

## New Mexico Rape Crisis Centers

Albuquerque  
Rape Crisis Center of Central New Mexico  
505-266-7712 Crisis: 505-266-7711

Farmington  
Sexual Assault Services of Northwest  
New Mexico  
505-325-2805 Crisis: 505-333-3336

Las Cruces  
La Pinon Sexual Assault Recovery Services  
575-526-3437 Crisis: 888-595-7273

Los Lunas  
Valencia Shelter Services  
505-565-3100 Crisis: 864-1383

Portales  
Arise Sexual Assault Services  
575-226-7263 Crisis: 575-226-7263

Raton  
Alternatives To Violence  
575-445-5778 Crisis: 575-445-5775

Santa Fe  
Solace Crisis Treatment Center  
505-988-1951 Crisis: 800-721-7273

Silver City  
Silver Regional Sexual Assault Support  
Services  
575-313-6203 Crisis: 866-750-6467

Taos  
Community Against Violence  
575-758-8082 Crisis: 575-758-9888

## New Mexico Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner's Unit

Alamogordo  
SANE Program of Otero and Lincoln County  
575-415-0913 Emergency: 575-430-9485

Albuquerque  
Albuquerque SANE Collaborative  
505-883-8720 Emergency: 505-884-7263

Farmington  
Sexual Assault Services of Northwest New  
Mexico  
505-325-2805 Emergency: 505-326-4700 or  
1-866-908-4700

Las Cruces  
Las Cruces La Pinon SANE Program  
575-521-5549 Emergency: 888-595-7273

Portales  
Arise Sexual Assault Services  
575-226-7263

Roswell  
I Can Survive Roswell Refuge SANE Program  
575-627-8361

Santa Fe  
Christus St. Vincent Regional Medical Center  
SANE Program  
505-913-4999 Emergency: 505-989-5952

Silver City  
Silver Regional Sexual Assault Support Services  
and SANE  
575-313-6203 Emergency: 1-866-750-6474

Taos  
Taos/Holy Cross Hospital SANE Program  
575-751-8990 Emergency: 575-758-8883

# Overcoming PAINFUL PAST EXPERIENCES

By: Betty Caponera, Ph.D

The feelings we harbor over a painful experience in our past can cloud our thinking and prevent us from making decisions and taking actions that would make our present life enjoyable. Sometimes, an experience from our past can be so painful that we cannot function well in our relationships with our individual partner, friends, family and coworkers. These relationships can become severely strained and be a source of incredible stress for us. Additionally, our emotions can cause distractions in our day, preventing us from working efficiently and effectively, and causing further stress. Sometimes, our emotions can be so overwhelming that they paralyze or immobilize us and prevent us from doing even the simplest tasks.

## CONSEQUENCES OF HARBORING PAINFUL EMOTIONS

When emotions from painful experiences in our past are not dealt with appropriately, physical, psychological, and behavioral symptoms may surface.

### PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

When the cells of our bodies produce energy, that energy is intended for use by our body systems. However, it takes physiological energy to harbor painful emotions associated with our past. To the degree we use our energy to respond to painful emotions, that energy is not available for our bodies and our bodies eventually break down.

### Examples of what can happen when our bodies are under prolonged emotional stress are:

- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Insomnia
- Lack of sexual interest
- Headaches
- Stomach & Colon disorders
- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Exhaustion
- Shortness of Breath
- Tightness in the throat
- Chest pains
- Acute asthma

### PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS:

- Excessive Worry
- Anxiety
- Fearfulness
- Low Self-Esteem
- Guilt
- Depression
- Psychosomatic Symptoms of Illness
- Shame
- Phobias

### BEHAVIORAL SYMPTOMS

Excessive participation in overworking, eating, drinking or other drug use, smoking, gambling, sex, shopping, reading, TV, and exercise are common escape behaviors done in response to emotional stress. Other behaviors may include a refusal to talk about the painful experience, determined attempts to control or deny feelings, apathy, personality change, and progressive social isolation. Many times we will continue to engage in these behaviors even though they do not make us feel better, and most often, even make us feel worse.

### LETTING GO OF HARBORED EMOTIONS AND GETTING THE LIFE YOU WANT

As you can see, the physical, psychological, and behavioral consequences of unresolved issues from painful and past experiences can devastate any hopes for having the quality of life you desire and deserve. Sometimes, we may not think we deserve to have a quality life because we feel responsible in some way for the painful experience that occurred.

