

HANDLING THE CRISIS STAGE

Many survivors of sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse go through a period where sexual abuse is literally all they can think about. You may feel overwhelmed by any decision in your life. You may find yourself having flashbacks uncontrollably, crying all day long, or unable to work. You may dream about the abuser and be afraid to sleep. Powerful reactions are also likely if you have forgotten your abuse and are now dealing with repressed memories.

The most important thing to remember is that the crisis stage is a normal part of the healing process and it will come to an end. The following suggestions may help you through this difficult time in your recovery:

- Know that you are not going crazy. What you are going through is a recognized part of the healing process.
- Don't hurt or try to kill yourself. You deserve to live. If you start feeling suicidal or self-destructive, reach out for help.
- Find people you can talk to. Don't try to bear it alone.
- Get skilled professional help.
- Do as many nice things for yourself as possible.
- Drop what is not essential in your life. Release the pressure any way you can. This means dropping people who are not supportive, quitting activities, lightening your workload, getting extra childcare.
- Create a safe area in your home. You need at least one place where you feel safe.
- Watch your intake of drugs and alcohol. Repeatedly numbing your feelings will only prolong the crisis.
- Get out of abusive situations. If you are currently in a situation where you are being abused, get out of it. If you feel like there is no other alternative, contact a battered women's shelter for support and assistance in identifying options.
- Sit tight and ride the storm. Your decision-making capability may be limited right now. Except for getting out of abusive situations, the crisis stage is usually not a good time for making major life changes.
- Remind yourself that you are brave. This is a challenging, scary, difficult period. You do not have to do anything but live through it.
- Remember to breathe. Stay as connected to your body as you can.
- Develop a belief in something greater than yourself. Spirituality can give you inspiration and strength.
- This too shall pass. Your experience tomorrow or next year or next week will not be the same as it is right now.
- Journal-writing. When you have the energy, you may want to consider writing in a journal to express your feelings and record your dreams. This will also be a way for you to see your recovery work unfolding.

Excerpt from The Courage to Heal by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis, Harper & Roe, New York, 1988.