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If you would like more information about this document, please contact the Self-Help Connection at info@selfhelpconnection.ca.

the Self-Help Connection
63 King Street
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada B2Y 2R7
Phone: (902) 466-2011 Fax: (902) 466-3300



TOOLS TO HELP GROUPS GROW AND FLOURISH

Tools — just as we use tools such as a hoe, a rake, a watering can, gardening books, and a composter to keep our garden growing and flourishing, so too we can use tools to keep our groups growing and flourishing. Tools come in a various shapes and forms and can be used for a variety of purposes.

INTRODUCTION

The talking stick was the most powerful tool we took back from the conference. It's O.K. to speak. You don't need something to hide behind. It's not as easy to pass when you have the stick. You know no one is going to interrupt, or give advice. We learned to listen without other voices, and hear what the person is saying at that time. It relieves the burden of giving feedback. The power of the stick is moving, magical.

As survivors we have learned to see or understand ourselves and others through the experience of the trauma of sexual abuse. The trauma has led us to hiding parts of ourselves, to a limited repertoire of coping skills, to a rupture of our closest relationships, and to a loss of our creative energy. So when we are in a group and begin to encounter the same issues and problems that occur in our lives outside of the group, such as feelings of not being heard or listened to, or having a difficult time imagining a different solution to a problem, or being unable to identify what we are feeling, or finding that words are inadequate to express what we are experiencing, then we might be tempted to withdraw from or leave the group.

Tools are experiences or implements that can help us create the ways in which we can learn about what we need, about how to express ourselves, about the hidden parts of ourselves, and about how to reconnect in relationship.

Tools are useful in creating the kind of environment that will support our growing and flourishing. Tools give us the opportunity to learn to grow and flourish. Our self-help groups can be tools for promoting learning about personal and social change. As adults we learn in many ways. Our jobs, our families, our social and recreational activities, and many other aspects of our lives including self-help groups become learning opportunities for us. We now learn new things based on our formal learning and on our lived experience. What we have learned through living and experience becomes a valuable tool that is used in self help-groups.

Research shows that adults learn more through actively participating in activities designed for learning rather than passively watching an activity or listening to a lecture. The tools offered in this manual provide a range of options for learning styles. For example, some people learn best through writing about their experiences, while other people learn through drawing or role-playing. Participation in a self-help group can be an opportunity to reclaim so-called old-fashioned skills.

At one time storytelling or oral history was the only way we learned about our culture, our history and ourselves — who we were and who we are. Before writing and reading, storytelling was the way people learned. With the advent of the industrial age storytelling became a dying art. It is now being reclaimed, even in the classroom, as a tool of learning. Self-help groups have developed mostly through storytelling and the sharing of experiences and knowledge.

A few words of caution. For tools to be effective they must be offered in a spirit of adventure, with the understanding that: there is no right or wrong answer or experience; a tool is offered, not forced; a tool is never more important than a person. The tools offered here have been used by survivor self-help groups and found to be helpful. A description of the tool is given followed by a suggestion for its use in a group. Keep in mind that a tool can be used in whatever way or purpose that you need in your group.

STORYTELLING

Telling a story can be as real or as imaginary as you want it to be. It can be a story about your abuse and how you coped and survived. It can tell the story of an imaginary person or of a person you would like to become. It can be told like a fairy tale. Its purpose is to share who you were, who you are, and who you want to be. Storytelling is a tool that can be used to:

- ✓ Tell people that it is O.K. to talk about abuse
- ✓ Suggest that we can change
- ✓ Model openness
- ✓ Create trust
- ✓ Practise listening skills

Here is a story, told by Soledad at the Survivors Helping Survivors conference. It is a powerful witnessing of the pain of abuse, and the hope for healing.

SOLEDAD'S STORY

Once upon a time there was a little girl who had grown big enough to tie her younger brother's shoe laces. Until that day, she had spent much of her time making mud pies, climbing trees, learning to whistle, dancing for an imaginary captive audience and admiring the wisdom and strength of the big

people around her. So peaceful was her world that she thought nothing of her father's long silences and her mother's obvious efforts to be cheerful at the dinner table.

One day, as the girl was about to capture a small lizard who was peacefully basking in the afternoon sun, she felt someone gently take her hand. Although not a word was spoken, the girl understood that she had to obey. She was silent while a man whispering words she could not understand, controlled her small frozen body. That night she was quiet, like her father, and relieved that no one noticed her fear.

