

# **From Pain to Power: A Resource Guide for Survivors of Sexual Violence**

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## **About the Author:**

Leah M. Forney is the Founder & Creator of SAAVE ME, a transformative movement dedicated to empowering organizations to foster safe, supportive, and inclusive learning and working environments, particularly for marginalized communities. Her commitment to this cause is rooted in both her personal and professional journey.

As a survivor of sexual assault, Leah has turned her personal trauma into a powerful narrative that drives her mission. Her story is not just one of survival but of thriving and leading by example. For the past decade, she has bravely shared her experience, leading crucial conversations with politicians, law enforcement, and attorney generals' offices. Her advocacy work has made her a respected voice in the fight against sexual violence.

Leah's professional accomplishments are as diverse as they are impressive. She is a published author, sought-after speaker, sexual assault prevention educator, and trainer. Her podcast, "Hey Queen, Thrive!" is internationally recognized and syndicated, further amplifying her voice and message.

Leah has become the go-to speaker for renowned organizations like RAINN and has been featured in various media outlets, including the Jackson Press, Dear Katie Podcast, End the Backlog Survivor Stories, ABC 7, The National Desk, & Authority Magazine just to name a few.

Leah sits on the community advisory board for George Mason University where she lends her knowledge and expertise to their initiative regarding the creation of digital messaging for black families to talk with their children about sexual health, sexuality, and sexual assault.

Leah's work has garnered numerous accolades, reflecting her impact and dedication:

I am H.E.R. International Awards: Woman on the Rise (2021), Podcaster of the Year Nominee (2023), CEO of the Year, Trailblazer of the Year, & Filmmaker of the Year Nominee (2024), Speak up Sis Awards: Phenomenal Leader Award (2023), Inspire U Awards: Podcaster of the Year, Speaker of the Year, & Coach of the Year Nominee (2023), ACHI Magazine: Woman on the Rise, Woman of Inspiration, Community Leader, & Podcaster of the Year Nominee (2023)

To learn more about SAAVE ME and Leah's impactful work, visit [www.leahmforney.com](http://www.leahmforney.com)

## **Introduction: A Message to Survivors**

To the survivor holding this guide, I want to take a moment to honor you. The courage and strength you have shown in facing the pain of your past, while continuing to walk forward in your journey, is nothing short of extraordinary. This guide is written with you in mind — a reminder that you are not alone, that your story matters, and that healing is possible.

Surviving sexual violence is a profound and personal experience, one that leaves an impact on every part of your life. But it does not define you. You are not your trauma. You are a survivor, resilient and capable of reclaiming your power.

This resource guide is designed to provide you with the tools, support, and knowledge to help navigate the healing process. Whether you are looking for crisis support, medical care, legal aid, or emotional healing, this guide offers accessible, survivor-centered resources that can help you take the next step in your journey — at your own pace.

This guide is a reflection of the strength I see in you, and my hope is that it offers you the support and empowerment needed to move from pain to power. You deserve to heal, to thrive, and to live a life full of hope, peace, and freedom.

You are worthy of all the love, care, and support that this world has to offer.

With deep respect and support,

**Leah M. Forney**

## 1. Immediate Support Resources

### National Helplines:

- **RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network):** 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) – Offers 24/7 confidential support and can help connect survivors to local resources.
- **Crisis Text Line:** Text HOME to 741741 – Provides free, 24/7 crisis support via text message.
- **SAMHSA's National Helpline:** 1-800-662-HELP (4357) – Offers free and confidential information on mental health and substance use services.

### Local Crisis Hotlines (Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C.):

- **Maryland:**
  - *Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA):* 301-328-7023
  - *Baltimore Crisis Response, Inc.:* 410-752-2272
- **Virginia:**
  - *Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance:* 1-800-838-8238
  - *Fairfax County 24-Hour Domestic and Sexual Violence Hotline:* 703-360-7273
- **Washington, D.C.:**
  - *DC Rape Crisis Center:* 202-333-7273
  - *Wendt Center for Loss and Healing:* 202-624-0010

### How to Find Local Crisis Hotlines by State:

Survivors outside the Maryland, Virginia, and D.C. areas can find local crisis hotlines by visiting RAINN's website and entering their zip code in the *Find Help* section. This feature provides contacts for the nearest sexual assault service providers, hospitals, and counselors by region.

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## Medical Support and Forensic Exams

Forensic exams, also known as *Sexual Assault Forensic Exams (SAFE)* or *rape kits*, are medical exams that document and collect evidence after a sexual assault. Here's what to expect and tips for navigating this process:

### What to Expect in a Forensic Exam:

1. **Immediate Medical Care:**
  - You will receive care for any physical injuries, regardless of whether you choose to complete the entire forensic exam. Medical professionals prioritize your health and safety throughout the process.
2. **Your Consent is Key:**

- Medical staff should explain each part of the exam and obtain your consent before proceeding with any step. You can opt out of any part of the exam at any time.
- 3. **Documentation of Injuries and Evidence Collection:**
  - If you consent, the examiner will collect evidence, which may include photographs, swabs, and clothing. They will document visible injuries and collect samples for evidence, such as hair, saliva, and bodily fluids.
- 4. **Clothing and Personal Belongings:**
  - Bring a change of clothes if possible, as some clothing may be collected as evidence. Hospitals typically provide replacement clothing if needed.
- 5. **Preserving Privacy and Confidentiality:**
  - The information shared with the healthcare provider is confidential. You are not required to file a police report to receive a forensic exam, and your identity will be protected according to HIPAA regulations.
- 6. **Support Person:**
  - You have the right to have a support person with you during the exam, such as an advocate from a local crisis center, a friend, or family member. Many hospitals can connect you with trained advocates upon request.
- 7. **Access to Follow-Up Services:**
  - You may be referred to follow-up services for additional health needs, including STI prevention, pregnancy prevention, or trauma counseling. Many forensic exam providers offer referrals to local counseling or support groups.

