



My Rights, My Self, My Choice, My Hopes:

A guide for young women who
have experienced sexual violence





nia has been delivering services for women, girls and children who have experienced sexual and domestic violence since 1975.

The organisation has three main aims:

- to provide services for women, girls and children who have experienced men's violence
- to contribute to ending male violence against women and girls
- to inform and influence policy and public awareness

nia is run for women and children by women, providing services developed in consultation with women who have experienced men's violence, and from a proudly feminist perspective.

nia run the East London Rape Crisis service which works with women and girls who have experienced any form of sexual violence at any time in their lives.

A stylized illustration of several women's profiles in various shades of purple and teal, overlapping each other. The profiles are facing right. A white speech bubble with a light blue border is positioned in the lower right area, containing a quote.

“ Sexual violence does not have to dictate the rest of your life, or define who you are. You are so much more than this experience. ”

My rights

You have the right to say no to any unwanted sexual advances to you. If anyone, including family members, partners, friends, acquaintances or strangers forces, coerces or manipulates you to do anything sexual that you do not wish to experience, they are committing sexual violence and are breaking the law.

The law that makes some sexual activity illegal is the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (for short the SOA 2003).

The blame should always fall on the person that has chosen to commit the act of sexual violence; it is never the victim-survivors fault. Disclosures of sexual violence should be taken seriously by anyone that you tell.

It is your right to choose to report to the police or continue with an investigation. You do not have to report to the police if you don't feel comfortable, or feel like you don't want to at that moment in time.

It is your right to say no to support if you don't feel ready to access, you always have the right to seek support when you do feel ready, no matter how much time passes.

You have the right to speak to a sexual health nurse or your doctor and get any treatment you may need. If you are 13 years or older, you have the right to access healthcare without a parent or guardian with confidentiality. They may ask some questions to make sure you are not in immediate danger and may encourage you to tell a trusted adult; however you should always be at the centre of the support.

Sexual offences in general It is illegal in the UK for someone to:

- carry out sexual activity with someone against their will;
- carry out sexual activity with a child under 13 years old, whether the child wants it to happen or not; and,
- carry out sexual activity with someone under 16 whether they want to or not.



“The blame should always fall on the person that has chosen to commit the act of sexual violence; it is never the victim-survivors fault.”

My self

Positive affirmations

Self-affirmations are statements that we tell ourselves in order to spark self-change. They are designed to alter our beliefs about ourselves such that they are more positive.

Generally speaking, self-affirmations serve as part of the psychological immune system, although we use self-affirmations as a coping mechanism, they can also motivate us.

Affirmations are more than just self-help statements to make ourselves feel better. Regular affirmations allow us to become more in tune with our thoughts and the way we think about our self in general.

When we are conscious of our attitudes towards the self, we can make an effort to eliminate negative thoughts. When we become more aware of ourselves, we are able to be mindful of surrounding ourselves with positive things.

The more you practice the more you notice what aspects of your life are most important to you as well as things that may be impeding on your happiness.

Positive affirmations can feel very odd at first and talking positively about ourselves isn't a natural process for many. You could try saying one nice thing each morning about how you hope the day will be; or say one positive thing you did at the end of the day.

You could write positive things down and collect them in an envelope to look at the end of the week; even if you feel there is nothing positive to say, tomorrow is another day and things may feel better then.

Coping mechanisms

Coping mechanisms are techniques that help reduce negative feelings when someone is feeling under stress. Those feelings might be the result of anxiety, anger, depression, or just general day-to-day stress.

Practicing coping strategies can help you to manage your emotions in a safe way.

Every child or young adult should have a "toolbox" of coping strategies that works for them. It's important to recognize that what works for one person may not work for another.

Self-care

Self-care is exactly what it sounds like; taking care of you.

Self-care will be different for everyone; there is no right or wrong way to do it.

Self-care is about you, what it is you need and taking steps to make it happen.

It could be finding things that bring you joy such as spending time with your friends and family, taking part in activity that you enjoy, having a relaxing bath or watching your favourite film.

Some people find it useful to have a self-care plan which incorporates the things that you know work for you. Creative outlets are used by some people, physical outlets such as sports may work for others.

You might just want to spend the whole day in bed, switch off and give your mind and body a rest, this is also fine; listen to your body and do what you feel is right.

Understanding and communicating your own boundaries can support self-care, and it is always ok to stop or walk away from anything that may trigger off uneasy, painful emotions or feelings.

Always know, its ok to not feel ok after sexual violence; in the same way its ok to feel like you are ok.

