



WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT

Sexual Assault Survivor Groups

These groups bring together people who have experienced sexual violence, including rape, assault, and childhood sexual abuse, in a space of shared experience and recovery. They come in two forms. Peer support groups offer community without a treatment curriculum, often through rape crisis centers and advocacy organizations. Clinician-led therapy groups treat the trauma, PTSD, depression, and shame that can follow. Sexual assault carries particular weight: shame, self-blame, and fear of not being believed. These groups name and actively counter those dynamics rather than reinforce them.

WHO IT'S FOR, AND WHO IT'S NOT

- A fit for survivors wanting community in a setting that understands these dynamics.
- Acute crisis after a recent assault may need immediate individual support and medical care.
- Severe dissociation or complex trauma may need individual stabilization first.

What it's for

Anyone who has experienced sexual violence, in childhood or adulthood, recent or distant.

Some groups focus on recent survivors; others on adult survivors of childhood abuse.

Some serve specific populations: women, men, LGBTQ+ survivors, or students.

WHAT TO EXPECT

1 Sessions run 60 to 90 minutes. You share at your own pace, never required to disclose details.

2 Ground rules center confidentiality, belief of survivors, and the right to share little or much.

3 Therapy groups are more structured. Facilitators in both are trained to respond to crisis.

Group-specific research is developing, on a strong broader foundation.

- A scoping review of 11 studies found group therapy for survivors **improved PTSD, depression, guilt, and dissociation**, while urging more rigorous research.¹
- A meta-analysis of 22 trials confirmed group psychotherapy is **efficacious for PTSD** across trauma types, including sexual assault.²

MAKING THE MOST OF IT

Share at your pace. You never have to narrate the assault to belong in the room.

You'll be believed. These groups are built to meet disclosure with belief, not doubt.

Shame loses its grip here. Hearing others name it is one of the most freeing parts.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU JOIN

- 1** Is this peer support or a clinician-led, trauma-focused therapy group?
- 2** Are facilitators specifically trained to work with sexual assault survivors?
- 3** Will I ever be expected to describe details of what happened?

Ready to find a group?

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If you're in crisis, call or text 988.



Sources

Sexual Assault Survivor Groups · references keyed to the numbers on page 1.

- 1 Heard, E., & Walsh, D. Group therapy for survivors of adult sexual assault: a scoping review. *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse* (2023), 24(2), 886–898.
- 2 Schwartze, D., Barkowski, S., Strauss, B., Knaevelsrud, C., & Rosendahl, J. Efficacy of group psychotherapy for posttraumatic stress disorder: systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Psychotherapy Research* (2019), 29(4), 415–431.

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The Group Guide is a directory, not a clinic. This handout is general education, not medical or mental health advice. Listings are written by group leaders and are not endorsements. Confirm details, cost, and fit with any group you contact.