#### **Where to Go for a Forensic Exam:**

- **Maryland:**
  - Most hospitals in Maryland offer forensic exams, and many have Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) who are specially trained. Major hospitals such as *Johns Hopkins Hospital* and *University of Maryland Medical Center* are equipped with SANE programs.
- **Virginia:**
  - Virginia has numerous SANE-designated hospitals. *INOVA Fairfax Hospital* and *Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Medical Center* both have SANE programs with trained forensic examiners.
- **Washington, D.C.:**
  - The *Washington Hospital Center* and *MedStar Georgetown University Hospital* offer forensic exams and have trained SANE nurses available.

## 2. Therapy and Support Resources

### Trauma-Informed Therapy:

Trauma-informed therapy is a therapeutic approach that prioritizes the safety, empowerment, and healing of trauma survivors. A trauma-informed therapist focuses on understanding and recognizing the impact of trauma on mental, emotional, and physical well-being. This type of therapy typically includes:

- **Building Safety:** Creating a safe, supportive environment that empowers survivors.
- **Trust and Transparency:** Therapists foster a trustworthy and transparent relationship, respecting survivors' autonomy and control over their healing journey.
- **Empowerment and Choice:** Survivors are encouraged to participate actively in their healing process.
- **Cultural Awareness:** Therapy acknowledges and respects the cultural and individual differences of each survivor, recognizing that trauma impacts everyone differently based on identity, experiences, and background.

### How to Find a Culturally Sensitive Therapist:

Finding a culturally sensitive therapist can be crucial for survivors who feel more comfortable working with someone who understands their background. Look for therapists who advertise culturally responsive or culturally informed services and use platforms designed to connect people with therapists who have similar cultural, racial, or ethnic backgrounds.

- **Platforms to Find Culturally Sensitive Therapists:**
  - **Therapy for Black Girls:** A directory of Black female therapists across the U.S., offering culturally relevant support for Black women and girls.
  - **Latinx Therapy:** Provides mental health resources for the Latinx community and a directory of Latinx therapists.
  - **Therapy for Black Men:** A directory specifically for Black men seeking culturally sensitive therapy.
  - **Asian Mental Health Collective:** A directory and resources for connecting with mental health professionals familiar with Asian and Pacific Islander cultures.
  - **Inclusive Therapists:** An online directory committed to diversity, inclusive care, and accessible mental health for marginalized populations.
  - **Open Path Collective:** A nonprofit network offering affordable therapy from therapists committed to inclusivity.

## Types of Therapy:

Each type of therapy approaches trauma healing differently. Here's a quick guide to common therapy modalities that support trauma recovery:

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** Focuses on changing negative thought patterns and behaviors related to trauma. Often includes developing coping strategies and practical tools for managing trauma responses.
- **Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT):** Emphasizes balancing acceptance and change, helping survivors manage intense emotions, build distress tolerance, and enhance interpersonal skills.
- **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR):** Involves guided eye movements or other bilateral stimulation to help process and reframe traumatic memories, reducing their emotional impact over time.
- **Somatic Experiencing (SE):** Focuses on body-based approaches, helping survivors release trauma-related stress stored in the body by exploring physical sensations and body awareness.
- **Narrative Therapy:** Encourages survivors to rewrite the "story" of their trauma, allowing them to see themselves as more than their experiences and to find new meaning in their healing journey.
- **Group Therapy:** Facilitates shared healing by connecting survivors in a group setting, helping them process trauma alongside others with similar experiences.

## Online Support Groups:

Online support groups provide a safe, accessible space for survivors to connect, share, and support each other through their healing journeys. Here are some recommended options:

- **From Pain to Power: A Survivor Healing Circle** – A tiered, survivor-centered support group offering different levels for each stage of the healing journey.
  - **Pandora's Project:** A nonprofit organization offering support groups for survivors of sexual violence, along with articles and healing resources.
  - **RAINN Online Hotline:** Provides a free, confidential chat-based support service for survivors of sexual assault, staffed by trained advocates.
  - **SASS (Sexual Assault Support Services) Survivors:** An online community providing resources and group sessions for survivors of sexual violence, focusing on empowerment and support.
  - **Supportiv (24/7 Online Emotional Support):** An anonymous peer support network with guided conversations for survivors dealing with trauma, stress, and other challenges.
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## Self-Care Tips for Managing Trauma Responses

Self-care is essential for healing, as it helps survivors manage trauma responses and feel more grounded. Here are some practical self-care strategies:

