
Moving Forward From Sexual Assault

NOVA
Northern Virginia
Community College

The Office of Wellness
and Mental Health

wellness@nvcc.edu

*“Grow past.
Move forward.
Heal.
Survive.”*

The quotes from this booklet are taken from
We Believe You: Survivors of Campus Sexual Assault Speak Out

Written by Annie E. Clark and Andrea L. Pino



Dear Reader,

The purpose of this booklet is to provide you with some important information to help you understand sexual assault. Some of the content in this booklet may be difficult to acknowledge or process for both survivors of sexual assault and those close to survivors. We encourage you to contact us at OWMH if you have any questions about the contents of this booklet. OWMH wants to support you in any way that we can. Included within this booklet: definition of sexual assault, common effects of trauma, reporting options, and assistance in moving forward.

If you, or someone you know, has experienced sexual assault,
remember,,,

YOU ARE NOT ALONE and

supportive resources are available to you.

NOVA's Office of Wellness and Mental Health

(OWMH) provides **FREE** services which are available

by email at wellness@nvcc.edu

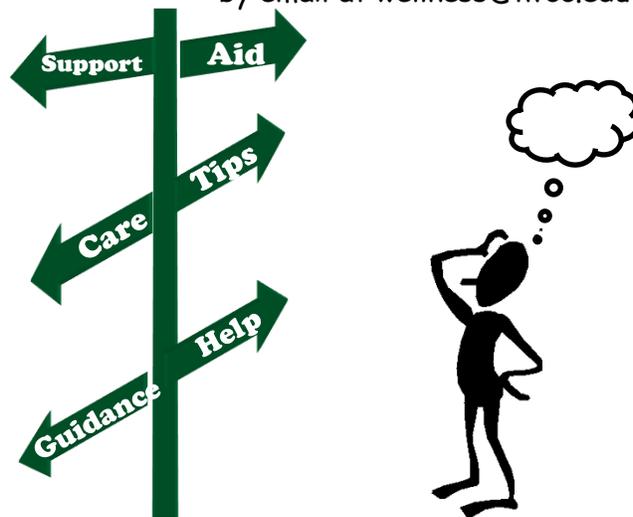


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How NOVA's Office of Wellness and Mental Health (OWMH) can help

Northern Virginia Community College's Office of Wellness and Mental Health (OWMH) is committed to provide information to anyone impacted by sexual assault, dating/partner violence, stalking and sexual harassment. All support is available to students, faculty, staff and family members of any gender regardless of age, ability, ethnicity or orientation **at no cost**.

Information offered to our clients include:

- To report sexual assault- contact titleix@nvcc.edu
- Crisis intervention services and referrals
- Psychological, medical, legal, and campus support and information
- Court or hospital information
- Referrals to community
- Educational programs for the NOVA Community
- Information support for other option

Contact NOVA's OWMH

Email: wellness@nvcc.edu

*"Healing begins when someone bears witness. I saw you.
I believe you." (p. 209)*

The Truth about Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is an act of sexual aggression and violence expressed through force, threats, and/or intimidation in which a person is made to engage in sexual activity without consent. Nationally, 1 in 5 women will be sexually assaulted in her college career. 1 in 16 men will be sexually assaulted while in college.

Some of the behaviors that are on the continuum of inappropriate sexual activity include:

- **Non-contact Sexual Offenses:** include unwanted or non-consensual sexual behaviors that do not involve touch, such as threats of sexual assault, exposing someone to or creating pornography, taking nonconsensual sexual photography or exposing someone to nudity.
- **Sexual Harassment:** encompasses any unwanted or unwelcome sexual advances or obscene remarks in the workplace or other professional or academic setting.
- **Sexual battery:** is the non-consensual touching, without penetration, of the intimate parts of another.
- **Rape:** includes any sexual intercourse or completed penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth through psychological coercion, intimidation, force or the victim's inability to consent. Any attempts to commit these acts are considered attempted rape.
- **Childhood sexual abuse:** any of the acts described above perpetrated against a child, someone younger than 18 years of age by an adult.

Many victims do not report the assault for many reasons. If you were assaulted, know that you are not alone and there are resources available for you.

