



Why is Life so Hard?

You **can** have
Freedom from the past
Power in the present
Hope for the future

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Emmaus CARES

Our Mission is to:

- provide for the full recovery of adult survivors from the effects of past neglect, abuse or trauma through the **Road to HOPE** program
- provide training and consultation to other agencies and professionals to help them work more effectively with adults affected by childhood neglect, abuse or trauma
- raise public awareness of this issue and the far reaching implications for victims and for society
- provide educational seminars and resources for parents and others in positions of trust

Introduction

If life is hard, if you struggle with depression, anger or anxiety, if you feel defeated, if things seem to work out for others but not for you and you have no idea why, this book is for you.

All human beings need certain things at particular times in their development in order to grow into whole, healthy, happy, effective adults. It is the responsibility of the adults in a child's life to provide those things. Regardless of the reason, if you didn't get the things you needed, you will face real challenges as an adult. Failure to provide what children need is defined by the World Health Organization as abuse.

This booklet was written to help you understand and recognize the effects of not getting the things you needed in childhood regardless of whether bad things were done to you or good things were withheld.

What happened to you is **not your fault**. Children are **never** to blame for the actions of adults and you are **not to blame** for the effects and symptoms that you live with on a daily basis.

Understanding what was damaged will help you to understand why you think and feel as you do. It will explain your actions but it will not make them right - it is not an excuse to continue self-destructive activities.

It's not fair! You are not to blame and yet you are the only one who can fix it. With help, you can learn how to care about yourself, take the steps necessary to repair the damage so that these symptoms no longer cause problems for you or those around you and learn how to live a happy and successful life.

It is **never too late** to reclaim your life!

Overview

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

Most people think of 'child abuse' as children being beaten or sexually molested, but those are only two of the ways in which children can be damaged. Neglect and abandonment as well as emotional, spiritual, psychological and verbal abuse also have devastating effects on children. All forms of abuse do damage to the child, and therefore to the adult they become, whether the abuse was experienced directly or witnessed by the child.

The United Nations' World Report on Violence and Health (World Health Organization 1999) defines child abuse and neglect as, *"all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power"*.

In other words, failure to provide what a child requires to become a whole, healthy adult is abuse.

IS IT DIFFERENT FOR BOYS AND GIRLS?

Both Canadian and U.S. Federal Health research studies confirm that at least one in four adult men and women suffered some form of abuse during childhood and that boys experienced this as often as girls. The damage is the same regardless of the form of abuse or the gender of the victim.

WHAT IF I DON'T REMEMBER EVERYTHING?

It is common for survivors to have gaps in their memories from childhood. This can be confusing and lead the person to believe their childhood could not have been 'that bad'.

Children need certain things from the adults in their lives in order to grow and mature. When this does not happen, either because of neglect or active harm being done to the child, the damage is the same. Not remembering may be a way of protecting oneself from events that were too awful or, as with neglect, may reflect the absence of interaction of any kind leaving the child feeling they are unimportant and that their feelings don't matter. In both cases the child's self-esteem is destroyed.

WHY CAN'T I LEAVE IT IN THE PAST?

Not getting what is needed during childhood damages the individual's view of themselves and their ability to understand and relate to the world around them. These adults usually do not know that what they see, hear and understand has been altered by their past experiences. They take action based on inaccurate information and are continually confused and frustrated when things do not go as they had hoped. They believe that what they feel and see and hear is accurate when in fact it is not.

Their life is ruled by **5 major fears**: ‘I won’t know what to do’, ‘I won’t do enough’, ‘I will make a mistake’, ‘People will think I am stupid, lazy or bad and reject me’, ‘People will not like me and abandon me’ and/or by the belief that they **don’t count** – what they want, think, say, need and feel doesn’t matter.

They cannot fix this by themselves. They need help to fully recover, repair the damage, and learn the skills to live. **Road to HOPE** allows them to do this.

Common Symptoms of Childhood Neglect, Trauma and Abuse

People who did not get what they needed as they grew up are often plagued with low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy and an overdeveloped sense of responsibility. They struggle with addictions, tend to fear rejection, anger and confrontation and are often overly concerned with taking care of others to their own detriment. They are haunted by nightmares or flashbacks of their childhood experiences. They find it hard to express a range of emotions and may be moody, feel threatened by personal criticism and are terrified by the possibility of rejection or abandonment.

They are often prone to extremes: they fear people or isolation, are dependent or loners, own nothing or hoard everything, antagonistic or timid, promiscuous or avoid intimate relationships, perfectionists or totally apathetic, fear failure or success. They are consumed with their appearance or have poor self-care.