- 1. Mindful Breathing:**
  - Practice deep, slow breathing to reduce anxiety. A simple exercise is inhaling slowly through the nose, holding for a few seconds, and exhaling through the mouth. This technique can calm the nervous system and ease tension.
- 2. Grounding Exercises:**
  - Use the *5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique* to stay present: identify five things you can see, four things you can touch, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste. This method can help bring you back to the present moment and reduce feelings of overwhelm.
- 3. Body Scanning:**
  - Conduct a mental body scan from head to toe, noticing any areas of tension and consciously releasing them. This technique fosters body awareness and helps survivors reconnect with their physical selves.
- 4. Creative Expression:**
  - Journaling, drawing, or painting can be effective ways to express feelings without words. Creative outlets provide a safe space to process emotions and can be a positive, therapeutic release.
- 5. Setting Boundaries:**
  - Setting boundaries with others, especially around triggering topics, can support emotional well-being. Let loved ones know if there are topics or environments you need to avoid during certain times.
- 6. Movement and Exercise:**
  - Gentle exercises, such as stretching, yoga, or walking, can help release physical tension stored in the body from trauma. Movement can also promote relaxation and a sense of grounding.
- 7. Affirmations and Self-Compassion:**
  - Practice positive affirmations or self-compassion statements to challenge negative self-talk. Remind yourself of your strengths and acknowledge your journey with kindness, which can foster resilience over time.

### 3. Legal Rights and Support Resources

#### Victim's Rights Overview:

Survivors of sexual violence have specific rights to ensure they receive fair treatment, support, and protection within the justice system. While laws vary by state, these are some commonly recognized rights for survivors in the U.S.:

- **Right to Fair Treatment:** Survivors have the right to be treated with dignity and respect throughout the legal process.
- **Right to Privacy:** Survivors' personal information and identities are protected to maintain privacy.
- **Right to Information:** Survivors are entitled to be informed about the progress of their case, including key dates, status updates, and outcomes.
- **Right to Protection:** Survivors can request measures to protect them from further harm, including protection orders.
- **Right to Participate in Proceedings:** Survivors may have the right to participate in court proceedings and provide input on decisions that affect them.
- **Right to Restitution:** Survivors may be entitled to financial compensation from the perpetrator for costs related to the assault.

Survivors seeking more details on their rights can access resources through local victim advocacy programs, legal aid centers, or online portals that explain state-specific laws.

#### Legal Support:

Free legal aid and survivor-centered advocacy groups offer crucial support to survivors by providing guidance on legal matters, representation, and help navigating complex judicial systems. Here's a list of national and local resources:

- **National Legal Resources:**
  - **Victim Rights Law Center (VRLC):** Provides free legal services to survivors of sexual violence, including help with privacy rights, safety, and employment issues.
  - **National Crime Victim Law Institute (NCVLI):** Offers resources, legal assistance, and advocacy for crime victims, with a focus on empowering survivors and ensuring their rights are upheld.
  - **RAINN Legal Assistance:** A directory of legal resources for survivors of sexual assault, including information on victim's rights and how to access legal support.
  - **Equal Justice Initiative (EJI):** Provides legal support to individuals facing issues of racial and social injustice, including those affected by gender-based violence.
  - **American Bar Association (ABA) Commission on Domestic & Sexual Violence:** Connects survivors with local legal services and offers resources for those facing sexual violence.
- **Local Legal Resources (Maryland, Virginia, D.C.):**

- **Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center:** Offers free legal assistance, support services, and referrals to survivors of crime, including those affected by sexual violence.
- **Virginia Legal Aid Society:** Provides free legal help for survivors of sexual violence, offering services related to safety, protection orders, and other civil matters.
- **Network for Victim Recovery of D.C. (NVRDC):** Provides free legal advocacy and case management to survivors of sexual violence, with a focus on empowering survivors to navigate the justice system.

Survivors can also locate additional local legal resources through the **National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC)**, which provides a state-by-state directory of advocacy groups and legal services.

### **Protection Orders:**

A **Protection Order** (also called a restraining order) is a legal order issued by a court to protect survivors from further harm by restricting contact with the perpetrator. This order may prevent the offender from coming near, contacting, or harassing the survivor in any way.

- **Types of Protection Orders:** Different types of orders are available, such as emergency, temporary, or long-term orders, depending on the state and the specifics of the case.
- **How to Obtain a Protection Order:** Survivors can file for a protection order at their local courthouse, often with assistance from victim advocates or legal aid offices. Many states also allow survivors to apply through online platforms or by contacting local support organizations.
- **Finding More Information:** Survivors can learn more about obtaining a protection order by contacting their local victim advocacy center, court assistance programs, or organizations like **RAINN** and the **National Domestic Violence Hotline**.

Protection orders can be a vital tool for ensuring safety, and survivors are encouraged to reach out to their local resources for guidance on the application process.

## **4. Understanding Trauma and Healing**

### **How Trauma Affects the Brain and Body:**

Trauma, especially when experienced in childhood or during prolonged periods, can have profound effects on both the brain and body. Understanding these impacts is crucial for survivors as they navigate their healing journey.

- **The Brain:** Trauma can alter the brain's structure and function, particularly in areas involved in memory, emotions, and stress responses. The **amygdala**, responsible for the fight-or-flight response, becomes more active, while the **prefrontal cortex**, responsible

for reasoning and decision-making, may become less effective. This can result in heightened anxiety, hypervigilance, and difficulty regulating emotions.

