



RECOGNISING THE SIGNS OF TRAUMA

How to support survivors of CSA

Adults who have survived childhood sexual abuse often develop **coping behaviors** that affect their relationships, communication, and emotions.

Recognising these patterns helps support workers respond with care, creating safe environments where survivors feel understood, respected and empowered to heal.

DIFFICULTY TRUSTING OTHERS

Survivors may struggle to trust, especially authority figures, and may push people away to test loyalty.

- ✓ *Be consistent and reliable.*
- ✓ *Let them set the pace.*

BOUNDARY CHALLENGES

Some fear rejection and over-accommodate, while others set rigid boundaries or struggle to recognise harm.

- ✓ *Reinforce their right to say no.*
- ✓ *Model and respect healthy boundaries*

LOW SELF-ESTEEM & SHAME

Survivors may feel unworthy or blame themselves.

- ✓ *Challenge negative self-talk.*
- ✓ *Reinforce their worth without dismissing feelings*

DISCOMFORT WITH SEXUALITY

Some engage in risky behavior to regain control, while others avoid intimacy entirely.

- ✓ *Avoid assumptions about comfort with affection.*
- ✓ *Support safe, consensual relationships at their pace.*

STRUGGLES WITH AUTHORITY

Survivors may mistrust professionals, resist control or struggle to self-advocate.

- ✓ *Empower them to make choices.*
- ✓ *Validate their feelings while encouraging advocacy.*

COPING THROUGH SUBSTANCE USE

Some turn to alcohol, drugs, or self-harm to numb pain.

- ✓ *Approach with compassion, not judgment.*
- ✓ *Offer resources for professional support.*

OVERPROTECTIVENESS

Survivors may be hyper-vigilant about preventing harm, especially to children.

- ✓ *Validate their instincts while balancing fear with practicality.*
- ✓ *Acknowledge their experiences without reinforcing paranoia.*

COMMON TRAUMA RESPONSES

FIGHT

Becoming aggressive or defensive when feeling threatened.

FLIGHT

Avoiding conflict or abruptly cutting ties.

FREEZE

Shutting down emotionally and becoming unresponsive.

FAWN

Trying to please others at their own expense to avoid conflict.