Many are insecure and tend to over react. They seek approval from others, judge themselves too harshly, and often expect more of themselves than they can deliver. They have difficulty predicting outcomes, feel guilty when they try to stand up for themselves and often hold on to bad relationships believing they need to fix the other person. They may be addicted to excitement as a way of feeling in control and blocking the fears and memories from the past. They cannot learn from experience and so remain trapped in a cycle of fear, frustration and failure. Many stop trying.

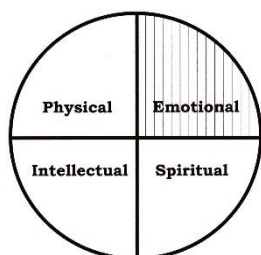
The damage done when children do not get what they need and the resulting high levels of stress appears to be a contributing factor in a number of other conditions including:

Addictions	Migraines
Anxiety/stress disorders	Nausea/dizziness
Backaches	Panic attacks
Breathing disorders	Problems concentrating
Chest pain	Rage
Compulsive behaviour	Self-mutilation
Constipation	Skin issues
Depression	Sleeping disorders
Diarrhea	Tension headaches
Eating disorders	Unexplained pain
High blood pressure	Various phobias
Kleptomania (stealing)	

Understanding What Happened

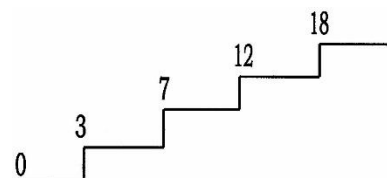
To recognize what was damaged it is important first to understand what is required for a child to grow up to be a happy and healthy adult.

FOUR PARTS OF A PERSON



Human beings have four parts: mind, body, spirit and emotions. Intellectual, physical and spiritual development continue as long as very basic opportunities exist. People learn even if they do not attend school regularly, grow even if their food is not totally nutritious and they develop some standards or values in their life even without good teaching.

Emotional development is different. There are set stages with specific needs to be met at each level. Each stage must be completed before moving to the next. If it is not, the person becomes emotionally 'stuck' at that stage.



This means that while they may look like an adult, think like an adult most of the time and have in place a set of values, when they are under emotional stress they will react more like a child without understanding why. Survivors actually describe 'feeling like a kid' when that happens but it is simply that their emotional self is 'stuck' because they didn't get what they needed to develop.

HUMAN NEEDS

Children need very specific things from the adults in their lives. They have no way to provide these things on their own and when the adults do not provide them, they simply miss out. No parent can perfectly provide for all the needs all the time, but for children to feel good about themselves and be able to understand and interact effectively in their world as they grow, they need most of those needs met most of the time.

Children need food, clothing, shelter, safety, security, predictability and order, love, acceptance, attention, encouragement, recognition and acknowledgement, privacy and play. An essential piece of a child's development is attached to having each of these needs met and when they are not, damage results.

The needs of children and adults are the same. What is different is that, as they grow, individuals can begin to contribute to getting their own needs met.

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

From **birth to age three** a child sees themselves as an extension of their parent (caregiver). When their cries are answered in a positive and consistent manner they begin to learn trust and self-worth. The expectation of good that they were born with is nurtured and the groundwork is laid for a positive self-image and a sense of security.

From **age three to seven** the child's ego is developing and since children tend to see the world in extreme terms (happy or sad, good or bad) they go from being a 'nobody' to the 'center of the universe'. This is the most critical stage because what a child comes to believe about themselves and the world during this period can set patterns that last a lifetime.

When their needs are met, the child develops positive self-image and good self-esteem. They learn trust and self-confidence. Creativity and independence are encouraged. The child learns to set appropriate boundaries, trust their own instincts and value positive social interactions.

When a child's needs are not met, lasting damage occurs. They not only miss the opportunities to learn and grow as they should but it teaches them that they are unlovable, worthless, and undeserving. They live with constant fear, guilt and shame with little hope that life will ever be different. These feelings and beliefs remain as the child grows and becomes an adult. They are reinforced every time something goes wrong. The person knows there is something wrong but has no idea what to do to fix it.

Not having needs met and experiencing serious trauma or loss at any stage can cause damage. The results will be more devastating if negative patterns were established early in the child's life.

WHY DO THE EFFECTS LAST SO LONG AND SEEM TO GET WORSE INSTEAD OF BETTER?

Children develop and mature normally when they have most of their needs met most of the time and children are totally dependent on the adults in their lives to meet those needs. When needs are not met, children come to conclusions that are wrong.

