

# **The Ultimate Step-By-Step Guide To Overcoming the Biggest Obstacles that Stop Survivors of Sexual Abuse from Healing**

Are you tired of feeling stuck and unsure about what's holding you back from getting the support you need to heal?

**This guide is an essential resource that helps survivors of sexual abuse overcome the challenges that hinder their healing process.**



**FREE HEAL® GUIDE**

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## Obstacles

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# A WARM WELCOME



**Embarking on a new journey of healing is an incredible and transformative experience. Although you might have encountered setbacks and moments of frustration along the way, remember that you are not alone. I am thrilled that my team and I have the opportunity to accompany you on this path, providing the support and guidance you need to reach the destination you desire.**

It's completely natural to have doubts about your ability to heal or feel uncertain about which direction to choose. But let me assure you, those doubts are only temporary roadblocks on your journey. With our collective expertise and your unwavering determination, we will navigate you through any obstacles that arise.

**Believe in yourself and the incredible potential within you.** You possess the strength and resilience to surpass any challenges that come your way. Trust in the process and have faith that healing is within your reach. You are more than capable of embarking on this transformative journey, and we are here to cheer you on every step of the way.

**So, let go of worry and embrace the possibilities that lie ahead. Together, we will unlock your inner strength, manage triggers, and alleviate your pain. The future is filled with hope, and your healing journey will lead you to a brighter, more fulfilling life..**

# My Story...

As a survivor myself, I have been where you are - not sure how to navigate the healing journey. To me it was a maze of confusion. I spent years exploring various avenues, from support groups to therapists, in my quest for healing. I grappled with managing triggers, flashbacks, and nightmares, while also rebuilding healthy family relationships and move forward with my life while I was still healing. It was challenging and at times a disheartening experience as I encountered dead ends and inadequate support along the way. I felt lost and unsure of how to move forward.

However, my journey took a turn when I became a parent. The responsibility of protecting my children became a powerful catalyst, motivating me to continue my search for the right help. Once I discovered the right resources, I made a commitment to dedicate myself to healing every single day. Within a year, armed with newfound knowledge and tools, I gained the strength and confidence to manage my life independently. It wasn't always easy, but I realized that my resilience grew from the work I had done, and I developed a belief in my own capacity to heal.

After my children were grown and yes, protected from sexual abuse, I made a personal promise to devote my life to assisting other survivors in finding the right support, education, and guidance. This commitment led to the creation of HEAL®, a comprehensive program designed to provide survivors with the resources and a clear path to feeling whole. HEAL® is not just a place to get resources, it is a transformative journey that guides you from pain to a sense of wholeness. It demonstrates that There is Life After Abuse® and offers a future filled with positivity and fulfillment.

Drawing from my unique perspective behind the scenes, I have authored HEAL®, a workbook specifically crafted to empower survivors in overcoming their past. This workbook is an integral part of the HEAL® Membership, which offers an exclusive experience to guide survivors through their healing process.

Ultimately, with the right information, education, and support, you will reflect on your journey and proudly proclaim, **"I did it! This was an immense challenge, but I persevered! I put in the work, and now I know what true freedom feels like!"**



## And here's the best part:

Your pain has the potential to be transformed into something extraordinary, making you a powerful force for positivity. The greatest secret lies in discovering your inner strength, which, with the right help, education, and guidance, will carry you through any trial and enable you to create the future you desire.

HEAL® was created to be your trusted companion, walking alongside you on your journey to healing and freedom. The HEAL® community is the key that may unlock your future.

So, are you ready to reclaim your life?

## Let's do it – together!

*Wendy M. Johnson*

CEO and Founder of Heal®

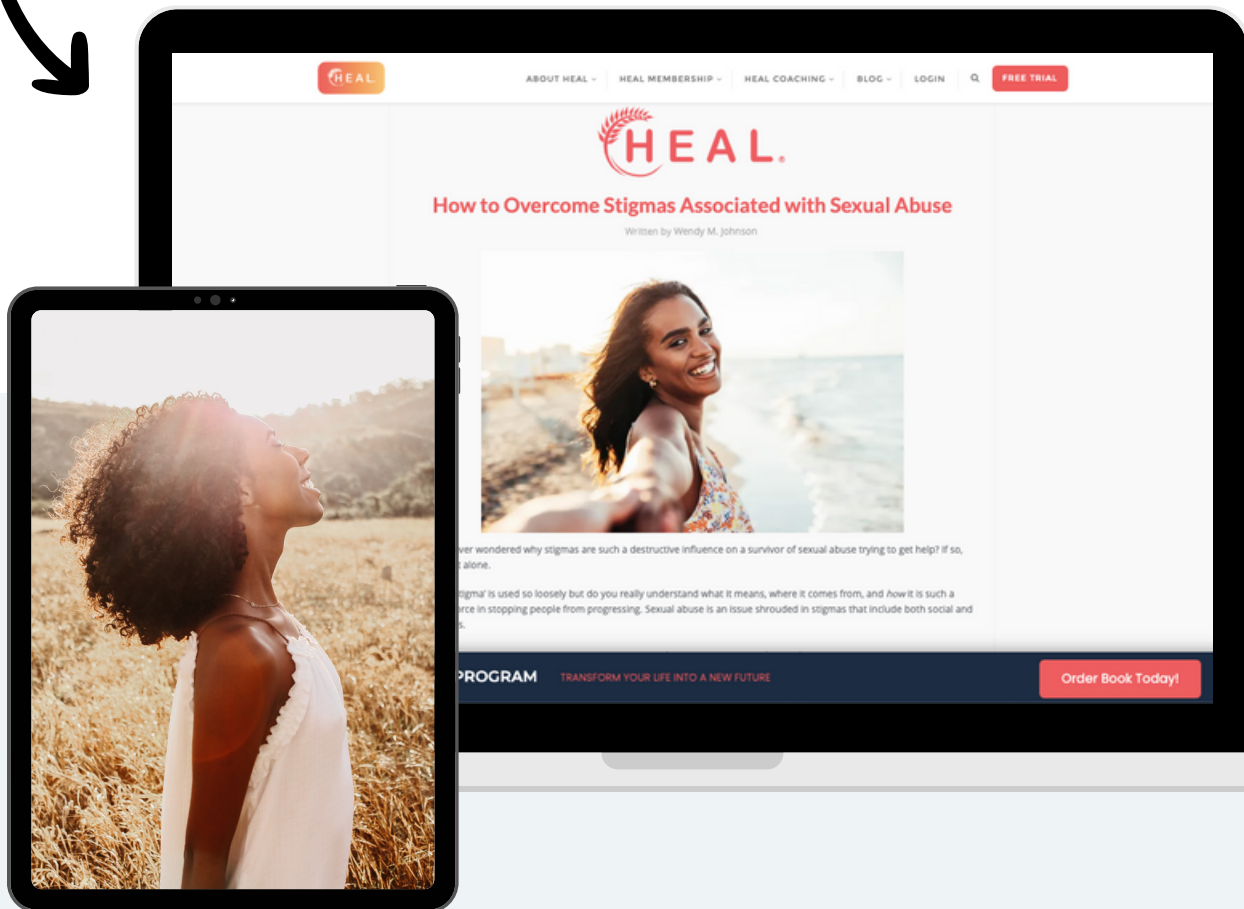
Host of The Wendy M. Johnson Show Podcast

## Let's Connect!



# OBSTACLE 1

DID YOU KNOW STIGMAS  
AND CULTURAL BARRIERS HAVE  
HELD SURVIVORS BACK FOR  
THOUSANDS OF YEARS?



[LEARN MORE](#)

# Social Stigmas

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## Social stigmas against victims of sexual violence:

01

Globally, there are societal attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate stigmas against victims of sexual violence, making it difficult for survivors to come forward.

### Examples

Societal attitudes and beliefs perpetuate stigmas and include victim-blaming narratives. When a survivor of sexual violence comes forward, they may face skepticism, disbelief, and blame from society. For instance, if a woman reports a sexual assault, she might be asked questions like, "What were you wearing?" or "Were you drinking?" These questions imply that the victim's behavior or choices somehow justify or invite the abuse, placing the blame on the survivor rather than the perpetrator.

### Effects

Such attitudes create a stigma that discourages survivors from speaking out and seeking support, as they fear being judged, not believed, or held responsible for the assault. This societal stigma reinforces the idea that victims should bear the burden of shame and guilt, making it difficult for survivors to come forward and access the help they need.

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# Social Stigmas

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02

## Barriers from families, social circles, and the media:

Survivors face barriers to disclosure due to stigmas imposed by their families, social circles, and negative media representations of sexual violence.

### Examples

- Survivors of sexual abuse often face barriers to disclosure due to stigmas imposed by their families, social circles, and negative media representations.
- Family and community beliefs that prioritize reputation and silence can discourage survivors from speaking out, fearing shame and dishonor.
- Negative media portrayals, such as victim-blaming narratives or skepticism, further deter survivors from sharing their experiences, fearing disbelief and public scrutiny.

### Effects

These stigmas create significant obstacles, making it difficult for survivors to come forward, seek support, and access justice.

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# Social Stigmas

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03

## Perception of sexual abuse as a private matter:

The belief that sexual abuse that occurs within the home is a private matter contributes to silencing victims and discouraging them from seeking help.

### Examples

- A survivor of sexual abuse by a family member may feel trapped by the belief that family matters should be kept private. This belief can create immense pressure on the survivor to maintain silence, fearing that exposing the abuse could disrupt family dynamics and relationships.
- Due to the perception that sexual abuse within the home is a private matter, survivors may hesitate to seek help from external sources such as law enforcement, counselors, or support organizations. They may worry about breaching the family's privacy and face possible backlash or further harm from their abuser.
- The belief in the privacy of home matters can also discourage friends, neighbors, or extended family members from intervening or reporting suspicions of abuse. They may feel reluctant to intrude on what they perceive as a personal family issue, leaving the survivor without crucial external support networks and opportunities for intervention.

### Effects

Families can turn on the victim of sexual abuse and defend the perpetrator. They will go to great length to silence the victim in an effort to 'go back' to 'normal life' or due to financial concerns' or 'continuing the cycle of abuse' in their family line due to their own past abuse.

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# Social Stigmas

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## 04

### Victim-blaming:

Blaming sexual assault victims for their rape is a common social stigma that adds to survivors' feelings of shame and self-blame.

#### Examples

- You are damaged goods or you are to blame for what happened.
- When a sexual assault victim is questioned about their clothing, behavior, or previous relationships, it perpetuates the social stigma of victim-blaming.
- Media coverage or public discussions that focus on the actions or character of the victim rather than holding the perpetrator accountable contribute to victim-blaming. This narrative reinforces the stigma that victims are responsible for the assault, intensifying their internalization of shame and self-blame.
- Within social circles or communities, derogatory comments or judgments towards sexual assault survivors can further deepen the stigma of victim-blaming. When friends, acquaintances, or even family members reinforce the notion that the survivor is at fault, it amplifies their feelings of shame and self-blame, hindering their healing and recovery process.

#### Effects

Victim-blaming turns the survivors inward and can stop you from even reaching out for help.