From that day on, her games became less fun.

Her little fists would smash the unfinished mud pies for no apparent reason. Climbing trees became a way of hiding.

Her body was an object of shame.

She felt exposed.

When she found herself being secretly pursued by her uncles, the same men who had protected her long ago, her soul began to abandon her body at the first signs of their approach. After a while, her soul was leaving so often, that it became easier for the girl to let it return only when there was absolutely no danger in sight. And that was not often. Eventually, her soul stayed away.

Time passed and the girl became a woman. One day, when she thought that her fate had been sealed, when she was forgetting what it was like to dance and sing, a door over the mountains, to the north of her homeland, opened. Without stopping to wonder what might be at the other side, she crossed it. To her amazement, she found herself living in a land inhabited by people whose words she could not understand. Everything about the new land was strange. There was snow on the ground, which in her homeland she had only seen at a distance, on top of the mountains. The people were different: their size, their food, their dances, their music. Even though she often thought about her home, the new land felt safe.

There were no familiar voices or faces: but she felt safe. No mountains to cradle her like a mother: but she felt safe. No southern cross in the night sky: But she felt safe.

"It doesn't matter if I'm homesick," she would say to herself. But her soul, which followed her like a shadow, knew better. A few years after her arrival in the new land, this woman-child became a mother. And then, for no apparent reason, she began to feel defenceless, vulnerable, small like her children, wishing for her mother's protection.

She would not think of her father because he had defied the gods by taking his own life. And although she knew she could take back her own power by following her father's footsteps, she also knew that her children would learn from her.

But her father's example became enticing, seductive, bewitching. For a while, she abandoned herself to despair. She was haunted by the childhood ghosts of guilt, the ghosts of fear and shame. Their presence was only expelled by her children's voices.

She was protective of her children in the way she imagined wolves to be. If she sensed danger anywhere near them, she would focus her eyes, the hair would bristle on the back of her neck, her paws stiffen, ready to pounce. She became strong, fearless, invincible. When her children were threatened, she regained her power, and her soul stood by. On alert, she and her soul were a team.

With time, her children grew up and she was able to divert her gaze. She discovered her reflection in the mirror and realized that she was a little girl whose body was bending from the weight of the ghosts she carried on her back.

One day, determined to get rid of them, she set forth to find a medicine woman who would teach her the ways of exorcism, warriorship and magic.

Since nothing happens by chance, not even in fairy tales, she met a most powerful and gentle sorceress who agreed to be one of her guides. Under the instruction and protection of this relentless teacher, the woman-child brought each of the ghosts into full view.

By summoning up all her courage, with the help of other ghost-carrying women, she was slowly able to get them off her back, face them, disarm them and take back the power they had stolen from her.

Then two magical things happened. The first was that the soul of the woman-child came back to inhabit her body. Together, they cried, shouted, cursed, danced and sang again. And as they did, they grew strong. They grew so strong in fact, that the woman-child became her own mother and father.

The second magical happening was that, as the woman-child learned to nourish herself, a great feeling of tenderness grew in her, and she knew she would only feel complete if she could help others gain their power and their souls, as she had done.

Since then, she has joined with other women to name and denounce. Their voices multiply, loud and clear, coming from all sides of the earth. They name the unnamable, the unthinkable. They shout "incest" "abuse" "rape" "victims" in all languages. And since the ghosts can only survive in silence and secrecy, they often tremble in fear and shrink back.

Sometimes the old ghosts return to haunt the woman-child. Sometimes they make her trip and fall unexpectedly. But they don't stay long. They cannot ride on her back, as they once did. She is a grandmother now. She has grown stronger, older and wiser.

And ... she is not alone.

This is my story, our story.

COLLAGES

Creating a collage is actually a non-verbal form of storytelling. A collage is put together using pictures, objects, material, and whatever else your imagination can come up with. The basic materials are bristol board, scissors, glue, and a source of pictures such as magazines and calendars; you can use any other materials such as crayons and paints, material, glitter or feathers. Creating a collage can tell various stories. It can be an individual or group collage. One group of survivors created a group collage that spoke to them of what keeps their group growing and flourishing. It can be created around various themes, such as: Who am I? What does my life look like right now? Where do I/we want to be? What are our images of healing and support?

