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## PUTTING YOURSELF FIRST: SELF-CARE

By Marlene Austin, PASSAGES, Inc. Executive Director

The holidays can be an exciting and joyful time for many people, and yet it can be a very stressful time as well for individuals for many reasons. For many survivors of sexual abuse, the holidays could also be an even more traumatic time.

Even for my dedicated staff who work tirelessly at PASSAGES, Inc., practicing "self-care" is very important for us all. Figuring out how to take care of yourself when you experience any of these responses following a traumatic experience can help you cope in a healthy way. If you are experiencing:

- ◇ Grief, denial, depression
- ◇ Headaches, lack of sleep,
- ◇ Elevated heart rate
- ◇ Withdrawal from social activities with family/friends
- ◇ Fatigue
- ◇ Nausea/dizziness
- ◇ Poor concentrations and disorientation
- ◇ Shock, disbelief, confusion
- ◇ Feelings of detachment
- ◇ Flashbacks-Feelings that the trauma is happening now

It is very important to make sure that you are taking care of yourself during and after difficult times. In the pages that follow are self-care tips to help you physically *and* emotionally.

*(continued on page 2)*



New volunteers Bethany Osario, Maria Joslin, McKenzie Rodriguez, and Samantha Peters share off their certificates of completion from Fall 2017 volunteer training!

## SELF-CARE, CONTINUED

### Physical Self-Care:

#### Healthy Eating

This is often over looked. Sometimes our lives get so busy that we do not have time to eat a healthy meal, or maintain healthy eating habits.

#### Exercise

Getting some exercise, even if it is a 30 minute walk can help combat feelings of depression or sadness. It also helps promote a healthy lifestyle.

#### Sleep

The recommended amount of sleep for adults is 7-10 hours a night. It is important to get plenty of sleep so that your mind and body are able to function.

### Emotional Self Care:

#### Counseling

This can be accomplished through a counselor, or even talking with a friend. If you are a survivor of sexual violence, we are here to help you.

#### Journaling

Some find it helpful to write down their feelings, fears, hopes, and dreams down.

#### Meditate

Some find relaxation techniques helpful. This could be as simple as sitting in a quiet room with your eyes closed and deeply breathing through our nose and out your mouth.

### Other:

#### Learn to say no.

This can be difficult, but it is important to make sure that you are not over loading yourself. Being over stressed or over-burdened can lead to under productivity. When we have too much on our plate that is the time when our physical and emotional needs are most often overlooked.

#### Maintain social connections.

It is easy to isolate ourselves or withdraw from loved ones when we experience something traumatic. Although it is okay to take time out for yourself and recharge, it is important to maintain contact with those who are important and support you, and learn to distance yourself from those who are negative influences in your life.

#### Find a balance to your life.

During and after a traumatic event it is easy to keep yourself busy so that you can avoid certain feelings that may arise from the event. Sometimes you will find yourself working too much, or sleeping too much, or even engaging in unhealthy behaviors such as over eating, or drinking too much.

Remember, it is normal to have those feelings after a traumatic experience. Also remember that each one of us recovers in their own time. It's ok to get support for yourself. If you are experiencing difficulties following sexual abuse, we would be happy to help.



*New Volunteers in Clearfield County—Amanda Vogel, Jessica Clontz, and Leeann Merryman!*

## SECONDARY WOUNDING AFTER TRAUMA

By Kylee Estudante, PASSAGES, Inc. Prevention Educator

Many survivors of sexual violence report experiencing secondary wounding following their trauma. Secondary wounding results when a person reaches out for support after experiencing trauma and are met with a response that leaves them feeling unsupported and sometimes feeling as though they were at fault for the trauma. Secondary wounding is often unintentional and due to a lack of knowledge of what to say but it can have an devastating effect on the survivor and their ability to recover from their experience.

Secondary wounding occurs for many reasons. People who have never been hurt or traumatized have a hard time empathizing with people who have been hurt. Someone may prefer to ignore the intense feelings that a person is experiencing because they can't manage the overwhelming feelings it sparks within them. Professionals who don't make time for their own self-care may become burned out, resulting in comments that may cause secondary wounding.

Statements such as "He/she would never do that.", "Well were you drinking?" or simply "I don't believe it." are prime examples of those that often cause secondary wounding. People who respond in this way are denying the reality of the trauma that occurred.

Whether or not someone experiences secondary wounding is often determined by how the first person responds to them after sharing their experience. If someone you love or someone you know chooses you to talk to about a traumatic event they have experienced, the most important thing you can do is be there to support them by listening and knowing how to respond.

