

Nothing wrong

Self care for
those who have
been abused
or who abuse
substances



Contents

For appropriate referrals in your local area, to feedback comments or to request more copies please contact us:

The Buoyancy Foundation of Victoria Inc.

Telephone 9429 3322

293 Punt Rd, Richmond

PO Box 2143, Richmond South 3121

info@buoyancy.org.au

www.buoyancy.org.au

We would love to work with people from different religions, cultures and languages to produce self care booklets for their communities. Please contact us if you are interested in other versions of this booklet or require it in alternative forms such as disk or tape.

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Many survivors of abuse make a connection between coping with past trauma and their current drug use. They come to realise that using doesn't work anymore.

Our lives can be trashed because of abuse. Or we can forgive ourselves for having been abused, for abusing drugs or for reacting in other ways to abuse.

It is possible for a life of using to become a life of self-expression and contribution to ourselves and to others.

The healing, soothing skills described in this book can us help reduce use and avoid harm.

Beneath our fight, flight, freeze, feel good, feel bad, feel frightened and angry sensations there is nothing wrong.

There is no advantage or disadvantage, no justification for anything, no purpose; nothing formed that can't be recreated.

Abuse can take away from a precious useful, balanced self. Self care as simple as aware breathing, can bring back wellbeing.

what is abuse?

Ab- *off, away, from* **Ab-use;** *misuse, make bad use of, deceive, maltreat, revile, perversion, an established unjust or corrupt practice*

Abuse can be something done or not done. It is abuse when someone doesn't provide us with the food or care they should provide. Anything that endangers or impairs our physical or emotional health, growth and development is abuse.

Abuse includes emotional and mental events such as rejection, frightening threats or acts, hostility, name calling and put-downs, persistent coldness, angry attack words, gossip dressed up in subtle psychological language, gestures and actions.

Abuse is a deliberate infliction of harm usually by and for someone who wants to exercise control, power and domination over the abused. It is usually covert—conducted with no witnesses—or disguised as 'for your own good'. Abuse is based on an illusion that you can control other people without giving them a real choice to say yes or no.

Sexual abuse is a sexual act that is imposed on someone who lacks the emotional and mental development to really give or refuse consent. Sexual contact in the context of a professional caring relationship is also sexual abuse. Inappropriate sexualising of a relationship and sexual harassment where a person is offended by acts, gestures, words etc can also be abuse.

Drug and alcohol abuse is the use of a mood-altering substance with negative consequences such as harmful effects on our relationships or ourselves.

self care

Self; a person's or thing's own individuality or essence

Selfhood; (rare) personality, separate and conscious existence

Care; solicitude, anxiety, occasion for these, serious attention, heed, caution, pains, charge, protection, things to be done or seen to, to take charge, exercising temporary control, feel concern or interest, provide food or attendance, feel regard for, deference, affection for, be willing and wishful

Some people recover from abuse naturally, with resilience and grace. Abuse can't fundamentally change the fact that there is nothing wrong with us. We were abused and are now taking care of ourselves and creating and causing what matters.

There is no right way and no wrong way to see abuse.

At times—maybe for a long time—we may choose to minimise the abuse or its effect, deny that it is abuse and distract ourselves from it. At other times we might use the fact we have been abused to justify something or use the abuse for a purpose.

Some of us will abuse drugs or alcohol at some stage as a way of coping with pain. Drugs and alcohol may not help with healing abuse and may make our pain worse.

Drug and alcohol use can also create conditions for further abuse; drug and alcohol abuse can itself become an issue.

Self care involves ideas for dealing with abuse by cultivating healthy reactions. If self care is challenging, we can do it gently, as if we are our own best friend.

We can choose to do self care for ourselves or not. Self care is a choice; it brings about the possibility of being well.

The information in this booklet also provides some self care for when we are listening to other people's painful stories of abuse.

there is no 'wrong way'

There is no 'wrong way' to cope with abuse and its ramifications. There is no 'right way'. All ways of coping—everything done at the time or done since to get through—are normal, are 'the way'.