When children do not receive love, they conclude that they must be unlovable; when they are not praised, they conclude that they are a failure; when they are not encouraged they believe they have no potential etc. As a result, the adult they become goes through life believing they are a failure, unintelligent, unlovable, unworthy and undeserving. They constantly struggle just to keep going. When difficulties come, it serves only to confirm these mistaken beliefs and keep the person in a self-destructive cycle of perceived failure.

Survivors can sometimes manage to stay ahead of the past that is pursuing them when they are younger. As time goes by however, the demands of life grow and eventually there is simply not enough energy to keep all the bad feelings, disappointments and memories under control. Despair takes over and many give up.

In addition, many have to contend with ill-informed people laying additional guilt on them with comments such as "It happened a long time ago, get over it" or "It's in the

past, forget about it” or “Just forgive them and let go of it” For a survivor it’s not “in the past”, the abuse happens all over again each time they remember.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHILDREN ARE NOT GIVEN WHAT THEY NEED

The child, and the adult they become, has low self-esteem and their view of the world is distorted. They cannot accurately interpret other people’s behaviour. This makes it very difficult to function effectively in social situations and leaves them extremely vulnerable to being hurt repeatedly.

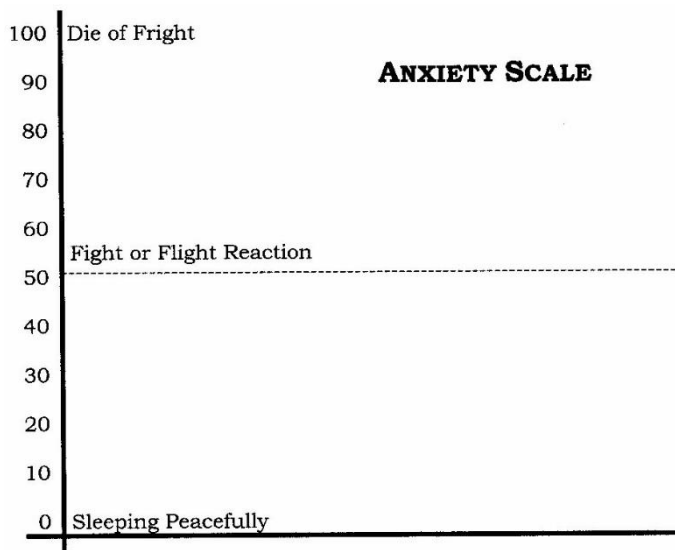
They believe they are basically ‘bad’ and that the world is not a friendly place. They live in constant uncertainty and confusion, often having no idea how to interpret the behavior of others and even when they think they know, often being sadly mistaken. They either trust the wrong people or no one at all. They are continually stressed by social situations. They do not understand what is expected and fear getting it wrong. This produces a condition called ‘hyper vigilance’ where the survivor lives in a state of heightened alert. They are constantly on guard trying to figure out what is going on and protect themselves at the same time.

When humans sense extreme danger, a physical response occurs that is meant to protect the individual. Extra blood and oxygen are sent to the heart, lungs and muscles so the person can either attack or run away from the danger. This is called the ‘fight or flight’ response and is automatic once a certain level of fear is reached. The extra blood and oxygen are diverted from the brain making it impossible to think. We are meant to react instantly, not weigh the possibilities and choose an appropriate response.

Consider an anxiety scale where zero represents the level of anxiety when sleeping calmly and 100 represents the level where one could actually die of fright.

Most people going about their normal everyday activities would register at about 20. The ‘fight or flight’ response kicks in at about 50.

Since survivors experience ongoing increased levels of fear (hyper vigilance) their normal level of anxiety is closer to 45.



They often experience overwhelming fear even when no real danger is present. Their bodies react and because they are so close to ‘fight or flight’ already, they cannot think, they do things they later regret and then gain a reputation for being irrational. The overwhelming emotional reaction occurs in situations if a feeling is similar to what they experienced during a experience in the past. They do not understand the connection so mistakenly believe that their reaction is warranted and the danger is in the present. This is called a trigger.

