My Little Book of Coping Methods

The PEACH Diaries

The Peach Diaries teamed up with Roisin Ross, an Independent Sexual Violence Advisor at Solace Women's Aid to design this booklet, helping survivors of sexual and domestic violence heal from their experiences and work through their trauma.

Abuse impacts on us in many different ways; this book is full of coping methods for you to try in times of need. The techniques in this book can be used as small, everyday steps to help you heal from the abuse you experienced.

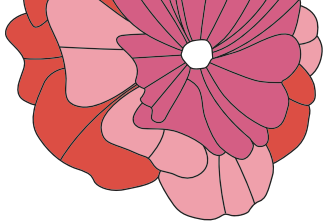
What happened to you does not define you; it is in the past.

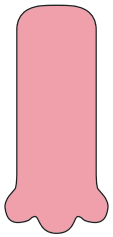
This is your time to heal.

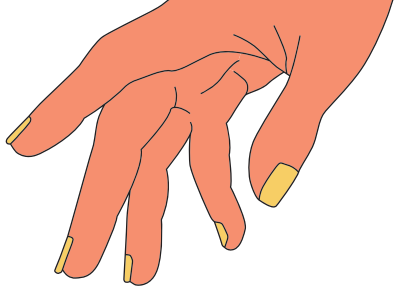
www.thepeachdiaries.co.uk

Healing takes courage, and we all have courage, even if we have to dig a little to find it.'

– Tori Amen





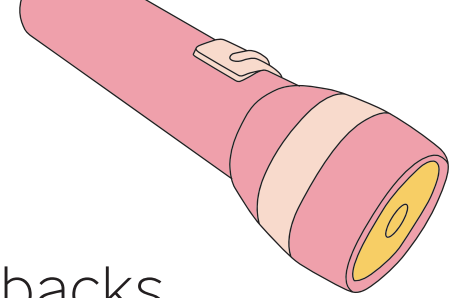


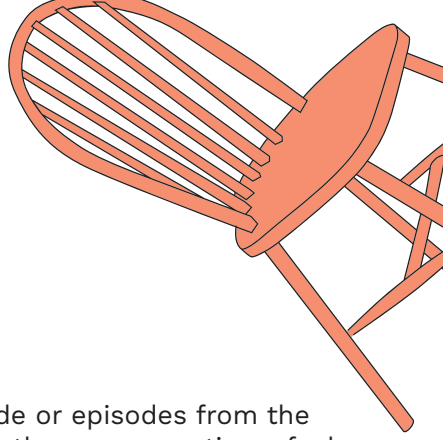
My Triggers

A ‘trigger’ is something that reminds you of an experience or emotion that is painful, frightening, dangerous or upsetting. A trigger can be a smell, a taste, a sensation, a word or even seeing something that relates to a traumatic event.

Sometimes it can help us if we know what our triggers are. Take some time to work out your triggers and, if you feel comfortable doing so, write them below:

If you are ever in need, you can always call the National Domestic Violence Helpline on **0808 2000 247** or the Samaritans on **116 123**.





Flashbacks

Flashbacks are sudden memories of an episode or episodes from the past. These can be very powerful and intense; they can sometimes feel like you are almost ‘reliving’ the experience. We can become unable to distinguish between the memory and the present time.

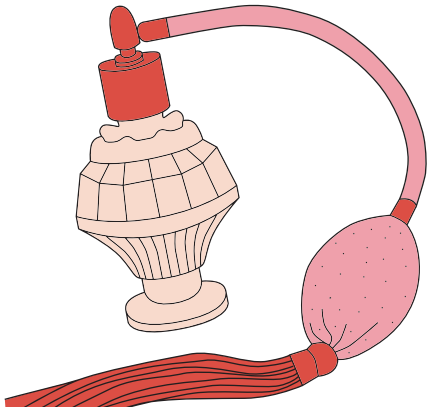
But flashbacks can be complicated: they can be of happy, sad, mixed or distressing memories. If those flashbacks negatively affect us, we can support ourselves during this. Here are some coping methods that might help you:

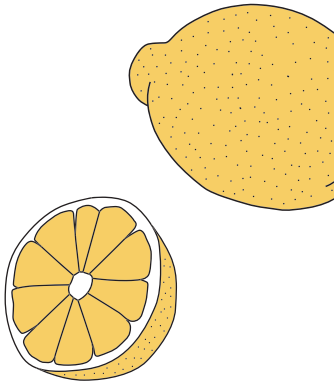
* Breathe in a comforting scent (for example peel a lemon) and focus on the smell.

