Dear Grieving Family,

We at the G.A.P. Network are so very sorry to hear about your loss. Please know that you have our deepest sympathy and our hearts are truly saddened that your loved one has passed away. As people who have suffered the loss of a family member due to a drug overdose, we wish to send our condolences to you and your family.

We are part of an organization called the G.A.P. Network which stands for Grief, Action and Advocacy to Prevention. Our members are individuals and family groups who provide a voice for the thousands of Ohio individuals and families impacted by substance use, especially the opiate and heroin epidemic. The G.A.P. Network is a program of Drug Free Action Alliance which is a statewide nonprofit charitable organization founded in 1987.

This letter is to let you know that you are not alone. Last year, there were more than 2,000 individuals who lost their lives due to unintentional drug overdose. And yet, despite the statistics, we know that all too often family members feel they are very much alone. The stigma of addiction can add a new layer of emotions such as guilt, judgment and anger to the already difficult grieving process. Many families feel overwhelmed trying to find answers as to how this happened to their loved one.

We hope that this packet of information can provide you with some valuable resources to help with both grief and a deeper understanding of addiction. And most importantly, we want you to know that we are here to offer emotional support. Our phone number and email are on the enclosed business card and we invite you to reach out to us if you wish to talk. We have walked in your path and know all too well the devastation of losing a family member to the disease of addiction.

With Our Deepest Sympathy,

The G.A.P. Network Advisory Council
What is the G.A.P. Network?

Moving from grief to action through advocacy for prevention. Supporting individuals; providing a voice for families; mobilizing communities. We’re bridging the gap.

The G.A.P. Network of advocacy groups was formed in response to a public outcry against prescription medication abuse and the heroin epidemic. Members are family engagement advocacy groups, which provide a voice for the thousands of Ohioans impacted by substance abuse - especially the opiate epidemic. The G.A.P. Network provides information, education, advocacy, networking and support to enhance your local efforts.

Our Mission

To provide support to families impacted by addiction and take action to create community change.

Drug overdoses are now the leading cause of injury death in Ohio. Prescription medication abuse - especially opiate pain killers - has resulted in addiction, increased crime and death. Heroin use is on the rise.

Advocacy groups provide support for those coping with active addiction and loss. Groups play a critical role in changing policies by making it more difficult to obtain illegal prescriptions, improved the reporting system of controlled substances, increased the number of Prescription Drug drop boxes for unused and outdated medications and shut down pill mills.

“So many other coalitions are targeted toward treatment. The G.A.P. Network is the best at providing guidance on advocacy.”

- Danielle Smoot
Cole’s Warriors
Our Approach

The G.A.P. Network offers training, technical support and grant opportunities. We can provide technical assistance, information, education, and resources to help your local efforts. Prevention is effective and we can help you make changes in your community through effective strategies.

Advocacy is Action

Advocacy helps sway public opinion, bolsters community support, creates change. Every advocacy group faces a set of unique challenges within its own community. That’s why the G.A.P. Network provides local support, training, resources, networking opportunities and advocacy guidance.

We’re Proud of Your Efforts

If you have advocacy challenges or would like help and support, contact us:

The G.A.P. Network of Drug Free Action Alliance
6155 Huntley Rd. Suite H
Columbus, OH 43229
614-540-9985

“Our biggest challenge is a lack of understanding that there is a problem with prescription medication abuse. We have to find ways to educate the community.”

-Amy Seidle
Brian’s Desire/Pickaway County

“The greatest benefit of being part of an advocacy network is that we are recognized as an established group and not just a bunch of angry or hurt parents.”

-Kathy Loos
SOLACE of Lorain County
Grief Resource List

This resource list was developed by individuals who lost a loved one due to drug overdose. “We are a community not by choice, but by circumstance, we reach out to each other in support and understanding, with tolerance and patience. We are a community, we do not grieve alone.”

–The Grief Toolbox

Books:

Beyond Tears: Living After Losing a Child by Ellen Mitchell - This book follows nine mothers who have each lost a child.