“As much as I loved the woman I was, I love every part of the woman I am today.” (p. 230)

What is Trauma and How Does it Impact You?

Trauma is a response to an event that a person experiences, witnesses, or confronts with actual or threatened death or serious injury, or threat to physical integrity of oneself or others. It often includes intense fear, feelings of helplessness, self-blame, shame, or horror.

The trauma response may develop days, months, or years after the actual event. The effects of trauma can be short-term or long-term. Long-term trauma can be debilitating which is why it's important that you address the trauma soon. This way you can recover sooner.

The trauma of being sexually assaulted can be devastating. You might experience flashbacks and nightmares. They can leave you quite frightened. You may feel like the world is a dangerous place. You might not trust anyone anymore. You might not even trust yourself. You may even blame yourself for what happened to you.

However, you need to remember that this is not your fault and that you can recover from sexual trauma. It will take time and the healing process can be difficult. It is possible to move forward from sexual trauma. You can still love yourself.

It can be extremely difficult to accept that you were sexually assaulted. You may be afraid of how people will react. You may think people will judge you or believe that you're "damaged goods". It may seem easier to act like it never happened. However, denial isn't going to help you move on. Accepting it will help you start on the path of recovery.

Reaching out to someone you can trust is the first step. Finding someone who is understanding and supportive is important. That's why NOVA's OWMH is here for you.

"Trauma isn't something you "get over" but you can get through it." (p. 158)

Is What I'm Feeling Normal?

Everyone reacts differently to trauma. Recovery takes time. Survivors of sexual assault typically experience a wide variety of reactions following a sexual assault. You may experience abrupt changes in mood. You may feel like you are overreacting to normal everyday problems and getting angry with yourself. You are not "going crazy"; these reactions are normal responses to an unexpected, life-threatening experience. Common survivor reactions include:

Anger: I want to kill him.

Anxiety: I'm having panic attacks. I can't breathe. I just can't stop shaking. I can't sit still in the class anymore. I feel overwhelmed.

Denial: It wasn't really a rape. Maybe I did consent.

Depression: How am I going to get through this semester? I'm so tired. I feel so helpless. I don't know how I can go on.

Disbelief: Did it really happen? Why me? Maybe I just made it up.

Disinterest in sex: I have no interest in sex anymore. The thought of having sex repulses me. Every time someone touches me, it reminds me of the assault.

Disorientation: I don't even know what day it is, or what class I'm supposed to be in. I keep forgetting things.

Embarrassment: What will people think? I don't feel like I can tell anyone.

Emotional Shock: I feel so numb. Why am I so calm? Why can't I cry?

Fear: I'm so scared of everything. What if I am pregnant? Could I get an STI or even AIDS? How can I ever feel safe again? Do people know there is anything wrong? I can't sleep because I know I'll have nightmares.

Flashbacks: I'm still re-living it. I see the perpetrator's face all the time.

Guilt: I feel as if it's my fault. I did something to make this happen.

Minimizing: It wasn't really that bad.

Powerlessness: Will I ever feel in control again?

Shame: I feel so dirty, like there is something wrong with me. I want to wash my hands or shower all the time.

"It is possible to stop thinking that you are shattered beyond repair, or not worth loving, anymore." (p. 212)

Physical, Emotional and Psychological Effects

Recovering from a sexual assault is difficult for any survivor. There are no rules for how survivors will react following a sexual assault. Because everyone is different, each person's way of coping with trauma will be different as well. You may find yourself reliving the incident, trying to find an alternative response or different outcome. You may see these possibilities in retrospect (now that the immediate danger has passed), but remember that you did the best you could at the time. You are not to blame and your actions were understandable given the potentially life-threatening circumstances of the assault.

We encourage you to seek help so that you can develop coping strategies and begin the healing process. Whether an assault occurred recently or some time ago, you may still be at risk for many physical and psychological after-effects. Without help, you may experience long-term negative impacts on your academic, vocational and social lives. That's why we have NOVA OWMH for you!

Physical Effects

The physical effects of a sexual assault may not be immediately apparent to a survivor. We recommend you seek medical attention to detect injuries and for health screenings.