## WHAT IS VICARIOUS TRAUMA?: PERSPECTIVES FROM A COUNSELOR ADVOCATE

By Wendi Wenzel, PASSAGES, Inc.  
Counselor

Regularly interacting with trauma can take its toll on those who are charged with supporting others through a difficult time, whether directly or indirectly. When someone like a counselor or advocate feels these effects, we refer to this as "vicarious trauma." An advocate may find themselves carrying around with them the traumatic stories they are told and this can begin to alter their own life, mental health, and worldview.

Some signs that you may be experiencing vicarious trauma include:

- Constant tiredness, even after resting
- Physical body tension
- Headaches, back pain and wrist pain
- Difficulty falling asleep or excessive sleeping
- Hypersensitive to emotionally-charged material
- Feeling like no matter how much you give, it will never be enough
- Increased levels of anger,

irritability, resentment or cynicism

- Minimizing the suffering of others in comparison to the most severe incidents or situations
- Avoidance of work, relationships and/or responsibilities
- Lacking a personal life outside of work

Just as a survivor can manage the physical and emotional symptoms associated with their trauma, an advocate can manage the negative effects of vicarious trauma. In both cases, the path to healing is going to be individual and self-motivated. We create our own healing through self-care and making our mental and physical health a priority in our busy lives.

Self-care should become a daily practice and can take many forms but each day should contain some time for you. Some examples include: journaling, yoga, meditation or going for a run. Create a space away from work—a peaceful place, where you can withdraw, relax and be still.

# DON'T READ THE COMMENTS SECTION: ON CONSUMING DIGITAL MEDIA AS A SURVIVOR OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

By Tia DeShong, PASSAGES, Inc. Volunteer Coordinator and Community Outreach Advocate

I am not the first, nor will I be the last young woman to be threatened with rape or murder on social media. It's a common phenomenon -- a woman shares a political or social opinion via Tweet or Facebook status and instantly the hidden social media users come out of the dark recesses of the internet to pounce, usually side-stepping the woman's viewpoint in order to attack her, as a person, more directly. We call those hidden social media users "trolls," and it always makes me think of the story my mother used to tell me when I was a little girl about the three goats trying to cross the bridge to feed on grass. Trolls, I was taught, were creatures that lurked in the shadows under the bridge and tried to lure you off of your path to drown in the dark, turbulent waters below.

Trolls threaten to rape and kill women all the time on Twitter. In my own case, I've been lucky that their attacks have ended with the verbal. The 2014 Gamegate controversy saw the personal information (including addresses) of women spread, by trolls, across the internet for all to see. Doxing, as the tactic has become known, is now a routine approach used to try to bully outspoken women (and men) into digital submission. As in the story with the three goats, when the troll's attempt to lure the first goat into the waters below does not succeed, his efforts escalate in ferocity.

We see similar tactics used against survivors of sexual violence. If a victim shares his or her story on the internet, they can not only expect a slew of "why are you telling this story *now*" comments, they can also expect threats. "I'll *show* you what real rape is," one victim was told. "We should take all these women lying about rape and actually rape them as punishment," another anonymous user suggested.

Even if users can manage to avoid overtly-violent trolls through the use of various blockers and privacy settings, the standard run-of-the-mill media post, be it social and traditional, has a lot of potential to cause distress. It is considered good journalistic ethics to not reveal the name of the victim in an article detailing a crime, but often other details make the identity of the victim clear anyway (particularly in small communities). If we hear that a 30 year-old-woman with two children has been arrested for child sexual abuse, we can infer that the victim was one of her two children (or both). If an article reports that a local man was found guilty of assaulting his girlfriend, you can wait for the "comments" section to fill in the rest of the missing information.

In her victim impact statement delivered in court, the Stanford rape case victim, Emily Doe, details her own experience with the media:

*"One day, I was at work, scrolling through the news on my phone, and came across an article. In it, I read and learned for the first time about how I was found unconscious, with my hair disheveled, long necklace wrapped around my neck, bra pulled out of my dress, dress pulled off over my shoulders and pulled up above my waist, that I was butt naked all the way down to my boots, legs spread apart, and had been penetrated by a foreign object by someone I did not recognize. This was how I learned what happened to me, sitting at my desk reading the news at work. I learned what happened to me the same time everyone else in the world learned what happened to me."*

As you can see, the potential for a survivor to feel distress when consuming media far exceeds privacy concerns. The way the media does the telling (or the way the public reacts to the telling) can be just as brutal. This is not meant to be an indictment of the media, per se. The public has the right to know about crimes so that they can be informed and safe, but journalists also have an ethical obligation to report crimes in a way that is mindful of victims and their loved ones, including avoiding salacious details. The charges against a perpetrator indicate the severity of the crime; painful details aren't needed. Most journalists comply with those ethical standards, but some do not.