To get a better understanding about the opiate-heroin epidemic is Sam Quinones’ book that came out in 2015 called Dreamland. http://www.samquinones.com/books/dreamland/

Tony Cooke: Life After Death, Rediscovering Life After the Loss of a Loved One (It is a Christian book)

Rare Bird: A Memoir of Loss and Love by Anna Whiston-Donaldson- This is a New York Times Bestseller on grief.

On line resources:

http://addictsmom.com/

http://www.compassionatefriends.org/home.aspx

http://www.drug-addiction-help-now.org/

http://www.drugfree.org/

http://grasphelp.org/

http://www.griefnet.org/resources/parents.html

We hope all the resources in this list are helpful. If you would like to add resources please contact contact@drugfreeactionalliance.org. We thank the members of the GAP Network Advisory Council for providing the resources listed above.
We hope all the resources in this list are helpful. If you would like to add resources please contact contact@drugfreeactionalliance.org.

We thank the members of the GAP Network Advisory Council for providing the resources listed above.

http://www.learn2cope.org/
http://www.myusara.com/
http://www.theafterloss.com/
http://theherofoundation.org/#/home

http://www.whatsyourgrief.com/ - Offers an information booklet titled *Surviving the grief of an overdose death*.


**Support Groups:**

https://www.facebook.com/groups/TAPUnited.Survivors.of.Loss/

http://www.compassionatefriends.org/Find_Support/Online-Community/Online_Support.aspx

http://www.griefshare.org/findagroup - This is a worldwide organization offering a 12 week program in small group settings for grief. It has a spiritual basis but is not sponsored by any one church. All are welcome weather they are active with their faith or not. The website directs people to plug in their zip code to find a group close to them. Columbus has several groups at any given time meeting a various churches.

Cornerstone of hope- offers support groups quarterly throughout the year. All groups are open to all, regardless of ethnic, cultural and faith backgrounds. They are led by professionally trained and experienced facilitators. Each meeting is two hours long and includes a light dinner. Support groups are offered free of cost to participants.
Grief

Grief is a normal natural reaction to some kind of loss. It is an emotional response usually caused by an ending of something or a change in something. That something is familiar, comfortable and desired.

The experience of grief is different for each of us. It is personal. It is a difficult process and can be more or less difficult depending on circumstances. Grief often involves a variety of emotions including anger, sadness, fear, loneliness, guilt, regret, depression, emptiness, confusion, anxiety and despair.

It is not uncommon to experience a mixture of these and other emotions. You may feel like you are on a roller coaster. Your emotions can quickly change from one moment to the next.

The challenge is to accept our emotions and give ourselves permission to feel whatever emotions arise. Accept that this is part of the grieving process. Don’t judge yourself or anyone else for how they feel. Try to share your feelings – it’s good to talk about them.

Grief is painful. But we cannot avoid it. We can’t go over, under or around it. The only way is directly through it.

Many turn to short-term fixes: alcohol, drugs, over eating, sleeping, shopping, hoarding, etc. These only tend to interfere with the healthy resolution of grief and may become just another problem.

Grief takes time. It takes as long as it takes.

Many experts have proposed that there is a predictable progression through stages of grief. The most recognized of these is that of Elizabeth Kubler Ross. She proposed that we move through five stages: denial, anger, depression, bargaining and acceptance.

No one moves through these in some orderly fashion, finishing one and moving to the next. Instead, we may go back and forth, repeating one or more stage before we move on.
Grief and Loss

Loss is an inevitable part of life, and grief is a natural part of the healing process. Feelings of loss are personal, and only you know what is significant to you. Dealing with a significant loss can be one of the most difficult times in a person’s life.

The length of the grief process is different for everyone. There is no schedule for grief. Although it can be quite painful at times, the grief process should not be rushed. It is important to be patient with yourself as you experience your unique reactions to the loss. With time and support, things generally do get better. However, it is normal for significant dates, holidays, or other reminders to trigger feelings related to the loss. Taking care of yourself, seeking support, and acknowledging your feelings during these times are ways that can help you cope.