Minor or serious physical injuries: You may suffer from a variety of minor or serious physical injuries, both internal and external. Trained medical providers can treat any injuries and screen for possible internal injuries.

Sexually transmitted infections: Gonorrhea and Chlamydia are the STIs most commonly diagnosed after sexual assault. Trained medical providers can also screen for Hepatitis B, Genital Warts, Herpes, Syphilis, and HIV/AIDS (transmission of this virus is rare in sexual assault incidents) and provide survivors with treatment, when appropriate. Anonymous and/or confidential testing is available through local health departments.

Pregnancy: Sexual assault results in pregnancy 1-5% of the time. Trained medical providers can offer information on choices and treatment that is available.

Stressed-related effects: You may experience a variety of stress-related effects, such as high blood pressure, headaches, compromised immune system and muscle tension.

Alcohol/Drug abuse or dependence: You might turn to alcohol or other drugs to cope with the assault. This can lead to dangerous health consequences.

"It's not your fault." (p. 197)

Emotional and Psychological Effects

Sexual assault can be very traumatic for you, both physically and emotionally. Sexual assault committed by a date or acquaintance can be more devastating for the victim than if the assault had been committed by a stranger since the victim's trust in others and in her or his own judgment can be seriously impaired. Thus, emotional and psychological damage is usually more devastating than the physical injury that may result. You probably felt powerless, vulnerable, violated, and humiliated. It may take considerable time and support for you to recover and overcome feelings of depression, fear, dependency, numbness, anxiety, shame, and guilt. Furthermore, your ability to function in various areas of life may be hampered for a short or long duration after the assault.

Common Emotional and Psychological Effects:

- Sleeplessness
- Inability to concentrate in class or function at a usual level
- Feelings of grief and despair
- Fear of being alone or with people in specific settings, especially at night
- Anxiety and mood swings
- Flashbacks
- Feelings of guilt and shame
- Feelings of helplessness
- Denial of the assault

You may have heard the terms Post-Traumatic Stress and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. PTS is a response some people have after experiencing or witnessing an unexpected, disturbing event. PTSD is a medically-diagnosed condition that results from trauma. It is characterized by severe symptoms that last for a long period of time. You might show symptoms of PTS after a sexual assault. After a period of time, those who are still unable to function well may have PTSD. This is another reason to remain in contact with OWMH.

"I'm learning to trust myself again." (p. 196)

Rape Trauma Syndrome

PTSD is often linked to a syndrome called the Rape Trauma Syndrome or Rape Related Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Rape Trauma Syndrome may occur in any sexual assault not just rape. The three stages of Rape Trauma Syndrome describe symptoms that a survivor may go through during the recovery path. You may or may not have every symptom listed below. This is completely normal. Everyone reacts to sexual assault differently.

Crisis or Acute Stage: This may last from a few days to two weeks following the incident. You may be visibly shaken and upset, may be crying, hyperventilating, etc. Or you might have a different style of coping where you appear completely calm but you're still hurting on the inside. Physical symptoms may include muscle aches and pains, headaches, stomach distress, insomnia, nightmares, or wanting to sleep all the time, lack of appetite, nausea, vomiting and other stress reactions. Emotional signs include shock, numbness, disbelief, denial or minimization, fear, anger, shame, guilt, betrayal, sadness, confusion, loss of self-esteem and lack of trust.

Outward Adjustment: This may last for a few weeks to a few months. On the surface, you may appear fine and returned to your normal routine, but you might have taken a few steps to increase your feelings of safety and security. For example, you might have changed your phone numbers, bought a new lock or a big dog, change jobs or majors, dropped out of school or transfer to another campus. You might've experienced flashbacks in response to certain environmental triggers that remind you of the assault. This is also the stage where you might be a little prepared to talk about happened. You're willing to get support and talk about your feelings associated with the assault. It's important that your family and friends remain patient and supportive during your recovery process. Education and support may be appropriate for both you and your loved ones at this point.