- **The Body:** Trauma can cause physical changes in the body as well. Survivors often experience chronic stress that leads to tension in the muscles, digestive issues, headaches, and other physical symptoms. Additionally, trauma can impact the nervous system, leading to a heightened startle response, difficulty sleeping, and physical responses to triggers. **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** is a common outcome, manifesting in flashbacks, nightmares, and a constant state of alertness.
- **The Healing Process:** Healing from trauma involves both the brain and the body. The brain can rewire itself through **neuroplasticity**—the brain's ability to form new connections and patterns of behavior. Similarly, the body can learn to release stored tension through practices such as **mindfulness**, **breathing exercises**, and **somatic therapy**. Healing also includes learning to process and express emotions, building a sense of safety, and reconnecting with the body in a nurturing way.

As survivors continue their healing journey, it's important to be aware of how trauma may continue to affect both mind and body, and to take steps toward integrating healing practices.

### **Books on Trauma and Healing:**

- **"The Body Keeps the Score" by Bessel van der Kolk, M.D.**  
A groundbreaking book that explores how trauma impacts the body and mind, offering practical insights on healing.
- **"Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma" by Peter A. Levine**  
A compelling exploration of how trauma is stored in the body and how it can be healed through somatic experiencing techniques.
- **"Trauma and Recovery" by Judith Herman**  
A classic book that provides an understanding of the trauma recovery process, outlining the stages of healing from trauma and abuse.
- **"Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving" by Pete Walker**  
Focuses on healing from complex PTSD, offering concrete steps to reclaim one's life and thrive after prolonged trauma.
- **"The Healing Power of Emotion" by Diana Fosha**  
Discusses how emotional processing is essential for healing from trauma, and introduces Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) as a therapeutic approach.
- **"Rising Strong" by Brené Brown**  
A powerful book about embracing vulnerability and building resilience after trauma or failure, using a framework of courage, connection, and creativity.

### **Podcasts for Survivors:**

- **Dear Katie Podcast**  
Hosted by Katie, this podcast offers survivors a space for healing, with interviews, survivor stories, and advice on reclaiming one's life after trauma.

- **Hey Queen, Thrive!**  
Hosted by Leah M. Forney, this podcast empowers survivors of sexual violence to find their voice, embrace their healing journey, and reclaim their power in life and business.
- **The Trauma Therapist Podcast**  
Aimed at young trauma therapists, this podcast also offers valuable insights for survivors, with information about trauma recovery and understanding the healing process.
- **The Trauma Recovery Coach Podcast**  
Hosted by Paul Christino, this podcast covers practical steps for trauma recovery, from expert advice to survivor stories of healing.
- **The Mindful Kind Podcast**  
Hosted by Rachael Kable, this podcast provides mindfulness tools that can be used to manage trauma responses, regulate emotions, and reduce stress.
- **Therapy Chat Podcast**  
Focuses on various trauma-informed therapy practices and trauma recovery insights, offering resources for survivors and therapists alike.
- **UnF\*ck Your Brain Podcast**  
Hosted by Kara Loewentheil, J.D., this podcast blends feminism, psychology, and social justice with practical advice for overcoming trauma and empowering oneself.

These books and podcasts provide valuable information, support, and inspiration to survivors, helping them understand trauma, its effects, and the many paths to healing.

## 5. Compensation, Emergency Financial Assistance, and Workplace Rights

### Compensation for Victims of Sexual Violence

#### National Resources:

- **Crime Victim Compensation Programs:**  
Every state in the U.S. has a **Crime Victim Compensation Program** that provides financial assistance to victims of violent crimes, including sexual assault. These funds can cover medical expenses, counseling, lost wages, and funeral expenses.
  - **How to apply:** Each state's program has different eligibility requirements and application procedures. To find the Crime Victim Compensation Program for your state, visit the **National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards (NACVCB)** website: [www.nacvcb.org](http://www.nacvcb.org).
- **The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Fund:**  
VOCA provides funding for state and local programs that support victims of crime, including sexual assault. Some of these funds may be used to cover therapy, medical bills, and other expenses that arise due to the crime.
  - **How to apply:** Check with local law enforcement or victim advocacy organizations for assistance in applying for VOCA funds.

- **Department of Justice (DOJ) Office for Victims of Crime:**  
The DOJ provides grants to support sexual assault survivors and their recovery through various victim services programs.
  - **How to apply:** Visit the **Office for Victims of Crime** website for more information: [www.ovc.ojp.gov](http://www.ovc.ojp.gov).

## Emergency Financial Assistance

### National Resources:

- **Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN):**  
RAINN offers support services for sexual assault survivors, including financial assistance for emergency needs, such as housing or transportation, through local community organizations and national funding programs.
  - **How to apply:** Visit the RAINN website for additional resources: [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org).
- **The National Domestic Violence Hotline:**  
The hotline provides resources and can connect survivors of sexual violence with emergency financial support, especially when they are escaping unsafe situations.
  - **How to apply:** Call 1-800-799-SAFE (1-800-799-7233) or visit [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org).
- **National Sexual Assault Hotline:**  
Managed by RAINN, this hotline can help survivors connect to emergency resources, including financial assistance for medical care, housing, and more.
  - **How to apply:** Call 1-800-656-HOPE (1-800-656-4673).