WHAT CHILDREN NEED

Food: adequate food on a regular basis; an eating environment at mealtimes that is peaceful and pleasant; understanding of food as nutrition and fuel for a healthy body (not used as punishment or reward)

Clothing: clothing appropriate to the climate, occasion, and style of peers; items that you like, had some choice about and feel good wearing

Shelter: protection from the elements; basic level of cleanliness; safe access to that shelter at all times

Safety: (within home) an environment in which to live and learn unthreatened; a place where you feel protected and welcome

Security: (outside the home or coming into the home from outside) protection when outside home environment; protection from people who come into the home from time to time

Predictability & Order: regular and reasonable routines; consistent responses to circumstances and/or behaviours; appropriate boundaries modeled and respected; appropriate choices, responsibilities and privileges

Love: told regularly “I love you”; touched, held, comforted appropriately (it matters how you feel); made to feel special and celebrated as an individual; behaviour separated from worth (you are good, your behaviour needs to change); forgiven and allowed to start fresh

Acceptance: loved unconditionally; encouraged to express emotion and alternate ideas; allowed to make mistakes without fear

Attention: individual time spent; notice and celebration of preferences; needs identified and promptly met consistently and appropriately

Encouragement: praised for effort even if unsuccessful; encouraged to learn and try new things; opportunity to learn, make mistakes and grow as a result

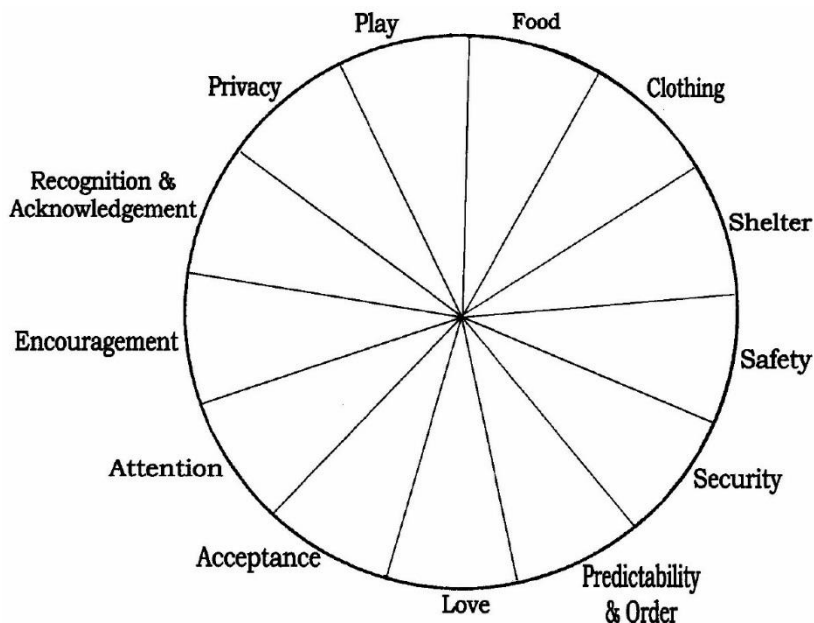
Recognition & Acknowledgement: praised for accomplishment; validation of what you think, feel, need, want and say; valued for just being you

Privacy: reasonable access to personal space and belongings; time alone when needed or desired; time to think when upset before being expected to deal with a situation

Play: unstructured time to do things simply for enjoyment; taught a balance between work and play

The **Needs Wheel** on the next page can help to assess how well your needs were met as a child. This is not about judging your parents or caregivers, it is about getting an objective picture of where and why there may be areas you struggle with as an adult that relate to your childhood experiences.

Instructions: Carefully read the definitions on page 9 that match each piece of the pie. Shade in the area that represents how well that need was met for you as a child of approximately 5 years or the earliest age you can clearly remember. The center of the pie is zero (need not met at all) and the outer rim is ten (need totally met). It is normal for survivors to have large gaps.



Understanding Grief

Understanding grieving is fundamental to understanding life. Grief is most commonly associated with death but in fact grieving takes place around all loss: loss of hopes, dreams, expectations, anything that is a change from what was anticipated or should have been. Grief is not optional. Although it may be delayed, it cannot be avoided. Even the smallest of events can trigger the grieving process. For example: A friend calls to cancel a half hour before you are to meet them for lunch. Each of the steps is outlined below.

Shock and Denial: “I can’t believe they did that?”

Emotional Release: “Oh *&\$#!”

Inability to Conduct Normal Activities: For a while, you are useless.
Nothing gets done.

Depression: “Now I’m all alone for lunch.”

Anxiety: “Now what am I going to do?”

Anger: “How dare they do that?”

Guilt: “Did I do something wrong? Is it my fault?”

Bargaining: “Maybe if I offer to pick them up or pay for their lunch they could still come.”

Acceptance: “Okay, fine, I am not having lunch with that friend today. I need another plan.”

Readjustment: “I can stay in and eat in the cafeteria; I can go to the sub shop; I can order pizza. I think I’ll go to the sub shop.”

The bigger the disappointment, or loss, the more time it may take to get through the grieving process. Survivors will experience major grief when they start dealing with the loss of their childhood. They also have losses in terms of experiences, relationships, time, potential, opportunities, etc.