Common Grief Reactions:

- Feeling empty and numb, as if you are in a state of shock
- Physical responses such as nausea, trouble breathing, crying, confusion, lack of energy, dry mouth, or changes in sleeping and eating patterns
- Anger at a situation, a person or in general
- Guilt about what you did or did not do
- Withdrawal from family, friends and common activities
- Difficulty focusing, working or making decisions
- Questions about faith or spirituality

If you are worried about any of the feelings or reactions you are having, it is a good idea to talk to a person who is close to you or a professional. The most important thing to remember is that grief is a process, and it takes time.
Coping With Grief

As you grieve, it is helpful to find activities that help you heal. Each one of us has an individual style of coping with painful experiences. The following suggestions may help you manage your feelings of grief.

- Share your thoughts, feelings and memories with others. Find those that are comfortable listening to you talk about it and let them know how it helps you. Consider writing in a journal if you are not ready to talk.
- Accept support. Let your family and friends know what you need and what you find helpful.
- Get physical exercise. It can help you sleep better, lowers your risk of depression, and can boost your immune system.
- Eat healthy, good foods.
- Use religion, philosophy, poetry, music, art, gardening, and walks in nature to gain relief and understanding. All religions recognize that grievers need special help, even if you have not been attending regularly. You won’t be turned away.
- Have a little fun. Recognize that laughter doesn’t mean you are being disrespectful. Don’t underestimate the effects of small pleasures.
- Postpone major decisions, such as selling your home or changing jobs.
- Allow time to grieve. Give yourself permission to backslide. Be patient with yourself. Read about grief so that you can see what you are feeling is normal.
- Resist the temptation to use alcohol or drugs to numb your pain. These can interfere with the grieving process by delaying it or covering it up.
- Know that seeking professional help doesn’t mean you are weak, inadequate or crazy. Consider getting professional help if you feel overwhelmed, hopeless, or helpless.
- Respect your spouse’s timetable and method of grieving.
- Prepare for the holidays and anniversaries. Even when you have moved forward in your grief, these dates may bring back some painful feelings. Make plans to be with friends and family members with whom you feel comfortable. This is also the perfect time to check in with other family members about how they’re doing with their grief and share mutual support.

You cannot prevent, cure or skip the grieving process. The only way out is participating in the journey. Some day the pain will lessen, leaving you with cherished memories of your loved one.

The G.A.P. Network – a program of Drug Free Action Alliance
6155 Huntley Road, Suite H
Columbus, Ohio 43229
Dealing with Survivor Guilt

When a loved one dies, feelings of guilt can be felt as there may be a tendency to blame ourselves for something we did or didn’t do that may have contributed to the death or things that were done or not done or not said. This is common. Guilt is a strong emotion.

Symptoms of survivor guilt are often similar to those of anxiety and depression. They may be experienced as mild or severe and can include the following:
- Nightmares
- Sleeplessness
- Loss of motivation
- Flashbacks
- Reduction in or disinterest in self care
- Increase in irritability or agitation

If guilt is excessive or prolonged seek professional help to work through your symptoms.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is an essential tool in our efforts to move forward in our grieving process.

Forgiveness is a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward another who has harmed you. It can bring peace of mind and frees you from corrosive anger.

Forgiveness involves letting go of deeply held negative feelings. It allows us to recognize our pain without letting that pain define us.

According to research, forgiveness:
- Makes us happier
- Improves our health
- Sustains relationships
- Helps resolve conflict
- Boosts kindness and connectedness
- Helps us heal
- Helps reduce trauma

Forgiveness is a process of releasing ourselves from a painful burden.
**Additional Resources**

**Information needed for when death occurs:**

Check list for survivors:

Funeral Consumers Alliance of Central Ohio [http://www.funeralsohio.org/documents.shtml](http://www.funeralsohio.org/documents.shtml)

Can’t afford a funeral information [https://www.funerals.org/frequently-asked-questions/2620-cantafford](https://www.funerals.org/frequently-asked-questions/2620-cantafford)

**Legal Resources**


Community Legal Aid NE Ohio [http://www.communitylegalaid.org/](http://www.communitylegalaid.org/)

The Legal Aid Society of Columbus [http://www.columbuslegalaid.org/](http://www.columbuslegalaid.org/)

Southeastern Ohio Legal Services [http://www.seols.org/](http://www.seols.org/)

Legal Aid of Western Ohio, Inc [http://www.lawolaw.org/](http://www.lawolaw.org/)

Works Cited


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For additional copies of this document, please call SAMHSA’s National Mental Health Information Center at 1-800-789-2647.