When the media migrated largely from a print to a digital platform, it brought with it the higher potential for disinformation and amateur punditry. While some speak of the "comments" section on an article

idyllically, picturing the way men used to sit around at the barber shop and discuss the local news, in reality it has acted as a smokescreen behind which anonymous users can disregard fact, ethics, and empathy in favor of emphasizing whatever kind of news suits their own worldview. The kind of trolls who prey on women and sexual assault survivors rely on the power and anonymity promised by the internet, and the looser and looser standards regarding which stories get shared on social media.

So, the internet isn't always a safe place for survivors of sexual violence (or women, more broadly). At the same time, suggesting we all just log off is utterly untenable in our modern, digitalized world. To suggest that is also incredibly unfair. In the same way that suggesting women not walk home alone at night puts the onus of prevention unfairly on the victim, suggesting that we just log off the internet corrals us into smaller and smaller quarters. We are not even safe in our own homes.

As with anything, individual actions are important (and can lead to self-empowerment), but nothing will ever change unless we see advocacy and support on the larger community level. We must hold journalist, media companies, and the politicians who regulate them accountable, but we must also stand up to our family and friends, carrying all we know about bystander intervention into the digital world as well.

On April 7, 2015, Grace Mann, a student at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, VA, was found strangled to death in the apartment she shared with fellow students. Having been sexually assaulted as a freshman at the university, Mann was an outspoken activist on campus, serving on the student senate, the sexual assault task force, and the campus feminist group, where she was the leader. In the months leading up to the attack, Mann and her group had been the subject of campus controversy after Mann wrote an article critical of the culture on campus, revealing that the university's rugby club routinely sang a song that depicted violence against women, including rape. When audio of the song came to light and the rugby group was suspended, UMW students reacted angrily against the feminist group and Mann, in-person and online. On the popular university app Yik Yak, where users post messages anonymously, students verbally attacked Mann and her fellow club members and threatened violence: "Gonna tie these feminists to the radiator and grape them in the mouth," one particularly threatening post read, presumably substituting "grape" for "rape" as a way of avoiding Yik Yak's moderators.

Mann and her peers voiced their concern for their safety to UMW officials, who instructed the students, in turn, to report the threats and harassment to Yik Yak (Yik Yak would later shut down in April 2017, following reports of user abandonment due to cyberbullying concerns). Weeks later, Mann was found murdered, one month shy of her 21st birthday.

Police quickly apprehended the male student whom Mann and her roommates had rented a vacant room to. At 30 years-old, he was older than the women, having had two previously-unsuccessful attempts at completing his undergraduate degree in the past. When he had been a freshman student, he had belonged to the university's rugby club. On the day of the murder, he acted erratically, sending vague and threatening text messages to his roommates. When two of them returned home, he reportedly asked the women what they would do "if Grace wasn't here anymore." In July of 2016, Steven Vander Briel was sentenced to life in prison for the murder of Grace Rebecca Mann.

How we talk about violence against women and sexual violence matters, including the way we do so on the internet. It is not a matter of "PC culture" run amok or young men who need "sensitivity training." It is the recognition and understanding that media, and how we participate with it, shapes and informs our culture. As with the fight to end all forms of sexual violence, we've got to change the culture before we will see the world that is truly safer for survivors.

Thank you for telling me.  
This is not your fault.  
You did nothing wrong.  
You are brave.  
Please don't give up.  
Healing is possible.  
How can I help?  
You are not alone.  
I am here for you.  
I believe you.

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You are exaggerating.  
It couldn't have happened that way.  
He/she would never do that.  
Well maybe if you hadn't...  
Well maybe if you had...  
You need to move on.  
Why did you wait so long to say  
something?  
You're overreacting.  
There are other people who have it  
harder than you.  
Prove it.

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## HOW WE RESPOND MATTERS

If you or someone you know needs to  
speak with a counselor,  
we are available 24/7.  
Call us toll-free at:  
1-800-793-3620

PASSAGES is a 501©(3) nonprofit organization. We are funded in part by the United Way of Clarion County, Dubois United Way, VOCA, the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape, and generous contributions from the communities we serve.



The staff, Board of Directors,  
and volunteers  
at PASSAGES, Inc.  
would like to wish you

*Happy Holidays!*

We look forward  
to your continued support  
as we strive to end  
sexual violence  
in the new year.