### Local Resources (Maryland, Virginia, and D.C.):

- **Maryland Crime Victim's Resource Center:**  
Offers financial assistance for medical care, counseling, and other related expenses through the state's Crime Victim Compensation Program.
  - **How to apply:** Visit [www.mdcrimevictims.org](http://www.mdcrimevictims.org) for more information.
- **Virginia Victim Assistance Network:**  
Provides emergency financial assistance for survivors of sexual violence, including support for lost wages, medical expenses, and relocation.
  - **How to apply:** Visit [www.virginia.victims.org](http://www.virginia.victims.org) for assistance.
- **D.C. Victim Assistance Program:**  
Offers financial assistance and other support services for victims of crime in D.C., including survivors of sexual assault.
  - **How to apply:** Visit [ovsjg.dc.gov](http://ovsjg.dc.gov) or call 202-727-8260.

## Workplace Rights for Survivors of Sexual Violence

### National Resources:

- **The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC):**  
Under federal law, sexual assault survivors are protected from discrimination in the

workplace. The **EEOC** enforces laws that protect workers from sexual harassment and retaliation. Survivors can file complaints if they experience harassment or discrimination due to their trauma.

- **How to file a complaint:** Visit the **EEOC** website at [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov) to file a charge or learn more about your rights.
- **The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA):**  
Under the **FMLA**, survivors of sexual violence may be entitled to job-protected leave to seek medical treatment, counseling, or attend legal proceedings.
  - **How to apply:** Contact your employer's Human Resources department to inquire about taking leave under the FMLA.

### **State & Local Resources (Maryland, Virginia, and D.C.):**

- **Maryland's Sexual Harassment Laws:**  
Maryland law prohibits sexual harassment and provides employees with protections from retaliation. Survivors can file complaints with the **Maryland Commission on Civil Rights**.
  - **How to file a complaint:** Visit [www.mdequal.org](http://www.mdequal.org).
- **Virginia Employment Rights for Victims of Crime:**  
Virginia law provides protections for employees who are victims of sexual violence, including job leave for legal proceedings and medical care.
  - **How to file a complaint:** Contact the **Virginia Employment Commission** at [www.vec.virginia.gov](http://www.vec.virginia.gov).
- **D.C. Sexual Harassment and Victim's Rights:**  
In D.C., employees are entitled to protection from workplace sexual harassment, and victims of sexual violence are entitled to job protection under the **D.C. Human Rights Act**.
  - **How to file a complaint:** Visit [www.ohr.dc.gov](http://www.ohr.dc.gov) or contact 202-727-4559.

## **6. Education, Job Training, Scholarships, and Advocacy Involvement**

### **Education and Job Training Resources for Survivors of Sexual Violence**

#### **National Resources:**

- **The Women's Opportunity Awards by Soroptimist International:**  
This scholarship is designed to help women who are the primary earners for their families and who have faced financial difficulties, including survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault. It provides financial assistance for education or job training.
  - **How to apply:** Visit [www.soroptimist.org](http://www.soroptimist.org) for more information on how to apply.

- **The Quell Foundation:**  
Provides scholarships for survivors of sexual violence to further their education or training. This program is aimed at helping survivors achieve independence and build a brighter future.
  - **How to apply:** For more details, visit <https://thequellfoundation.org/scholarships/>
- **National Women's Law Center - Economic Justice:**  
The **National Women's Law Center** advocates for financial support for survivors, including those pursuing higher education or vocational training. The center provides access to funding and legal advice for survivors seeking to advance their education or job skills.
  - **How to apply:** Visit [www.nwlc.org](http://www.nwlc.org) to explore funding and training resources.
- **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA):**  
A federal program designed to provide job training, career development, and education services to individuals with barriers to employment, including survivors of sexual violence.
  - **How to apply:** Contact local **American Job Centers** to learn how WIOA funding can support you: [www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org).

#### Local Resources (Maryland, Virginia, and D.C.):

- **The Maryland Department of Labor - Workforce Development:**  
Offers job training and career services to residents of Maryland, including those who are survivors of violence.
  - **How to apply:** Visit [www.labor.maryland.gov](http://www.labor.maryland.gov) for more information.
- **Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) – Job Training and Placement Services:**  
Provides services that support survivors in gaining skills and entering or re-entering the workforce.
  - **How to apply:** Visit [www.vec.virginia.gov](http://www.vec.virginia.gov) to connect with training programs.
- **D.C. Department of Employment Services (DOES):**  
Offers job training, educational support, and career services for residents of D.C., including sexual violence survivors.
  - **How to apply:** Visit [does.dc.gov](http://does.dc.gov) to explore available services.

#### Scholarships for Survivors of Sexual Violence

- **The Joyful Heart Foundation's Healing and Education Scholarship:**  
This scholarship provides financial assistance to survivors of sexual violence who are pursuing education and healing programs. It is specifically aimed at helping survivors reclaim their voice and empowerment through education.
  - **How to apply:** Visit [www.joyfulheartfoundation.org](http://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org).
- **The Women's Foundation of Southern Arizona – Education and Career Scholarships:**  
This foundation offers scholarships to help women, including survivors of sexual assault, pursue their educational and career goals.
  - **How to apply:** Visit [www.womensfoundation.org](http://www.womensfoundation.org).