Tools for Living

All people need basic tools for interacting successfully with their world. Children need opportunities to learn these skills in a safe, nurturing environment. Without them, children grow up at a serious disadvantage and lack the ability to understand the world around them. It is as if they are being asked to participate in a 'Life Game' without knowing the rules. This leaves them vulnerable to loneliness, misunderstanding, frustration and failure.

There are eight important areas of life in which survivors commonly have difficulty. Beneath each of the following titles and descriptions is a list of the ways in which survivors commonly approach them. The list is followed by a further brief explanation and then a list of healthy strategies employed by people who were given these tools in childhood. It is not too late for you to become skilled in these areas too.

1. TRUST

Knowing who and when to trust people is essential to being safe, effective and successful in life. This must be taught. People are not born knowing who to trust. The ability to determine who can be trusted and with what is essential for making good decisions, setting appropriate boundaries, communicating effectively and having successful relationships.

Common survivor strategies and experiences:

- I decide very quickly whether or not I like someone
- I really want other people to like me
- I often find out people are not who they first seemed
- I am shocked and disappointed when people turn out differently from what I thought
- I tell people my story before I know them for a long time
- I often find people use what I tell them to hurt me later
- People promise me things and don't deliver
- People sometimes take advantage of me
- I sometimes feel like I cannot trust anyone
- I trust everyone until they give me a reason not to
- I am lonely

When survivors cannot figure out who they should trust, they guess. They often choose a category that they think ought to be trustworthy like a 'professional person'. The first time a 'professional person' turns out not to be trustworthy, survivors conclude that they can no longer trust ANY 'professional person.' Then they choose a new category. Survivors go from one extreme to the other – they arbitrarily choose a category and trust everyone in it until they have a reason not to trust one person in that category. Then they conclude they can trust no one in that category. They go on to another category

and another and another until they conclude, “This doesn’t work. I can’t trust anybody!” So they isolate themselves. After a while they become so desperate to have someone in their life that they trust the very next person who comes through the door and are inevitably hurt again.

Healthy Strategies for Trust

Make sure the people you choose to trust with your time and personal information are worthy – make sure they demonstrate characteristics of emotional health. Are they honest, trustworthy and dependable? Are they self-confident and accepting of others? Are they positive, caring and loving? Are they active and adventurous, supportive and loyal? Are they respectful of themselves and others? Do they take good care of themselves and have a healthy self-esteem? Watch and see which characteristics they possess before you decide how much you will trust them.

- Go slowly. Test people before making a decision to trust them. Find a reason TO trust rather than wait for a reason NOT to trust.
- Require others to earn trust, first with small things and then with progressively more significant information but be careful: not everyone can be trusted to the same extent and that’s okay.
- Make decisions on an individual basis rather than establishing blanket categories.
- Don’t let how you feel be the only factor in determining what you believe about someone. Look at the facts.
- Trust different people with different things. There are levels of trust. It is normal not to trust everyone with everything about you.

2. BOUNDARIES

Once you can accurately determine who can be trusted and under what circumstances, it becomes much easier to set appropriate boundaries to keep yourself safe. Boundaries help you decide who should be in your life and to what extent. Setting good boundaries hugely increases the likelihood of having safe and successful interactions of all kinds. Boundaries, perhaps more than anything else, give you control in your life and keep people from treating you badly.

Common survivor strategies and experiences:

- I tell personal information to people I have just met
- I agree to do things for others even when it is not convenient for me
- I find it hard to say ‘no’ to people
- I give people advice when they tell me their problems
- I bring to my home people I have just met
- I often give more than the other person in a relationship
- I ask new people personal questions
- I lend money to people and they don’t pay me back
- It often doesn’t work when I follow advice from others
- I often worry about other people’s problems
- I never tell anyone anything about myself
- I don’t like to bring anyone into my home
- When people share problems with me, I think I need to ‘fix’ them

Survivors either have huge walls of protection around themselves so that nobody gets close or no protection at all so that anybody can come right in. They do not understand that they can decide who is allowed in their life and how much. Once they make an informed determination about who can be trusted with what, it is essential to put in place appropriate boundaries based on those decisions. Sharing with others then needs to follow those levels of trust to avoid being hurt by giving personal information to the wrong person.

It is important for survivors to have a system to use because they do not see normal danger signs when they are controlled by their needs and emotions. Even when they suffer as a result, they are bewildered, failing to understand what happened and therefore helpless to prevent it from happening again.