Creating collages is a way of tapping into our creative energy. They give expression to the non-verbal parts of ourself that might not otherwise be heard. Sometimes the analytical part of ourself is really surprised by what the collage is revealing because it doesn't seem to fit with how we present ourself.

Creating a group collage can tell us about who we are in the group, and how we negotiate time and space for our needs. After collage work spend some time sharing the experience.

ICEBREAKERS

An icebreaker is an activity or exercise that is designed to help build a group and to warm participants up to being part of the experience. It can be used at anytime during the session, not only at the beginning. An icebreaker can be a verbal or non-verbal activity or a combination. An icebreaker can serve several purposes:

- ✓ Establish a focus
- ✓ Integrate new members
- ✓ Establish links of interest and common experience
- ✓ Show we can be alike or different and be welcome
- ✓ Show we can be ourselves here
- ✓ Discharge negative emotions so as to create space for a positive experience
- ✓ Establish norms and rules of the group
- ✓ Show that learning can be fun

Icebreakers To Start a New Group — The group divides into pairs. Each pair finds one thing that you share and one thing that is different about you. Each pair joins another pair and goes through the same process, finding something you share and something that is different. Depending on the numbers in your group, you either join up with another group or come together in a big group. Once back together, each person introduces herself to the group saying one thing that is different about herself and one thing that is similar.

The similarities and differences can range from hair or eye colour to age to number of people in your family, or years in therapy, and can include anything else you can think of.

This icebreaker can be used by members to introduce themselves. Each person introduces herself giving her first name, an adjective that starts with her initial that describes her, and a gesture. For example a person might say, "My name is Beth, I'm bold," and then stamp her foot.

Icebreakers To Share Feelings In Difficult Situations — Complete these sentences: The colour of my feelings right now is ... If I were the weather, I would be...

Icebreakers To Set Goals — Pass a key around and share what door it would open for you.

Icebreakers To Have Fun - One person starts telling a story, each person gets a minute and then the next person takes up the story, until every one has had at least one turn.

ARTWORK

Artwork often scares people off because of early messages received about not being good enough. It's important to enter into these activities with the idea that it's not about being an artist, but about expressing our inner self with colour or clay or cloth, etc. It's about letting our inner child have the chance to express herself in a non-judgemental environment and about expressing ourselves in a non-verbal way. It's about fun, too. Here are some common forms of artwork.

Clay — to create a symbol of our feelings.

Fingerpaints — a great way to give your inner child an opportunity to play and to express herself.

Drawing — use your non-dominant hand to draw what you are feeling. Our non-dominant hand often has access to the more hidden or unconscious parts of ourselves. This method is particularly useful in situations where we find ourselves reacting without knowing why. It can help you to identify what your feelings are.

Draw a picture of your abuser, and then burn or shred it as a way of releasing feelings.

Drawing a self portrait — use large paper. Lie on it and have a group member outline your body. Then write, draw or use pictures to show your qualities or characteristics. To encourage yourself to use this tool, you might place a basketful of crayons, coloured pencils, markers, oil pastels and chalk in the middle of your group. Each person can have her own scrap book or journal.

ANGEL CARDS/HEART CARDS/MEDICINE WHEEL CARDS

These cards are examples of a tool that can be used in a variety of ways. Each card has a word, a saying, or an image on it, and is intended to help you focus on particular aspects of your inner self. The more you think about the quality reflected by the word or image on the card, the more you will find this quality echoing in your life.

For example, one heart card carries the words, "You are a bright light." You might pick an angel card with the word "Humour" on it. The quality or meaning of the word is what you are inviting into your life and/or group at that particular time. The cards can be used for individual or group purposes. Meditating on the essence of the word or image brings support to help you overcome obstacles and

gain greater understanding of your personal or group inner life. The cards can be used to lift your spirit, to motivate you or to empower you to be more of who you really are.

You can pick a card at the beginning of a new cycle of your life or group; you can pick one with a particular task in mind, such as an obstacle to overcome, or simply to give you a direction to focus on for a period of time. Here's an example of how you can use the cards. Mix the cards and place them in a basket or bowl. Sit quietly, breathe slowly and deeply and relax. Allow your thoughts and feelings to settle and centre yourself in a circle of light. In the stillness, take some time to review your present situation.

Focus on those aspects of yourself or your environment which you would like to improve or change. Set your goals simply and specifically. Move into an open and receptive space and affirm your willingness for your goals to be fulfilled.