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SMA-3717
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Foreword

It contains information, ideas, and strategies that people from all over the country have found to be helpful in relieving and preventing troubling feelings and symptoms. The information in this booklet can be used safely along with your other health care treatment.

You may want to read through this booklet at least once before you begin working on developing your own action plans for prevention and recovery. This can help enhance your understanding of the entire process. Then you can go back to work on each section. You may want to do this slowly, working on a portion of it and then putting it aside and coming back to it at another time.

After you have finished developing your plan, you may want to review and revise it on a regular basis as you learn new things about yourself and ways you can help yourself to feel better.

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Introduction

This is a serious issue. This booklet is just an introduction—a starting point that may give you the courage to take action. It is not meant to be a treatment program. The ideas and strategies are not intended to replace treatment you are currently receiving.

You may have had one or many very upsetting, frightening, or traumatic things happen to you in your life, or that threatened or hurt something you love—even your community. When these kinds of things happen, you may not “get over” them quickly. In fact, you may feel the effects of these traumas for many years, even for the rest of your life. Sometimes you don’t even notice effects right after the trauma happens. Years later you may begin having thoughts, nightmares, and other disturbing symptoms. You may develop these symptoms and not even remember the traumatic thing or things that once happened to you.

For many years, the traumatic things that happened to people were overlooked as a possible cause of frightening, distressing, and sometimes disabling emotional symptoms such as depression, anxiety, phobias, delusions, flashbacks, and being out of touch with reality. In recent years, many researchers and health care providers have become convinced of the connection between trauma and these symptoms. They are developing new treatment programs and revising old ones to better meet the needs of people who have had traumatic experiences.

This booklet can help you to know if traumatic experiences in your life may be causing some or all of the difficult symptoms you are experiencing. It may give you some guidance in working to relieve these symptoms and share with you some simple and safe things you can do to help yourself heal from the effects of trauma.

Some examples of traumatic experiences that may be causing your symptoms include —

- physical, emotional, or sexual abuse
- neglect
- war experiences
- outbursts of temper and rage
Some things that may be very traumatic to one person hardly seem to bother another person. If something bothers you a lot and it doesn’t bother someone else, it doesn’t mean there is something wrong with you. People respond to experiences differently.

Do you feel that traumatic things that happened to you may be causing some or all of your distressing and disabling emotional symptoms? Examples of symptoms that may be caused by trauma include —

- anxiety
- insomnia
- agitation
- irritability or rage
- flashbacks or intrusive memories
- feeling disconnected from the world
- unrest in certain situations
- being “shut down”
- being very passive
- feeling depressed
- eating problems
- needing to do certain things over and over
- unusual fears
- impatience
- always having to have things a certain way
- doing strange or risky things
- having a hard time concentrating
- wanting to hurt yourself
- being unable to trust anyone
- feeling unlikable
- feeling unsafe
- using harmful substances
- keeping to yourself
- overworking

Perhaps you have been told that you have a psychiatric or mental illness like depression, bipolar disorder or manic depression, schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder, obsessive—compulsive disorder, dissociative disorder, an eating disorder, or an anxiety disorder. The ways you can help yourself handle these symptoms and the things your health care providers suggest as treatment may be helpful whether your symptoms are caused by trauma or by a psychiatric illness.