Healthy Strategies for Boundaries

Effective boundaries provide a safe place from which to interact with the world. They allow a measure of control and help protect against further abuse. Healthy boundaries look like a series of concentric circles based on how much time and information about yourself you share with people. A new person is placed in the outside circle and only allowed to come closer one ring at a time as they prove themselves to be safe. At the first sign of danger, that person is moved back a ring and observed, making sure that only people who have proven themselves are allowed to move closer. As the circles get smaller, the number of people in each circle also decreases.

Establishing appropriate boundaries is an ongoing conscious process. The decision about how much of your life can be shared with whom must be made based on experience over time, not a 'best guess.'

- Apply strategies for knowing who to trust
- Take time to test people
- Find a reason to allow someone closer rather than bringing them right in and having to move them out again
- Admit mistakes when you bring people too close too soon and take action – you won't get it right all the time
- If you aren't sure wait or at least ask someone who knows
- Share a little at a time even if you think they can be trusted

3. DECISION MAKING

Life is a never-ending series of decisions. Making good decisions is critical to having a safe, happy and successful life. This requires time, information and a method for determining what is beneficial, enjoyable and possible.

Common survivor strategies and experiences:

- I make decisions based on whether others will be happy with me
- I agree to do things I don't want to do
- I often cannot do things I promise to do
- I am often late
- I never have enough time

- I often worry that my decisions are wrong
- I try to put off or not make decisions
- I get upset when people disagree with me
- I don't like making decisions
- People get upset with me when I can't decide something
- I often make decisions too quickly
- Things I agree to do often take more time than I expect
- I have made lots of bad decisions in the past

Decision making for survivors is painful. It's about keeping others happy, being liked and not getting in trouble. All possible outcomes have to be considered before making the choice. This can be overwhelming and sometimes it is easier not to decide at all or agree to the first thing that enters their mind. When a decision is finally made, there will almost always be a period of self-doubt because there was no clear reason for making the choice and there is a fear that something might have been missed.

Healthy Strategies for Decision Making

Making decisions involves asking these questions: Do I have all the information I need to make this decision? Is it good for me to agree to this decision? Do I want to do this? Am I capable of doing this?

- Allow time to make decisions – don't allow others to pressure you
- Look at several options and outcomes for each potential choice
- Make sure you consider each of the above questions
- Know why you chose as you did – it will be easier to stick to your decision

As you accept that you have a right to consider yourself in the choices you make and learn rational ways of identifying and weighing options, decision-making becomes a normal, positive experience.

4. PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION

Effective planning and organization is essential to achieving goals and having life turn out well. The result is more control in life, increased confidence about the future and positive results for effort invested.

Common survivor strategies and experiences:

- My plans often get messed up
- I often change my plans to accommodate what others want
- I often run out of time when doing something
- I find it hard to finish things I start
- Things take longer than I think they will
- Life seems out of control
- I sometimes try to be two places at once
- I forget appointments
- I usually have not thought about what I will do if my plan doesn't work out
- I often just wait and see how it goes instead of having a concrete plan

Survivors arbitrarily base their decisions on the reactions and approval of others. Their ability to follow through is therefore negatively impacted when others challenge their decision in any way. They usually do not have well thought out reasons for making the choice in the first place and therefore will readily change their plans to accommodate others. The wants and needs of others count more than their own. They have difficulty saying no unless they are angry.

Healthy Strategies for Planning and Organization

Effective planning and organization requires setting priorities and then arranging tasks in a way that is both measurable and achievable. When decisions have been well thought out, careful consideration given to assigning relative importance to each part, a realistic timetable established and a 'Plan B' developed should the primary plan not work out, it is relatively easy to complete tasks.

- Follow the strategies for decision making – when you know why you made a decision you will not be as easily swayed
- Don't try to please or accommodate everyone – they will be more upset if you promise and don't deliver than if you say "No" in the first place
- Set priorities – do the most important things first
- Make sure you consider yourself and your needs in making plans

As you learn to give first consideration to what is good for you and understand the process of setting priorities, you will be more comfortable standing your ground and less likely to allow others to impose their demands or disrupt your plan. Your confidence will increase because you will know how and why you made the decisions. It is no longer about pleasing others but about making informed choices for yourself. This will enable you to have order, predictability and control over various aspects of your life and to fulfill responsibilities you have appropriately identified as yours. No longer will you feel required to set aside or alter your plans to accommodate the requests of others.

5. COMMUNICATION

Communication forms the basis of human interactions in the world. Being able to talk to others about what we think, feel, need and want is vital. Listening and being able to interpret messages effectively is also necessary to understanding what is happening in any situation. The best communication occurs in an atmosphere of calm. It also helps to know something about the person with whom we are communicating and their state of mind to avoid being misunderstood.