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# Self-Stigmas

01

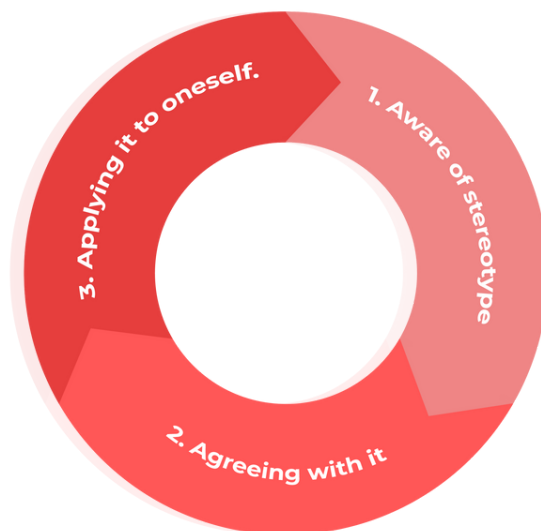
## Internalization of negative stereotypes:

Survivors of sexual violence may internalize negative stereotypes, leading to negative emotional reactions such as:

- **Low self-worth,**
- **Poor self-efficacy, and**
- **Reluctance to seek help**
- **Shame**
- **Guilt**
- **Self-Blame [1]**

02

## Three-step process of self-stigma:



**This internalization occurs after exposure to victim-blaming messages from society. [2]**

# Cultural norms and their impact on survivors of sexual abuse:

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1

## **Culture as a set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors:**

Culture is defined as a set of shared attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors among a group of people. It is learned through socialization from various sources such as family, peers, teachers, community elders, and media. [3]

- **Attitudes:** In some cultures, there may be deeply ingrained attitudes that view sexual violence as a taboo subject, leading to silence and stigma surrounding survivors.
- **Values:** Cultures that prioritize honor and reputation may discourage survivors from speaking out due to the fear of bringing shame upon themselves or their families.
- **Behaviors:** Cultural norms related to gender roles and power dynamics can influence behaviors that perpetuate sexual violence or enable abusive relationships.

2

**Cultural messages perpetuating stigmas:** Cultural elements, including families and media, may reinforce messages that contribute to stigmatization of survivors of sexual violence.

- **Family:** In certain cultures, families may emphasize the importance of maintaining the family's reputation, leading to the perpetuation of stigmas and discouragement of survivors from seeking help.
- **Media:** Media representations that sensationalize or blame survivors of sexual violence can reinforce stigmas, shaping public perception and perpetuating negative attitudes. [4]



# Cultural norms and their impact on survivors of sexual abuse:

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3

## Cultural markers and judgments:

Culture provides markers by which behaviors are judged, and acceptance within a group is determined. Behaviors related to sexual violence may be influenced by cultural norms and values. [

- **Modesty:** Cultural norms regarding modesty and sexual behavior may influence judgments and perceptions of survivors, reinforcing victim-blaming narratives and perpetuating stigmas. Most cultures believe if a woman is sexually abused or raped they are no longer virtuous or modest. But that is false. A woman is still virtuous and modest after abuse because rape or abuse cannot rob a woman of that. **Being virtuous is a mindset and a lifestyle and a core belief system that resides within the woman.** Society may judge the act of abuse and blame the woman and although that is wrong, it cannot rob her of her virtue. Someone else's judgment does not and cannot change who you are or your beliefs unless you let them.
- **Patriarchy:** Societies with deeply entrenched patriarchal norms may judge survivors based on traditional gender roles, placing blame or doubt on their experiences.

# Cultural norms and their impact on survivors of sexual abuse:

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4

## Criticism of cultural norms perpetuating abuse:

Cultural norms have been criticized for perpetuating the cycle of abuse by enabling cover-ups and secrecy surrounding sexual violence.

- **Victim-blaming culture:** Certain cultural norms can contribute to victim-blaming, shifting the responsibility onto survivors rather than holding perpetrators accountable.
- **Secrecy and cover-ups:** Cultural norms that prioritize maintaining family reputation or protecting the community's image can lead to cover-ups and perpetuate a cycle of abuse.

5

## Difficulty in changing family systems:

Family systems are often deeply entrenched in cultural norms, making it challenging to address and change the cycle of abuse within these systems.

- **Inter-generational transmission:** Cultural norms and values are often passed down through generations within families, making it difficult to challenge and change abusive patterns and behaviors.
- **Cultural resistance:** Family systems may resist change due to cultural traditions and beliefs, making it difficult to address and break the cycle of abuse within these cultural frameworks.

# How to overcome Stigmas and Cultural Norms regarding Sexual Violence



## What society can do:

**Overcoming social stigmas against victims of sexual violence requires a multifaceted approach.**

- **Raising awareness** through education and campaigns is crucial to challenge misconceptions and shift societal attitudes. Promoting empathy and understanding, emphasizing consent and respect, can help debunk victim-blaming narratives.
- **Providing safe and supportive spaces for survivors** to share their stories, seek help, and access resources is essential. This includes establishing confidential reporting systems, counseling services, and legal support.
- **Holding perpetrators accountable** through effective legal measures sends a strong message that society stands with survivors, discouraging stigmatization and promoting a culture of support and justice. The legal system needs to change to be more victim friendly. Right now the legal system needs an overhaul on supporting survivors.



## What survivors can do:

Survivors of sexual violence face numerous challenges on their healing journey, including the social and self-stigmas that can impact their recovery. While society has a role to play in addressing these stigmas, survivors themselves also have the power to overcome them. Here are some strategies survivors can employ to reclaim their voices and heal:

1

**Seek professional support:** Engaging with therapists, or support groups or a healing platform like HEAL® from people who are specifically trained in trauma and sexual abuse can provide survivors with a safe and supportive environment. Professionals can help survivors navigate their emotions, work through self-blame, and develop coping mechanisms to manage trauma-related symptoms.

2

**Seek professional support:** Engaging with therapists, or support groups or a healing platform like HEAL® from people who are specifically trained in trauma and sexual abuse can provide survivors with a safe and supportive environment. Professionals can help survivors navigate their emotions, work through self-blame, and develop coping mechanisms to manage trauma-related symptoms.

3

**Practice self-compassion:** Survivors may struggle with self-blame and feelings of shame. Practicing self-compassion involves being kind to oneself, acknowledging that the abuse was not their fault, and challenging negative self-perceptions. Engaging in self-care activities, such as exercise, meditation, or creative outlets, can help survivors nurture their emotional well-being.



4

**Educate oneself:** Learning about sexual violence, trauma, and the healing process can be empowering for survivors. It helps to gain knowledge and understand that their experiences are not isolated incidents. Educating oneself can also provide tools to challenge societal myths, internalized stigma, and foster a sense of empowerment.

5

**Share your story, if and when ready:** Speaking out about the experience can help survivors reclaim their voice and break the silence surrounding sexual violence. Sharing one's story can contribute to personal healing, raise awareness, and challenge societal stigmas. However, it is essential to prioritize one's safety, well-being, and readiness before deciding to disclose.

6

**Establish boundaries:** Setting boundaries with others is vital for survivors' healing journey. This includes determining who to share their experiences with, what information they are comfortable disclosing, and establishing boundaries in relationships to prioritize their well-being and avoid re-traumatization.

7

**Practice self-care and self-empowerment:** Engaging in self-care activities that promote physical, emotional, and mental well-being can aid survivors in their healing process. Engaging in activities that bring joy, practicing mindfulness, and setting achievable goals can help survivors regain a sense of control and self-empowerment.

**By utilizing these strategies, survivors can take active steps towards overcoming social and self-stigmas associated with sexual violence. It is important to remember that healing is freedom from the past. Seeking support, practicing self-compassion, and reclaiming their power can contribute to their overall well-being and resilience.**



# Testimonials

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“THE BIGGEST RELIEF THAT I RECEIVED FROM THIS SUPPORT GROUP WAS THAT I WAS NOT ALONE AND THAT I WAS NOT CRAZY. at these experiences and flashbacks were real and I didn’t have to keep reliving them day to day. I could start my healing process with lasting relationships and promising recovery.

– HEAL Survivor

“THIS Group [HEAL] BROUGHT ME HOPE BECAUSE IT WAS DIFFERENT. I HAD HOPE THAT I COULD RECOVER AND NOT JUST “COPE.”

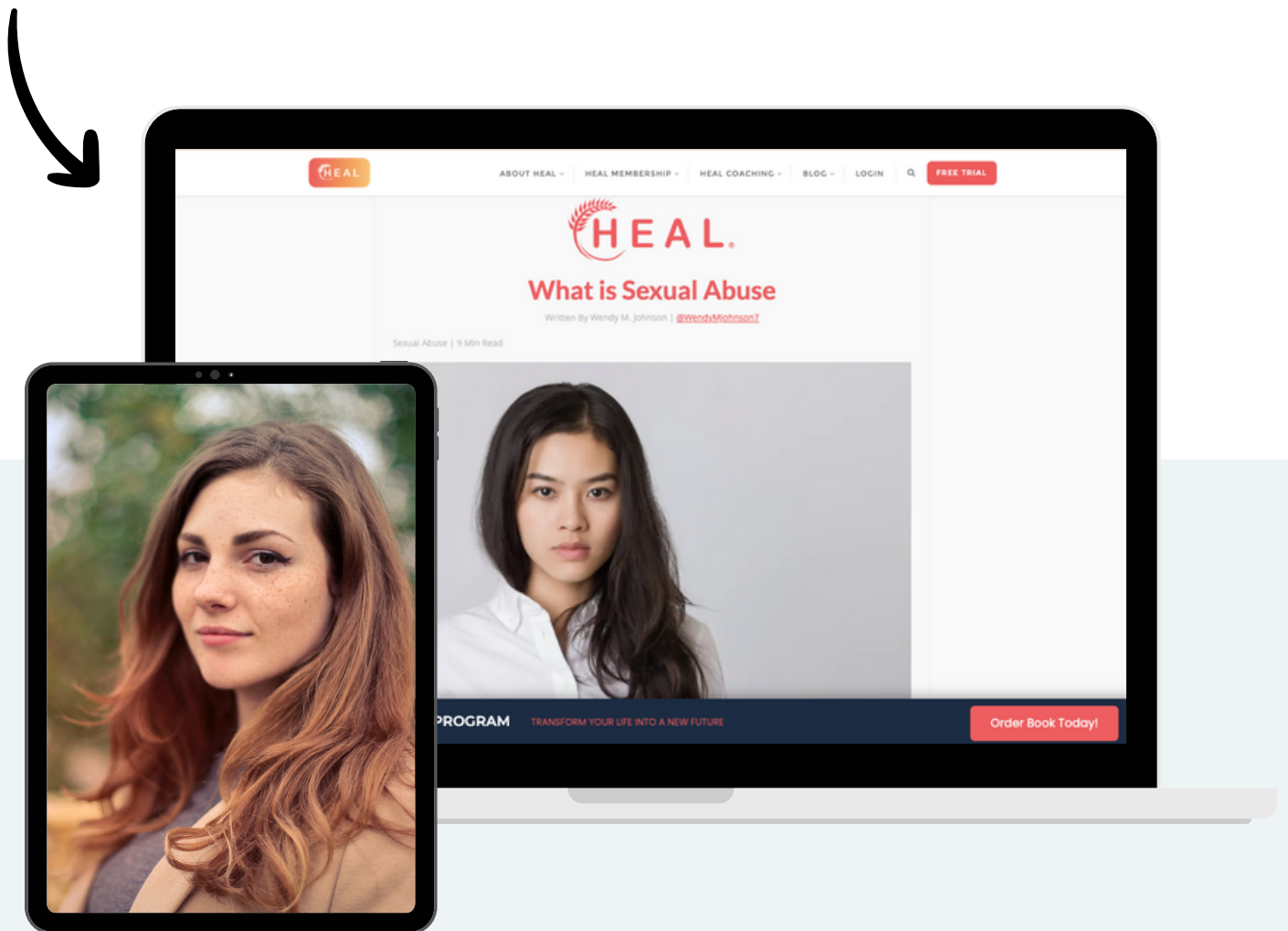
- HEAL Survivor





# OBSTACLE 2

WHO DO SURVIVORS FEAR  
BACKLASH OR RETRIBUTION FROM?



[LEARN MORE](#)



# Fear of Retribution

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Fear of backlash or retribution refers to a survivor's apprehension about potential negative consequences or retaliation that they may face from the perpetrator or others if they disclose their experience of sexual abuse.

Retribution can manifest in various forms, such as threats, intimidation, blackmail, physical harm, or social and professional repercussions. Survivors may fear that speaking out could lead to further harm, loss of relationships, job security, or damage to their reputation. The fear of retribution primarily revolves around personal safety and security.

Survivors of sexual abuse may fear backlash or retribution from various individuals or groups, depending on their specific circumstances.