**Help From Health Care Providers, Counselors and Groups**

You may decide to reach out to health care providers for assistance in relieving the effects of trauma. This is a good idea. The effects of trauma, even trauma that happened many years ago, can affect your health. You may have an illness that needs treatment. In addition, your health care provider may suggest that you take medications or certain food supplements to relieve your symptoms. Many people find that getting this kind of health care support gives them the relief and energy they need to work on other aspects of healing. To find health care providers in your community who have expertise in addressing issues related to trauma, contact your local mental health agency, hospital, or crisis service.
If you possibly can, work with a counselor or in a special program designed for people who have been trauma-
tized. A counselor or people leading the program may refer you to a group. These groups can be very helpful. 
However, keep in mind that you need to decide for yourself what you are going to do, and how and when you 
are going to do it. You must be in charge of your recovery in every way.

Wherever you go for help, the program or treatment should include the following:

Empowerment—You must be in charge of your healing in every way to counteract the effects of the trauma 
where all control was taken away from you.

Validation—You need others to listen to you, to validate the importance of what happened to you, to bear wit-
ness, and to understand the role of this trauma in your life.

Connection—Trauma makes you feel very alone. As part of your healing, you need to reconnect with others. 
This connection may be part of your treatment.

If you feel the cause of your symptoms is related to trauma in your life, you will want to be careful about your 
treatment and in making decisions about other areas of your life. The following guidelines will help you decide 
how to help yourself feel better.

Have hope. It is important that you know that you can and will feel better. In the past you may have thought 
you would never feel better—that the horrible symptoms you experience would go on for the rest of your life. 
Many people who have experienced the same symptoms that you are experiencing are now feeling much bet-
ter.

They have gone on to make their lives the way they want them to be and to do the things they want to do.

Take personal responsibility. When you have been traumatized, you lose control of your life. You may feel 
as though you still don’t have any control over your life. You begin to take back that control by being in charge 
of every aspect of your life. Others, including your spouse, family members, friends, and health care profes-
ionals will try to tell you what to do. Before you do what they suggest, think about it carefully. Do you feel that 
it is the best thing for you to do right now? If not, do not do it. You can follow others advice, but be aware that 
you are choosing to do so. It is important that you make decisions about your own life. You are responsible for 
your own behavior. Being traumatized is not an acceptable excuse for behavior that hurts you or hurts others.

Talk to one or more people about what happened to you. Telling others about the trauma is an important 
part of healing the effects of trauma. Make sure the person or people you decide to tell are safe people, people 
who would not hurt you, and who understand that what happened to you is serious. They should know, or you 
could tell them, that describing what happened to you over and over is an important part of the healing pro-
cess. Don’t tell a person who responds with statements that invalidate your experience, like “That wasn’t so 
bad.” “You should just forget about it,” “Forgive and forget,” or “You think that’s bad, let me tell you what hap-
pened to me.” They don’t understand. In connecting with others, avoid spending all your time talking about your 
traumatic experiences. Spend time listening to others and sharing positive life experiences, like going to mov-
ies or watching a ball game together. You will know when you have described your trauma enough, because 
you won’t feel like doing it anymore.

Develop a close relationship with another person. You may not feel close to or trust anyone. This may be 
a result of your traumatic experiences. Part of healing means trusting people again. Think about the person 
in your life that you like best. Invite them to do something fun with you. If that feels good, make a plan to do 
something else together at another time—maybe the following week. Keep doing this until you feel close to this 
person. Then, without giving up on that person, start developing a close relationship with another person. Keep 
doing this until you have close relationships with at least five people. Support groups and peer support centers 
are good places to meet people.
There are many things that happen every day that can cause you to feel ill, uncomfortable, upset, anxious, or irritated. You will want to do things to help yourself feel better as quickly as possible, without doing anything that has negative consequences, for example, drinking, committing crimes, hurting yourself, risking your life, or eating lots of junk food.

- **Read through the following list.** Check off the ideas that appeal to you and give each of them a try when you need to help yourself feel better. Make a list of the ones you find to be most useful, along with those you have successfully used in the past, and hang the list in a prominent place—like on your refrigerator door—as a reminder at times when you need to comfort yourself. Use these techniques whenever you are having a hard time or as a special treat to yourself.