Now invite a card to join you, and when you feel ready, choose a card. If in group, a single card can be chosen or each person can choose one. Take a few minutes to reflect on the card and then use it as a focus of discussion. If the group is having some difficulty resolving a conflict, you might think about using the cards as a way to focus yourselves on what you might need to help you in the resolution. Angel cards can be purchased at the Frog Hollow Bookstore in Halifax, N.S., 5640 Spring Garden Road, B3J 3M7, (902) 429-3318, for \$13.95. The heart cards can be purchased for a special price to self-helpers of \$11.82 (this includes taxes), plus shipping by calling in Metro Halifax (902) 827-3553, or the rest of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and PEI toll free 1-800-563-3368. You can send a cheque or money order to: Harvard Marketing Agencies Ltd. and mail to 29 Nabine Drive, Porters Lake, N.S., B3E 1G8. VISA accepted.

A BINDER OF CREATIVE MATERIALS

The binder can contain any materials that inspire you, that have a special meaning, that express how you feel, that touch your heart, that offer support and insight. Poems, stories, blessings, prayers, and songs/chants are examples of what you might put in your binder.

The materials can be used on an individual basis as needed or as a group. For example, some groups use the Serenity Prayer, at the beginning or end of their meetings.

***God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,***

and the wisdom to know the difference.

When the group might be feeling low and de-energized, a favourite song or chant can be sung as a way to get your energy moving. One group keeps this song in their binder and uses it as a way to remind themselves to have patience when things are difficult.

I WILL BE GENTLE WITH MYSELF (source unknown)

I will be gentle with myself
I am loving myself
I am a child of the universe
Being born each moment

One group keeps the following poem, written by a group member, in their binder, to remind them of the power of the group.

THE GROUP (by Nancy Lin)

The support group meetings
always start with the greetings
to bring all up to date
with the previous week's fate

As we sit in a ring
we each try to bring
what strength we possess
to ease each others' stress

whether sorrow or joy
we try not to be coy
but open and caring
there is so much sharing

It's become a safe place
where we each try to face
whatever issues arise
without our usual disguise

From a past full of pain
we now try to gain
the skills that we need
and old habits to cede

We are each unique
but past critique
left us unaware
that we are precious and rare

From the smiles that glow
it's clear that we each know
the others have worth
and have since their birth

But from ourselves we'd been turned
as false lessons we'd learned
thinking only others are right
- from ourselves we take flight

But here we're amazed
and old beliefs are razed
to find there's acceptance
instead of deception

This group brings such delight
I hope with all my might
those in need won't miss
finding a group such as this.

GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Discussions can involve member's personal stories. It is very important for members to have their stories witnessed and validated by others who have gone through a similar experience. This can be painful for groups, but this witnessing and validation has a powerful effect on bonding and trust building. There is the implicit understanding that, even though it may be painful, I will listen to your story because you honoured me by listening to mine. I also reserve the right to leave if your story is too powerful or upsetting. In a healthy group members inevitably move beyond these "war stories" to stories of healing, growing, flourishing, and success.

Discussions can also be used to help members reflect on issues. For instance, the SHE group (Survivors Healing Through Empowerment) uses these questions to help members reflect on the group experience. These questions are made up by group members, put in a shoebox, and passed out during the meeting, and discussed for 20 minutes.

- Why did you come to this group?
- What have you learned about yourself that is helping you?
- What is your biggest fear?
- Does it help you when others tell their stories?
- What is some thing you have to let go of in order to move on?
- What is one of the things you have learned about yourself?

Other discussion tools used by the SHE group help members build their confidence and self-esteem. Members pick a letter of the alphabet out of a shoebox and are encouraged to complete this sentence with a positive adjective:

I like myself because I'm (a) attentive, I like myself because I'm bold, I like myself because I'm caring, etc.

AGENDAS

An agenda is a list of topics that will be covered during a meeting. It is a guide for both the facilitator and members. Most self-help meetings last for two hours. Here is a typical agenda from a survivors group:

- Check-in (suggested time, 5-15 minutes)

Each member says briefly how she is feeling before the group starts. New members may be introduced at this time. The idea is to begin the meeting on a positive note. Each member responds to a particular question and speaks in turn. No one comments or interrupts. Always give permission to pass. Group members can rank how they feel on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being feeling great, and 0 being no energy.