There is no 'wrong way' to feel. All our feelings when the abuse was happening and how those feelings have shaped our experiences are normal responses to pain.

When we are abusing drugs and alcohol, (including pills and solvents), we can get into a moral panic: I'm bad, it's bad, they are bad, it's good, I'm good, they are good. There is no 'wrong way' to think.

All negative and positive opinions are just creatures of thought formed from the past or gained from others.

We can be safe. We can find needle exchanges. There is a whole drug service system to reduce harm to us, our families and our friends.

there is no 'wrong way' to self care

There is no 'wrong way' to recover from the impact of abuse. The intention of healing in itself is of benefit.

There are ways that are more workable, however, ways that produce more care and less abuse.

Letting anger sweep in and go in thirty seconds gives us time for things other than just letting anger eat up our lives.

Letting tears flow can release lots of tension. If we stop crying after a regular thirty seconds of self-pity, we can have time for a social life.

It can also be beneficial to share the story of abuse. How people recover from drug and alcohol abuse is as varied as people themselves. What works for you?

We can share our story with someone else, someone trustworthy who knows there is nothing so terrible that it can't be talked about.

Counsellors can fulfil this role and support our journey or we can share experiences with a journal, in a picture, with some music or with other story-tellers.

The experience of others can inspire and inform us. The reality is that every journey—even on the most crowded road—will be unique.

confronting abusers

Self care can go on perfectly well without us ever needing to confront abusers.

It may never be physically or emotionally safe to confront some abusers. Some abusers may never admit what happened or apologise.

Any act of revenge or violence has unpredictable results. More suffering, such as arrest, may only bind abused to abuser.

We can focus on our other needs such as having good friends and a peaceful life.

If we can and will confront an abuser it is best done with:

- Preparation—a clear head, heart and nervous system. Being even-keeled may make the communication more successful.

- An advocate—a cool friend, a lawyer, a child protection worker, a women’s health worker or a worker from Centres Against Sexual Assault or Rape Crisis Centres.

The impact of abuse (especially sexual and substance abuse) on children, women and men is a common human response. It’s not okay for any of us.

The impact may vary slightly depending on gender and age.

sexual abuse and young people

It is a crime—against the law—to abuse someone, however people are rarely charged. The right to feel safe can exist as a declaration of intent to yourself, even if there is no option to escape at present and no-one safe to talk to. If you are unable to escape from abuse, the abuse is still not okay.

- If you are an abused young person, you are not alone. Surveys show that as many as 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 6 boys have been abused sexually. This means that many other people have also been abused.
- Caring for yourself could involve looking for an adult who is trustworthy and who will listen. Many people do not want to believe that abuse happens, but many will believe you.

- To find out if someone is a person who is trustworthy, say ‘What would you do if you knew someone who was being abused?’ See if your question gets an answer that gives your body a greater feeling of safety.
- If you find people who do not want to listen or who make your body feel more uncomfortable, move on. Keep looking until you find someone who will listen.
- If the abuse is still happening, ask the trustworthy person to help stop it.
- There are some people in the community who are trained and willing to help. These people may include Kids Help Line, counsellors at schools and other counsellors (found through Yellow Pages or health centres).

impact of sexual abuse on women

Many women who are survivors of sexual abuse suffer in silence because they feel isolated or ashamed or because they do not want to upset their family.

Women survivors may suffer from depression or agoraphobia in reaction to their pain.

Women may turn their pain/anger/rage in on themselves. They sometimes do so in the form of behaviours associated with diet; they may over-eat or impose an over-strict diet regime on themselves.

Some women may have impulses to injure themselves; some may cause themselves bodily harm to make the pain of abuse specific.

Sexual assault has emotional, physical and social impacts on women. Each woman will have particular needs that may be difficult for her to meet on her own. There are many support services available ready to help when she is ready to access them.

Women's refuges and other women's services are available.

impact of sexual abuse on men

The sexual abuse of men and boys was not widely acknowledged in the past, but it is common. Men's reactions to sexual abuse vary widely.