- **Do something fun or creative,** something you really enjoy, like crafts, needlework, painting, drawing, woodworking, making a sculpture, reading fiction, comics, mystery novels, or inspirational writings, doing crossword or jigsaw puzzles, playing a game, taking some photographs, going fishing, going to a movie or other community event, or gardening.

- **Get some exercise.** Exercise is a great way to help yourself feel better while improving your overall stamina and health. The right exercise can even be fun.

- **Write something.** Writing can help you feel better. You can keep lists, record dreams, respond to questions, and explore your feelings. All ways are correct. Don't worry about how well you write. It's not important. It is only for you. Writing about the trauma or traumatic events also helps a lot. It allows you to safely process the emotions you are experiencing. It tells your mind that you are taking care of the situation and helps to relieve the difficult symptoms you may be experiencing. Keep your writings in a safe place where others cannot read them. Share them only with people you feel comfortable with. You may even want to write a letter to the person or people who have treated you badly, telling them how it affected you, and not send the letter.

- **Use your spiritual resources.** Spiritual resources and making use of these resources varies from person to person. For some people it means praying, going to church, or reaching out to a member of the clergy. For others it is meditating or reading affirmations and other kinds of inspirational materials. It may include rituals and ceremonies—whatever feels right to you. Spiritual work does not necessarily occur within the bounds of an organized religion. Remember, you can be spiritual without being religious.

- **Do something routine.** When you don't feel well, it helps to do something “normal”—the kind of thing you do every day or often, things that are part of your routine like taking a shower, washing your hair, making yourself a sandwich, calling a friend or family member, making your bed, walking the dog, or getting gas in the car.

- **Wear something that makes you feel good.** Everybody has certain clothes or jewelry that they enjoy wearing. These are the things to wear when you need to comfort yourself.

- **Get some little things done.** It always helps you feel better if you accomplish something, even if it is a very small thing. Think of some easy things to do that don't take much time. Then do them. Here are some ideas: clean out one drawer, put five pictures in a photo album, dust a book case, read a page in a favorite book, do a load of laundry, cook yourself something healthful, send someone a card.

- **Learn something new.** Think about a topic that you are interested in but have never explored. Find some information on it in the library. Check it out on the Internet. Go to a class. Look at something in a new way. Read a favorite saying, poem, or piece of scripture, and see if you can find new meaning in it.
Do a reality check. Checking in on what is really going on rather than responding to your initial “gut reaction” can be very helpful. For instance, if you come in the house and loud music is playing, it may trigger the thinking that someone is playing the music just to annoy you. The initial reaction is to get really angry with them. That would make both of you feel awful. A reality check gives the person playing the loud music a chance to look at what is really going on. Perhaps the person playing the music thought you wouldn’t be in until later and took advantage of the opportunity to play loud music. If you would call upstairs and ask him to turn down the music so you could rest, he probably would say, “Sure!” It helps if you can stop yourself from jumping to conclusions before you check the facts.

Be present in the moment. This is often referred to as mindfulness. Many of us spend so much time focusing on the future or thinking about the past that we miss out on fully experiencing what is going on in the present. Making a conscious effort to focus your attention on what you are doing right now and what is happening around you can help you feel better. Look around at nature. Feel the weather. Look at the sky when it is filled with stars.

Stare at something pretty or something that has special meaning for you. Stop what you are doing and take a long, close look at a flower, a leaf, a plant, the sky, a work of art, a souvenir from an adventure, a picture of a loved one, or a picture of yourself. Notice how much better you feel after doing this.

Play with children in your family or with a pet. Romping in the grass with a dog, petting a kitten, reading a story to a child, rocking a baby, and similar activities have a calming effect which translates into feeling better.

Do a relaxation exercise. There are many good books available that describe relaxation exercises. Try them to discover which ones you prefer. Practice them daily. Use them whenever you need to help yourself feel better. Relaxation tapes which feature relaxing music or nature sounds are available. Just listening for 10 minutes can help you feel better.

Take a warm bath. This may sound simplistic, but it helps. If you are lucky enough to have access to a Jacuzzi or hot tub, it’s even better. Warm water is relaxing and healing.