Common survivor strategies and experiences:

- I often don't say what I really think, want, need or feel
- I often think people are mad at me when they aren't
- I often take what is said personally
- I am told I over react
- I am more concerned with keeping other people happy than in saying what I think
- I am unwilling to express my opinion in case people get mad at me or think I am different

- I find it hard to discuss an issue with someone who has a different opinion
- People often tell me I have misunderstood what they said
- Sometimes I am told I talk too much
- I use humour to belittle myself
- I excuse sarcastic comments or critical words by claiming 'just kidding'
- I sometimes get so nervous talking to people that I can't think straight
- I am sometimes told I am not listening
- I jump to conclusions quickly

It is very difficult to do any kind of negotiating with a survivor. They will promise what they think others want to hear without being realistic about what they can actually achieve. Their need to please, be accepted and avoid conflict takes precedence over everything else. They do not intend to mislead but often cannot do what they have promised. If talking about what they think is hard, expressing feelings is even harder. They often feel they have to keep up an image so the world doesn't see how 'bad' they feel they are. They are always worried about being 'found out'. All of this makes communication very complicated.

Healthy Strategies for Communication

Effective communication happens when both parties feel safe and feel that they are heard, when each one clearly states what they want, think, need or feel and the other hears accurately what is said, and, that both parties clearly understand what has been agreed and their part in it or when there will be a decision.

- Listen to the entire message being communicated before responding. This frees you from the pressure to answer immediately and allows you to really hear what is said.
- Keep an open mind. Do not make negative assumptions or take comments personally. It is probably not about you.
- When the other person has finished speaking, take the time to think about what might have been meant by what was said. You will be better able to respond and express yourself without being overwhelmed by fear of rejection. It is ok to take time to think before giving an answer.
- Give yourself time before making commitments. You must realistically determine if you are able to do what is being asked and if it is good for you to be doing it.

As you have positive experiences, you will build confidence in your ability to understand what you hear, express something worthwhile and communicate that to others.

6. RELATIONSHIPS

Human beings are meant to live in relationship with others. In good relationships there is benefit to **both** parties based on trust, appropriate boundaries, good communication, equality and mutual respect. It is essential for both people in the relationship to be satisfied.

Common survivor strategies and experiences:

- I get into relationships or make friends very quickly
- I find it hard to spend time alone
- I think other people are responsible for how I feel or act
- I settle for less than I want because I feel it's all I can have or deserve
- I often feel the other person is giving less to the relationship than I am
- I am told I am selfish
- I find it hard to share my thoughts and feelings
- I stay in relationships even when I am unhappy
- My relationships/friendships don't last
- I often feel jealous
- When I am angry I say things I regret later
- When I am upset I stop talking to the person
- I don't know how to fix things when my relationships start to go badly

For a survivor, relationships are about trying to get what they need from those around them and still be liked. When those seem incompatible, being liked will win. Their issues with communication and trust make it extremely difficult to build and maintain healthy relationships. They don't understand the effect of what they do and say on the people around them and they often misinterpret what others do and say to them.

They stick with what they know, even if it is not good, rather than face the fear and uncertainty of something new. They may repeat the patterns that are familiar from childhood – like staying with an abusive partner because they were not taught as children that they deserved to be treated well. They don't understand they have the right to something better. Because they blame themselves when things go wrong survivors accept the blame for their partner's behaviour as well. They keep trying to figure out what they can do to make the situation better. Fear of abandonment also keeps survivors in relationships where there is little chance for success.

Healthy Strategies for Relationships

Meaningful relationships result when individuals have clear expectations about what they want and need, know who to trust, select their friends and partners wisely, communicate effectively, and allow time to accurately evaluate the overall benefit. It is essential for both people in the relationship to be satisfied!

- Apply strategies for trust, boundaries, communication, decision making and planning to relationships
- Figure out what went wrong in the last relationship before beginning a new one
- Know what you want and what you have to offer in a friendship and/or relationship
- Get feedback from people you trust – they may see things you don't
- Treat others well and insist they do the same to you

7. INTIMACY

Intimacy refers to the closest relationships people have with others where innermost thoughts, feelings, fears, hopes and dreams are shared with another person. In the case of a partner, this also includes physical intimacy. Intimacy requires a level of risk and

vulnerability. People who learn to love and accept themselves, will be able to give and receive love and expresses it through intimacy.