- Some men experience anger, anxiety and depression.
- Some men have problems with their sexuality and intimacy.
- Most men do not talk about this experience until they are adults and in ongoing counselling or in long-term relationships.
- Men have great difficulty dealing with the experience of powerlessness. It should also be remembered that as a child in contact with an adult there is a huge power imbalance. The child does not have responsibility for what happened.

- A large part of men's work of recovery is concerned with getting in touch with feelings—even overwhelming feelings—and in building self esteem.

facing our dragons

We can give ourselves credit for our strength and skills, for surviving difficulties that most people may never experience.

Our dragons are whatever undermines us and causes us continued suffering. They can be poverty, prison, pain, a court case, our own parenting or greed for material things to compensate for our suffering.

We need new strengths and skills to face our dragons and take away their power.

Drowning the dragons in drugs and alcohol can also drown our spirit and energy. It can drown the messages from our body on how to live and what to do with life.

our armour

The strategies we have developed to cope with the consequences of abuse make up our armour.

A human response to suffering is to become cold, like water freezing into ice.

Recovery is the slow melting of that ice with the warm water of self care. It involves us being open to the possibility of support, intimacy or solitude.

We will know recovery has taken place when we no longer blame ourselves for the abuse, when we no longer see ourselves as damaged and when we can treat others and ourselves with affection and respect.

taking off our armour

Be gentle — self care is self soothing.

Be playful — recovery does not have to be serious. Sing a song, share a joke, dance.

Be patient — everything needs time.

Be kind — it costs nothing and it brings a great harvest.

Don't look for results — do not try to attain anything, any goal, any ideal of how it should be. Just enjoy.

Forgive when back-sliding — forgive something every day (it's embarrassing being a human being!)

Accept that relapse happens — going back to abusing substances happens. So does using less and less and less and less and stopping.

Seize what is understandable — nurture it and let it develop its own subtleties.

Take it easy — the path may not always be smooth and it may not lead constantly upwards. Reach plateaus and spend some time on them; or like soil in a garden, lie fallow for a while.

Use baby steps — only take steps when you're ready. Stand up, fall down, stand up, take a step, fall down, take a step, take a step, etc.

Follow passions — find things you love to do.

being kind to ourselves

one hour a day

Any unrealistic expectations can lead to disillusionment and discouragement. Recovery may take quite some time. One hour focused on it a day is a good start, and any more is a bonus.

repetition

One day of healing after one day of healing after one day of healing after one day of healing after one day of healing; by this process of repetition, healing slowly becomes a habit.

doing straight things

Everybody has a unique combination of intelligences; things they love and things they can do. That's a key to growth and development. Ours could involve numbers, pictures, people, words, ideas, hanging around inside, our body, music, art or food.

opportunities each day

Today is a new day, a new beginning full of opportunities to heal and options to go forward. Begin each new day by stretching your arms to the sky and breathing deeply.

Each new day is also an opportunity to take the initiative and not put things off any longer.

holiday moods

When we're on holiday our whole attitude to life changes. It becomes more relaxed and easy-going, less concerned with or influenced by the past or the future. This is a wonderful mood to bring to normal, day-to-day life.

recovery is a journey, not an end

We can use self care simply for the enjoyment it gives, for how good it makes feeling all sorts of feelings.

remembering

When self care continues, we will reconnect with innocence, joy and trust. There is no need to look elsewhere to find the resources we need to lead a happy, energetic, inspired life; all that is needed is right here, right now. Our bodies, emotions and minds are the sources of recovery.

connecting with our hearts

Our hearts are warm and giving and that warmth is communicated through our hands. When we close our eyes and touch someone who wishes to be touched, we can feel communication from our heart through our hands to whoever we are touching.

connecting with our bodies

It's okay not to think about things...until ready
To not know what to think
How to think
Sensations of an abused body come back
Things now trigger memories
Of then
Negative cranky thoughts of then
What is then what is now?
Thinking what is past
That does not stay in the past
Putting past back in the past
Again and again and again
So to live in
Our already heavenly body
Now and now and now

space and boundaries

When we are abused our boundaries—lines in the sand where other people can go and cannot go, our right to say yes or no, our sense of private space—are disrespected. Our personal integrity and wholeness is invaded.