## How to Get Involved in Advocacy for Sexual Violence Survivors

### National Resources:

- **RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network):**  
RAINN is a leader in sexual violence advocacy and offers many opportunities for survivors to get involved in their mission to support victims, raise awareness, and promote policy change.
  - **How to get involved:** Volunteer or become an advocate through the RAINN website: [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org).
- **National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC):**  
The **NSVRC** provides tools and resources to survivors who want to engage in advocacy efforts for sexual violence prevention. They offer advocacy training and opportunities to work on a national level.
  - **How to get involved:** Visit [www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org) for resources and advocacy opportunities.
- **The Victim Rights Law Center:**  
Advocates for survivors of sexual violence, particularly in the legal system. They work to ensure that survivors have access to justice and provide opportunities for survivors to become involved in systemic advocacy.
  - **How to get involved:** Learn more at [www.victimrights.org](http://www.victimrights.org).

### Local Resources (Maryland, Virginia, and D.C.):

- **Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA):**  
MCASA works with survivors of sexual violence to advocate for their rights and to create systemic changes to prevent violence. They offer opportunities for survivors to engage in local advocacy efforts.
  - **How to get involved:** Visit [www.mcasa.org](http://www.mcasa.org) for more information on how to volunteer or become an advocate.
- **Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance:**  
Provides advocacy opportunities for survivors to get involved in grassroots efforts to raise awareness and fight for stronger policies against sexual violence.
  - **How to get involved:** Visit [www.vsdvalliance.org](http://www.vsdvalliance.org).
- **D.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence:**  
This coalition works to protect and advocate for victims of sexual violence and provides opportunities for survivors to contribute to advocacy work in the D.C. area.
  - **How to get involved:** Visit [www.dccadv.org](http://www.dccadv.org).

### Your Opportunity to Advocate: From Pain to Power:

We encourage you to join our advocacy network by getting involved in local and national efforts. Survivors can find strength in helping others and advocating for systemic changes.

- **How to get involved:** Learn about **From Pain to Power: A Survivor Healing Circle** and explore how you can contribute to advocacy efforts. Visit our website to join our efforts: [Insert website link].

## 7. Long-Term Healing Tools

Healing from sexual violence is an ongoing journey, and incorporating supportive tools into your daily life can be a powerful way to aid in long-term recovery. Below is a list of apps, online therapy platforms, and other resources that provide ongoing support and help with managing trauma responses.

### Apps for Mindfulness, Relaxation, and Mental Health

- **Calm App**  
*Calm* is a popular app designed to help users manage stress, anxiety, and sleep. It offers guided meditations, breathing exercises, sleep stories, and calming music to help individuals find peace and balance in their lives.
  - **Available for:** iOS and Android
  - **Link:** [www.calm.com](http://www.calm.com)
- **Insight Timer**  
This app provides free guided meditations, mindfulness practices, and a supportive community for mental health and well-being. It also has a variety of courses focused on trauma healing, self-care, and emotional regulation.
  - **Available for:** iOS and Android
  - **Link:** [www.insighttimer.com](http://www.insighttimer.com)
- **Headspace**  
Headspace offers mindfulness and meditation tools aimed at helping users manage stress, anxiety, and emotional challenges. It includes tailored meditations, breathing techniques, and sleep aids, which can be particularly helpful for trauma survivors.
  - **Available for:** iOS and Android
  - **Link:** [www.headspace.com](http://www.headspace.com)
- **Breeth**  
Breeth is an app designed to provide mindfulness, meditation, and emotional well-being exercises, with a specific focus on helping individuals manage trauma and emotional wounds.
  - **Available for:** iOS and Android
  - **Link:** [www.breeth.com](http://www.breeth.com)

### Therapy and Counseling Services

- **BetterHelp**  
BetterHelp provides online therapy services by connecting users with licensed therapists. This platform offers private sessions through text, phone, or video calls, making it accessible for those who may have difficulty attending in-person appointments.
  - **Available for:** Online platform

- **Link:** [www.betterhelp.com](http://www.betterhelp.com)
- **Talkspace**

Talkspace offers a similar online therapy platform where users can access licensed therapists through messaging, audio, and video calls. Talkspace also provides support for survivors of trauma and PTSD, with therapy options tailored to different needs.

  - **Available for:** iOS, Android, and Web
  - **Link:** [www.talkspace.com](http://www.talkspace.com)
- **7 Cups**

7 Cups connects individuals with trained listeners or therapists, offering emotional support and counseling services. It includes a peer support network and mental health resources for those dealing with trauma.

  - **Available for:** iOS and Android
  - **Link:** [www.7cups.com](http://www.7cups.com)

### **Supportive Communities and Peer Networks**

- **Reddit - r/sexualassault**

A community on Reddit that provides a safe space for survivors to discuss their experiences, share resources, and offer emotional support to one another. The group is moderated to ensure a trauma-informed environment.

