



## EVIDENCE-BASED TREATMENTS



### GENERAL

There are many treatments that effectively treat the psychological difficulties associated with experiencing sexual assault or abuse, especially post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These treatments include:

#### COGNITIVE-BEHAVIOR THERAPY

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) involves working to change both unhelpful thoughts and behaviors. CBT may involve both elements of exposure therapy and of cognitive processing therapy. CBT usually involves weekly sessions, lasting 60-90 minutes each. The length of treatment will vary depending on the patient's needs and abilities.

#### TRAUMA-FOCUSED CBT

TF-CBT is a specific subset of CBT that focuses on trauma and treats a range of psychological difficulties commonly experienced after sexual assault or abuse. The structure of sessions are similar to CBT.

#### PROLONGED EXPOSURE

Prolonged exposure (PE) helps people cope with PTSD symptoms by teaching them ways to gradually approach memories, feelings, and situations that are related to the sexual assault. People who experience assault and then develop PTSD often try to avoid anything that reminds them of the assault. This usually feels good in the short term, but does not work in the long term and prevents the person from overcoming PTSD. PE helps people end patterns of avoidance. By talking about the details of the assault and by confronting safe situations that have been avoided, people diagnosed with PTSD start to feel better and stop avoiding important areas of their lives.

#### COGNITIVE PROCESSING THERAPY

Cognitive processing therapy (CPT) helps people to evaluate and change upsetting thoughts that they have had since experiencing a trauma such as sexual assault. When people are able to change their thoughts about the assault, they can change the way they feel. Experiencing assault can change the way you think about yourself, about others, and about the world. For example, many people think that they are to blame for the assault they experienced. In CPT, people learn to reevaluate the thoughts they have about assault and decide when it makes sense to change their thinking.



The following treatments also show promise for treatment of the psychological difficulties associated with sexual assault, however the evidence of their efficacy is not as strong as that supporting the treatments above:

#### EYE-MOVEMENT DESENSITIZATION AND REPROCESSING THERAPY (EMDR)

The goal of EMDR is to help people process the traumatic event they experienced in a helpful way. For a person who has experienced assault, EMDR involves thinking about the assault while paying attention to a back-and-forth movement or sound (e.g., a finger waving side to side, a light, or a tone).

#### NARRATIVE EXPOSURE THERAPY

Narrative exposure therapy is designed for individuals who have experienced an ongoing traumatic event. For instance, some people are involved in abusive relationships that last for many years and are assaulted many times during the relationship. Narrative exposure therapy helps people talk through memories of exposure to trauma and put these memories together into a story.