* Look around you. Make a list of the items in the room; count the colours or pieces of furniture around you.

* Hold something cold, like a piece of ice, or hot, like a mug of tea. Please be careful not to hurt yourself.

* Make up your own mantra, close your eyes and say it to yourself. Even a small statement like ‘I am safe now’ can help.





Nightmares & Sleeping Problems

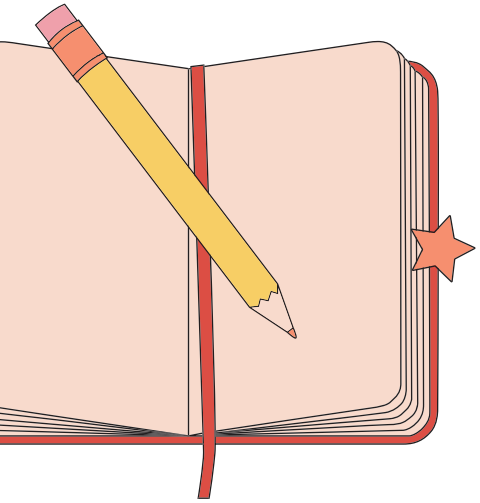
The impact of our experiences can affect us when we are asleep. This can be through nightmares or sleeping problems. You may feel that the attack or an aspect of the abuse you have experienced is actually happening to you again in your sleep. If you experience nightmares regularly, it is likely that you will be anxious about going to sleep.

Here are some techniques that might help:

* De-stress before bed. Have a warm bath. Read a book. Try to unwind.

* Try to get rid of difficult memories by writing them down and storing them away. Imagine a small house, put all your bad thoughts in the house and slam the door shut.

* If you suffer from nightmares, write yourself a caring note to put by your bed. If you wake up in the night, try to remember to read the note to yourself. Even writing, 'I am not there, I am safe, everything is ok' can help.



Self-harm

Self-harm is when a person intentionally hurts themselves as a way of coping or expressing overwhelming emotional distress. Survivors of sexual or domestic violence may use this as an outlet for difficult or painful feelings. You might be trying to numb the pain, experience some release or trying to regain a sense of control.

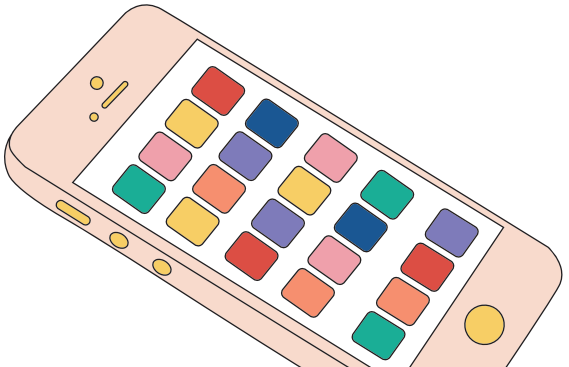
But self-harm is a negative coping strategy. It is damaging, can carry the risk of infection and sometimes result in life-threatening medical problems.

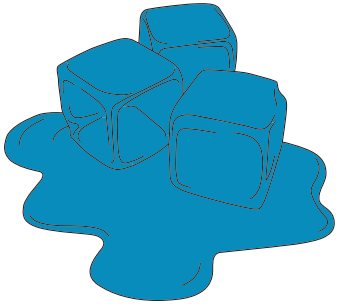
If you are thinking about self-harming or are self-harming, these techniques can help:

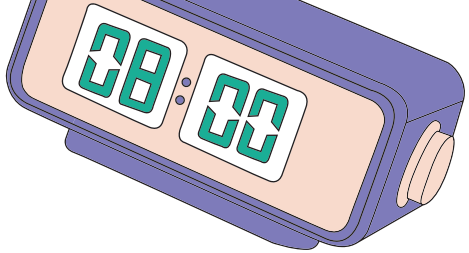
* Leave the room where the object is that you intended to use for self-harm- or remove it from your sight to stop the urge.