# Fear of Retribution

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1

**Perpetrators:** Survivors often fear retaliation or further harm from their abusers. This fear can arise from the power dynamics and control that abusers exert over their victims. Or no threats can be made but it is inferred that survivors are not to disclose as it becomes a way of life.

e.g.

## Perpetrator backlash:

- **Survivors may worry about** facing physical, emotional, or psychological consequences if they speak out or seek help.
- **Threats and Intimidation:** Perpetrators may use threats of physical harm, violence, or further abuse to intimidate survivors into silence. They may warn the survivor of the potential consequences of disclosing the abuse, instilling fear and making the survivor hesitant to come forward.
- **Manipulation and Gaslighting:** Perpetrators may employ manipulation tactics, such as gaslighting, to undermine the survivor's perception of reality. They may deny or minimize the abuse, making the survivor question their own memory or doubt the validity of their experiences. This psychological manipulation can lead to self-doubt and silence.
- **Victim-blaming and Shaming:** Perpetrators often employ victim-blaming techniques to shift responsibility and shame onto the survivor. They may convince the survivor that they somehow provoked or deserved the abuse, reinforcing feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blame. By instilling these negative beliefs, perpetrators discourage survivors from speaking out due to the fear of judgment or being further stigmatized.
- **Isolation and Control:** Perpetrators may isolate survivors from their support systems, cutting off communication with friends, family, or professionals who may offer help or validation. This isolation creates a sense of dependence on the perpetrator and makes it difficult for survivors to find support or disclose the abuse.
- **Financial or Social Consequences:** Perpetrators who hold positions of power or influence may leverage their status to silence survivors. They may threaten to ruin the survivor's reputation, harm their professional or personal relationships, or use financial control to manipulate and intimidate the survivor into silence.

**These examples illustrate how perpetrators can employ various tactics to silence survivors of sexual abuse, creating barriers for disclosure and perpetuating the cycle of abuse. It is important to recognize these strategies and provide support systems that empower survivors to break the silence and seek justice.**

# Fear of Retribution

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2

**Family Members:** Survivors may fear backlash from their own family members. This can stem from cultural or societal norms that prioritize family reputation or honor over addressing the abuse. It can also be the result of continuing the cycle of abuse that has happened for generations. Or a survivor has seen other family members who came forward and were not believed or bullied into silence. Family members may exert pressure on the survivor to remain silent, perpetuating a culture of secrecy and stigma.

e.g.

## Family backlash:

- **The fear of tarnishing the family's reputation** can create immense pressure for survivors to remain silent, even if it means enduring further abuse or perpetuating the cycle of abuse.
- **Survivors may fear backlash from family members** due to the continuation of a cycle of abuse that has occurred for generations. The fear of being met with disbelief or retribution from family members can be a significant barrier to survivors seeking support or justice.
- **Family members, including immediate or extended relatives, may exert pressure on the survivor** to remain silent about the abuse. This pressure can stem from a desire to preserve family harmony, avoid social judgment, or protect the perpetrator. Survivors may fear the potential fallout of speaking out, such as being disbelieved, facing blame, or being isolated within the family unit. This pressure perpetuates a culture of secrecy and stigma surrounding the abuse, making it challenging for survivors to come forward and seek help.

# Fear of Retribution

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3

**Peers and Social Circles:** Survivors may fear negative reactions or rejection from their friends, acquaintances, or social circles. Concerns about disbelief, victim-blaming, or judgment can prevent survivors from disclosing their experiences or seeking support.

e.g.

## Peers and Social Circle:

- **Disbelief:** Peers and social circle members may express disbelief, doubt or skepticism when a survivor discloses their experience of sexual abuse. They may question the survivor's credibility, leading to feelings of invalidation and discouraging further disclosure or seeking support.
- **Victim-Blaming:** Instead of offering empathy and support some peers may engage in victim-blaming. Victim blaming actions include: implying that the survivor somehow caused or invited the abuse. Victim-blaming attitudes can intensify feelings of shame and self-blame, making it harder for survivors to come forward or feel supported.
- **Judgments and Stigmas:** Peers and social circle members may pass judgments on the survivor's behavior, character, or past relationships, further stigmatizing them. These judgments can manifest as gossip, social exclusion, or labeling, causing emotional distress and isolation for the survivor.
- **Minimization and Trivialization:** Instead of acknowledging the seriousness and impact of the abuse, some peers may downplay or trivialize the survivor's experience. They may make insensitive comments or jokes, dismiss the survivor's emotions, or suggest that the abuse was not a significant issue. Such reactions can invalidate the survivor's feelings and discourage seeking help.
- **Social Isolation or Rejection:** Disclosure of sexual abuse can lead to social repercussions, including social isolation or rejection from friends and social circles. Peers may distance themselves from the survivor, fearing association with the uncomfortable topic or out of a lack of understanding. This isolation can compound the survivor's feelings of shame and make it harder for them to find support.

**It is important to note that not all peers or social circle members react negatively. Supportive and understanding individuals can also play a significant role in providing a safe and supportive environment for survivors to disclose their experiences and seek the help they need.**

# Fear of Retribution

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4

**Community or Cultural Groups:** In certain close-knit communities or cultural groups, survivors may worry about facing ostracism or being shunned by their community. Cultural norms, traditions, or religious beliefs can contribute to the fear of backlash or exclusion if the survivor speaks out about the abuse.

e.g.

## Community or Cultural Groups:

- In some close-knit cultural communities, survivors fear being ostracized if they speak out about abuse that could bring shame to their families and the community.
- Cultural stigmas surrounding sexual abuse may lead to exclusion and social backlash for survivors who defy the norm of silence.
- Religious or cultural sanctions, such as condemnation or excommunication, can deter survivors from speaking out due to fear of severe consequences.

# Fear of Retribution

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5

**Legal and Justice System:** Survivors may have concerns about the response they will receive from the legal and justice system. Fear of not being believed, facing a lack of support, or being retraumatized during legal processes can discourage survivors from reporting the abuse or seeking legal recourse.

e.g.

## Legal and Justice System:

- **Lack of Belief:** Survivors may fear that their accounts of sexual abuse will not be believed by law enforcement, lawyers, judges, or jury members. This lack of belief can discourage survivors from reporting the abuse or pursuing legal action.
- **Lack of Support:** Survivors may experience a lack of support throughout the legal process, which can further discourage them from seeking justice. This lack of support can manifest as limited resources for survivors, insufficient trauma-informed training for legal professionals, or inadequate victim services.
- **Retraumatization:** The legal process can potentially retraumatize survivors through aggressive cross-examinations, insensitive questioning, or insensitive treatment by legal professionals. This retraumatization can deter survivors from pursuing legal recourse, fearing the emotional toll it may take.

# How to overcome Backlash and Retribution from others:



**Survivors can take various steps to overcome the challenges associated with each section:**

1

## Perpetrators:

- **Seek safety and support:** Reach out to trusted individuals, friends, or organizations that can provide safety and support during the healing process.
- **Document evidence:** Preserve any evidence of the abuse, such as messages, photographs, or witness testimonies, to strengthen their case if they choose to pursue legal action.
- **Build a support network:** Connect with survivor support groups, counseling services, or advocacy organizations that can provide guidance, resources, and empowerment.

## 2

## Family Members:

- **Seek external support:** Reach out to external support systems, such as therapists, counselors, helplines, or the HEAL® membership, who can provide guidance on navigating family abuse dynamics and healing from the impact of family responses.
- **Educate family members:** Share educational resources or information about sexual abuse and its effects, promoting understanding and empathy within the family.
- **Establish boundaries:** Set clear boundaries with family members, communicating the survivor's needs and expectations, and limiting contact if necessary for personal safety and well-being.

## 3

## Peers and Social Circles:

- **Choose supportive relationships:** Surround yourself with individuals who demonstrate empathy, understanding, and respect for survivors' experiences.
- **Educate peers:** Engage in conversations that challenge victim-blaming and promote survivor support, educating peers about the impact of sexual abuse and the importance of validation and belief.
- **Seek support networks:** Connect with survivor support groups, or organizations that provide a safe space for sharing experiences and receiving support from individuals who have faced similar challenges.



## 4

### Community or Cultural Groups:

- **Seek allies within the community:** Identify individuals or organizations within the community who prioritize survivor support and empowerment, building alliances for advocacy and creating safe spaces.
- **Challenge cultural norms:** Engage in discussions and awareness campaigns that address cultural stigmas surrounding sexual abuse, promoting education and understanding within the community.
- **Share personal stories:** By sharing their experiences, survivors can contribute to breaking the silence and raising awareness, fostering empathy and understanding within the community.

## 5

### Legal and Justice System:

- **Improved Training:** Legal professionals, including law enforcement, lawyers, judges, and court staff, should receive comprehensive training on trauma-informed practices. This training will enhance their understanding of the unique needs and experiences of survivors, ensuring a more supportive and empathetic approach.
- **Victim Advocacy and Support Services:** Increase funding and availability of victim advocacy and support services within the legal system. This includes providing survivors with access to trauma-informed counselors, victim advocates, and resources that can guide them through the legal process and address their emotional needs.
- **Sensitivity and Respect:** Foster a culture within the legal system that promotes sensitivity, respect, and dignity for survivors. This can be achieved by implementing protocols that discourage victim-blaming, implementing courtroom policies that minimize retraumatization, and ensuring respectful treatment of survivors during legal proceedings.
- **Legal Reforms:** Review and reform existing laws and procedures to ensure they protect the rights and interests of survivors. This may include revising statutes of limitations, enhancing privacy protections, and implementing specialized courts or divisions dedicated to handling sexual abuse cases.

**By taking these steps, survivors can work towards overcoming the barriers imposed by perpetrators, family members, peers, community, and the legal system, empowering themselves on their healing journey and seeking justice and support.**



# Testimonials

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“I knew I wanted to write down my healing journey which consisted of a lot of painful experiences and abusive memories. I found my best time to journal was after my support groups. I would go home and spend some time reflecting and releasing and processing.”

-Survivor



# OBSTACLE 3

## HOW DOES SHAME, GUILT, AND SELF-BLAME AFFECT YOU AFTER SEXUAL ABUSE?



The laptop screen displays the HEAL website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the HEAL logo and links for ABOUT HEAL, HEAL MEMBERSHIP, HEAL COACHING, BLOG, LOGIN, and a FREE TRIAL button. Below the navigation bar, a headline reads: "Our self-guided 14-session program will teach you tools, techniques, and life skills". The main content area features three smartphone screens showing the HEAL app interface, with a central image of a smiling woman. Below this, the heading "Self-guided HEAL Educate Curriculum" is displayed. Underneath, there are two columns of text: "Anywhere" and "The Support You Want".

**Self-guided HEAL Educate Curriculum**

**Anywhere**  
By providing a curriculum based on top research dealing with healing from sexual trauma survivors can begin to understand that they have the power to overcome their past and live a new abuse-free life. Survivors deserve educational curriculums designed to inspire and empower them to reclaim their lives in a safe and powerful way.

**The Support You Want**  
Educate opens the door to a new life by educating survivors on the top 14 topics that all survivors of sexual abuse deal with: Hope and Choice, Understanding Abuse, Anger and Abuse, Trust and Boundaries, The Culture of Abuse, Believing Your Own Perceptions and more. We hope to see you along your journey!

The tablet in the foreground shows a woman in a white dress standing in a field of tall grass, holding a bundle of wheat, with a warm, golden light in the background.

[\*\*LEARN MORE\*\*](#)

# Shame and Guilt and Self-Blame:

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Shame, guilt, and self-blame are common emotions experienced by survivors of sexual abuse, but they are distinct and have different psychological implications:

1

**Shame:** Shame is a deep and pervasive sense of feeling flawed, unworthy, or damaged as a person. It often arises from a belief that the abuse was somehow the survivor's fault or that they are inherently to blame for what happened. Shame is often accompanied by a sense of humiliation, self-disgust, and a desire to hide or isolate oneself from others. It is a self-focused emotion that can lead to a negative self-image and a constant fear of judgment or rejection.