Recognising emotions/feelings

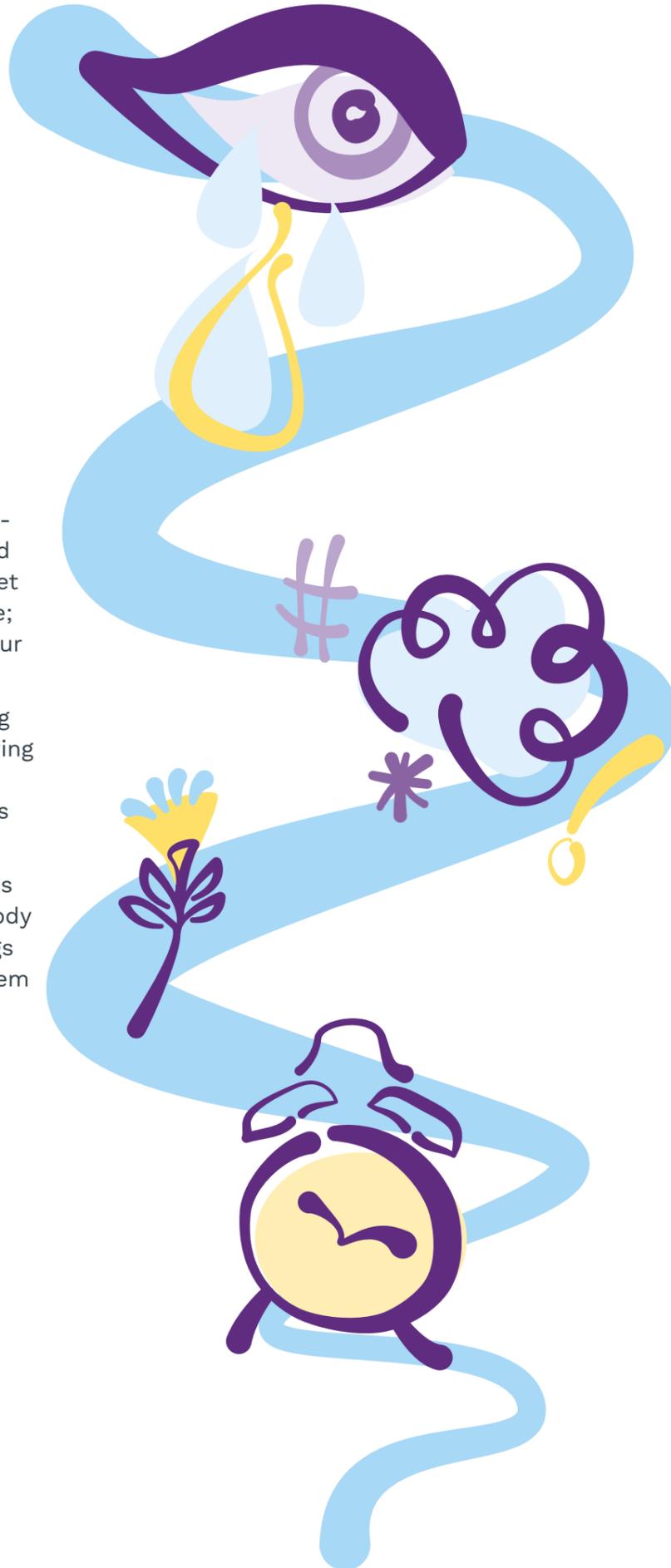
Understanding your responses and reactions can help the healing process, and support you to move forward.

There is no set time for healing; all victim-survivors are individual and no-one should ever make you feel like you 'should just get over it'. You are the expert in your own life; learn to cope in your own way through your own emotions and feelings.

It is natural to feel like you are not moving fast enough, healing takes time and allowing yourself space to understand the feelings and emotions that you have will make this process slightly more comfortable.

You could try to write down your emotions and feelings to allow a release for your body and mind, some people mark their feelings down in a diary to monitor what made them feel good, or bad, and what triggered these feelings.

Recognising your emotions and what heightens them can help you feel like you're on top of them.



My choice

Boundaries

Boundaries are guidelines or limits that a person creates to identify reasonable, safe and permissible ways for others to behave towards them and how to respond when those limits are passed.

You have the right to place, affirm and reaffirm your own personal boundaries.

It may feel quite unusual to place boundaries at first; specifically with people you know such as family or friends, however this will become easier, and feel more natural over time.

It is your right to live without any discomfort or negative feelings.

YOU get to choose positive people to surround you.

It is always OK to say no and reaffirm your boundaries.

Consent

Consent means more than just agreeing to take part in something saying yes and being able to make choices free of pressure, coercion and fear, this is the same with sexual consent.

Consent doesn't have to mean a stiff, awkward, formal conversation. It can be a continuous dialogue about what you want, don't want, like and don't like.

It is your right to say no and/or to withdraw your consent at any time. It doesn't matter who the other person is, what your relationship with them is, how far you've gone with them or others in the past.

Physical, emotional and psychological pressure may be used to force someone else into sexual activity. Just because someone does not hold you down and make you engage in a sexual act against your will or if you do not say 'no', it does not mean you have consented.

16 is the legal age of consent within the UK.

Sexuality

You, and only you decides who you wish to share personal, romantic, sexual experiences with; that may be with a woman, man or no-one.

All of these choices are normal and they may change during your lifetime.

Think about what means something to you, and who you would like in your life, if anyone.

My hopes

You decide what your future holds.

Healing and moving forward from sexual violence is not a linear process; you may have some really good days, and quite possibly some low days. That's OK. All victim-survivors will have their own healing process, and ways of coping.

It is possible to heal from sexual violence and reconnect with life, finding a new way forward, a way that YOU decides what happens and who is in your life. Healing is about moving forward and it is natural to have ups and downs.

It is your right to feel safe in your life, surrounded by people who are positive for you, that you can feel comfortable and yourself with. It is your right to feel good about yourself, with confidence and boosted self-esteem.

Sexual violence does not have to dictate the rest of your life, or define who you are. You are so much more than this experience.

You are important; your feelings matter and are valid. You are not alone.



The London Survivors Gateway offers victims and survivors of rape and sexual abuse help to access specialist services in London.

We provide information on what support is available after rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse or any form of sexual violence and can help survivors to access these services. We work with anyone aged 13 or above regardless of gender, sexuality, disability, language, ethnicity or immigration status.

The Gateway is a partnership between the four London Rape Crisis Centres, Galop, SurvivorsUK and the Havens and is run by the Women and Girls Network.

www.survivorsgateway.london
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