Drugs and alcohol also blur boundaries. For example, people who are intoxicated may not use safe sex. The good feeling of the drug may blur the feeling of caution needed to motivate them to use a condom and prevent transmission of blood-borne viruses such as HIV AIDS and Hepatitis.

Setting limits and boundaries involves thinking about and making decisions and pursuing goals. It involves letting go of our expectations of others and of trying to fulfil others' expectations of us.

When our boundaries are clear, there is a spaciousness around us that houses an area in which we are at ease.

Whole, like the sky,
spacious,
the world then,
is inside,
and the moon and stars,
lie within.

relating

Other people's happiness does not rely on abuse of any sort. Good relationships have suitable boundaries and are positive to everyone. We can find people who it doesn't hurt to be with.

giving

Giving may or may not be about spending money. Giving can be about being there in small ways for others with our hearts and minds, slowly and mindfully.

Giving can be sharing anything with other people and their own styles, smells, colours, words, chants, tastes, movements, sounds.

Sometimes pain can open our hearts. People who have experienced serious pain understand others' suffering more easily; they can develop empathy.

Too much getting and too much giving can destroy the balance between body, nature and mind. We have to decide what leads to cravings, to holding on to sorrow and what brings joy, simplicity and freedom.

security

Having a secure place to go to is a crucial support when life and relating become difficult.

We can go to a secure place to settle our emotions and to get space for working on the situation or person we find difficult.

We need to choose a quiet place for our secure place. It needs to be comfortable and pleasant to be in, clean and clear with situations and people who hurt, removed.

daily self care

We are our own honoured guests.

Self care is about looking after all aspects of our life as if we were looking after an honoured guest. This means being treated with detailed concern for our needs and enjoyment, and with respect and dignity.

Most people look after their car better than they do their body. Taking deliberate care of every need is important to our enjoyment of living.

We are someone whose needs are important. We are someone who deserves to feel safe, at ease, happy, strong, confident in being who we are and competent to do what we choose.

Eat well — take the time for three nutritious meals a day. This nurtures and grounds our bodies to be alert and clear.

Sleep well — get to bed earlier. Make sure the bed is comfortable for a good night's sleep. Try to sleep for eight hours a night. Make sure the room is quiet and secure, there is no light from clock-radios and that there is a good pillow and the right number of blankets or doonas.

Be active — activity can have a big impact on worry, depression passivity, drift and resignation. Activity is thinking with muscles and posture; it is in no way inferior to thinking with the mind. Being active is so important that it alone can build health and happiness. There are many invigorating activities such as walking, dancing, yoga, swimming or playing sport.

Clear out physical clutter — clear and clean surfaces, clear out dust and old bills etc. This will give you energy and a sense of space. It will make room for fresh natural smells, colours, textures and light.

Handle money matters — with care and attention.

Take care — of any sicknesses or injuries straight away. Do not ignore the problem.

Take care — with mood altering drugs, whether prescribed or un-prescribed. Alternative remedies like Chinese herbs or homeopathic remedies may help.

Count — drinks and drugs and limit intake to what is planned.

Monitor — substance use.

We know we are recovering from substance abuse when we:

- Reduce high-risk behaviour and practise safe use and safe sex.
- Know the harmful affects of what we are using. Does what we use nourish or poison our relationships, our environment and us?
- Know our physical health is improving and we feel better, sleep better, eat better, and have someone we can trust to talk to.
- Maintain an ongoing plan.
- Watch for relapse warning signs.
- Can work with the problems of everyday life.

releasing stress

Stress can be caused by physical, mental or emotional tension.

Tensing our face, hunching over or scrunching up our shoulders can increase our heart rate, speed up our breathing and move our voice to a higher pitch.