Groups sometimes ask an open-ended question here, such as, "How did your week go", and most of the meeting then gets taken up by hearing from every member with no limits on airtime. We suggest that if you use the check-in, you restrict airtime to 2-3 minutes so as not to use all of the meeting time. Check-in time can also be used to go over the group's guidelines.

- Relaxation Exercises (Optional, suggested time, 5 minutes)

These can help ground members, and bring them to the present. The group focuses on breathing, pulling their thoughts together, getting grounded for the meeting, and leaving worries and tensions at the door.

- Light and Livelies (suggested time, 5 minutes)

These are short, energetic games that revitalize the group. You can use yoga, dancing (the Macarena), charades, etc. These can be used at the beginning of the meeting, or just after break to perk members up.

- Business (suggested time, 10 minutes)

Who is facilitating, timekeeping? Update on last meeting? Unfinished business? Go over today's agenda - any changes? additions?

- Today's Program (suggested time, 30 minutes)

Groups use a variety of tools, or a combination at each meeting — discussions, study groups, visiting speakers, videos, activities that inform members and help build their confidence, one-to-one encouragement at and between meetings, advocacy activities, public education, education of the membership through attendance at workshops and conferences, socializing, fundraising, problem-solving session to share and/or develop coping strategies, fun night, etc.

- Break (suggested time, 10 minutes)

- Evaluation/Feedback Round (optional, suggested time, 10 minutes)

This is a time to say now you felt about the meeting, bring up tensions, unresolved issues, and what has to be changed.

- Next Meeting Plans (optional since you might have long-term goals mapped out, suggested time, 10 minutes).

- Closing (suggested time, 10 minutes)

A warm closing leaves members with a good feeling and a desire to return. Ten minutes may be reserved at the end of the meeting for a conscious closing process which may include expressions of appreciation, such as "I really feel better getting that problem off my chest".

Or, "The group really gave me some good ideas. Thanks." The closing should be brief and positive. It may involve an evaluation of the meeting. Everyone's voice is heard briefly at closure, even if it is to say "pass." Closure is a time to "check out", to move away from the group's togetherness to each member's separate life.

At the closing, you can also restate your group's guidelines on confidentiality, such as, "When you leave here, what you saw here or heard here stays here."

If the goal of the meeting was to work on a problem, remind members in a positive way how much was achieved. Celebrate the meeting's end with a song, or a poem on the importance of the group. End the meeting on time.

If possible, co-facilitators could meet after the meeting to look at what went well and what might be changed at future meetings.

THE MEDICINE WHEEL

The Medicine Wheel has been given to us by the First Nations. Medicine, as it is used by the First Nations in the wheel, refers to holistic healing, teaching, enlightening and spiritual energy. Holistic healing emphasizes the importance of healing the whole person. The whole person consists of four aspects: body, mind, spirit, and emotions.

The Wheel or sacred circle it represents symbolically reflects the continuation of life, the four seasons and the four stages of human growth, from birth, to youth, to adulthood, to the stage of being grandparents or elders. The circle teaches the interrelationship of everything in the universe, that every living thing and person is connected to each other. This connectedness depicts the relationship people have between races. Colours are used symbolically to indicate different cultures; yellow represents Oriental, red represents the First Nations, black, the Black Race, and white, Europeans.

The sacred circle symbolically reflects the directions and the elements of life. The four directions moving clockwise, give direction to a path. The North direction is the physical realm, the East is the mental or enlightenment realm, the South is the spiritual realm, and the West is the emotional or introspective realm. All of these parts make up the whole. The circle teaches about respect and equality toward every living being. Respect and equality display status and a sense of belonging within the circle. There is no one before you, nor is there anyone behind you. All are equals. With one person to my left and one person to my right, I am strong with their support. Every member is needed and has a place of belonging. This connectedness, balance and sense of belonging is seen in both Native and non-Native communities. However, this balance and connectedness can be torn

apart. This imbalance is shown (in part) through the existence of childhood sexual abuse.

The Medicine Wheel is a concrete reminder of our wholeness and interconnectedness. As such it is a tool that can be used by a group to explore our personal and collective self.

The starting point of the wheel is the **North**. The **North** is the realm of our physical body, including environment. As a group you might explore and share what is happening with your bodies, asking yourselves what is happening in your life that reflects an imbalance or balance in my body or environment. Is my house safe, am I eating well?

