

Week 1: How the Course Works and What Is Abuse and Trauma?

The course has been designed to give you useful information about:

- What abuse and trauma is
- How it affects people physically and psychologically (emotionally or their mental health)
- Most importantly it will give you ideas of how to cope, as well as possible.

The course is most useful for people who have lived through childhood abuse; physical, sexual or emotional or ongoing adult abuses, most commonly domestic abuse and who feel affected physically or emotionally by these experiences. We will look at these in turn in the next few pages.

The course is designed to develop an understanding of the NORMAL range of reactions to abuse and trauma (some of which will last for years or even decades) and learn new ways of coping with them.

A good way of thinking about this course is to imagine that you are trying to develop your own 'survival kit' using a selection of tried and tested ways of coping with your difficulties.

Alone, each of these coping skills may not be enough, but in the right combination or with enough practice people who have used the course tell us they really felt a difference.

The Outline of the Course

- Week 1:** How the course works and what is abuse and trauma?
- Week 2:** What are the effects of abuse and trauma?
- Week 3:** Keeping safe and getting started
- Week 4:** Surviving the surviving
- Week 5:** Understanding anxiety and ways of coping with anxiety
- Week 6:** Understanding anger and ways of coping with anger
- Week 7:** Understanding depression and ways of coping with depression
- Week 8:** Understanding shame and ways of coping with shame
- Week 9:** Understanding flashbacks, nightmares and dissociation and ways of coping with these
- Week 10:** Effective communication, looking back and looking forward

The course is not designed to replace one to one therapy but to improve your understanding of your difficulties and give you more skills to cope with them. You are likely to still want or need therapy after you have used the course although some people feel they do not.

Everyone attending has been invited because we know that they have experienced some kind of abuse or trauma in their lives. The abuse you experienced may have happened recently or may have happened decades ago (or anything in between). Some people may still be experiencing ongoing abuse and trauma.

This course is not an opportunity to talk about the details of what happened to you.

There are several reasons for this, but most importantly people attending are at different stages in dealing with the things that have happened to them and can get upset when faced with other people's stories.

If you need to talk one to one, the course leaders will be available for a chat after the teaching sessions are over. They will discuss what else you might need and how you could access that.

You do not need to talk in the course unless you feel comfortable with that. But people feeding back how they have got on with some of the coping suggestions are always welcomed! If you feel able to, please feel free to ask questions about the material that is being taught.

The sessions are 1 ½ to 2 hours long (with a coffee/tea break in the middle). The information given will also be found in this weekly handout and in the Key Points handout.

If there is any risk associated with you taking this home, please ask someone else to keep it safe, for example the course leaders.

If you need to move around during the course sessions, or leave the room please feel free to do that. One of the course leaders will check you are OK after a few minutes if you haven't returned. If you are attending the course online and need to take a break, please let one of the course leaders know.

We hope you find this useful but if you have any difficulties or suggestions for improving things please let the course leaders know.

Understanding the Impact of Abuse and Trauma

What is abuse and trauma?

Abuse is when someone harms you. This may be a one off but it often happens over a period of time.

There are many types of abuse, which can happen at different times in people's lives. It can be an incident or a series of incidents, often where we are harmed by another person in a way that makes us feel frightened, terrified, overwhelmed or helpless.

In childhood, you may have experienced:

- **Neglect** (not having our needs, such as for food, heat or affection met)
- **Physical abuse** (for example, being hit, slapped, punched)
- **Sexual abuse** (being touched in a way we didn't like, being shown pornography, or being raped)
- **Emotional abuse** (being laughed at, called names, put down or criticised)
- **Witnessing violence** (seeing assaults on other family members)
- **Familial substance abuse** (seeing caregivers under the influence of drugs or alcohol)

These may have been one-offs, but can often happen repeatedly at the hands of people we believe should have been caring for us.

In adulthood, you may have experienced:

- **Physical abuse** (assaults, for example being punched, kicked, or slapped)

- **Sexual abuse** (being forced into sexual acts against our wishes)
- **Emotional abuse** (being laughed at, called names, put down or criticised)
- **Financial abuse** (having access to money minimised or withdrawn)
- **Over-control** (for example, having who we speak to, what we do, or what we wear being controlled)
- **Stalking and harassment** (unwanted attention for a period of time).

How common are these types of abuse?

Unfortunately, although measuring such terrible and secretive acts is difficult, we know that the experience of abuse is relatively common. The World Health Organisation (WHO)¹ looked at the high quality research available across the world and summarised that:

- 20% of women and
- 5-10% of men experienced sexual abuse in childhood

The Scottish Government reports that at least:

- 1 in 5 women experience domestic abuse in adulthood²
- Police Scotland report that of every 5 reports of domestic abuse in 2019 to 2020, one reported victim is male.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE. It is also common for people to experience more than one type of abuse across their life.

¹ For more information please see the World Health Organisation (2014) The World Report On Violence and Health WHO Geneva

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-crime-justice-survey-2019-20-main-findings/pages/20>
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/domestic-abuse-statistics-recorded-police-scotland-2019-20/documents>

| What is Trauma?

A trauma reaction is what we call it when an experience such as abuse overwhelms your ability to cope.

This might be because:

- it was so awful.
- it happened when you were young and had fewer ways of coping.
- it happened over and over again.
- there were other things happening in your life that were also taking energy to cope with (a new job or a new baby for example).
- it hit a particular 'button' personal to you.