If we pay attention to signs of stress, we can deliberately release it with activity or relaxation.

We all need time off, time to ourselves, time to just enjoy without any pressure to achieve anything.

relaxation exercise

Lie down and close your eyes. Bring your full attention (slowly and deliberately) to each part of your body that is stressed. Deliberately relax the muscles around the area of stress and let go of it. Move on to another stressed area and do the same. Alternatively, de-stress your whole body, starting with your toes and working upwards.

stress release exercise

Hands are activating points that can diffuse the stress reflex.

Place the palm of one hand across your forehead then place the palm of the other hand over the protrusion at the back of your head. Gently hold the head between your hands for at least a minute. Feelings of stress should gradually diminish.

nurturing spirit

Self care is an attitude that gives weight to all the good things. It is very easy to fall into the habit of focusing on the unpleasant things that have happened and forget to smell the roses.

Do — something nice every day. Have a treat, have a favourite food or a warm perfumed bath.

Stimulate — a sense of humour. Read a funny book or see a comedy film.

Find — the small things that lift up a day. Water a pot plant, take the dog for a walk in the park, bake a cake, have a friend over for dinner, write a poem, run a mile, watch a sports match live, join a library, read some new books, look after some goldfish.

Get involved — and make a contribution. Look for things that are really important and do them. Think of volunteering or getting involved in a local club or organisation.

be gentle and slow

We can calm the body, breath and spirit by making all our movements gentle and slow.

For example, if we deliberately slow down when we're walking, we can feel the earth beneath our feet, notice the sky overhead, feel the breeze on our skin; we can get the benefit of connecting with our surroundings.

It is good to begin every activity with several deep, quiet breaths.

When we try to do two things at once we can benefit from noting the less important activity and going back to the main activity.

Genuine, heart-felt rituals such as making and drinking a cup of tea can reconnect us with life.

Have you been
A waterfall that looks like ribbon
a sun soaked rock
seasons,
clouds,
a leaf

opening up to a great life

Making life great can take courage; it often feels easier and more secure to keep things the way they are. The original root of the word ‘courage’ means ‘of the heart’.

Our social and physical environment, housing and relationships can give us half our sense of reality. If our external circumstances are not great, it’s important to take steps to make things better and to act positively to initiate a context that supports us.

Look — at all the things that are quite hard, that have been the same way for a long time. If you would prefer some things to be different, think about how this could happen. Make a plan and start implementing it.

Think — about how you spend your day and whether it is fulfilling. If you want to be doing something else maybe you could learn new skills or take up new studies.

Think — about fun. Is it time to finally take up painting or writing that book? Perhaps it’s the moment to catch up with old friends or make new ones.

Think long term — start something today that will keep growing tomorrow. Some people grow plants, some people have collections. It’s good to have things that will grow.

Treat — tired, negative states that keep popping up as if they were movies; count the re-runs or write them down and burn them until they disappear. They can disappear if you gently refocus on your body breathing.

Give — yourself encouragement. Get rid of that inner critic!

Make — decisions in a positive state of mind; these decisions have the best chance of a good outcome.

Have — faith. Think of worthy qualities in life that are worth imitating and creating. A lot of people care. There are great environments and communities for self care and to care for.

Hang out — with positive people with whom you can create a great context for your life.

everything can be self care

The past is a memory and the future is imagination. Together they can keep us from enjoying our day-to-day living.

Sometimes when we’re doing something, we begin to think about something in the past or in the future. Each time we notice our attention wandering to the past or the future, we need to gently bring it back to the task we’re doing.

When we focus our full attention on an activity, however ordinary, and put aside normal self-talk and emotional weather patterns, a different quality of experience becomes available. When we're showering, for example, if we deliberately focus on the feeling of the water and the care we're taking of ourselves, the shower will have a different quality to it and will benefit our body, mind, emotions and spirit.

