



Sexual Assault Response Services *of Southern Maine*

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COPING SKILLS

As survivors of sexual abuse or assault, many of us have developed coping skills both to deal with trauma of the abuse/assault and to cope with the aftermath. The creativity of the survivors during the healing process is virtually endless; and the things we chose to do to survive were the best things we could do at that time.

Many survivors find, however, that as the healing process progresses, some of the coping skills that were previously effective no longer produce the desired effects. When that happens, it is time to develop new coping skills.

At the time of the assault, some of the common coping skills include:

- Denial or minimizing the assault/abuse
- Keeping the assault/abuse a secret
- Talking endlessly about the assault/abuse
- Developing addictions
- Care-taking others so that we won't have to cope with our own feelings
- Developing eating disorders
- Self-abusive behaviors
- Phobias
- Compulsive behaviors (cleaning, bathing, shopping, exercising)
- Promiscuity
- Celibacy
- Controlling behaviors
- "Obsession" with books about sexual assault/abuse
- Surrounding oneself with survivors
- Being in perpetual crisis
- "Acting out behaviors"

Although when these coping skills were integrated into the survivor's behavior patterns, they were functional healing behaviors, they often become ineffective later on in recovery. Sharing coping skills that have worked is an important affirmation and learning process for many survivors. The most important thing to remember is that we are survivors, and therefore we do have control over our actions and the power to change those behaviors which are no longer meeting our needs.

Help, Hope, and Healing