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RECOVERING FROM SEXUAL ABUSE: A CHECKLIST

**Find Out Where You Are in Your Healing Journey &
What Kind of Support You Most Need Right Now**

Do you feel like you have tried everything to get better, but nothing seems to be helping?

After more than 20 years of searching for answers and researching how to heal from sexual abuse, you can imagine that I've made every mistake in the book! I want to share with you what took me years to learn and help you to bypass the confusion and frustration, so you can stop spinning your wheels and navigate your way through each stage of recovery, and do so with ease and clarity.

At first we find ourselves in the victim stage, followed by our becoming a survivor of the abuse. My goal is to take you past the survivor stage into becoming a Beyond Survivor™.

By working through my checklist, you will gain an understanding of the three stages of recovery and determine what you need to focus on at each stage so that you can heal and move on with your life!

Let's get started!

TIP: *In any journey of recovery, there are different areas that you're going to be working on. As you complete this checklist you will get a picture of where you are at overall. It's perfectly natural to find that you are further along in some areas than others. Don't let this be a source of frustration but instead focus on the positives in each area.*

STAGE 1: VICTIM

The first thing I want you to know is that if you are in this first stage and identify as a victim, there's nothing bad or wrong about that. The term "victim" has a bit of a bad rap. But, in reality, this term captures a very important stage in the journey of recovery, and it's perfectly okay if you're in that stage!

At this stage in recovery, you may either be currently experiencing abuse or you may have not yet been able to acknowledge the abuse you've experienced. Dismissing, minimizing, and denying what happened, or is happening, is the name of the game at this stage.

I spent many years at this stage. I didn't want to talk about the abuse at all. I barely acknowledged it. I wanted to pretend that everything was okay. So, I buried my head in the sand and tried to be a "normal" little girl.

Eventually, I could no longer ignore the pain I was in and the truth that this pain originated from the sexual abuse I experienced.

I began my journey out of the victim stage by completing the following steps.

Take a moment to check off the steps you have completed.

CHECKLIST #1

- I have acknowledged that my current or past experience is abuse
- I have come to understand that I deserve safety, to be cared for, and that the abuse was a major violation
- I have willingly faced and acknowledged the hurt and the pain I am experiencing
- I have sought support in getting away from my abuser (should you still be in an abusive situation)
- I have stopped minimizing or dismissing and instead acknowledge my experience

THE BOTTOM LINE: *The #1 goal for this stage of recovery is to stop minimizing or dismissing the abuse and instead acknowledge your experience. It's not about fixing anything right now. Rather it's just about acknowledgement and recognition.*

If you were unable to check off some of the items on the previous page, then it's important to seek out support in order to move from the victim to survivor stage. Following is a list of different types of support I recommend for you at this stage.

TYPES OF SUPPORT

- ◆ Chat rooms and forums that provide a safe space to begin talking about your experience and receive comfort from fellow victims. (e.g. Pandora's Aquarium, pandys.org)
- ◆ Shelters and other organizations that help one to safely remove themselves from an abusive environment
- ◆ Newsletters, blogs, and videos that serve as both resources and encouragement

There are healthy, smart ways to crack that proverbial door open bit by bit so that you won't be overwhelmed, but I want you to know that you can manage and handle the feelings you encounter. It all starts with a willingness to say, "Okay, I'm willing to go in and take a look."

STAGE 2: SURVIVOR

I refer to this as the “fed up” stage. This stage is when you are fed up with feeling out of control, tired, sad, lonely and/or angry. You are fed up with unhealthy relationships. You are fed up with low self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy.

You will know you are ready to take this next step when you are ready to actively seek out opportunities to talk about the abuse and understand the connections between the past and the present. It’s no longer just simply about naming what happened. It’s about going a step further and saying, “This happened to me and therefore _____.”

In my own journey, there was a moment in my mid-20s when I realized I could no longer go on living with the hurt and pretending to be okay. Instead I acknowledged that I had been abused, it was impacting my life, and it was time to face it and get some help.

I realized that just being able to acknowledge what happened was no longer enough for me. Instead, I had to reflect upon and actively engage in facing and owning what happened by completing the following steps.

Take a moment to check off the steps you have completed.

CHECKLIST #2

- I have shared thoughts and feelings about the abuse with others and choose when to do so
- I have an increased awareness of my value and worth
- I recognize relationship tendencies that avoid and lack honesty and intimacy
- I recognize the connections between the abuse and the way I feel, think, and behave today

THE BOTTOM LINE: *The #1 goal of this stage is to be able to make connections between the abuse and the way you feel, think, and behave in the present day. It’s about piecing together how the abuse is affecting your present day experiences.*

If you were unable to check off some of the items on the previous page, it's important to seek out the following types of support in order that you may move from the survivor to beyond survivor stage.