  - **Available for:** Online community
  - **Link:** [www.reddit.com/r/sexualassault](http://www.reddit.com/r/sexualassault)

### **Journaling and Reflection Tools**

- **Penzu**

Penzu is an online journal platform that offers a private, secure space for users to reflect, process their thoughts, and document their healing journey. Writing can be a powerful tool for survivors to manage emotions and track progress over time.

  - **Available for:** Online platform
  - **Link:** [www.penzu.com](http://www.penzu.com)
- **Daylio**

Daylio is a mood tracking and journaling app that allows users to track their emotional health and reflect on their feelings through brief entries. This app helps survivors understand patterns in their emotional states and work on building coping strategies.

  - **Available for:** iOS and Android
  - **Link:** [www.daylio.net](http://www.daylio.net)

### **Other Helpful Resources**

- **The National Domestic Violence Hotline**

Provides text, chat, and phone support to individuals in need of emotional support and safety planning. While focused on domestic violence, they offer support to survivors of sexual violence as well.

  - **Available for:** Text, call, and chat

- Link: [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org)

## 8. Culturally-Specific Resources for BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and Faith-Based Communities

Sexual violence impacts all communities, but survivors in BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), LGBTQ+, and Faith-Based communities may face unique barriers and cultural challenges in seeking support. Below is a list of culturally-sensitive resources designed to meet the specific needs of survivors from these communities.

### Resources for BIPOC Survivors

- **Black Women's Health Imperative (BWHI)**  
The Black Women's Health Imperative works to eliminate health disparities that impact Black women, including sexual violence, by providing educational resources, advocacy, and support programs.
  - **Available for:** National
  - **Link:** [www.bwhi.org](http://www.bwhi.org)
- **The National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC)**  
NIWRC is dedicated to supporting Indigenous women and children who have been affected by violence, providing culturally relevant resources, advocacy, and technical assistance.
  - **Available for:** National
  - **Link:** [www.niwrc.org](http://www.niwrc.org)
- **National Black Women's Justice Institute**  
National Black Women's Justice Institute offers support, resources, and a network for Black women survivors of sexual violence, with a focus on trauma-informed care and culturally sensitive healing approaches.
  - **Available for:** National
  - **Link:** <https://www.nbwji.org/>
- **Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence (API-GBV)**  
API-GBV provides resources for Asian and Pacific Islander communities on addressing gender-based violence, including sexual violence, with culturally specific services and education.
  - **Available for:** National
  - **Link:** [www.api-gbv.org](http://www.api-gbv.org)
- **La Mujer Obrera**  
A grassroots organization that offers resources, advocacy, and education for Latina women survivors of violence, including sexual assault, with culturally relevant services.
  - **Available for:** National
  - **Link:** <https://www.mujoerobra.org/>

### Resources for LGBTQ+ Survivors

- **The Trevor Project**  
The Trevor Project provides crisis intervention and suicide prevention services for LGBTQ+ youth, with a focus on supporting survivors of sexual violence and other traumas.
  - **Available for:** National
  - **Link:** [www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org)
- **GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation)**  
GLAAD offers resources and advocacy for LGBTQ+ individuals, including those who are survivors of sexual violence. They work to address the needs of the LGBTQ+ community in the context of sexual violence and related issues.
  - **Available for:** National
  - **Link:** [www.glaad.org](http://www.glaad.org)
- **National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP)**  
NCAVP provides support, resources, and advocacy for LGBTQ+ survivors of violence, including sexual assault, through a network of local and national organizations.
  - **Available for:** National
  - **Link:** [www.avp.org](http://www.avp.org)
- **LGBT National Help Center**  
The LGBT National Help Center offers support and resources for LGBTQ+ survivors of violence, providing a safe space to talk about experiences and access to services.
  - **Available for:** National
  - **Link:** [www.glbthotline.org](http://www.glbthotline.org)

## Resources for Faith-Based Survivors

- **The Faith Trust Institute**  
Faith Trust Institute offers training, resources, and advocacy for faith communities to address sexual violence, providing survivor-centered approaches and promoting faith-based healing.
  - **Available for:** National
  - **Link:** <http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/>
- **The United Methodist Church: UMC Sexual Ethics & Safe Sanctuaries**  
The United Methodist Church offers resources for survivors of sexual violence within faith communities, promoting ethical responses to sexual abuse and ensuring safe spaces for survivors.
  - **Available for:** National
  - **Link:** [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org)
- **Ministry Safe**  
Ministry Safe provides training and resources for faith communities to address sexual violence and assist survivors, particularly those who have experienced trauma within religious institutions.
  - **Available for:** National
  - **Link:** <https://ministrysafe.com/hopehealing/>

- **Jewish Women International (JWI)**

JWI provides support, education, and advocacy for Jewish women survivors of sexual violence. They offer resources that address trauma within the Jewish community and foster a faith-centered approach to healing.

- **Available for:** National
- **Link:** [www.jwi.org](http://www.jwi.org)

## **Local Resources**

Since many localities offer culturally-specific services, survivors should contact their nearest crisis center or national hotline for specific local resources. Many local organizations provide outreach programs, support groups, and advocacy tailored to BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and faith-based survivors.