Resolution: It may take months or years for some survivors to reach this stage. You begin to recognize that while you can't forget the assault, you can leave the pain and memories behind as you move forward with your life. You've realized that the focus is on the future rather than the past. This is the stage where you went from a victim to a survivor.

*"I learned that I was worthy of love, and
worthy of self-love." (p. 229)*

Having Issues with Intimacy?

Surviving a sexual assault might have changed your views on a lot of things. Being intimate with your partner might not be so easy as it once was. This could include having sex or simply being able to hug or kiss. It may be difficult for you to be comfortable with touching after the assault. You might feel as if you will never have intimate contact again but that is not usually the case. It will take time for you to feel comfortable with being touched. Intimacy might be easy for some survivors but it might be difficult for others and that is completely normal.

A sexual assault can also change how you once viewed sex. Before you might have found sex to be thrilling but now your attitude towards it is negative. You either stopped having sex or can't enjoy sex like before. The most important thing in this situation is that you are aware that what you are experiencing is due to the trauma of sexual assault. By acknowledging that, you can start the process of moving past it. After the sexual assault, you might have changes in your sex life and that is a completely normal response.

Below is a list of changes that might occur after your assault:

- You might be avoiding sex
- You may think of sex as an obligation
- You feel disgusted, guilty or angry when touched
- You have a difficult time becoming aroused
- You're emotionally distant during sex
- You have disturbing sexual thoughts
- You have a hard time maintaining an intimate relationship
- You have no desire for sex
- You may have increased alcohol or substance abuse

“A difficult part of my recovery was learning to be in a relationship again and to accept love.” (p. 56)

Should I Seek Supportive Services?

Supportive services can be a great option for you as you move forward in life. Often people shy away from supportive services because they believe that is for the mentally ill or they are ashamed of what happened to them. But supportive services will help you—any victim/survivor— recover from your traumatic experience.

OWMH's mission is to address the issues of sexual assault, stalking, and dating/partner violence by providing confidential support and services to anyone and that **includes you**. Contact NOVA's OWMH by e-mail at wellness@nvcc.edu. We are available to help and support you in the best and safest way possible, including referrals to police and/or other community agencies that may be helpful for your recovery.

Benefits of Supportive Services

- Understanding what has Happened to you
- Making Decisions about Legal and Campus Options
- Enhancing Academic and Social Functioning
- Minimizing the Negative Effects of the Assault
- Building Social Support
- Protecting Oneself from Further Victimization

Remember, you don't have to go through this alone.” (p. 197)

Benefits of Supportive Services

Understanding what Happened to you: There might be a chance that you are left feeling confused and unsure of what actually happened, especially if the perpetrator is an acquaintance or dating partner. Supportive services offers an opportunity to review the incident in question and become clearer about whether it actually constituted a sexual assault.

Making Decisions about Legal and Campus Options: You might be unsure about how to proceed in terms of reporting the assault to police, pressing criminal charges, or initiating campus proceedings. In supportive services, you can discuss various options and arrive at a decision which will most likely promote healing and resolution in your individual circumstance.

Enhancing Academic and Social Functioning: Sexual assault is a traumatic experience that has disrupted your life and may temporarily make it difficult for you to function at your usual level. Supportive services can help you develop effective coping strategies that make it more possible to pursue school, work, social relationships during the period of recovery.

Minimizing the Negative Effects of the Assault: You might experience a wide range of feelings including anger, depression, guilt, and fear. Additionally, you might experience physical symptoms such as difficulties with memory, nightmares or "flashbacks" of the assault, as well as disturbances in interpersonal relationships. Supportive services provides assistance with "working through" the trauma of sexual assault, with the goal of minimizing negative psychological and social effects.

Building Social Support: A major goal of supportive services is to help you build a support network of people who can help you through this difficult time. For many, a support group can be instrumental part of the recovery process. Talking with others who have had the same experience can greatly decrease feelings of shame and isolation. Also, counseling can include your partner or family members, as they may need help understanding how to be supportive.

Protecting Oneself from Further Victimization: Although sexual assault is never the victim's fault, you might have been targeted by perpetrators because you lack assertiveness and have difficulty trusting your own self-protective instincts. Through supportive services, you can develop confidence and skills that may decrease your likelihood of being assaulted again.