Shame is like a double edge sword. It is rooted in society and internalized by the individual. **Shame is the most destructive force that stops you from healing.** Shame can blind a person to believing they don't have the strength to change, especially when fear and shame have become normal, everyday feelings. Because you may have felt like an object, subjected to someone's sexual desires, you can experience a lifetime of shame if you do not get the help you need.

Shame is so painful that most people will do anything they can to 'avoid' it even at the cost of not reaching out for help. **The problem is that when you internalize the shame from being sexually abused the shame manifests itself through distorted thoughts and feelings.** You will start to feel damaged, or flawed, or dirty or a defective person. Those thoughts and feelings are rooted in shame.

What happens when you do not get the help you need is that you can act out in self-destructive ways, such as battling with addictions, eating disorders, body image issues, suicide ideation. The shame core is covered up with excessive control, perfectionism, rage, power, criticalness, and being judgmental. It is also covered by dissociation or rigid roles.

# Shame and Guilt and Self-Blame:

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2

**Guilt:** Guilt is a feeling of responsibility or remorse for one's actions or perceived failures. In the context of sexual abuse, survivors may experience guilt for not being able to prevent or stop the abuse, or for any perceived actions or thoughts that they believe contributed to the abuse. Guilt often involves a belief that one has done something wrong or violated their own moral code. Unlike shame, guilt is focused on specific behaviors or actions rather than a global sense of self-worth.

As a victim of sexual abuse, you may also experience guilt by someone making you feel guilty through manipulation. A sex abuser often makes you feel guilty as a motivator to do what they want. Another form of guilt a victim feels is when their body responds to the abuse. A victim can also feel guilt because they believe they should have been able to stop the abuse or speak out. A victim can also feel if no one believed them, they should have kept telling until someone did. This form of guilt spills over to self-blame.



# Shame and Guilt and Self-Blame:

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3

**Self-blame:** Self-blame refers to the tendency to hold oneself accountable or responsible for the abuse. It involves attributing fault and responsibility to oneself, rather than recognizing that the abuser is the one who is truly responsible. Self-blame can be a result of internalizing societal victim-blaming messages, distorted beliefs about one's worthiness or deservingness, or the desire to regain a sense of control over the situation. It often reinforces feelings of shame and guilt.

Many survivors of sexual abuse feel that they are somehow to blame for what happened to them. They feel ashamed or guilty, even though they were not responsible for the abuse. These feelings can be a significant barrier to healing and can make it difficult for a survivor to talk about what happened to them.

Statements of blame, which evoke feelings of guilt and shame, may be used to ensure the abuse will stay a secret by the victim. Often perpetrators tell their victims no one will believe them or do anything about it (p. 32). Many abused children believe that the perpetrator can and will carry out their threats. Such children are concerned that others would blame them or not believe them, and those fears often hold them captive in silence (p. 32).

It's important to note that these emotions can coexist and interact with each other, making it challenging for survivors to separate and understand their individual experiences. Healing involves recognizing and addressing these emotions through support networks, self-reflection and if needed, therapy. It is important for survivors to work towards replacing shame, guilt, and self-blame with self-compassion, self-forgiveness, and a realistic understanding that the responsibility for the abuse lies solely with the abuser.

# How to overcome Shame, Guilt, and Self-Blame:



1

## Seek professional help:

Join a support group that specializes in sexual abuse or a supportive community such as the **HEAL® Membership** to overcome these debilitating emotions. You can also engage in therapy or counseling with a trauma-informed professional who can help you explore and process your emotions. They can provide guidance, support, and evidence-based techniques to address shame, guilt, and self-blame, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) or Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR).

2

## Challenge negative beliefs:

Identify and challenge negative beliefs associated with shame, guilt, and self-blame. Replace self-blaming thoughts with more compassionate and realistic perspectives. Develop a deeper understanding that the responsibility lies with the abuser, not the survivor.



**3**

### **Educate yourself:**

Learn about the dynamics of sexual abuse, common reactions of survivors, and the impact of trauma. This knowledge can help you recognize that your feelings of shame, guilt, and self-blame are common responses to the trauma you experienced. Understanding that these emotions are not rational or justified can help reduce their hold on you.

**4**

### **Build a support network:**

Surround yourself with a network of supportive and empathetic individuals. This can include trusted friends, family members, or joining support groups with other survivors of sexual abuse. Sharing your experiences and receiving validation from others who have gone through similar situations can help alleviate feelings of shame, guilt, and self-blame.

**5**

### **Practice self-compassion:**

Cultivate self-compassion by treating yourself with kindness, understanding, and acceptance. Challenge self-critical thoughts and replace them with self-affirming statements. Engage in self-care activities that promote your well-being and prioritize your needs.

**6**

### **Engage in self-expression:**

Expressing your feelings in a safe and supportive manner can help reduce shame, guilt, and self-blame.

**7**

### **Challenge societal narratives:**

Recognize and challenge societal narratives that perpetuate victim-blaming and contribute to feelings of shame and self-blame. Surround yourself with supportive communities and advocates who understand and validate your experiences as a survivor.

# What decreases shame, guilt and self-blame?

Getting support, knowing others have felt the way you do and have worked passed it. **Understanding this is a temporary stage that can be overcome.** Remember that healing is a personal journey, and it may take time and effort to overcome these deeply ingrained emotions. Working with professionals who specialize in sexual abuse can provide personalized guidance and support throughout this process.



# Testimonials

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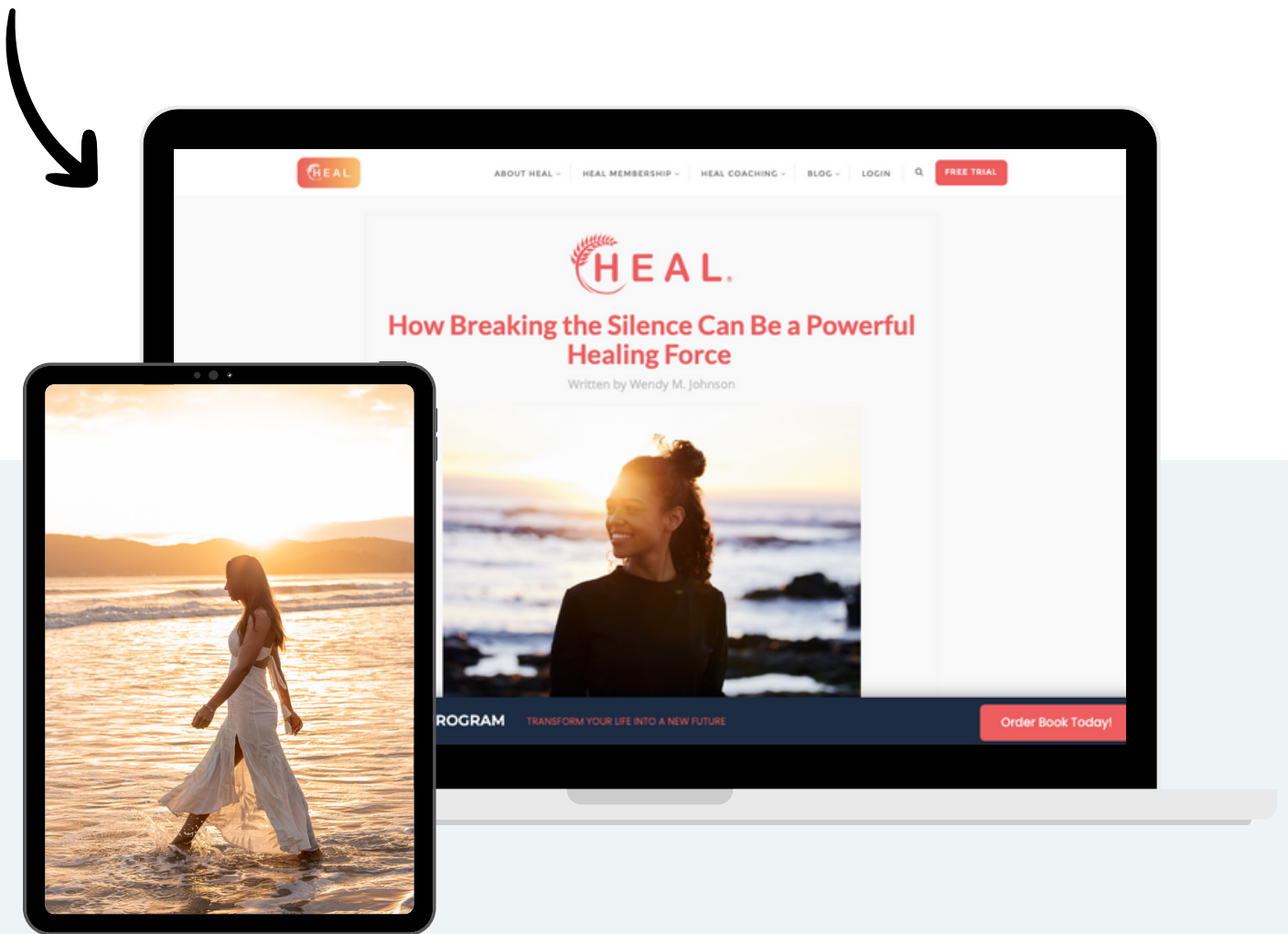
“I knew I wanted to write down my healing journey which consisted of a lot of painful experiences and abusive memories. I found my best time to journal was after my support groups. I would go home and spend some time reflecting and releasing and processing.”

-Survivor



# OBSTACLE 4

DO YOU FEAR BEING JUDGED IF YOU COME FORWARD?



[LEARN MORE](#)

# Do you Fear being Judged if you come forward?

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Fear of Judgment relates to the survivor's worry about how others, including friends, family, acquaintances, or society at large, will perceive and react to their disclosure of sexual abuse. The fear of judgment arises from concerns about being blamed, disbelieved, stigmatized, or shamed for their experience. Survivors may worry about not being taken seriously, facing skepticism, or being subjected to scrutiny and criticism for their actions or choices leading up to or following the abuse.

Fear of being judged creates barriers to survivors coming forward and seeking support and focuses on harming the emotional well-being, social acceptance, and potential repercussions on relationships or social standing.

## Answer

**Overcoming the fear of judgment can be challenging for survivors of sexual abuse, but there are steps they can take to seek help and support despite their concerns. Here are some suggestions:**

### **Reach out to support networks:**

Connect with trusted friends, family members, or support organizations that specialize in assisting survivors of sexual abuse. These individuals or groups can provide empathy, validation, and guidance throughout the healing process.



2

## **Seek professional help:**

Consider reaching out to therapists, counselors, or support groups experienced in trauma and sexual abuse. These professionals can offer a safe and confidential space to process emotions, develop coping strategies, and provide guidance on navigating the journey toward healing.



3

## **Educate yourself about resources and rights:**

Research local and national organizations that offer assistance to survivors of sexual abuse. Understand your legal rights and available resources, such as helplines, counseling services, legal aid, or support groups. Being informed can help survivors make informed decisions and feel empowered.



4

## **Develop a safety plan:**

If there are concerns about retribution or personal safety, survivors can create a safety plan in consultation with professionals or support organizations. This may include strategies for ensuring physical safety, securing personal information, and accessing emergency assistance if needed.

5

## Consider reporting the abuse:

Reporting the abuse to the appropriate authorities is a personal decision that survivors can make after carefully evaluating their situation and considering the potential outcomes. If they choose to report, they can seek guidance from legal professionals or advocacy organizations to understand the process and available support.

6

## Practice self-care:

Engage in self-care activities that promote physical, emotional, and mental well-being. This can involve activities like exercise, mindfulness, therapy, creative outlets, or connecting with supportive communities. Taking care of oneself can help build resilience and manage the effects of judgment or stigma.

7

## Join survivor support networks:

Participate in survivor support groups or connect with other individuals who have gone through similar experiences. Sharing stories, insights, and resources with others who understand can provide validation, strength, and encouragement.