*For a current listing of*

*New Mexico Sexual Assault Program Coordinators*

*in your community refer to [www.nmcsap.org](http://www.nmcsap.org).*

*Click on the Find Help tab and go to New Mexico Mental Health Centers.*

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**NMCSAP**

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(505) 883-8020 (within the Albuquerque area)

Toll Free at 1 (888) 883-8020 (beyond the Albuquerque area) FAX (505) 883-7530

E-mail: [nmcsap@swcp.com](mailto:nmcsap@swcp.com) Web site: [www.nmcsap.org](http://www.nmcsap.org)

In some cases, you may have been responsible for what happened, but in many more cases, you may only mistakenly believe you were responsible. This is especially true if you were a child at the time of the experience, since as a child, you would not have had the life experience and psychological development necessary to interpret all life events accurately. If you were indeed responsible for the occurrence of a past painful experience, remember this truth: **no matter what is true of your past, the world is still in need of your best contributions.** You can only give your best by becoming your best self; and this is only possible if you consider yourself deserving of emotional healing.

Whether you or someone else is responsible for the painful experience from your past, you can learn to let go of the pain, shame, guilt, anger, hatred, bitterness, resentment, embarrassment, isolation, that is unnecessarily affecting your life today. You can free yourself from emotional distraction and focus your mind and energy on actions that create a quality day, every day, by doing the following:

- 1. ACCEPT THE REALITY OF THE PAST EXPERIENCE** You cannot turn back the hands of time and erase painful experiences from your past. Even if you wish to forget the experience, many times your subconscious remembers for you. The goal is not to forget them, but to be able to remember them without the pain.
- 2. TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR HAPPINESS**  
While it is true that you cannot undo the past, the good news is that you don't have to undo the past or relive the past by yourself or with any other person involved in the experience to get on with your life. Getting rid of your painful emotions does not require effort from anyone but you. In fact, freeing yourself from painful emotions does not require repentance or any other action from someone who may have hurt you; it simply requires a decision that you are no longer willing to let yourself hold on to the negative emotions that are preventing you from living your life the way you want.
- 3. MENTAL REASSURANCE**  
When you decide not to link your happiness to what someone else does or does not do, remember that you are not condoning, forgetting or minimizing what was done to you in your past, you are simply saying that it is of no consequence in your healing. Your healing is only up to you.
- 4. ASSESS YOUR NEEDS**  
When you realize that getting over your past is really not about anyone else, and instead, is really just a choice you make to move on, the time and energy you focused on the guilty party no serves a purpose or makes any sense. Your time and energy can now be directed toward those things that meet your present needs. To the degree your needs are met, you will enjoy a sense of balance in your day. When you achieve balance, your stress is minimal and so are the stress consequences discussed earlier.
- 5. ACCEPT YOUR FEELINGS**  
When you decide to take care of yourself by attending to your needs, the first thing you must confront is your feelings. Burying your feelings only delays the discomfort you will certainly feel the next time the memory of the painful experience is triggered. The more you process your feelings, the less feelings are available to be triggered along with the remembered experience. Eventually, you will be able to remember the experience without the associated pain.

## **6. PROCESS YOUR FEELINGS**

When your feelings are free to emerge, you may process them by writing in a journal, writing a letter you may never send, crying, using a punching bag, talking with a family member or friend, practicing meditation, praying, engaging in music, dance, exercise, - any activity that will help you work through the feelings versus escape from the feelings. Remember, time alone does not heal. It is what we do with time that makes the difference.

## **7. DIRECT YOUR FEELINGS WORK**

Many times pain from past experiences is triggered at impractical times for processing our feelings, such as at work in the middle of a meeting or presentation, etc...The purpose of dealing with your feelings is to minimize your stress and improve the quality of your day, not to make it worse. At times such as these, it is okay to suppress your feelings with the fervent promise to revisit them at a later time when you are alone and can process them freely.

## **8. FINDING REFUGE IN YOUR FAITH**

If you enjoy a faith relationship, ask for the strength and courage to meet the pain that is a part of your healing experience. Ask for guidance in making the right decisions in your healing process.

## **9. IDENTIFY YOUR SUPPORTS**

Make an effort to reach out to others to laugh, cry and share your feelings. Support outside the family in the form of friends, support groups, teachers, and clergy can be very helpful in processing your feelings and obtaining greater objectivity.

## **10. GET PROFESSIONAL HELP WHEN STUCK**

Sometimes, the emotions associated with painful experiences of our past may be overwhelming and too much to handle on our own or with identified supports. In such cases, contacting a professional therapist to guide and supervise your healing process is strongly advised.

## **11. A PARTING THOUGHT...**

You can move out of a victim position and take control of your life. You can create the kind of life you deserve with the simple will to do so and a commitment to do two things: 1) work through your feelings, and 2) address your physical, social, psychological and spiritual needs. **Why not start today, we're counting on you!**