Expose yourself to something that smells good to you. Many people have discovered fragrances that help them feel good. Sometimes a bouquet of fragrant flowers or the smell of fresh baked bread will help you feel better.

Listen to music. Pay attention to your sense of hearing by pampering yourself with delightful music you really enjoy. Libraries often have records and tapes available for loan. If you enjoy music, make it an essential part of every day.

Make music. Making music is also a good way to help yourself feel better. Drums and other kinds of musical instruments are popular ways of relieving tension and increasing well-being. Perhaps you have an instrument that you enjoy playing, like a harmonica, kazoo, penny whistle, or guitar.

Sing. Singing helps. It fills your lungs with fresh air and makes you feel better. Sing to yourself. Sing at the top of your lungs. Sing when you are driving your car. Sing when you are in the shower. Sing for the fun of it. Sing along with favorite records, tapes, compact discs, or the radio. Sing the favorite songs you remember from your childhood.

Perhaps you can think of some other things you could do that would help you feel better.
The Healing Journey

Begin your healing journey by thinking about how it is you would like to feel. Write it down or tell someone else. In order to promote your own healing, you may want to work on one or several of the following issues that you know would help you to feel better.

- Learn to know and appreciate your body. Your body is a miracle. Focus on different parts of your body and how they feel. Think about what that part of your body does for you. Go to your library and review books that teach you about your body and how it works.

- Set boundaries and limits that feel right to you. In all relationships you have the right to define your own limits and boundaries so that you feel comfortable and safe. Say "no" to anything you don't want. For instance, if someone calls you five times a day, you have the right to ask them to call you less often, or even not to call you at all. If someone comes to your home when you don't want them to be there, you have the right to ask them to leave. Think about what your boundaries are. They may differ from person to person. You may enjoy it a lot when your sister comes to visit, but you may not want a visit from your brother or a cousin. You may not want anyone to call you on the phone after 10 p.m. Expect and insist that others respect your boundaries.

- Learn to be a good advocate for yourself. Ask for what you want and deserve. Work toward getting what you want and need for yourself. If you want to get more education for yourself so you can do work that you enjoy, find out about available programs, and do what it is you need to do to meet your goal. If you want your physician to help you find the cause of physical problems, insist that he or she do so, or refer you to someone else. When you are making important decisions about your life, like getting or staying married, going back to school, or parenting a child, be sure the decision you make is really in your best interest.

- Build your self-esteem. You are a very special and wonderful person. You deserve all the best things that life has to offer. Remind yourself of this over and over again. Go to the library and review books on building your self-esteem. Do some of the suggested activities.

- Develop a list of activities that help you feel better (refer to the list in the section “Things you can do to help yourself feel better”). Do some of these activities every day. Spend more time doing these activities when you are feeling badly.

- Every family develops certain patterns or ways of thinking about and doing things. Those things you learn in your family as a child will often influence you as an adult—sometimes making your life more difficult and getting in the way of meeting your personal goals. Think about the ways of thinking and doing things that guide you in your life. Ask yourself if they are patterns, and if you need to change them to make your life the way you want it to be. For example, in your family you may have been taught that you never tell anyone certain family secrets. In fact, it may be very important to share some family secrets with trusted friends or health care providers. Or you may have been taught that you must always do what certain members of your family want you to do. As an adult, it is important that you figure out for yourself what it is you want to do. In effect you can become your own loving parent.

- Work to establish harmony with your family or the people you live with. Plan fun and interesting activities with them. Listen to them without being critical.

- Work on learning to communicate with others so that they can easily understand what you mean. When talking with another person about your feelings, use “I” statements, like “I feel sad” or “I feel upset” rather than accusing the other person. You may want to practice good communication with a friend. Ask your friend to give you feedback on how you can be more easily understood.
You may have lots of negative thoughts about yourself and your life. Work on changing these negative thoughts to positive ones. The more you think positive thoughts the better you will feel. For instance, you may always think, “Nobody likes me.” When you think that thought, replace it with a thought like, “I have many friends.” If you often think that you will never feel better, replace that thought with the thought, “Every day I am feeling better and better.”