## **9. Trauma-Informed Care Practices & Rights in Healthcare**

Trauma-informed care (TIC) is an approach that recognizes the widespread impact of trauma on individuals and strives to create environments that promote healing, trust, and safety. In healthcare, it means treating survivors of sexual violence with sensitivity and respect, ensuring that their physical and emotional needs are met in a way that acknowledges the trauma they have experienced. Below is an overview of trauma-informed care practices and reproductive health for survivors, as well as tips on how to self-advocate in healthcare settings.

### **What is Trauma-Informed Care?**

Trauma-informed care involves understanding the prevalence of trauma, recognizing its impact, and integrating this knowledge into the way services are delivered. It emphasizes safety, empowerment, and choice for the survivor at every stage of care. Healthcare providers who practice trauma-informed care are trained to be mindful of how their interactions and procedures may affect survivors, helping to reduce the risk of retraumatization.

Some key principles of trauma-informed care in healthcare settings include:

1. **Safety:** Ensuring the physical and emotional safety of survivors during all interactions and procedures.
2. **Trustworthiness and Transparency:** Creating an open, respectful, and predictable environment where survivors feel comfortable and informed.
3. **Peer Support:** Encouraging connections with other survivors and offering support throughout the care process.
4. **Collaboration and Empowerment:** Involving survivors in decisions about their care and promoting their autonomy.
5. **Cultural, Historical, and Gender Sensitivity:** Acknowledging and respecting the unique cultural, racial, and gender experiences of survivors.

## Reproductive Health for Survivors of Sexual Violence

Sexual violence can significantly impact reproductive health. Survivors may experience physical consequences, including injuries, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), or unintended pregnancies. Mental health impacts may also include feelings of shame, guilt, or fear surrounding their reproductive health.

Healthcare providers should address these concerns with sensitivity and compassion, and survivors are entitled to:

- **Confidential care:** Information shared about a survivor's health should remain confidential.
- **Access to emergency contraception and STI testing:** Survivors of sexual violence may be entitled to emergency contraception (e.g., Plan B) and STI testing following an assault.
- **Supportive care and options:** Survivors should be provided with options for family planning, pregnancy counseling, and reproductive health, with support for making informed decisions that honor their autonomy and healing.

It is essential for survivors to have access to reproductive health resources that acknowledge and validate their trauma while promoting their healing and well-being.

### 7 Tips on How to Self-Advocate in Healthcare

Survivors have the right to receive compassionate and respectful care. Here are 7 tips on how to self-advocate in healthcare settings to ensure your needs are met:

1. **Know Your Rights**
  - As a survivor, you have the right to receive care that is free of judgment and trauma-informed. Familiarize yourself with your rights to privacy, confidentiality, and respectful treatment.
  - You also have the right to request a support person or advocate to accompany you during medical appointments.
2. **Ask for Trauma-Informed Care**
  - If you feel comfortable, let the healthcare provider know that you are a survivor of sexual violence and request that they follow trauma-informed care practices. This can help ensure your emotional and physical safety during exams or procedures.
3. **Communicate Your Needs**
  - Be clear about your needs and any specific accommodations you may require, such as taking breaks during exams, limiting physical contact, or having someone with you during sensitive procedures.
4. **Request to Be Informed**
  - Before any medical procedures or exams, ask the healthcare provider to explain what will happen, what it will feel like, and how long it will take. This can help reduce anxiety and allow you to feel more in control of the situation.

## 5. **Set Boundaries**

- You have the right to set boundaries. If any procedure or touch feels uncomfortable or re-traumatizing, speak up and request an alternative approach or delay. You can always ask for a moment to collect yourself or step outside if needed.

## 6. **Speak Up About Emotional Impact**

- If you are feeling triggered or overwhelmed during your visit, let the healthcare provider know. They should understand that trauma can impact a survivor's ability to engage in medical procedures, and they should be prepared to adjust their approach.

## 7. **Seek Support**

- If you're not sure how to advocate for yourself, consider reaching out to a sexual assault advocate or counselor for help preparing for your medical appointment. They can help you navigate your healthcare needs and ensure you receive respectful, survivor-centered care.

## **Where to Find More Information**

- **The National Sexual Assault Hotline (Rainn):** For immediate support and information on reproductive health options after an assault.
  - **Call:** 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
  - **Website:** [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)
- **The National Women's Health Network (NWHN):** Offers educational resources on reproductive health and rights, including information for survivors of sexual violence.
  - **Website:** [www.nwhn.org](http://www.nwhn.org)
- **Planned Parenthood:** Provides resources for reproductive health, including STI testing, contraception, and pregnancy care. They also offer support for survivors of sexual violence.
  - **Website:** [www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)
- **The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG):** Provides detailed information on how to navigate reproductive healthcare after sexual violence.
  - **Website:** <https://www.acog.org/>

Thank you for trusting this guide to be part of your journey. Your courage in seeking the support and resources you need is an incredible act of strength. Every step you take toward healing is a testament to the resilience within you, and I am deeply honored to have been able to share this resource with you.

Know that healing is not linear, and there is no "right" way to walk this path. You are doing the hard work, and that alone is something to be incredibly proud of. Always remember: You are worthy, you are enough, and your story matters.

If you ever need further support, encouragement, or guidance, please don't hesitate to reach out. Together, we can continue to build a community where survivors thrive, where healing is honored, and where you always have a place to turn.

With heartfelt gratitude,

**Leah M. Forney**

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