* Send a text message to someone- it can be about anything. It can be about how you are feeling or something that seems unimportant. Keeping your hands busy is important, and texting a friend or loved one can help you get through this time.

* Draw on yourself: use henna tattoos or rub ice on the part of the body where you wanted to self-harm.







Suicidal Thoughts & Feelings

Suicidal thoughts and feelings can be natural responses to trauma. Feelings like these can be exhausting, painful and very confusing. Dying may not be something that you really want to do. But you may feel that you can no longer cope with what happened or how you feel now.

You aren't alone. But please remember suicidal thoughts aren't permanent. You have a future. If you find yourself thinking about suicide, there are resources to give you support and get through this tough time.

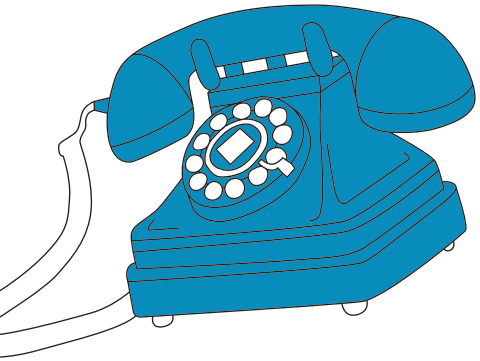
Remember: you are strong and help is out there.

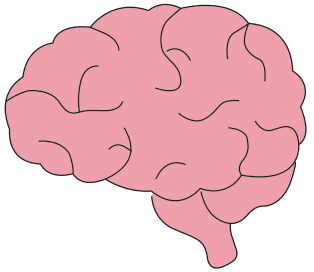
* Try speaking to someone you trust like a family member, a friend, your GP or even a work colleague. **You can always call the Samaritans on 116 123**.

* Try to avoid alcohol or drugs. These can intensify our feelings and make us feel worse.

* Keep yourself 'grounded'. Stick to a daily routine, with regular times for getting up, eating and relaxing and going to bed.

Don't forget: if you need immediate assistance to call 999.





What is Dissociation?

Dissociation is when you become detached from reality. You can imagine dissociation as being like a spectrum, which ranges from experiences like day dreaming to chronic and complex dissociation, which can make everyday life very hard.

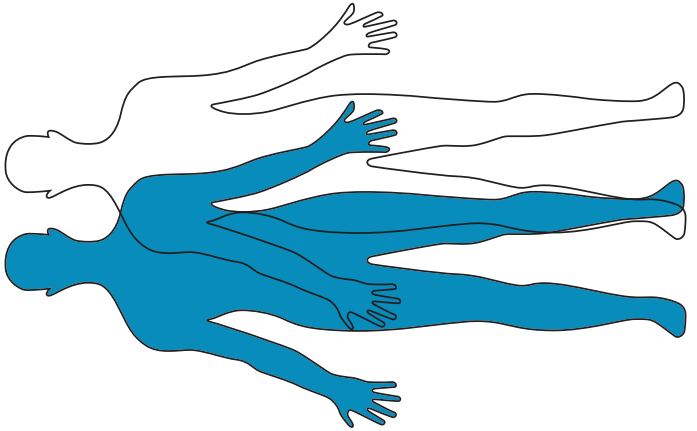
So why might we dissociate? Dissociation is a defence mechanism the brain uses to cope with trauma, It's like an 'out-of-body' experience when you feel as if you are floating away from reality.

Here are some techniques to bring us back to reality if feel like we suffer from dissociation:

* Try to bring yourself back to your surroundings and physical yourself. Look around you; say your name, age and the first thing you see.

* Let the most supportive people in your life know what to do in times of crisis. They may not understand your dissociation but they will want to help you.

* Write down 5 things you love about life. This can ground us and help us appreciate of lives.



Eating Disorders

Sexual and domestic violence can affect survivors in many ways, including perceptions of the body and feelings of control. Of course, this can lead some of us to eating disorders, when we change our eating habits in order to have a sense of control, to cope with the trauma and feelings. While these actions provide short-term relief, they can cause long-term damage to your health.

If you think you have an eating disorder these things may help:

* Make a list of positive statements. Pick one. Look at yourself in the mirror say it every morning and night. The positive statement will become a part of you. Stick these statements around your mirror to remind you of how amazing you are!

* Talk it out. Talk about your feelings, thoughts and control methods with a trusted friend or family member.