**It is important to remember that each survivor's experience is unique, and the steps they take to seek help should be easier than it is. Patience, self-compassion, and seeking support from understanding individuals and organizations can make a significant difference in overcoming the fear of judgment and accessing the help survivors need.**





# Testimonials

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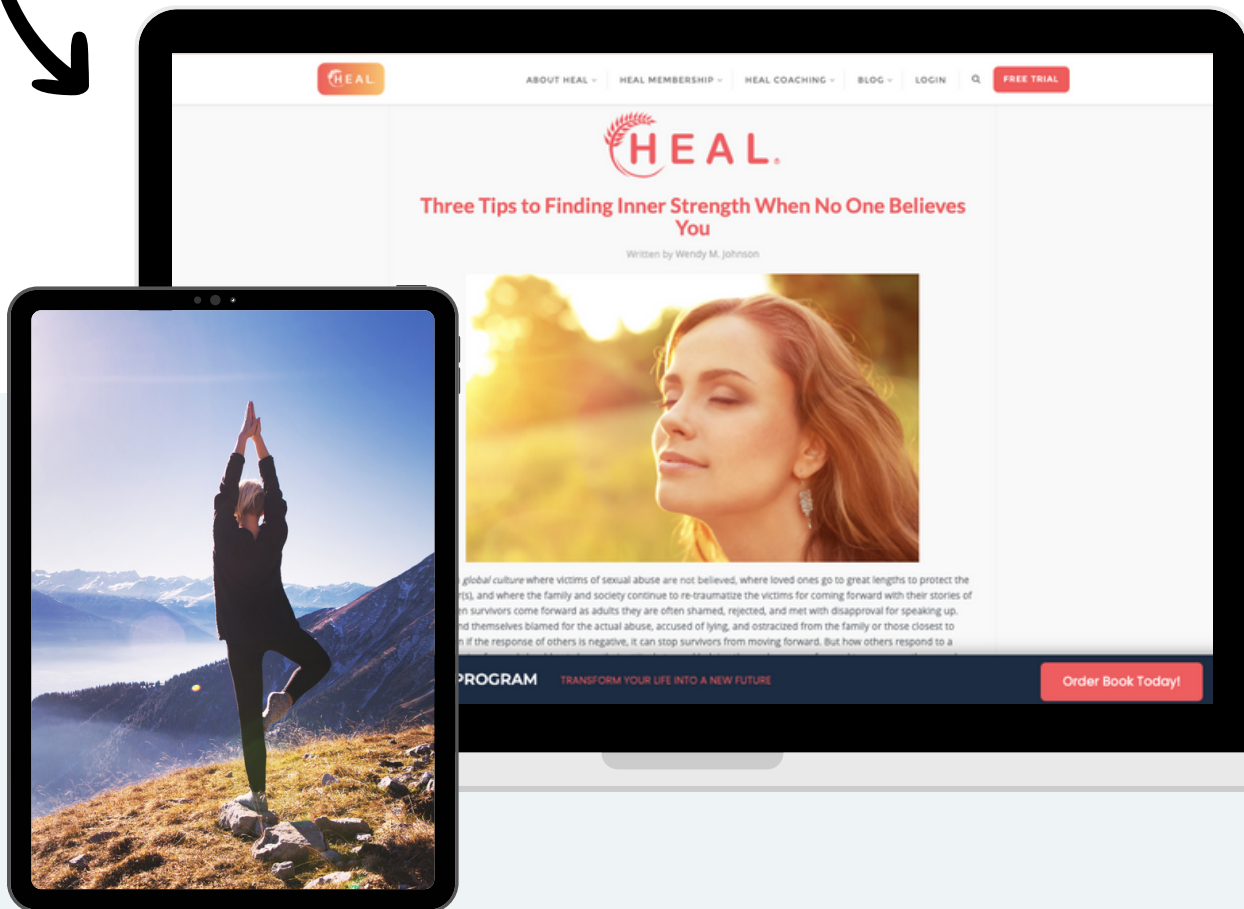
“I knew I wanted to write down my healing journey which consisted of a lot of painful experiences and abusive memories. I found my best time to journal was after my support groups. I would go home and spend some time reflecting and releasing and processing.”

-Survivor



# OBSTACLE 5

ARE YOU AWARE OF THE LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF DENYING OR REPRESSING YOUR EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL ABUSE?



[LEARN MORE](#)

# VICTIM DENIAL

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Denial is a destructive power that binds you to the past. “Denial is a psychological defense mechanism that a person uses to screen out distressing realities and the painful feelings they cause.” [6]

Denial protects us from the pain of our abuse. Denial regarding sexual abuse occurs with the victim, their family members, and society.

When you are in denial, you deny real feelings, real perceptions, real thoughts, real wants, and real needs. You especially deny your fears, loneliness, sadness, hurt, and rejection. Denial takes you into a world filled with lies. You deny yourself of expression. Denial keeps you from growing. Denial harms you because it causes you to ignore problems for which there are solutions. Dealing with this denial will help transform your life. During the abuse, denial allowed your body and mind to adjust to the shock more gradually. However, it is not good to deny warning signs that are treatable.

The cause of denial is inner conflict. You likely repressed your memories of abuse not only because of the pain, but because you were a child who was dependent on parents. Denial helped you cope with the unthinkable reality that your parent, family member, or trusted adult was cruel enough to sexually abuse you.

# FAMILY DENIAL

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“In the case of a mother who is in denial about the abuse of her child, the denial protects her from the pain of the knowing about the abuse, from her ensuing feelings of anger and betrayal toward her abusing partner, and from her feeling guilty for not having protected her child.”[7] Denial means that “at some level she may be aware that the abuse is occurring, but to ward off these feelings, and perhaps to avoid facing the potential dissolution of her marriage, she denies its occurrence.”[8] If a parent is unable to confront the abuse of their children, it may be a result of them being victims of sexual abuse themselves. This example would explain another reason that sexual abuse is a multigenerational problem.

“Some mothers maintain their state of denial in the face of the most overt signs.”[9] In a family where sexual abuse is occurring, the “victims often exhibit clear physical and behavioral symptoms. Yet, even faced with these plain signs, some mothers continue to refuse to believe that the abuse is occurring. In some cases, she may even blame her child for the abuse.”[10]

**It is quite common for mothers (or fathers) to know that the sexual abuse is occurring. There are many reasons why they don't protect their children.**

- 1 They worry about how they will provide for their children without their spouse's help.**
- 2 They really love their spouse and choose their relationship over the safety of their child.**
- 3 They really love their spouse and choose their relationship over the safety of their child.**
- 4 They really love their spouse and choose their relationship over the safety of their child.**
- 5 Even if they can support themselves, they cannot cope with the reality of the abuse and turn a blind eye, defending their spouse over the child.**
- 6 By admitting the abuse happened, the spouse can feel it is a reflection of them not protecting their child.**

# FAMILY DENIAL

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A person who knows of the abuse but is in denial, can devastatingly and aggressively protect the abuser. A mother's denial of the sexual abuse can **"have a more damaging psychological effect than the abuse itself."** [11]

A spouse or partner in denial of the abuse is the greatest asset to an abuser. The abuser knows that their spouse or partner will protect them, stand by them, and even lie for them to help cover up the abuse. A spouse or partner may notice bruises on the child's thighs, ankles, or wrists. They may hear the child continually say that it hurts to sit down.

A non-abusing spouse or partner may see the abuser leaving the child's room in the middle of the night, forcing the child to kiss them on the lips, **telling a daughter that she is "sexy,"** making demeaning remarks to a child of the opposite sex, insisting on giving a child baths, or taking showers with them.

Despite these signs, many will still deny that anything is happening. A spouse or partner in denial will lie to authorities, doctors, and even extended family to help cover up the family culture of abuse. The abuser and the spouse or partner may never talk openly about it, but there is an unspoken understanding that the non-abuser will defend them no matter what.

A child's number one defense against sexual abuse is supposed to be their parents. When the abusing parent fails, a child's second defense against sexual abuse is supposed to be the non-abusing parent. When that fails, the child is trapped in a world of being a sex slave to their own parents.



# SOCIETY DENIAL

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Society does not want to believe that the fathers, brothers, uncles, and grandfathers are the abusers or that abuse even occurs. Society says that these men look like everyone else, that they couldn't possibly be abusers. When a victim has the courage to speak up, they are asked why they didn't tell anyone sooner and their memory is brought into question. Society is a victim's greatest battle. In some countries, if a child is sexually abused, the family and society ostracize the victim. Society and even laws protect the sex abusers and blame the victim for the abuse. Denial keeps society from taking the appropriate action to protect victims of sexual abuse.

## STAGES OF DENIAL:



**Victims deny the truth because accepting it means that they have to take action. When you were a child and the abuse was happening, you were powerless. This is likely when you started using denial as a coping mechanism. You deny problems because they are familiar. You grew up with them. You minimize what the abuse did to you. You don't admit the detrimental impact the abuse had on you.**

# How to overcome Victim, Family, and Society Denial



## Overcoming Victim Denial:

1

### Recognize denial:

Acknowledge that denial is a defense mechanism used to screen out distressing realities and painful feelings.

2

### Seek support:

Reach out to professionals who can provide a safe and supportive environment for discussing your experiences and emotions.

3

### Educate yourself:

Learn about the common signs and effects of denial to better understand its impact on your healing journey.



4

## **Face your feelings:**

Allow yourself to experience and process the real emotions associated with the abuse, including fears, loneliness, sadness, hurt, and rejection. Finding a professional to help you work through denial is important. If you are overwhelmed with dealing with your past, a professional can safely help you walk through the process of managing your emotions while you work through your past.

5

## **Seek therapy or counseling:**

Work with a qualified professional who can guide you through the process of addressing denial, healing past trauma, and developing healthier coping mechanisms.



# Testimonials

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“I knew I wanted to write down my healing journey which consisted of a lot of painful experiences and abusive memories. I found my best time to journal was after my support groups. I would go home and spend some time reflecting and releasing and processing.”

-Survivor

**Are you able to identify any issues that have occurred in your life because your own denial, family denial, or societal denial?**

Brainstorm your thoughts below:

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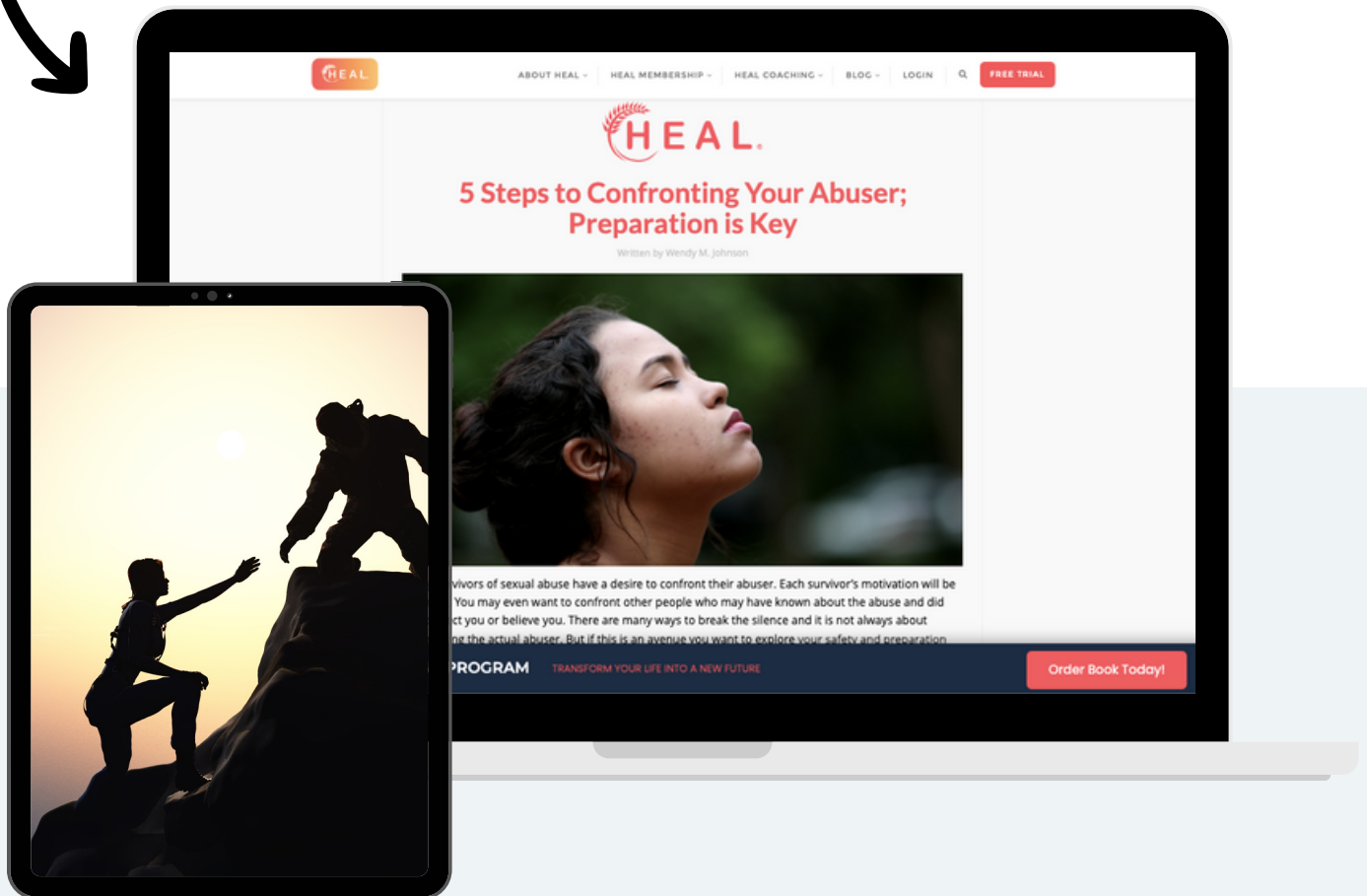
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# OBSTACLE 6

HOW DO SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE EXPERIENCE AND OVERCOME INTERNALIZED BELIEFS THAT STEM FROM THEIR TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES?



[\*\*LEARN MORE\*\*](#)

# Internalized Beliefs and Overcoming Them After Sexual Abuse

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Survivors of sexual abuse often internalize harmful beliefs that stem from their traumatic experiences. These beliefs can profoundly impact their self-perception, sense of worth, and ability to navigate relationships. Here are examples of internalized beliefs and steps to overcome them:

1

**Belief: "The abuser treats me how I feel inside, so I must be worthless."**

**Overcoming:** Challenge this belief by recognizing that the abuser's actions do not define your worth as a person. Seek a supportive community or support group and if needed therapy to work on building your self-worth, self-esteem, self-compassion, and a positive self-image. Surround yourself with supportive individuals who affirm your value.

2

**Belief: "It keeps happening; therefore, I have no meaning other than giving pleasure to someone."**

**Overcoming:** Understand that abuse is never the survivor's fault and does not define their purpose or worth. Engage in a healing path that empowers you and helps you reclaim your agency, such as setting boundaries, pursuing personal goals, and engaging in self-care. Seek a supportive community, support group or therapy to process the trauma and develop a healthier understanding of your own identity and purpose.

# Internalized Beliefs and Overcoming Them After Sexual Abuse

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3

**Belief: "I was not taught about my own agency or how to handle uncomfortable situations."**

**Overcoming:** Recognize that the responsibility lies with the abuser, not with you. Educate yourself about **consent**, **healthy boundaries**, and **assertiveness skills**. Engage in a supportive community or support group that focuses on empowering survivors and teaching effective **coping strategies**. Learn to recognize your own strengths and develop the confidence to assert your rights.

4

**Belief: "I don't know appropriate roles for people in authority, and it's a devastating feeling to believe I am nothing."**

**Overcoming:** Seek guidance from professionals, mentors, or support groups who can provide guidance on healthy relationships and appropriate boundaries. Challenge the belief that you are nothing by exploring your own unique qualities, strengths, and aspirations. Engage in activities that foster personal growth such as joining a membership for survivors like HEAL® or join a support group or seek therapy. You could also engage in a self-discovery, such as journaling, creative expression, or pursuing hobbies and interests.

# Internalized Beliefs and Overcoming Them After Sexual Abuse

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5

## **Belief: "I am damaged, flawed, and irreparable."**

**Overcoming:** Remember that healing is possible, and you are not defined by the abuse you endured. Seek professional help to process trauma, develop coping strategies, and rebuild a positive self-image. Engage in self-care practices that nurture your physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Surround yourself with a supportive network that encourages your healing journey.

**Overcoming internalized beliefs is a gradual process that requires patience, self-compassion, and support. Seeking professional help is essential, whether in a support group, with a community that specializes in sexual abuse or as needed a therapist can provide guidance tailored to your specific needs and help you reclaim your sense of self-worth and agency. Remember that you are deserving of love, respect, and a fulfilling life beyond the shadows of the abuse you experienced.**



A photograph of four women laughing together outdoors. The woman on the far left is wearing a yellow top and blue jeans. The woman next to her is wearing a grey and white checkered hat. The woman next to her is wearing glasses and a dark top. The woman on the far right is wearing a red top and blue jeans. They are all smiling and laughing, creating a warm and joyful atmosphere. The background shows green trees and a clear sky.

# Testimonials

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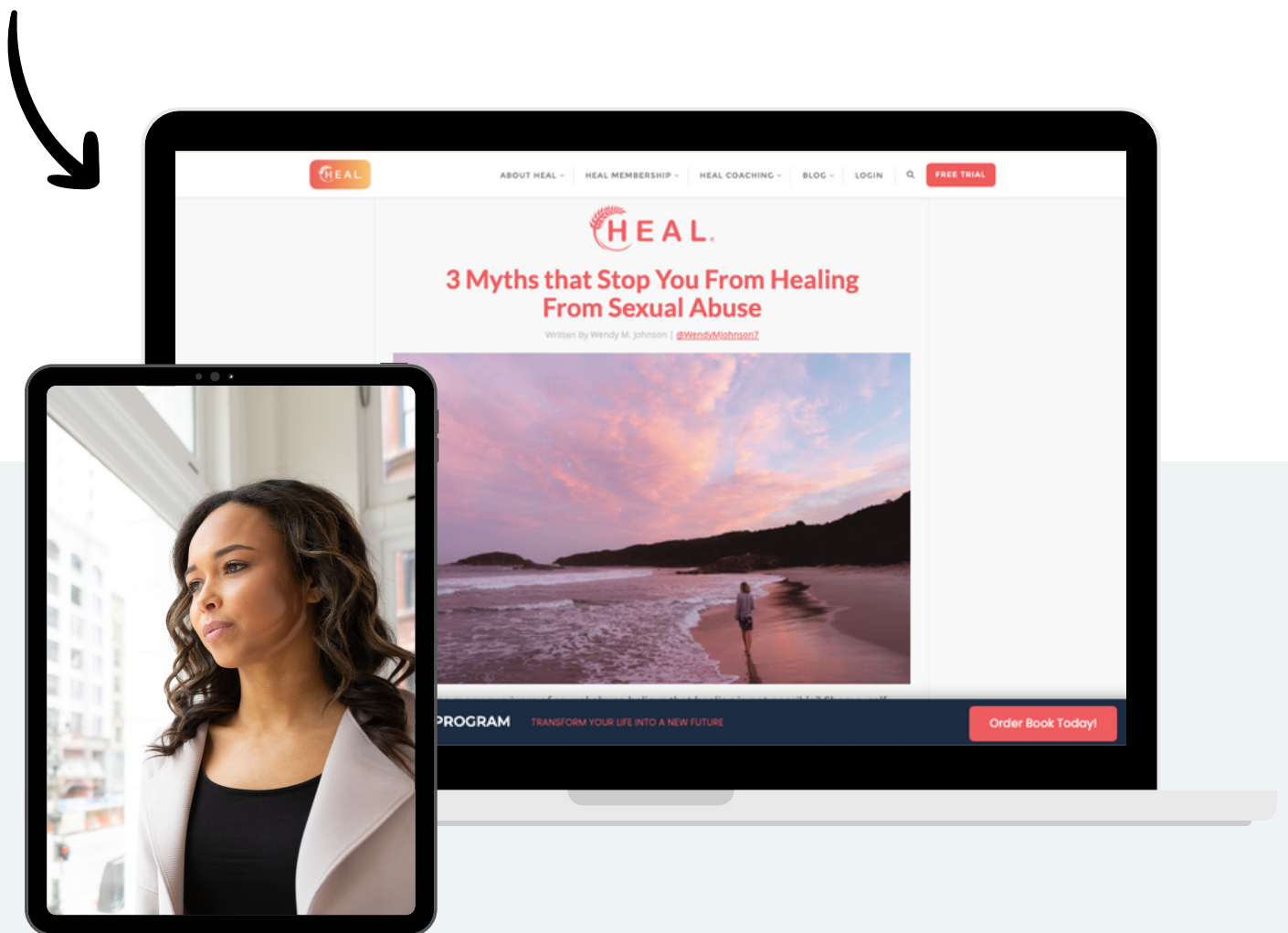
-Survivor





# OBSTACLE 7

WHAT TRAUMA SYMPTOMS DO SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE EXPERIENCE AND HOW TO OVERCOME?



[LEARN MORE](#)

# Survivors of sexual abuse may experience a wide range of trauma symptoms, which can significantly impact their well-being and daily life.

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These symptoms can include:

1

## Flashbacks and nightmares:

Survivors may have intrusive memories of the traumatic event, experiencing vivid and distressing recollections or nightmares that reawaken the trauma.

2

## Anxiety and hypervigilance:

Constant worry, heightened alertness, and a sense of being constantly on guard are common symptoms. Survivors may struggle with trusting others and constantly anticipate danger.

3

## Depression and mood swings:

Feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities are common. Mood swings, irritability, and emotional numbness can also be present.

4

## Difficulty trusting others:

Survivors may struggle to establish and maintain trust in relationships due to the betrayal experienced during the abuse. This can result in challenges with intimacy, vulnerability, and forming healthy connections.

5

## Self-hatred and self-destructive behaviors:

Survivors may internalize guilt, shame, and self-blame, leading to feelings of self-hatred. This can manifest in self-destructive behaviors such as self-harm, engaging in risky behaviors, or developing addictions.

**Many of these symptoms can fall under Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). If you feel you have one or more of these symptoms, you may need to seek the help of a therapist who can help see if you have a diagnosable issue and can offer specific guidance to help you.**

# How to overcome trauma symptoms



**To overcome trauma symptoms, survivors can take the following steps:**

**1**

## **Seek professional help:**

Engage in therapy with professionals experienced in trauma and sexual abuse. They can provide guidance, support, and evidence-based therapies to address trauma symptoms. Engage in trauma-informed therapies: Explore trauma-specific therapies such as Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), or Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT). These therapies can help process trauma and alleviate symptoms.

**2**

## **Build a support network:**

Surround yourself with trusted friends, family, or support groups who understand and validate your experiences. Sharing with others who have similar experiences can provide comfort and a sense of belonging.

**3**

## **Practice self-care:**

Prioritize self-care activities that promote physical, emotional, and mental well-being. This can include exercise, mindfulness practices, healthy eating, getting enough sleep, and engaging in activities that bring joy and relaxation.

4

## Learn coping strategies:

Work with a support group, organization, or a therapist to develop healthy coping strategies for managing anxiety, depression, and triggers. These can include relaxation techniques, grounding exercises, and self-soothing practices.

5

## Challenge negative beliefs:

Identify and challenge negative self-beliefs and replace them with self-compassion and positive affirmations. Working with a therapist can help address and reframe distorted thoughts.

