

# NOT DAMAGED, NOT BROKEN

Exploring Mental Health &  
Substance Use with Adult  
Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse



**05** Connect &  
Listen

by Leah Green

# **Not Damaged, Not Broken: Exploring Mental Health & Substance Use with Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse**

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**05**

## **Connect & Listen**

**Tips for Advocacy in a Mental  
Health Crisis**

# Advocacy In a Mental Health Crisis

## What therapists want advocates to know\*:

“We want survivors to find someone they feel comfortable and safe with. We do not take it personally if folks reject us and choose another provider. We do not want clients to take care of our feelings, we just want folks to take care of their own feelings.”

“We don’t know more about trauma than you do. Therapists rely on advocates for information about trauma and sexual violence. Trust yourself and your advocacy knowledge.”

“There is still a lot of stigma in this country around accessing mental health systems. Often when you make a referral to a mental health provider it can feel like the end of the relationship with a survivor. They can internalize it as a punishment or dismissing them. The way you talk about this referral can change how this lands with survivors.”

## Things to avoid

Don’t argue about reality or belief statements. Debating the reality of what someone is experiencing may increase trauma.

- Don’t use psychiatric jargon.
- Don’t offer mental health referrals before providing advocacy.
- Don’t immediately make a psychiatric referral
- Don’t laugh or make fun, appear shocked, or try to dismiss or minimize.



## Remember

- You are not here to fix it. You are here to support and listen.
- They are having a natural reaction to an extreme amount of stress.
- You are collaborating to explore their feelings and situation with curiosity.
- It is okay to slow down and offer encouragement and gentle regulation tools.

## Supporting survivors, step-by-step

**Prepare yourself.** If you meet the survivor with anxiety, fear, or other extreme emotions they will feel those feelings too. Calm yourself so you can bring calm to the survivor.



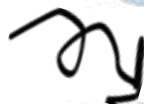
**Encourage regulation.** In a state of stress or distress, it's helpful to calm the nervous system; this is regulation. We can regulate the body and mind with breathing, validation, and listening.



**Wait to offer new material.** Problem solving, tangible support, or strategizing after regulation.



**Connect.** Make contact with the survivor. Get consent. Ask before trying to help: "would you be open to me sitting with you?" "Is it okay if we stay on the phone as you are feeling this wave of big feelings?"



**Practice regulation together.** With consent, offer to coach or teach gentle ways to soothe the nervous system. Remind them they are the best expert on what works for them. Validate that they are having a natural reaction to extreme stress.

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