Many people, who have experienced abuse, blame themselves for what happened to them. We will come back to this at various times in the course.

But here are the facts (even if this is hard to believe at the moment):

- The responsibility for abuse lies with the person/people who hurt you (whatever they said or might be saying)
- Survivors are not to blame
- There is nothing that you did or said that justifies the abuse
- Abuse is a crime. If you were burgled no one would suggest that you must have been a bad person to deserve it.

| The Phased Intervention or 3 Stage Model Approach

This course has been written based on the 3 stage model or Phased Intervention approach to treating survivors of abuse and trauma.

Recovery is possible and this approach states that the first task in recovering from abuse and trauma is to get safe and then to learn skills to cope with the effects of it. After this, it is often useful to go onto think and talk about the memories of the experiences themselves.

It is often described as:

Stage 1: Safety and Symptom Stabilisation

This means ensuring you are safe from others and yourself and that the 'symptoms' or difficulties that trouble you feel more under your control.

Stage 2: Remembrance and Mourning

This means having the time and space to think about what happened to you, to make sense of your own unique personal history and begin the process of grieving for what you may have lost.

Stage 3: Reconnection

This is the stage you begin living your life, learning to deal with relationships, choices and being able to recognise that the experience of abuse is just one of the things that has made you who you are.

This course is designed as a way of helping you tackle stage 1 of the process. You may need different kinds of help and support as you move through these stages.

It is important to say that although this looks neat and tidy written down, in reality survivors tend to move in and out of different stages depending on their needs at the time.

Also the time and effort you need to put into each stage will be unique to your own experiences. You may need to come back to the stage 1 tasks at different stages, particularly if you are experiencing a lot of stress.

| Safety First

The 3 stage model asks us to think about safety first and foremost. The most important thing is your own safety and the safety of children. You need to think about the following issues really carefully.

If you are currently at risk of on-going physical, emotional and sexual abuse from someone

This could be an abuser from your past, who you may still have contact with because of ongoing family contact or a current or ex-partner. If you feel you are currently at risk, then the first priority is to think about how you can manage that risk:

- If you are at urgent risk, please call **999**.
- Talk to someone who supports you. This could be a friend, your G.P. or other professional you are in contact with such as a health visitor or a support worker.
- Phone the 24/7 Scottish domestic abuse & forced marriage helpline on **0800 027 1234** or look at **www.sdafmh.org.uk**. There are options for live chat, email, phone and a safety button which closes the website quickly.

- There is also the 24/7 UK domestic abuse helpline on **0800 2000 247** or go to: **www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk**
- For women, find your local domestic abuse agency such as Women's Aid. You can get contact information from **www.womensaid.scot** which has lots of useful information.
- For men, phone the National Helpline for Male Survivors of Domestic Abuse **0808 801 0327**. Opening hours and further information available on **www.mensadviceline.org.uk**. There are options for live chat, email, phone and a safety button which closes the website quickly.
- For perpetrators of domestic abuse who would like help to stop, you can call **0808 802 4040** or visit **www.respectphoneline.org.uk**

We will look at safety planning in detail in the next few weeks. Please ask the course leader for this information if needed now.

If it is not safe to take this pack home with you, for any reason, please ask the course leaders to keep it for you.

As this is designed to help you, perhaps you could start to plan somewhere you could keep it - with a friend or relative?

If you feel overwhelmed and despairing

You feel you may be at risk of suicide or serious self-harm:

- Contact your G.P
- Contact your support worker, psychiatrist or C.P.N. (if you have one)

- Contact the Samaritans 24/7 on **116 123** or email them at jo@samaritans.org or go to their website on www.samaritans.org
- Contact a safe/supportive friend or family member
- Phone Breathing Space (open weekends and evenings) on **0800 83 85 87** or visit www.breathingspace.scot
- Contact NHS 24 for advice on **111** or www.nhs24.scot

If you know of a child at risk of abuse, sharing this information is important, although this is sometimes difficult for many reasons. You can discuss this with a professional who is supporting you (under law they will have to share this information) or contact one of these agencies:

- The local social work department.
- The police.
- Speak to one of the course facilitators or another health professional.

| The Three P's

One of the key messages of this course is the 3P's:

1. Preparation

When you hear a coping skill you think might be quite useful-do some planning. When would you use it? Do you need anything to make it work? How would you know it had or hadn't worked?

For example, we will talk about coping with anxiety by introducing safe coping mechanisms. These might include learning some techniques or trying some new ways

of coping with difficult feelings. However, you may need to organise some quiet time to practice the techniques, organising this might be an example of preparation.

2. Practice

When you have identified the difficulty you want to tackle and the coping skill you are going to try, it is important remember that it will need practice. Think of overcoming the effects of abuse and trauma in a similar way as the challenge of getting fit. If you decided to get fit you are unlikely to believe that 'I walked to the park today so I'll sign up for the marathon tomorrow!' In reality you need practice and time to get that good.

3. Patience

This is the hardest one! It is the thing that tends to mean that New Year's Resolutions last until 9.30pm on the 1st of January and that very few of us manage to do the marathon. Despite our good intentions, very few of us have the patience to keep going with the practice that would lead us to the success we so crave.

We hope the course will give you some support to at least get started with this. Changing things is hard. But sometimes keeping going the way things are at the moment is even harder.

If you have any questions, please ask the course leaders and we look forward to meeting you again next week.