The same thing works with cooking, cleaning, eating, talking, caring for others, even day-dreaming. We need to do each thing with full attention and when it is finished, let it go and move on.

identifying and meeting our needs

Thinking that your needs are not important or wondering what they are can be a natural consequence of experiencing abuse.

We may have developed the idea that it is not worth taking care of ourselves, that we don't deserve to be looked after. 'Oh, well, it's only us, it doesn't matter. We should focus on others' needs.'

our needs are important

- Make a list of 10 needs. This is called the power of 10; it's a good way to identify needs.
- Put a time and date for meeting each need beside everything on the list. Think of ways your needs can be met and take the first steps to

make them happen. If they are not done in the set time, write down another time or wipe it off the list.

- Design and display the list some way that is fun. Stress, drugs and alcohol can take away our memory so display the list or tell people so you won't forget.
- Don't try to do it; it is trying to try! Do it or don't do it. Saying we are going to do something and then not doing it can make us lose faith in ourselves and in our words.
- Do you put other people's needs before your own? Become clear about what you are responsible for or where you may be sacrificing your own wellbeing.

becoming aware

Most of the time we run on automatic; our suffering is automatic, our defensive armour is automatically in place, and the past is at the controls.

Awareness is like taking a magnifying glass (without opinion or judgment) and just watching ourselves, our lives and actions, our relationships and everything around us. It is just becoming aware of it all, of who we are right now.

We are not trying to become anyone else, some imagined or perfect person; we are trying to become who we really are. So it is important to recognise who we are now, with all our fractures and failings in place.

Developing awareness is quite a deliberate process at the start. We just relax and watch what is happening. When we become unaware again—as we will over and over—we just return to watching. Eventually awareness will become as natural as breathing.

It takes time to learn any new skill so be relaxed about it, take it slowly and easily.

body awareness

Body, mind and emotions are not separate. Our bodies respond to every thought and feeling we have. This response may be subtle or so habitual it is unnoticed.

We can practise being aware of our bodies and become alert about each gesture and movement.

We can identify exactly where a feeling is in the body and what the actual sensation is. We can identify the strength, colour, smell, sound, image, movement or event associated with it.

mind awareness

Mind awareness means watching our thoughts in the same way as we watch our body. It means watching without tension or judgement and without trying to control the thoughts. It means just watching our thoughts as they come and go like clouds across the clear blue sky of our minds.

Mind awareness can strengthen and calm us. It is training to distinguish between reality and the river of thoughts and feelings running through us. Equanimity grows with mind awareness; we can more calmly face anything that life throws at us.

awareness of triggers

A trigger is a situation that creates fear or other severe stress. Triggers bring on strong experiences such as bad memories, confusion, insomnia or panic attacks.

When we experience a trigger we need to:

- Pay attention to what is happening. Observe how it feels, what the feeling is. Do not ignore it.
- Notice if we immediately reach for something (like alcohol or drugs) to dull the fear and pain.
- Watch the emotion, the passion, the sleeplessness or panic like weather to be weathered. Contact someone who can help, such as a counsellor.
- Breathe to our chest, to our 'one point' of physical balance (two inches below our belly button) or fasten our mind to our toes to deeply relax.
- Remember that it is going to be all right. This will pass.

awareness exercise

Sitting comfortably, just notice simple things like the pressure of the chair, the sounds around, the feelings in different parts of your body.

Each time you begin wandering to the past or the future, gently bring yourself back to noticing the sensations of sitting in the chair. At first, do this for a few minutes each day; then extend the time.

Practise body awareness and notice your body starting to relax, to become more attuned, harmonious and at ease.

The real thing,
is not to fight,
with thoughts and feelings.
The real thing,
is to grow in awareness,
because then one wins,
without any fight whatsoever.

breathing

We live because we breathe. If the heart is unsettled, our breathing will be disorderly. When the heart is at rest, our breathing is calm.

