin your healing journey by thinking about how it is you would like to feel. Write it down or tell someone else. In order to promote your own healing, you may want to work on one or several of the following issues that you know would help you to feel better.

- Learn to know and appreciate your body. Your body is a miracle. Focus on different parts of your body and how they feel. Think about what that part of your body does for you. Go to your library and review books that teach you about your body and how it works.
- Set boundaries and limits that feel right to you. In all relationships you have the right to define your own limits and boundaries so that you feel comfortable and safe. Say “no” to anything you don’t want. For instance, if someone calls you five times a day, you have the right to ask them to call you less often, or even not to call you at all. If someone comes to your home when you don’t want them to be there, you have the right to ask them to leave. Think about what your boundaries are. They may differ from person to person. You may enjoy it a lot when your sister comes to visit, but you may not want a visit from your brother or a cousin. You may not want anyone to call you on the phone after 10 p.m. Expect and insist that others respect your boundaries.
- Learn to be a good advocate for yourself. Ask for what you want and deserve. Work toward getting what you want and need for yourself. If you want to get more education for yourself so you can do work that you enjoy, find out about available programs, and do what it is you need to do to meet your goal. If you want your physician to help you find the cause of physical problems, insist that he or she do so, or refer you to someone else. When you are making important decisions about your life, like getting or staying married, going back to school, or parenting a child, be sure the decision you make is really in your best interest.
- Build your self-esteem. You are a very special and wonderful person. You deserve all the best things that life has to offer. Remind yourself of this over and over again. Go to the library and review books on building your self-esteem. Do some of the suggested activities.
- Develop a list of activities that help you feel better (refer to the list in the section “Things you can do to help yourself feel better”). Do some of these activities every day. Spend more time doing these activities when you are feeling badly.

- Every family develops certain patterns or ways of thinking about and doing things.

Those things you learn in your family as a child will often influence you as an adult—sometimes making your life more difficult and getting in the way of meeting your personal goals. Think about the ways of thinking and doing things that guide you in your life. Ask yourself if they are patterns, and if you need to change them to make your life the way you want it to be. For example, in your family you may have been taught that you never tell anyone certain family secrets. In fact, it may be very important to share some family secrets with trusted friends or health care providers. Or you may have been taught that you must always do what certain members of your family want you to do. As an adult, it is important that you figure out for yourself what it is you want to do. In effect you can become your own loving parent.

- Work to establish harmony with your family or the people you live with. Plan fun and interesting activities with them. Listen to them without being critical.
- Work on learning to communicate with others so that they can easily understand what you mean. When talking with another person about your feelings, use “I” statements, like “I feel sad” or “I feel upset” rather than accusing the other person. You may want to practice good communication with a friend. Ask your friend to give you feedback on how you can be more easily understood.
- You may have lots of negative thoughts about yourself and your life. Work on changing these negative thoughts to positive ones. The more you think positive thoughts the better you will feel. For instance, you may always think, “Nobody likes me.” When you think that thought, replace it with a thought like, “I have many friends.” If you often think that you will never feel better, replace that thought with the thought, “Every day I am feeling better and better.”
- Develop an action plan for prevention and recovery. This is a simple plan that helps you stay well and respond to upsetting symptoms and events in ways that will keep you feeling well.

Using the activities in the section “Things you can do to help yourself feel better,” make lists of things that will help you keep yourself well and will help you to feel better when you are not feeling well. Include lists:

- to remind yourself of things you need to do every day - like getting a half hour of exercise and eating three healthy meals - and also those things that you may not need to do every day, but if you miss them they will cause stress in your life, for example, buying food, paying bills, or cleaning your home;
- of events or situations that may make you feel worse if they come up, like a fight with a family member, health care provider, or social worker, getting a big bill, or loss of something important to you. Then list things to do (relax,

talk to a friend, play your guitar) if these things happen so you won't start feeling badly;

- of early warning signs that indicate you are starting to feel worse - like always feeling tired, sleeping too much, overeating, dropping things, and losing things. Then list things to do (get more rest, take some time off, arrange an appointment with your counselor, cut back on caffeine) to help yourself feel better;
- of signs that things are getting much worse, like you are feeling very depressed, you can't get out of bed in the morning, or you feel negative about everything. Then list things to do that will help you feel better quickly (get someone to stay with you, spend extra time doing things you enjoy, contact your doctor); and
- of information that can be used by others if you become unable to take care of yourself or keep yourself safe, such as signs that indicate you need their help, who you want to help you (give copies of this list to each of these people), the names of your doctor, counselor and pharmacist, all prescriptions and over-the-counter medications, things that others can do that would help you feel better or keep you safe, and things you do not want others to do or that might make you feel worse.

## **Barriers to Healing**

Are there any things you are doing that are getting in the way of your healing, such as alcohol or drug abuse, being in abusive or unsupportive relationships, self-destructive behaviors such as blaming and shaming yourself, and not taking good care of yourself? Think about the possible negative consequences of these behaviors. For instance, if you get drunk, you might lose control of yourself and the situation and be taken advantage of. If you overeat, the negative consequences might be weight gain, poor body image, and poor health. You may want to work on changing these behaviors by using self-help books, working with a counselor, joining a support group, or attending a 12-step program.

## **Moving Forward on Your Healing Journey**

If you are now about to begin working on recovering from the effects of trauma, or if you have already begun this work and are planning to continue making some changes based on what you have learned, you will need courage and persistence along the way. You may experience setbacks. From time to time you may get so discouraged that you feel like you want to give up. This happens to everyone. Notice how far you've come. Appreciate even a little progress. Do something nice for yourself and continue your efforts. You deserve an enjoyable life.

Always keep in mind that there are many people, even famous people, who have had traumatic things happen to them. They have worked to relieve the symptoms of this trauma and have gone on to lead happy and rewarding lives. You can too.

From SAMHSA <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA-3717/SMA-3717.pdf>

For additional resources you could also contact your state consumer advocacy network/ agency. Find it by looking under Mental Health in the Yellow Pages of your phone book or online.