Moving to the **East**, the realm of the mind, is an opportunity for the group to examine thoughts and views. The **East** signifies a new beginning and learning new ways. Attending to what our thoughts and views are, reflecting on how we developed them, and sorting out what we want to keep and what we want to discard or reshape is the work required in this realm.

The **South** direction reflects the formation of the spiritual realm. Spirituality is the foundation for culture, values, beliefs, personal philosophy and morals. The spiritual self guides all three other areas. The **West** direction talks about introspection, looking inside ourselves to see what is there. The feelings that are there act like a thermometer or warning signal, sending messages about reactions to life and the experiences being encountered. You may find buried feelings from the past that still need expression or feelings rooted in the present that you were unaware of and also need expression.

At any time you can use the wheel to help you focus, to aid in discussion of difficult topics, or to bring into conscious awareness hidden aspects of yourself. The wheel can also represent the group, reflecting the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual life of your group.

To use the Medicine Wheel concept, you and your group may first want to make the wheel a physical reality. A simple way to do this is to figure out the placement of the directions in your meeting space and use a piece of coloured cloth, ribbon or paper to remind you of the circle. White is the colour of the North, Yellow is the East, Red for the South, and Black for the West.

At any time you can use the wheel to help you focus, to aid in discussion of difficult topics, or to bring into consciousness hidden aspects of yourself. For example, if you are discussing how the sexual abuse affected you, you could imagine yourself sitting in the West to look at what your feeling are, how the feelings of your family affected you, and what were the feelings of your larger

community. The next step would be to look at how all these feelings interacted with your body, your mind, your spirit and your relationships.

THE TALKING CIRCLE

The Talking Circle as described here is another tool that has been given to us by the First Nations. However, you may have experienced it in another form such as in 12-Step groups.

The Talking Circle is symbolic of the circle of life. All things are inter-related and everything in the universe is part of a single whole. To gain true understanding of an individual, one has to accept the person as being an equal and a valuable part of the greater whole.

In the Talking Circle participants sit in a circle. A Talking Stick (carved staff) or other power object such as a stone is passed from one participant to the other in a clockwise direction around the circle. The Talking Stick symbolizes that whoever is in possession of it "holds the floor" and must be respected until she has finished with her words and has passed the object to the next person. The principles of the Talking Circle teach an individual active listening skills, balance of thoughts and emotions and memory skills.

The process of passing the Talking Stick continues until all have had their turn, when finally general discussion takes place on subjects revealed in the circle. It is believed that respect is the basic law of life. In the Talking Circle, respect is shown to another in the form of the following:

- Never interrupt the person who is talking unless invited to do so.
- Speak in your authentic voice.
- Never put another person down, or speak about others in a negative way, whether they are present or not.
- Listen with courtesy to what others say, even if you feel that what they are saying is worthless. **Listen with your heart.**

The Talking Circle can be used by your group to share feelings and thoughts about sensitive topics, to open a topic, or to resolve conflict or to help focus you when there is no clear agenda.

WHAT YOU CAN DO WHEN YOU FEEL TRIGGERED*

In groups, you may want to include some guidelines acknowledging that members may be triggered at different times and acquaint new members of the group with this experience and how it is dealt with in your group. This will help with issues of safety and boundaries, prevent rescuing and support individuals members learning to take care of themselves even in difficult situations.

When you feel: nothing
 frozen
 out of control
 fogged in
 numbed out
 floating
 swimming
 imprisoned
 overwhelmed

...you may have been "triggered" by something — a sound, smell, image, voice, song, music, touch, something someone has said. Whatever the exterior trigger, the physical, mental, emotional experience or lack of experience you have as a result may be a replay of how you originally reacted to a traumatic experience in the past in an effort to protect yourself.

What you can do in the present:

- Breathe consciously, breathe and count.
- Breathe and remind yourself: "Breathe in, breathe out."
- Breathe and feel the hairs in your nose.
- Breathe and focus on your upper lip under your nose to sense the warmth of your breath.

* Thanks to
Rosemary
Sullivan for
writing this
section.

- Breathe in and imagine the breath going all the way down to your toes.
- Breathe out and imagine any yuk you do not want in your body moving up and out.
- Hold your body with a comforting touch, your hand on your heart, your arms crossed holding onto your arms, hands on your cheeks, hands on your head, arms around your legs, in whatever position try and have your feet flat on the floor, ground, earth.