**Remember, healing is a unique journey, and it takes time and patience. It is important to seek professional support and surround yourself with understanding and empathetic individuals who can support your healing process.**



# Testimonials

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“I knew I wanted to write down my healing journey which consisted of a lot of painful experiences and abusive memories. I found my best time to journal was after my support groups. I would go home and spend some time reflecting and releasing and processing.”

-Survivor

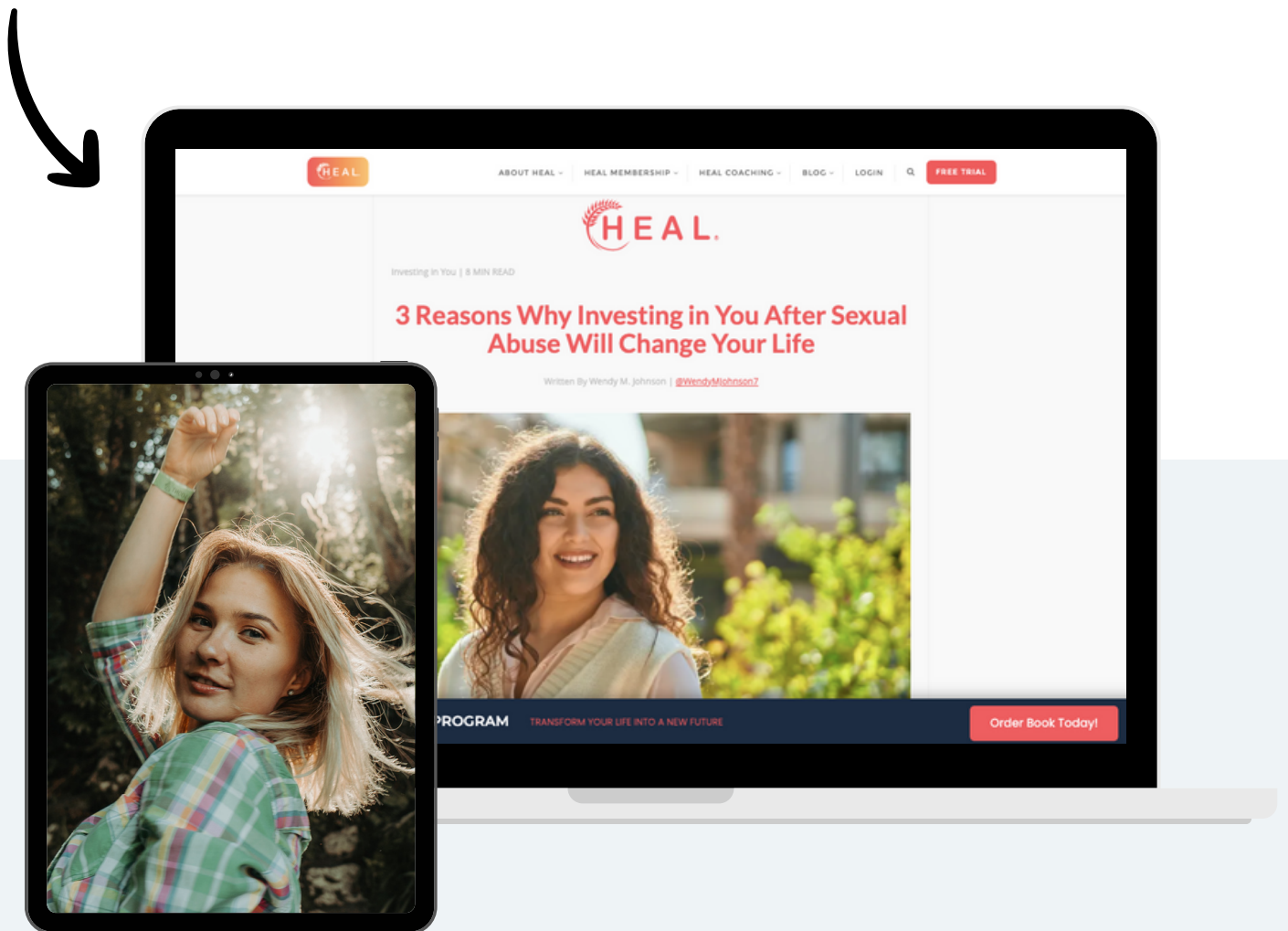






# OBSTACLE 8

WHY DO SURVIVORS EXPERIENCE A LACK OF SELF-LOVE AFTER ABUSE?



[LEARN MORE](#)

# Survivors of sexual abuse often face significant challenges in developing feelings of self-love and self-compassion due to the trauma they have endured.

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**A lack of self-love and self-compassion occurs for many reasons.**

**1**

## **Lack of self-worth:**

Survivors may struggle with low self-esteem and a sense of unworthiness. They may believe that they are fundamentally flawed or undeserving of love and care that is rooted in experiencing sexual abuse.

**2**

## **Self-blame and shame:**

Survivors often internalize feelings of guilt and shame, believing that they are at fault for the abuse or that their worth has been diminished because of it.

**3**

## **Negative self-talk:**

The internal dialogue of survivors can be filled with self-criticism, harsh judgments, and a constant replaying of negative beliefs about themselves.

**4**

## **Difficulty accepting love and care:**

Survivors may find it challenging to accept love, compliments, or acts of kindness from others. They may feel unworthy of such expressions of care and struggle to believe that they are deserving of positive attention.

# How to overcome these struggles and cultivate self-love and self-compassion



**A lack of self-love and self-compassion occurs for many reasons.**

**1**

## **Practice self-care:**

Prioritize self-care activities that nurture your well-being and demonstrate self-love. This can include setting boundaries, engaging in activities that bring joy, taking care of your physical health, and prioritizing rest and relaxation.

**2**

## **Challenge negative self-talk:**

Pay attention to your internal dialogue and actively challenge negative self-talk. Replace self-critical thoughts with kind and compassionate statements. Treat yourself with the same compassion and understanding you would extend to a close friend.

**3**

## **Surround yourself with supportive people:**

Build a network of supportive individuals who believe in your worth and provide unconditional support. Surrounding yourself with people who uplift and validate your experiences can help reshape your self-perception.

4

## Cultivate self-compassion:

Learn to extend kindness and understanding to yourself. Treat yourself with the same empathy and care you would offer to someone you love. Embrace imperfections and acknowledge that healing is a journey that requires patience and self-compassion.

5

## Seek support:

Seek support groups or organizations that specialize in sexual abuse healing. If you feel your issues are too much to bear alone engage in therapy with a trauma-informed professional who can help navigate the complex emotions and beliefs surrounding self-worth and self-compassion. Therapists can provide guidance, support, and techniques to challenge negative self-beliefs.

**Remember, developing self-love and self-compassion is a process that takes time and practice. Be patient with yourself, celebrate small victories, and seek support from those who can walk alongside you on this journey of self-discovery and healing.**



# Testimonials

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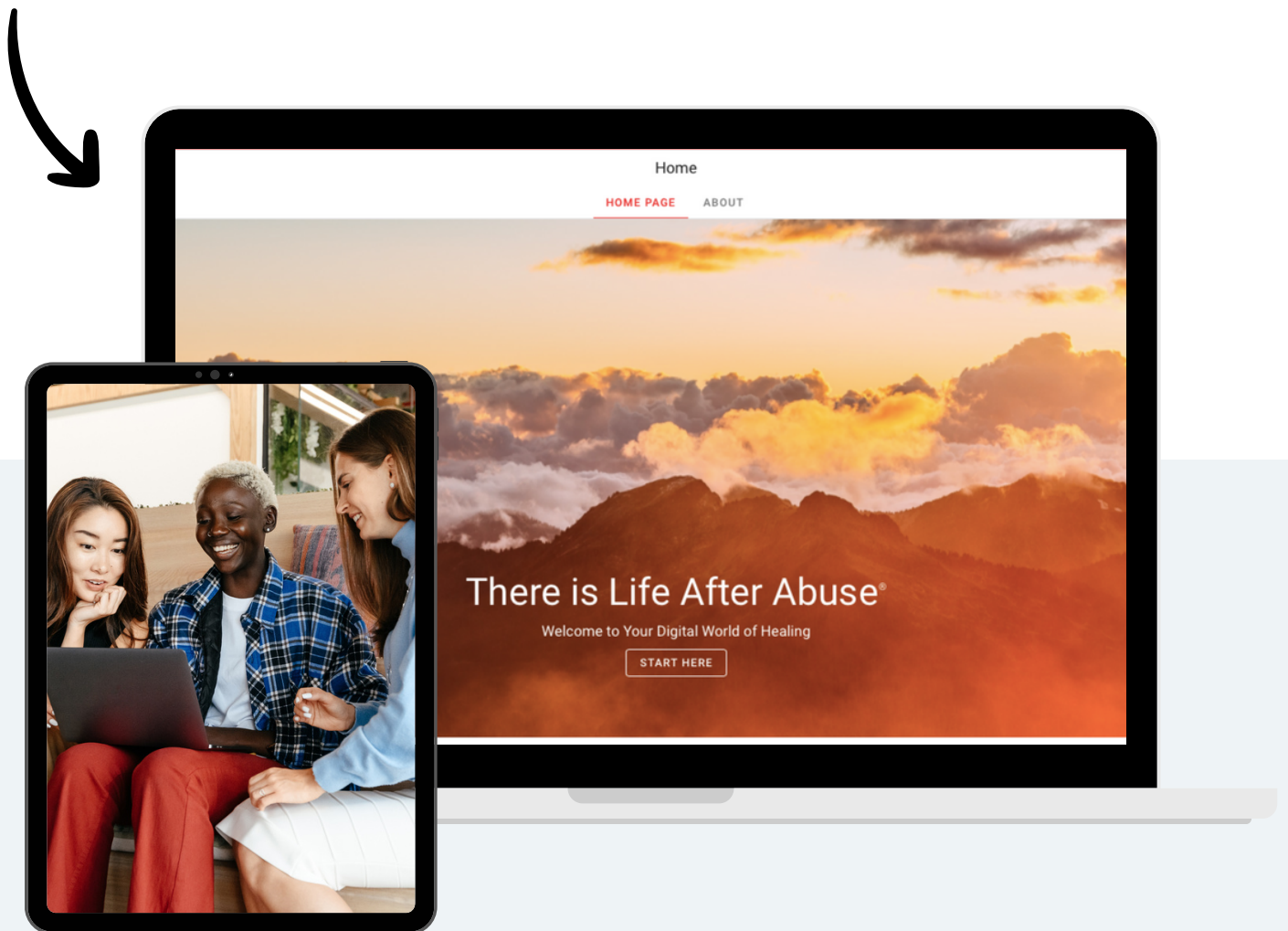
-Survivor





# OBSTACLE 9

WHERE CAN SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE FIND SUPPORT AND RESOURCES WHEN THEY LACK ADEQUATE HELP?



[LEARN MORE](#)

# Where Survivors Find Resources?

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Survivors of sexual abuse may feel isolated and alone especially if they do not have supportive family members or friends. Without a support system, it can be overwhelming to even want to heal. Lack of access to resources – survivors of sexual abuse may not feel they have access to therapy, support groups, or other resources that can help them heal and this can be especially challenging for people who live in rural areas.

But there are many solutions no matter where you live. When survivors of sexual abuse lack adequate support and are unsure of where to find the help they need, there are several avenues you can explore



# Where Survivors Find Resources?

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1

## Helplines and Hotlines:

National helplines and hotlines are available in many countries, providing confidential support and guidance to survivors of sexual abuse. These helplines can offer immediate assistance, resources, and referrals to local organizations.

2

## Online Support Groups and Communities:

Online support groups and forums provide a space for survivors to connect with others who have similar experiences. These communities offer support, validation, and a platform for sharing resources and advice.

3

## Nonprofit Organizations:

Numerous nonprofit organizations focus on supporting survivors of sexual abuse. These organizations often offer counseling services, support groups, legal assistance, and other resources. Research local organizations or national networks that can provide the support needed.

