

# COPING WITH CRISIS

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Crisis can hit at many points whilst you're dealing with and recovering from sexual abuse. It can hit when:

- **You begin to realise what happened to you as a child.**
- **You start getting memories about what happened to you.**
- **You begin to talk about what happened and it begins to 'hit home' how much you've been hurt.**
- **You start to get other memories you didn't know were there.**
- **Other things go 'wrong' in your life like relationship break-ups, financial difficulties, problems at work.**
- **Things remind you of the abuse, like having contact with the person who abused you, the death of the abuser, or significant anniversaries such as birthdays.**
- **Something very scary happens like you are the victim of an assault. This is scary in itself and can also be a powerful reminder of the past abuse.**

Crisis can be a particular feature of the early stages of remembering and dealing with the abuse. It can feel at this point like everything is in chaos. But it's not confined to this stage. Along the way a crisis can be triggered by some of the events described above. Sometimes things can seem to get worse before they get better as the full extent of the hurt suffered becomes clearer. There's not a particular time limit to a crisis. They can be short and dramatic or last for a long time.

## ***What happens in a crisis?***

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It's hard to imagine it going away, and it's hard to see a way through it. You may feel:

- **Like you and your life are totally disorganised.**
- **That you can't cope with things like you usually can.**
- **Feeling tense and panicky most of the time.**
- **Extremely numb, like you can't feel anything.**
- **Like you're not safe.**

It's usually noticeable that one or more parts of your life are not working right, and people around you may have commented upon this.

Where there's a crisis there's usually a feeling of being threatened. The threat may be obvious and physical such as the place where you're living not being particularly safe. Or it may be more subtle – as if your inner sense of yourself as a person is under threat. You may feel like you can't cope with that feeling of threat. Being abused can trigger a number of threats for you:

- **Starting to get memories can leave you feeling vulnerable. It can be a shock to the system to think that this could have happened to you.**
- **If you are having a lot of distress you may start to feel out of control.**
- **Starting to get memories can leave you feeling vulnerable. It can be a shock to the system to think that this could have happened to you.**
- **If you're having a lot of distress you may start to feel out of control. Again, children are usually taught that they should 'be in control' and not 'give in' to emotions. Feeling out of control can be very scary.**
- **Remembering and dealing with your abuse can change the way you think about yourself as an adult. Children tend to grow up trying to think of themselves as strong and independent. Like adults in films. Remembering your pain as a child may effect this view of yourself. That can feel threatening.**
- **You may feel confused sexually. What happened to you as a child may lead you to question what sex means for you now. Conflicting feelings of wanting to love and to be loved but sensations of fear may be triggered by sexual contact. All of this is very unsettling and may threaten the way you see yourself sexually.**
- **If you're currently in a dangerous situation or suffered a recent assault you might be thinking, 'why can't I cope with this? I should be able to'. Again, this threatens your overall sense of safety.**

### ***What to do in a crisis? - Build the life raft for recovery!***

Over the next few pages we'll look in detail at coping with crisis. To help with this you could use the image of a life raft. This sees the process of recovery from abuse as being like a river running down to the sea. The aim is to get further down the river towards the sea. And as you do you start to feel more in control, happier and more fulfilled. The pain gets less. It's a difficult journey, but one that has been completed many times by many survivors of abuse.

Any rapids you encounter on the way are like a crisis. You need to travel in something safer on this journey for, whilst the water will often be smooth and

the raft will simply glide with the stream, the rapids are very difficult to get over. So, you need a sturdy life raft to get you over the rough patches.

Building the life raft for recovery means:

- **Staying alive.**
- **Getting support.**
- **Keeping yourself safe.**
- **Establishing control over distress.**
- **Beginning to feel your feelings.**

Try to build your life raft as soon as you can, even if you're not in crisis now. It's important that when you need it you can jump in. If you're in a crisis now then try to concentrate on building it. Get some help with building it from those around whom you trust.

The new few pages will give some tips on how to do it. Most of these topics come from other survivors who are on the journey too. They have overcome many rapids and their experience might be of great help. The life raft is just an image. If it doesn't suit you then you could imagine your own safe image. It might be a house, or a boat or a plane – anything which will help you feel safe, protected and able to survive the hard times until better times come.