Develop an action plan for prevention and recovery. This is a simple plan that helps you stay well and respond to upsetting symptoms and events in ways that will keep you feeling well.

Using the activities in the section “Things you can do to help yourself feel better,” make lists of things that will help you keep yourself well and will help you to feel better when you are not feeling well. Include lists:

- to remind yourself of things you need to do every day - like getting a half hour of exercise and eating three healthy meals - and also those things that you may not need to do every day, but if you miss them they will cause stress in your life, for example, buying food, paying bills, or cleaning your home;
- of events or situations that may make you feel worse if they come up, like a fight with a family member, health care provider, or social worker, getting a big bill, or loss of something important to you. Then list things to do (relax, talk to a friend, play your guitar) if these things happen so you won’t start feeling badly;
- of early warning signs that indicate you are starting to feel worse - like always feeling tired, sleeping too much, overeating, dropping things, and losing things. Then list things to do (get more rest, take some time off, arrange an appointment with your counselor, cut back on caffeine) to help yourself feel better;
- of signs that things are getting much worse, like you are feeling very depressed, you can’t get out of bed in the morning, or you feel negative about everything. Then list things to do that will help you feel better quickly (get someone to stay with you, spend extra time doing things you enjoy, contact your doctor); and
- of information that can be used by others if you become unable to take care of yourself or keep yourself safe, such as signs that indicate you need their help, who you want to help you (give copies of this list to each of these people), the names of your doctor, counselor and pharmacist, all prescriptions and over-the-counter medications, things that others can do that would help you feel better or keep you safe, and things you do not want others to do or that might make you feel worse.

Barriers to Healing

Are there any things you are doing that are getting in the way of your healing, such as alcohol or drug abuse, being in abusive or unsupportive relationships, self-destructive behaviors such as blaming and shaming yourself, and not taking good care of yourself? Think about the possible negative consequences of these behaviors. For instance, if you get drunk, you might lose control of yourself and the situation and be taken advantage of. If you overeat, the negative consequences might be weight gain, poor body image, and poor health. You may want to work on changing these behaviors by using self-help books, working with a counselor, joining a support group, or attending a 12-step program.

Moving Forward on Your Healing Journey

If you are now about to begin working on recovering from the effects of trauma, or if you have already begun this work and are planning to continue making some changes based on what you have learned, you will need courage and persistence along the way. You may experience setbacks. From time to time you may get so dis-
couraged that you feel like you want to give up. This happens to everyone. Notice how far you’ve come. Appreciate even a little progress. Do something nice for yourself and continue your efforts. You deserve an enjoyable life.

Always keep in mind that there are many people, even famous people, who have had traumatic things happen to them. They have worked to relieve the symptoms of this trauma and have gone on to lead happy and rewarding lives. You can too.

Further Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
Center for Mental Health Services
Web site: www.samhsa.gov

SAMHSA’s National Mental Health Information Center
P.O. Box 42557
Washington, D.C. 20015
1 (800) 789-2647 (voice)
Web site: www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov

Consumer Organization and Networking Technical Assistance Center (CONTAC)
P.O. Box 11000
Charleston, WV 25339
1 (888) 825-TECH (8324)
(304) 346-9992 (fax)
Web site: www.contac.org

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)
(formerly the National Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association)
730 N. Franklin Street, Suite 501
Chicago, IL 60610-3526
(800) 826-3632
Web site: www.dbsalliance.org

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)
(Special Support Center)
Colonial Place Three
2107 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201-3042
(703) 524-7600
Web site: www.nami.org

National Empowerment Center
599 Canal Street, 5 East
Lawrence, MA 01840
1-800-power2u
(800)TDD-POWER (TDD)
(978)681-6426 (fax)
Web site: www.power2u.org
Resources listed in this document do not constitute an endorsement by CMHS/SAMHSA/HHS, nor are these resources exhaustive. Nothing is implied by an organization not being referenced.

You could also contact your state consumer advocacy network/agency. Find it by looking under Mental Health in the Yellow Pages of your phone book.