- Imagine you can breathe into your body whatever colour, texture, warmth, coolness, sound you enjoy and that soothes you

Open your eyes and look at your hands and say:

"This is my body, I own this body, this body belongs to me."

All of these interventions you can do anywhere you are. In the group, they can be done quietly as other things are going on. Or, everyone in the group can do these things as a group exercise to provide a safe, supportive environment for a member experiencing the trigger. If you are in your group, and you feel you are present in your body in the here and now by doing some of the above, you might want to do another piece of working with a trigger. You can take a bathroom break, or wait your turn and:

Stamp your feet on the ground and say:

"This is my ground, this is where I stand in the here and now. I acknowledge I was hurt and overwhelmed in the past and now I am in charge of what I am sensing, thinking, seeing, imagining and feeling."

Walk around in a circle coming to rest in the centre of the circle and say:

"This is my safe space here in the present and any sensations, images, thoughts, feelings or parts which I don't want to be experiencing at this time can have a place in the circle, but not in me or my body. I will work on this later."

Learning how to be with our experience of being "triggered" will help us learn how to understand the different experiences of consciousness all human beings are capable of experiencing. While trauma and traumatic stress is not the path any of us would choose to expand our consciousness, learning how to navigate through different levels of consciousness broadens and expands our abilities.

THE BANNER PROJECT

The Banner Project display represents a symbolic gathering of incest survivors. It was started in 1989 by three members of an incest survivors support group in Madison, Wisconsin. The display is made up of handprint sections of hundreds of survivors from all across the United States, Canada and several other countries.

The Banner Project exists to:

- Honour ourselves for surviving.
- Reach out to survivors in love and support.
- Empower survivors to express their anger and pain.

- Encourage all of us to continue our healing.
- Remind the world of our presence, courage, determination.
- Promote greater awareness of the effects of incest.
- Increase community response and services to survivors.

The handprint design grew from the idea that hands are used for many purposes, including nurture, love and human connection. And each person's handprint is unique. The sections are sewn together into large, wall-size panels, because hands joined together signify unity and strength.

In 1992, the Banner Project was given the Public Awareness Award from the Wisconsin Committee for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect, for "promoting the healing of incest survivors." It is also featured in Laura Davis's **The Courage To Heal Workbook**, a guide to healing for adult survivors.

The Banner Project continues to grow. There are currently nine large panels (each 10'X6'), and new handprint sections are added regularly.

All incest survivors are invited to make their own handprint sections to join the others. The Banner Project continues to travel throughout the world. Anyone interested in displaying all or part of the Banner for a special event can do so for just a modest fee (\$10.00), plus shipping expense. For more information, or to request the Banner for display, contact the Wisconsin Committee at 608-256-3374, or write: The Banner Project, C/O Wisconsin Committee, 214 N. Hamilton Street, Madison, WI 53703.

The Banner Project invites the entire community to stand up and speak out, bear witness for survivors, and help in creating a world where survivors can reclaim their power and regain lives filled with joy and possibilities. As part of the first province-wide survivors conference, Survivors Helping Survivors, we invited participants to make a quilt square and to invite any other survivors they knew to do so. The Self-Help Connection has offered to co-ordinate the receiving of the squares and to get them sewn together. This is an opportunity to begin the creation of the Nova Scotia Survivors Quilt. The first panel will be made of the squares of those who attended the conference. The initials SHS will identify the squares of those who attended the conference.

- Your banner should be made out of fabric, with a finished size of 11 inches wide x 8½

inches tall (the size of a regular sheet of paper turned sideways.)

- Please try not to use fabrics which are too heavy to sew, such as felt or quilted fabrics.
- Draw, embroider, applique, paint, or otherwise imprint your handprint on the fabric. You may add any other words, design, image or message you wish, to personalize your section. You may also add your name or initials, if that would be meaningful to you, but it is not necessary. Leave a half inch on all sides, so we can sew your section to the others.
- Mail your section to the Self-Help Connection. We will eventually mail your completed banner section to: The Banner project, c/o Wisconsin Committee, 214 N. Hamilton St. Madison Wisconsin. Phone 608-256-3374. Banner sections become the property of the Banner Project and cannot be returned. The confidentiality of all survivors will be protected.

As your group uses the tools in this manual, remember to remind yourselves that any tool is only as useful as you are willing to make it, as it helps you in learning about yourself, and as it helps to keep your group growing and flourishing. Change, adapt, create are the operative words!