A subtle relationship exists between spirit and breath. Try these exercises.

calming your spirit

Exhale from an open mouth as though your breath was a long string. Then close your mouth gently and slowly and inhale through the nose. Repeat this 3 times or as many times as you want.

unifying your spirit

Count in-breaths from 1 to 10 and then start again. If you lose count with random thoughts, start from 1 again.

ah-hm method

Exhale, say 'ah' softly in the heart. Inhale, say 'hm'. Make no sound as 'ah' and 'hm' become everything and your mind and emotions settle.

watching breath

The purpose of watching breath is to assist us to notice the workings of the mind and to bring a measure of peaceful clarity into the mind.

Find others to practise breath-awareness with; it will be easier to practise. Some meditation groups have breath-awareness as their main activity.

breath-awareness exercise

Find a clean and quiet place and sit comfortably, but with a straight back. This posture helps the breath-awareness process.

Follow the sensation of ordinary breath as it flows in through your nostrils, fills your chest and abdomen and flows out again.

Try maintaining attention on your nostrils as your breath goes in and out. Your mind will wander; each time it does, keep patiently returning to your breath.

Breath has a tranquillising quality; it is steady and relaxing if it isn't forced.

using breath to develop kindness

The practice of watching breath spreads kindness.

Visualise — breath as light, as a warm ray that gradually sweeps through all the body.

Lightly focus — attention on the centre of your chest, around your heart region.

Breathe in — with the thought, ‘May I be well and happy’, or ‘Peace’.

Breathe out — and let the kindness spread outward. Think, ‘May others be well, happy and at peace’.

If you’re experiencing negative states of mind, breathe in the qualities of tolerance and forgiveness. Visualise the breath as a colour associated with healing. On the out-breath let go of any stress, worry or negativity and extend the sense of release through your body and mind.

developing acceptance

Our feelings change like the weather. We ebb and flow like the tides. We wax and wane like the moon. If we were locked in a room for 24 hours our feelings would keep on changing, even though nothing was happening to stimulate us.

Acceptance is a sense of friendliness towards ourselves; it involves befriending even shame, hurt and feelings of unworthiness. The point is not trying to change ourselves. Always striving to improve ourselves is a kind of subtle aggression.

Acceptance involves being able to see our limitations with clarity, gentleness and kindness. It is not about trying to get rid of fear or anger; instead it is about making friends with them.

It is okay to feel sad. It is okay to feel anger that does not turn into violence. It is okay to feel all emotions.

Acceptance is not about saying that it’s good that we’re this way; rather it’s about acknowledging our feelings and the stories that go with them to perpetuate them.

Accepting pain as it comes and goes (instead of trying to shut it out) transforms it. This doesn’t mean we like or agree with what has happened or is happening. Acceptance is the first step, not the end point.

When we have accepted a feeling, a moment, we can develop the skills to change the tune, put on another movie, write the script of our own lives.

real acceptance

Experiencing pain is a part of life; even the very rich and famous experience pain.

We can agonise over how things should have been different and how wrong it all is, or we can make sure such things don’t happen again and move forward.

We sometimes fear that it will be overwhelming to accept all the pain and allow ourselves to feel.

It can seem that way for a moment, but maybe pain is also a message sensation; once we’ve got the message we move beyond feeling that way.

To move on is to face what is there and what is beyond it.

changing feelings with a smile

The expression on our face can actually change our feelings.

A half-smile feels good. It involves firstly relaxing the face—letting go of the muscles—then relaxing the neck and shoulders and, finally, half-smiling with the lips. This is an exercise, so it has to be repeated at different times for it to work.

We can benefit from practising smiling first thing after waking up. We can benefit from smiling when we're waiting on the phone, in traffic or at the train station. Smiling is the opposite of the natural expression we get when we're irritated.

We can practise smiling while we listen to music, while we're lying down or while we're sitting in a chair.

letting go

Letting go of emotions is the natural end-point of acceptance; it means being able to experience the ups and downs of life without being thrown or damaged by them.

Emotions are like waves
on the ocean
but when the waves
are taken for the ocean
it is a terrible mistake.

telling our stories

When we tell the story of our abuse to a professional it works better if the professional has no past connection with any one involved in our story. The professional must be solely concerned with helping us and must show us empathy, acceptance and respect. We need to be comfortable with each other so we can speak and listen to each other. We need to create a place of safety together.