Common survivor strategies and experiences:

- I find it hard to share what I really feel, need or want
- I am afraid of being rejected or abandoned by others
- I am dissatisfied with the way I look
- I have stayed in unhappy relationships rather than be alone
- I have stayed in a relationship where I was treated badly
- I often have sex at the beginning of a relationship
- I find it hard/impossible to talk about what turns me on
- I feel the relationship depends on my ability to perform sexually
- I sometimes don't enjoy sex

Intimacy is difficult for survivors. They find it hard to talk about what they think and how they feel. They don't know who they can trust and relationships in general are difficult. It is no surprise then that survivors are often unable to tell their partner what they like, what they don't like, what feels good, what is uncomfortable, etc. Communication at that kind of level is very hard and often just doesn't happen. Their ability to relax and enjoy their relationship with their partner is seriously marred by their own feelings of inadequacy and failure, their misinterpretation of communication, and their need to please.

Thoughts and feelings directly affect the body. Sexual intimacy often has more to do with thinking and emotions than with function. When someone is afraid, feeling bad about themselves or under any other kind of pressure, physical response and enjoyment will be negatively impacted. Leftover feelings of failure, inadequacy, betrayal, guilt and shame all impact their ability to relax and enjoy their relationship with a partner. However, as people learn to be comfortable with who they are and accept and love themselves, they will be able to give and receive love and express it through intimacy.

Healthy Strategies for Intimacy

- Apply strategies for trust, boundaries, communication, decision making, planning & organization and relationships
- Go slowly.
- Be comfortable with yourself first.
- Think about what you want, like, value, need and enjoy.
- Ask the same of your friend/partner.
- Be comfortable talking and being with each other before increasing the level of intimacy.
- Try again even if things don't go exactly the way you had hoped

8. AUTHORITY

Relating well to those in authority is an essential life skill. It is particularly confusing and stressful for survivors to deal with authority figures because the abuse they suffered as children took place at the hands of people in positions of power and trust. Some

become submissive and lack assertiveness while others become defensive and are confrontational. Neither approach is effective.

Common survivor strategies and experiences:

- I don't like confrontation
- If approached by an authority figure, I assume the worst
- I do things I don't want to do to avoid conflict
- I am afraid to ask questions when I don't understand something
- I feel like I get walked on a lot
- I get into arguments and become angry when others disagree with me
- I have had trouble keeping a job
- Many of my bosses have been jerks and out to get me
- I prefer jobs where I don't see the boss much
- I hate being told what to do
- I will put up with a bad situation rather than talk to the boss

It is confusing and stressful for survivors to deal with authority figures because the abuse they suffered as children took place at the hands of people in positions of power and trust. For some, their need to be liked leads to submissiveness and a lack of assertiveness (e.g. "If I stay very quiet, I won't upset you.") while for others their fear causes them to be defensive and confrontational (e.g. "A good offence is the best defense"). Both approaches are extreme and equally ineffective over time. They are reactions to the fear that constantly haunts survivors.

Healthy Strategies for Authority

- Apply strategies for trust, boundaries, decision making, planning & organization, communication, and relationships
- When you have to go to the authority figure, plan what you will say and practice saying it to someone you trust
- When the authority figure approaches you, allow yourself time to respond - you do not need to agree or disagree immediately
- Try not to assume the worst
- When you are the authority figure, apply the strategies for trust, boundaries, decision making, planning & organization, communication, and relationships
- Whenever possible get another perspective from someone who can be objective

Please note: These strategies are for managing the symptoms only and **will not repair the damage**. They will allow you to have some measure of control but will require constant effort and awareness. They are effective only to the degree you are able to continue to put forth the energy required to remember and use them.

Complete the **Road to HOPE** program and you can repair the damage and live completely free from the past. You deserve to be healthy, happy and whole.

It is never too late to reclaim your life!

Becoming Free from the Past

If you did not get all you needed as a child it is **not your fault**. Children are never to blame for the actions of adults and you are not to blame for the symptoms of the abuse that you live with on a daily basis. Understanding what was damaged will help you understand why you think and feel and behave as you do. It will explain your actions but it will not make them right – surviving abuse is not an excuse to continue hurting others or yourself.

It's not fair! You are not to blame for what happened to you but you are the only one who can fix it now. With help, you can learn how to care about yourself and take the steps necessary to repair the damage so that these symptoms no longer cause problems for you or those around you. Repairing the damage done when you did not get what you needed as a child is possible. No one can do this by themselves. **Road to HOPE** offers the opportunity to understand what happened, repair what was damaged, reduce anxiety, erase the 'triggers' that cause you to behave in ways that are unhelpful and learn the tools you need to be a whole, healthy, happy individual.

You can be free from the symptoms! You can learn how to have control in your life and become who you want to be without having to keep working at it.

Contact **Emmaus CARES** for details and to learn about groups meeting in your area.

Phone or text: 519 777 5717

Website: www.emmauscares.com