"It's not too late to heal." (p. 197)

Medical Treatment

There are two kinds of exams available for survivors of sexual assault. You may choose between a sexual assault evidence collection exam (sometimes called SANE exams) and a general medical exam. If you're interested in having the perpetrator prosecuted in court, a SANE exam is your best option.

The purpose of the SANE exam is to check for injuries and collect evidence for prosecution. Hospitals that perform a SANE exam only perform them within five days of the incident. If you wait after five days, evidence is difficult to collect.

However, if you don't have a SANE exam, then it is very important that you see a physician or nurse as soon as possible in order to receive a physical exam and medical treatment, if necessary. Even if you do not notice any injuries, you should still have a medical examination, as you could have internal injuries of which you are not aware. It is important that you discuss treatment options with a health care professional.

*"I can promise you that it is possible to look
in the mirror." (p. 212)*

Medical Options

You Have Choices!

| General Medical Exam | Sexual Assault Evidence Exam |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available anytime | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available within five days of the incident |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check for injuries • Screen for STI's and offers treatment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check for injuries • Screen for STI's and offers treatment |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screen for pregnancy and offer emergency contraceptive pills (ECP) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screen for pregnancy and offer emergency contraceptive pills (ECP) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not require you to report to police or prosecute | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not require you to report to police or prosecute |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less effective in criminal cases than the evidence exam | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without this exam, criminal prosecution may be very difficult |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be used in a civil suit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be used in a civil suit |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewed by doctor or nurse | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewed by a sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE nurse) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performed at doctor's office or medical clinic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be performed at a designated hospital ER |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid by you if you go to a private doctor or clinic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid for by the State (Commonwealth of Virginia) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserves legal chain of evidence |

"Everybody heals differently." (p. 235)

Reporting to Law Enforcement

You have choices!

| If you choose to report..... | If you choose NOT to report..... |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can change your mind at any point in the criminal just process. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can change your mind and file a report to the police |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are encouraged to consent to a Sexual Assault Evidence Exam within 5 days of the incident. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are still encouraged to receive an Evidence Exam at the hospital within 5 days of the incident. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are encouraged to have a victim advocate with you at the hospital. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is advisable to seek support from NOVA's OWMH |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your name will be on the criminal warrant (legal document authorizing an arrest). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may file an anonymous report through a third party such as NOVA's OWMH. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your name will appear on the indictment (legal document accusing a person of a crime). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OWMH will not share your information with others without your consent. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your name and personal information WILL NOT be made available to persons not working on the case. | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You will be interviewed by: police, medical staff, detective, prosecutor (your attorney) at no expense to you. | |

“Learn to love yourself again, and remember, your life may have come to a semi-colon, but not a period.” (p. 182)

Legal Options

You have choices!

| Criminal Case | Civil Case |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You want the perpetrator to be charged with a crime and prosecuted by the state. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You wish to hire a private attorney to sue the perpetrator or a third party for personal damages. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The defendant (perpetrator) must be found “guilty beyond reasonable doubt.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standard of proof is lower, jury does not have to be unanimous for you, the victim, to prevail. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An Evidence Exam within 5 days of the incident will serve to collect as much evidence as possible. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Though an evidence exam isn’t required, it may help your case. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your medical and legal fees are paid by the state. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you win, the defendant is ordered to pay money for damages caused - medical expenses, loss of income, tuition, pain and suffering, etc. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Rape Shield Law applies, meaning your past sexual history cannot normally be used in court. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Rape Shield Law applies, meaning your past sexual history cannot normally be used in court. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once tried as a criminal case, it cannot be tried again. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A civil suit can be used alone, in addition to, or after a criminal case. |

“In the process of healing, it is essential to reclaim our voices, narratives, and self-worth.” (p. 223)

Reporting Options

As a member of the NOVA community, you have choices when it comes to reporting. If you do not wish to officially report, then that is up to you. Below are some options you have. If you would like more information about any of them, just ask OWMH.