* Distract yourself. Do something you love. Meet up with supportive people. Eating disorders affect our mental health and it is important we do not let them consume our lives.

* You can always call BEAT, a specialist eating disorder helpline:

  BEAT Adult Helpline: 0808 801 0677
  BEAT Student line: 08088010811
  BEAT Youth line: 0808 801 0711

Substance Abuse

Survivors of domestic or sexual violence can become reliant on alcohol or drugs to cope with their traumatic past. These substances can make us feel numb and temporarily let us escape some of the pain. When we feel low, it can be tempting to turn to quick-fix solutions that seem numb the pain. This can impact massively on on future health and lives.

If you are using alcohol or drugs try these coping strategies:

* Avoid places or people where you get alcohol or drugs. Instead, explore new places and meet new people- these can have a positive impact on your life.

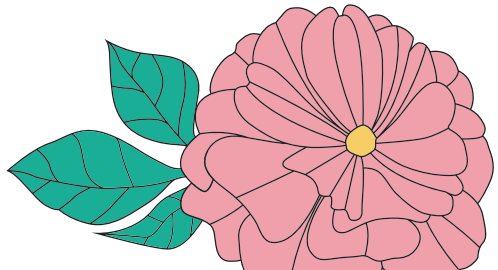
* Write a list of what you can do when you aren't drinking or taking drugs. Write a wish list of what you could do with your life without them.

* Create your own emergency support plan. Build up a good, supportive network of people. Write notes to yourself you can find in times of need.

Remember you can always use:

* **Talk to Frank**, free support around substance misuse: **0300 123 6600**

* **Drinkline** runs a free, confidential helpline for people who are concerned about their drinking, or someone else's. Free helpline: **0300 123 1110** (weekdays 9am–8pm, weekends 11am–4pm).



Guilt / Self-blame

Many victims of sexual and domestic violence feel responsible for what happened to them. In fact they are often made to feel by the abuser that it was their fault.

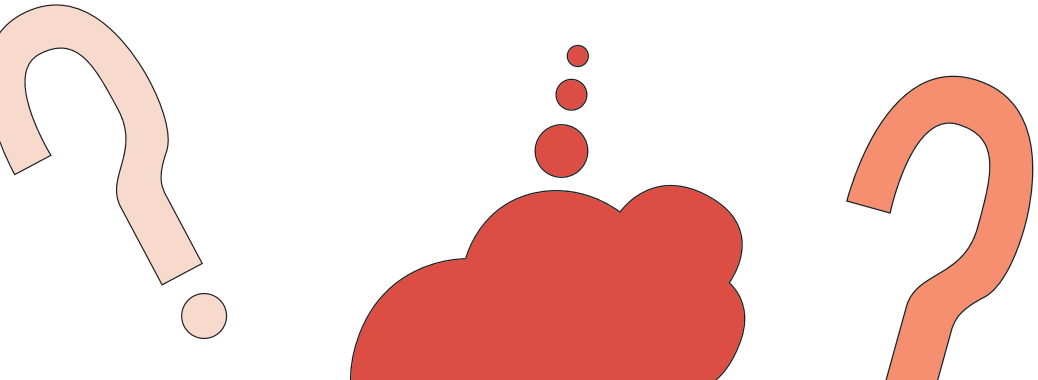
You are not to blame. This was not your fault. You are not responsible. Your abuser is.

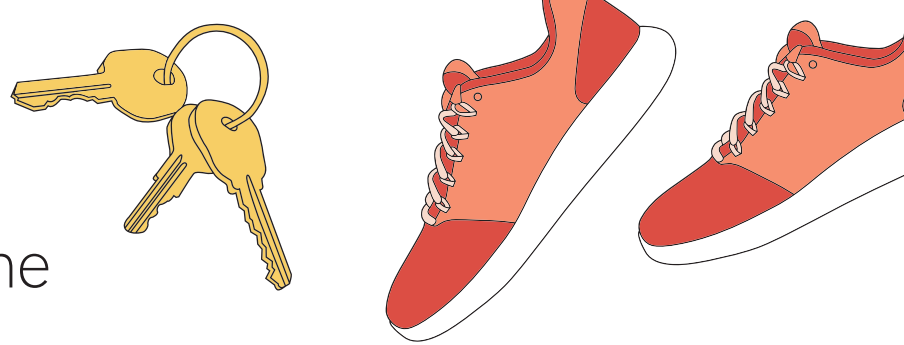
Think about the following:

* What would you say to a friend in the same situation? Would tell her that it was the abuser's fault and not hers? No you wouldn't, so why would you do this to yourself? Be kind to yourself. Be your own friend.