TYPES OF SUPPORT

- ◆ Counseling or therapy
- ◆ Support groups (e.g., The Lamplighters, lamplighters.org; Adult Survivors of Child Abuse, rachelgrantcoaching.com/asca)
- ◆ Books including Be Your Own Hero Workbook, by Angela Shelton
- ◆ Visit bit.ly/recoveryresources for a more complete list

At this stage in recovery it is most important that you understand that you will have good days and bad days. Of the three stages, this stage often feels the most like a roller coaster—going from the highs of new insights and a sense of breaking free, to the lows of learning of additional life issues to be worked on.

It is important to be gentle with yourself during this period, and to utilize and lean on your support system. I want to encourage you to appreciate and celebrate each forward step!

I really want to emphasize that last point of celebration. I remember thinking at this stage, "My god! There are so many things I've got to figure out. The list is overwhelming!" But one thing I've really come to know is that, especially at this stage, you are going to be talking a lot about the past, the pain, and may be finally feeling things that you've shoved away for a very long time.

And yes, it sucks.

But you are also going to be gaining new insights, hopefully trying to do things a bit differently, and likely succeeding from time to time. So please don't forget to celebrate the new insights, attitudes, strategies, and choices that you are making at this stage. They are the building blocks of your recovery.

We need little moments of reinforcement to help us along at this stage. It can be as simple an act as taking a walk, dancing to your favorite song, or celebrating with a friend. However you may choose to honor your journey, just remember it is important to do so.

STAGE 3: BEYOND SURVIVOR™

I often call this the “enough is enough” stage. As a survivor, you will have gained a sense of empowerment by no longer seeing yourself as a victim. You will have done amazing work to reach a place where you are able to acknowledge the abuse and accept and exist with this knowledge.

However, this recognition and sense of empowerment is not enough to truly be free. You are now ready to do something about it – you are clear that’s it’s time for your life to be about something more than just recovery.

At this stage, you will be willing and ready – even if scared or nervous – to actively challenge the patterns of thought and behavior you identified during the survivor stage that have been holding you back.

For me, this was the work I did through my late 20s in order to reach the place where I am today: full of joy, able to have healthy, connected relationships, enjoying my life, and full of energy and purpose.

Now, it’s your turn to check in with yourself.

CHECKLIST #3

- I have let go of shame, guilt, and any belief that the abuse was my fault
- I have released my anger, loneliness, and fear of abandonment
- I have developed strong communication skills and self-confidence
- I have learned how to trust again, how to set boundaries, and how to enjoy healthy relationships
- I have reconnected with my genuine self and have left the pain of the past behind

THE BOTTOM LINE: *The #1 goal of this stage is to reconnect with your genuine, authentic self so that you can go out into the world and just be yourself, live your life to the fullest, and no longer be impacted by the abuse on a daily basis.*

If you were unable to check off some of the items on the previous page, then it's important to seek out the following types of support in order to reach this final stage of recovery.

TYPES OF SUPPORT

- ◆ Workshops and support groups that focus on skills rather than reflection
- ◆ [Sexual abuse recovery coaching](#)
- ◆ Workbooks such as *Beyond Surviving: The Final Stage in Recovery from Sexual Abuse*
- ◆ Solution focused or cognitive behavioral therapy (does not apply to everyone)

I encourage you to think about the three stages I've outlined as a roadmap for your healing journey.

One way to think about them is to imagine that you are at the center of a circle and around you are layers that have been put there because of the abuse. For example, the "I'm always going to be a victim layer", the "I'm not good enough layer" the "nobody will love me layer", etc.



VICTIM

You are not ready to even acknowledge that those layers exist



SURVIVOR

You are interested in acknowledging and understanding what those layers are all about



BEYOND SURVIVOR™

You are ready to cut away, remove those layers

I spent so many years of my life feeling frustrated and confused; not knowing for sure if what I was doing was actually making a difference. I started to feel like I was just going to be stuck feeling miserable and broken for the rest of my life.

Looking back, not being able to clearly define where I was in my journey and not knowing what kind of support would actually be most helpful for me caused me to spend far more time in recovery than necessary. I don't want that to happen for you.

By identifying which stage of recovery you are currently in, you will be better able to focus your recovery work and seek out the types of support that will serve you best.

Instead of becoming disheartened and confused, you can get the help you need when you need it. I look forward celebrating you as another Beyond Survivor!