Office of Wellness and Mental Health (OWMH) - For support and assistance only. Contact us at: wellness@nvcc.edu or <https://www.nvcc.edu/wellness/index.html>

Criminal Case - To have the perpetrator arrested and prosecuted in court. The perpetrator must be found "guilty beyond reasonable doubt" which can result in incarceration. To start the process, you first need to make a police report in the jurisdiction where the incident occurred. The police will investigate and if there's enough evidence, the perpetrator will be arrested. This case will go to the prosecutor for review. The prosecutor will then make a decision whether or not to set a trial date.

Title IX - A federal law that protects students, staff, and faculty from sex and gender discrimination. Anyone who experiences sexual misconduct at NOVA may contact the Title IX Office for assistance. An administrative process can be held to hold the perpetrator accountable, using the preponderance of evidence standard (more likely than not). No police report is required in a Title IX case. If the perpetrator is found responsible, academic sanctions up to and including expulsion are possible. If no investigation is requested, the office can still provide accommodations as needed. Services available by phone 703.323.2262.

Civil Case - To bring a lawsuit against the perpetrator or third party for personal damages. The perpetrator must be found guilty using the clear and convincing burden of proof. To start the process, you must hire a civil attorney to take your case. No police report is required but filing a police report is important to strengthen your case. Your attorney will collect evidence and prepare for a civil trial in a community courthouse.

"I did go through something terrible, but I came out a better person than before." (p. 167)

Resources

On Campus

NOVA Office of Wellness and Mental Health - wellness@nvcc.edu

NOVA Title IX Coordinator - 703.323.2262 or titleix@nvcc.edu

NOVA Police Department - 703.764.5000

NOVA Human Resources - 703-323-3110

In the Community

Local Police Department - 911 (for emergency)

Fairfax County Domestic and Sexual Violence Services - 703-360-7273
(24 hour)

**Action in Community Through Service Sexual Assault Services (ACTS)
(PWC)**- 703.368.4141 (24 hour)

Alexandria Sexual Assault Center - 703-683-7273 (24 hour)

Loudoun Citizens for Social Justice/LAWS - 703-777-6552 (24 hour)

Doorways for Women and Families (Arlington) - (703) 237-0881 (24
hour)

Network for Victim Recovery DC - 202.742.1727

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) - 1-800-656-HOPE
(4673)

Virginia Statewide Sexual Assault Hotline - 1-800-838-VADV (8238)

National Center for Victims of Crime - (202) 467-8700
(Civil Attorney Database)

Additional Information

<https://www.nvcc.edu/wellness/index.html> - NOVA Office of
Wellness and Mental Health (OWMH)

<http://www.nsvrc.org> - National Sexual Violence Resource Center

<http://www.vsdvalliance.org> - VA Sexual and Domestic Violence Action
Alliance

“There are people who will support you.” (p. 197)

Self-Care Techniques

It's important to remember that you need to take care of yourself. A part of recovery is to practice self-care. Below are suggestions that might help you on your recovery path.

Self-Care Techniques:

- Support from Loved Ones - Try to find people that you can trust with your feelings and thoughts.
- Stress Reduction Activities - Yoga, meditation, massage and music are great stress free activities that you could try.
- Keep a Journal - Writing in a journal is a good way to express your feelings. It's a healthy way to release all your emotions that you might have inside.
- Take Small Breaks - Whenever you feel stressed or unsafe then take short breaks. This would be the time for you to relax and get away from whatever that's making you stress. Something you could do during your time out is take a walk in nature.
- Support Group - Joining a support group can help you quite a lot on your recovery path. It can be helpful to talk about your experience or listen to others who are in the same situation. OWMH has a great support group that you can join if you want to talk or listen.

Self-Care isn't always easy doing it by yourself. It's better to have someone support you on your recovery path. Consider speaking with OWMH for assistance about any of these options.

“Do what you think is best for you.” (p. 198)

Remember!!

You are not alone.

It's not your fault.

We believe you.

We are here for you.

NOVA's Office of Wellness of Mental Health
(OWMH) provides **supportive information**
available by email at wellness@nvcc.edu or
<https://www.nvcc.edu/wellness/index.html>

"I wasn't a victim anymore." (p. 235)



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