Before we tell our story, we can ask if the professional has a code of ethics. This is a written agreement that outlines acceptable behaviour and expectations in the professional relationship.

Below is an example of a professional's code of ethics and workability.

code of ethics and workability

- I will focus on the welfare of our service users and relevant family members in matters affecting them, above all other concerns. To this end I will deliver kind and humane treatment to all in my care, regardless of age, race, religion or lack of religion, sexual orientation or health status.

- I will not do harm to a service user, either physically or psychologically. I will not verbally assault, ridicule, attempt to subjugate or endanger a service user, nor will I allow other service users or staff to do this.
- I will prefer changes in the lives of service users, only on their behalf and in the interest of promoting recovery from the condition of drug dependence and other associated problems. I will not otherwise press them to adopt beliefs and behaviours which reflect my value system, rather than their own.
- I will be aware of my skills and limitations. Since service users and ex service users may perceive me as an authority, I will never counsel them or advise them on matters not within my area of expertise.
- I will be willing to refer to other programs or individuals where appropriate. I will find out about the services that can assist the different needs of the client and pass on the information.
- I will not engage in any activity that could be construed as exploitation of service users for personal gain, be it sexual, social or financial.
- I will not promote dependence on me, but empower service users to empower themselves.
- I will not name or give information about a service user, ex service user or family member, unless specifically authorised in writing by the service user.

- I understand and agree to defend both the spirit and the letter of policy on service users' rights, and to respect the rights and views of other professionals.
- I understand that a therapeutic relationship does not end with a service user leaving. I recognise the need to maintain the same concern for the ex service user's well being as acknowledged above.
- I will serve as a responsible role model for service users, staff and the community in my personal use of mood-altering drugs.
- If I have been chemically dependent in the past, I will maintain abstinence from drugs while employed.
- I will be responsible for the wellbeing of my peers and the community by not ignoring illness or unethical conduct in my colleagues.
- I will be responsible for my continuing education and professional development as part of my commitment to providing quality care for those who seek help.

making sense of abuse

What happens if there is no clearing of anger and grief, no healing of precious human life, no lightening up, no growth in sense of personal awe, justice and respect; no self care?

Abusers are often angry (mainly with themselves) and they fear for themselves after an incident when they felt powerless in the face of a common human problem. There may not have been a single other human being in whom the person could confide their true feelings.

Instead of finding, facing and sharing perhaps forgotten, hurtful incidents, the feelings they've had and the decisions they've made, abusers attempt to compensate themselves. They do this through abuse of other people and greed for things like 'power over other people' or drugs.

When they're abusive, abusers do not want to understand that what they do is abuse, nor do they want to be understood. Confusion reigns; this confusion is often a warning sign that abuse is occurring. One third of sexual abusers will completely deny being an abuser.

Sometimes abusers say abuse is the abused person's fault. It is never the abused person's fault.

That does not mean the abused person can't do something about being abused. Sometimes they can do something about abuse and they can always choose their reaction to abuse. They can make their own sense of what abuse is to them and choose their response.

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— Deborah Homburg, CEO

We are

The Buoyancy Foundation of Victoria Inc. is a Melbourne drug counselling service that was established in 1967. Its mission statement is 'To create and offer opportunities to participate in a culture of self expression and contribution.'

Our vision is to:

- Inspire others (in this booklet to inspire people who have been abused and/or who are abusing drugs, including alcohol) to create and offer themselves opportunities to express themselves and contribute to themselves and other people.
- Model an impeccable level of integrity and accountability.

As individuals, this means we completely take on responsibility for a whole and honest job of caring for ourselves and taking care of our relationships and agreements with other people.

The purpose of this booklet is to increase awareness of what happens when abuse occurs and of what self care looks like.

This booklet exists to help all of us to fulfil our vision for ourselves.

A free publication