4

## Therapists and Counselors:

Seek out therapists or counselors who specialize in trauma and sexual abuse. They can provide a safe and confidential space for survivors to heal, develop coping strategies, and work through their experiences.

5

## Medical Professionals:

Consult with medical professionals such as doctors, nurses, or gynecologists who can provide necessary medical care, conduct examinations if needed, and offer referrals to appropriate resources.

6

## Social Services and Advocacy Groups:

Social service agencies and advocacy organizations can provide assistance with housing, legal support, navigating the justice system, and connecting survivors with other necessary resources.

7

## Faith-Based Organizations:

Social service agencies and advocacy organizations can provide assistance with housing, legal support, navigating the justice system, and connecting survivors with other necessary resources.

8

## Online Directories and Databases:

Utilize online directories or databases that list resources available in your region or country. These directories can help locate specialized services, support groups, therapists, and other relevant support options.

**Remember, reaching out for support is an important step towards healing. While it may feel daunting at first, there are resources available to provide the support, guidance, and healing necessary for survivors of sexual abuse.**



# Testimonials

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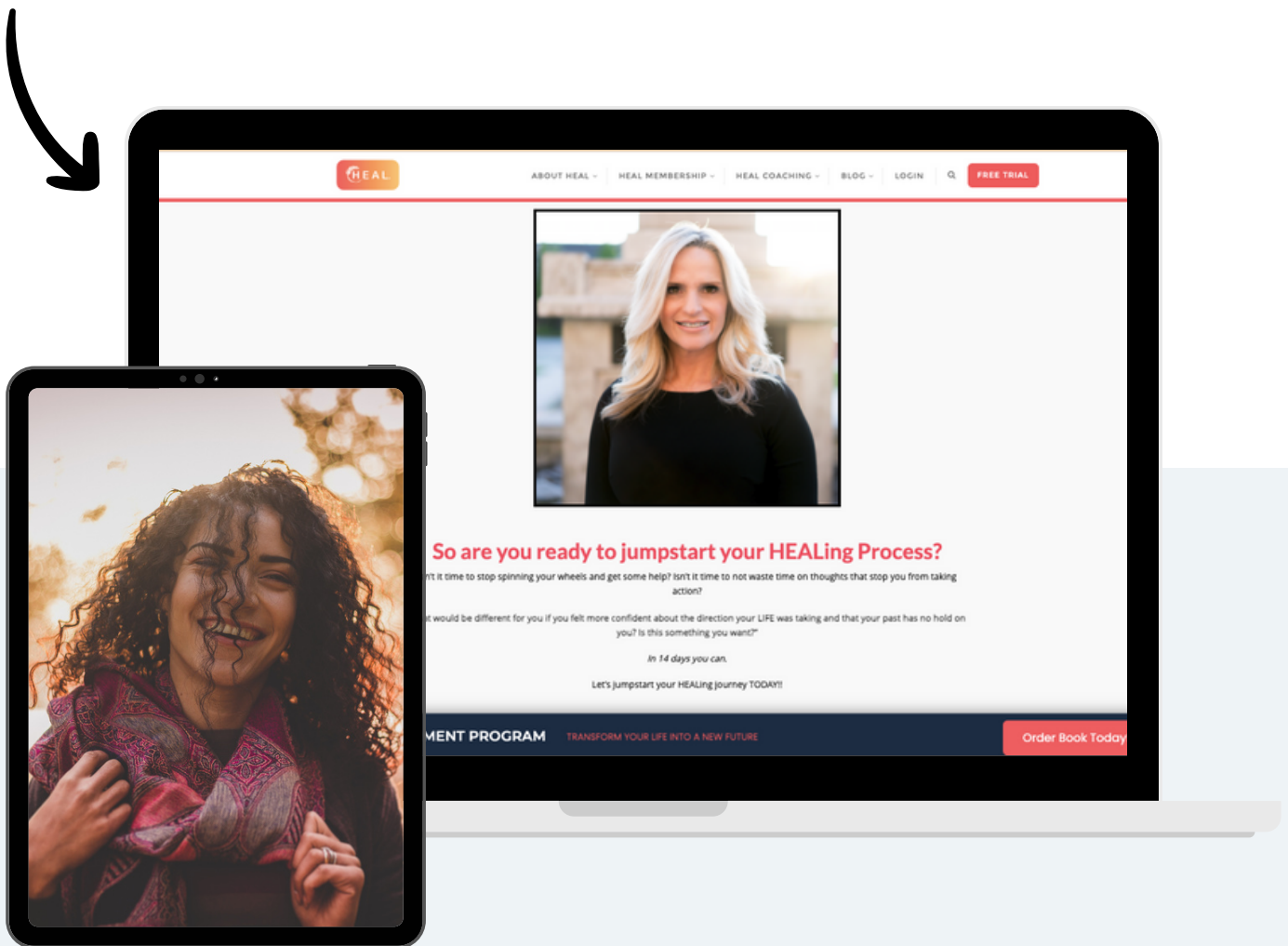
“I knew I wanted to write down my healing journey which consisted of a lot of painful experiences and abusive memories. I found my best time to journal was after my support groups. I would go home and spend some time reflecting and releasing and processing.”

-Survivor



# OBSTACLE 10

DO YOU BELIEVE YOU CAN HEAL?



[LEARN MORE](#)

# Do you believe you can heal?

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When you are sexually abused, you feel powerless. When you feel powerless, you can feel hopeless. You may feel hopeless about your future and can become bitter, angry, and even confused. **You may feel stuck. Those are normal feelings considering what you have been through.** You survived the sexual abuse and now need to know if you can ever have a life not plagued by your past. You may want to know if you can have healthy relationships, if you can trust again, if you can stop self-destructive behaviors (such as addictions or eating disorders), if the nightmares and flashbacks will ever go away, or if you even have a purpose.

**Your past may be filled with pain, but your future does not need to be.** Right now, you may only see yourself as an abused person, not worthy of love by others, not worthy of self-love. You may have extremely negative self-talk and self-sabotaging behaviors. You may find that you often refer to yourself as the names you were once called.

Survivors are not necessarily afraid of change; they are afraid of giving up what they know, even if it is bad. They are afraid to move forward because they have not experienced what the change will bring, nor do they trust themselves to accomplish the change needed. **Survivors want to avoid more pain when they have been through a lot of pain.** The fact is, when trying to overcome your past, you will experience pain, perhaps more pain as an adult because you can really understand the magnitude of what has happened to you. However, you will also gain inner strength, an inner clarity, and a better sense of who you really are. Only then can you look forward to a better future.



# You can Heal!

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No matter how hard or insurmountable it may seem to dig your way out of an abusive environment, it is possible. At HEAL® we have seen people who have the hardest of circumstances leave their abusive spouses, leave abusive extended families, move from a church where the leader was their abuser, move from a town where they would run into their abuser at the grocery store, and leave a country where they were raped. **Healing is action.** Along with dealing with the past, you also have to deal with the present. Nevertheless, it is so important to stay the course because healing does not need to take a lifetime.

There is too much life to live. Healing is different from any experience you will ever have. It is emerging from one life to another. A rebirth that you choose to experience. That choice will be hard, but living as an unhealed victim is the harder choice. **To stay suspended in a past of pain for a lifetime is a tragedy and a choice.**

**"Life after abuse means understanding your new sense of inner power, your resiliency, and an inner belief that you can take care of yourself."**

**- Wendy M. Johnson**

# Overcoming a trial of this magnitude teaches you how resilient and strong you are. Healing gives you a higher sense of self-understanding.

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The greatest part of healing is having a sense that everything is going to be okay because of you. Healing also lets you know that you have the tools to react to trials. It gives you a sense of knowingness and a belief in yourself that you can overcome future trials. Life After Abuse also includes an inner, deep, and strong self-confidence.

During your healing process, you will have conquered your insecurities and realize that you can overcome outside destructive forces. **There is nothing more rewarding than knowing that you can count on yourself, protect yourself, and protect others around you.** This is quite a different mindset than that of a victim. Instead of wanting someone to take care of you and feel sorry for you, you will know that you can take care of yourself. In fact, you can take care of yourself better than anyone else can. Instead of feeling sorry for you, people will want to emulate you and learn how to tap into that inner power you possess.



# You can Heal!

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Taking care of yourself also includes re-examining and choosing the relationships you want to be in, which may include having to end some that are not compatible with your new self. Taking care of yourself may include changing your surroundings. Your surroundings may include situations that may not be healthy for you.

**As you heal, you grow from the inside out.** You stop blaming others in your life for your life. The sexual abuser and all involved are still accountable for their actions. Your past may be the reason you are in the situation(s) you find yourself in now. However, with healing comes a sense of understanding that blaming others doesn't allow you to move forward. **You need to take where you currently are, past and all, and realize that you are responsible for the decisions you make now to get out of the situations that are not healthy to be in. There has to be a starting point to make a change in your life.** Healing helps you have more courage to take ownership and responsibility for who you are, despite the past.

**"It may seem a lot to expect victims of sexual abuse to stop this slave-like, inhumane practice. But nothing changes just because a victim is no longer being victimized. Change occurs when the individual heals. A healed victim is a powerful force. A healed victim understands the journey that needs to be crossed in order to heal. A victim's fear turns to a healed survivor's courage. A victim's self-hatred and shame turns to a healed survivor's self-love and self-acceptance. A victim's silence turns to a healed survivor having a voice. A victim's exploitation turns to a healed survivor protecting others".**



# Testimonials

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“I knew I wanted to write down my healing journey which consisted of a lot of painful experiences and abusive memories. I found my best time to journal was after my support groups. I would go home and spend some time reflecting and releasing and processing.”

-Survivor



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# BEFORE YOU GO...

## CONGRATULATIONS!

### **You are ready to start or finish your healing journey!**

It's a life transforming path, one that we are thrilled to see you take.

But wait! One last tip! We know that survivors backed by a supportive community see MUCH greater rates of success than those who go at it alone.

**Our community is incredible and we're excited to welcome you into our exclusive membership community. Join us right here, right now and start connecting with other members at all stages of the journey.**

**Swap stories. Ask questions. Share thoughts. And multiply your healing potential with a team who specializes in sexual abuse healing.**

## And one last thing...

HEAL® is a membership site created specifically for survivors to heal.

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**The HEAL® Monthly Membership** was created for women on a journey to heal from sexual abuse and overcome living with unresolved trauma that can leave you feeling broken or not feeling worthy of love and affection and can stop you from having fulfilling relationships.

Members have access to the exclusive **step-by-step HEAL® Course** delivered in masterclass style videos. This powerful resource takes you by the hand and walks you through each crucial step of the healing process. You will gain knowledge, tools, and support necessary to overcome the challenges of healing.

- 2 **LIVE Weekly Q&A Coaching with Wendy** to answer your questions.
- 3 **Weekly Live support group** Optional to attend. You can go through the HEAL® Course with a group. This is a 12-week group via zoom.
- 4 **LIVE Weekly Workshops** in FB community with Wendy with a workbook to help apply what you are learning.
- 5 **Immediate full access** to HEAL's exclusive 14-session educational course that includes over 100 masterclass style videos, journaling, assessments, inspirational videos, meditations, etc.
- 6 **Complete access to HEAL's growth tools** (daily well-being check-in, trigger tracker, personal behavior monitoring, worksheets... and more) These tools are designed to support your growth and help you track your progress along the way.
- 7 **Access all content from anywhere**
- 8 **Additionally, HEAL® offers separate coaching services for survivors who desire a more personalized, one-on-one experience outside of the membership.**

## What sets HEAL® apart is its Educational Approach

With 16-core topics, meticulously crafted to address being free of shame, blame, and guilt, learning who to trust, how to set healthy boundaries, how to feel whole, learn you have not been robbed of a purpose or potential and so much more.

[Join the HEAL® Community](#)

**We can't wait to see you!**

Love and Friends,

**Wendy and the HEAL® Team**



# There is Life After Abuse®

[www.healfromabuse.com](http://www.healfromabuse.com)