* You might feel dirty and ashamed. Try to separate what happened to you from you as a person. You are more than that experience. What the abuser did to you might have made you feel dirty and ashamed or worthless. But that does NOT make you a dirty or bad or worthless.

* Some of us wrestle over and over again, asking what did I do wrong? What could they have done to stop this, why was this person in my life? You did nothing wrong. Don't beat yourself up. The abuser is responsible, not you.





Shame

Survivors of sexual or domestic abuse can sometimes feel shame about their past. You might not want to speak to anyone. You might think they will judge you, tell other people or not believe you.

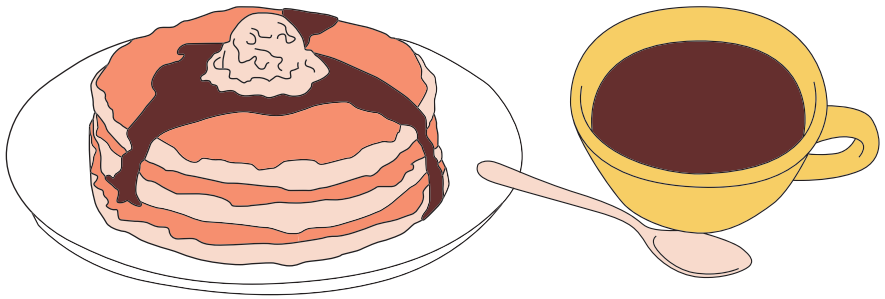
The most important thing is that you don't have to tell anyone if it doesn't feel comfortable. You have the choice in who or what you tell.

If you feel shame but do not want to look for outside help, here are some ideas:

* Don't isolate yourself due to this shame. Find a reason to leave the house every day, even if it's to go buy some breakfast or go on a run.

* Write a pros and cons list of sharing what happened to you with other people. It will give you a clearer picture of what you want to do.

* You can call a support service if you don't want to tell anyone you know. The **National Domestic Violence helpline (0808 2000 247)** **Rape Crisis (0808 8029 999)** or the **Samaritans (116 123)** are good services for this.



Self-confidence

An abusive partner or person can impact on our self-confidence. They can have said negative things about our looks, our clothes and our personalities. That abuser might seem to have destroyed us and we think that we will never feel confident or happy again.

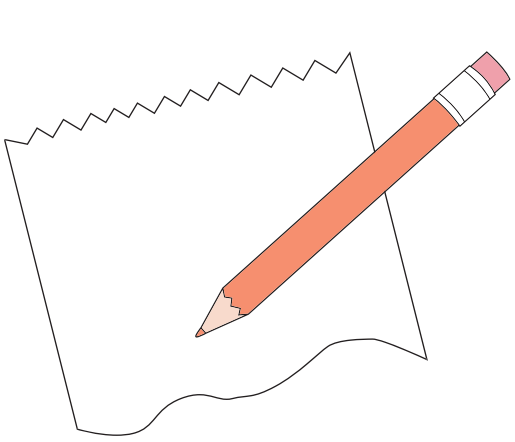
Think again. Don't let them destroy your dreams, your goals, your beliefs, your ambitions and your relationships.

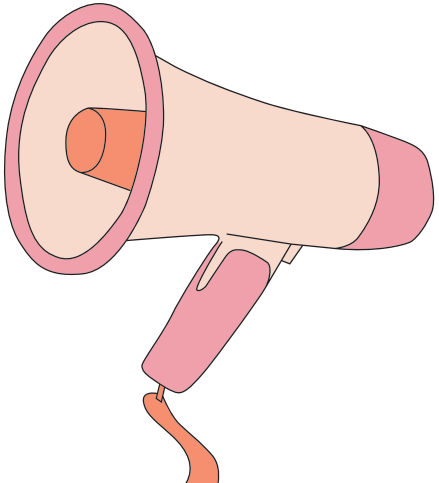
Here are some self-confidence ideas that can help:

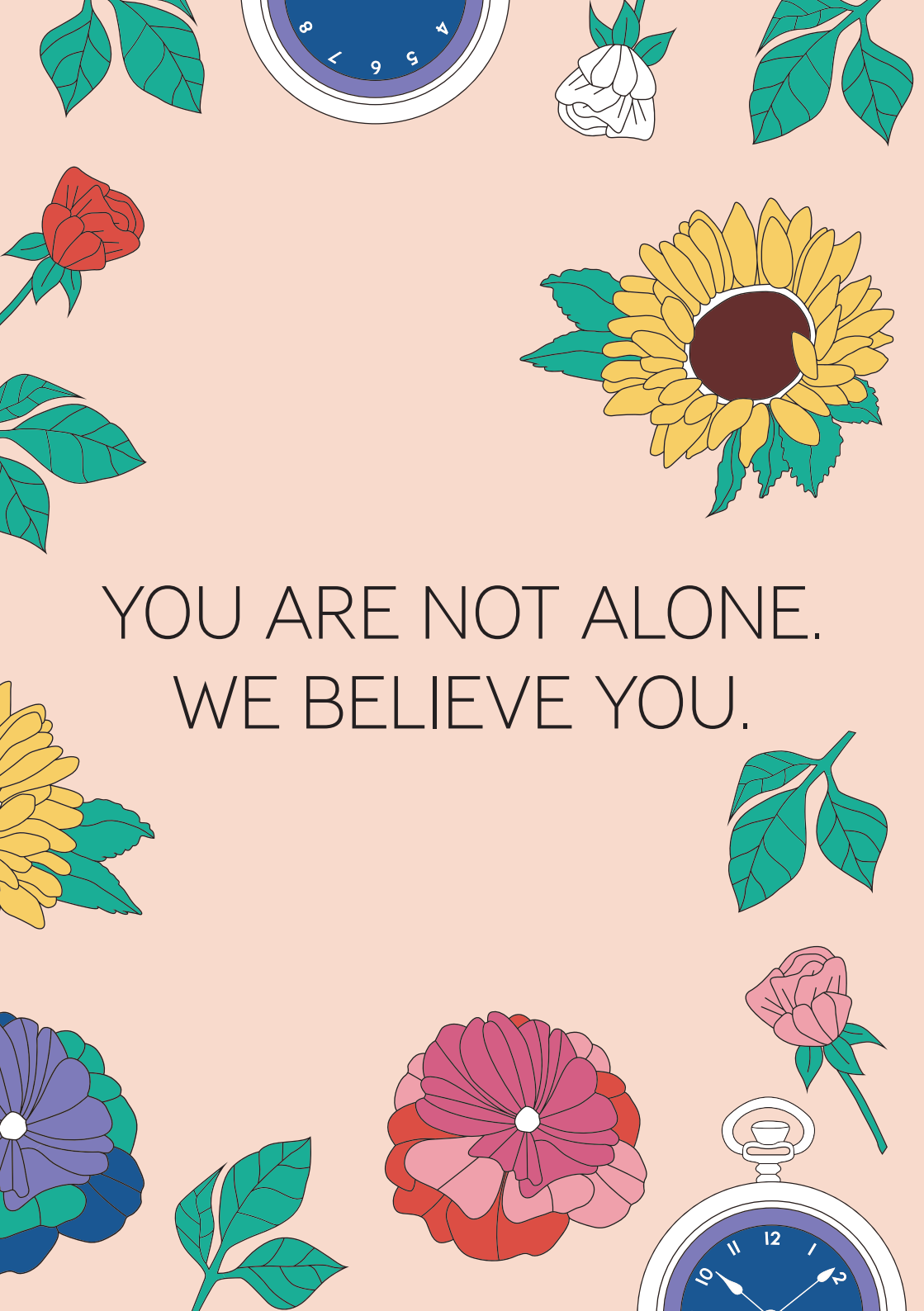
* Write a letter to yourself before this happened to you. What did you love about yourself? What do you want to do with your life? What do you believe in? You are still that person; you can get back to that.

* Self-care is key! Take time each day to care for yourself. This is important.

* If your abuser used to say certain mean things to you, normalise those words! SHOUT the words from the rooftops, write them down and tear them up. Those words do not define you – they are not part of you at all.



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WE BELIEVE YOU.