

Sound Therapy for Healing Survivors of Sexual Abuse

Every 73 seconds another American is sexually assaulted. That means that during a 15 minute presentation another 12.3 people in this country will be sexually assaulted. 1 out of 6 women and 1 out of 33 men. 9 out of every 10 victims are female. Each year just under 600,000 assaults occur. (1)

Worldwide over 136 million women have been abused. That is 35% of the female population which is almost half of all humans.(2) These statistics are based on those incidents that have been reported. There are many that go unreported by those not wanted to speak up or relive the shame. They know their abusers and do not want to ruin their lives. The victims often are accused of “asking for it” or being provocative. They relive the trauma in the telling and are assaulted again. These statistics are only for Americans. The numbers worldwide are staggering. Is it any wonder we live in a society where war and violence are used to dominate, manipulate and control? To dull or numb the pain, we turn to drugs, alcohol, sex, shopping, or food to name a few. The resulting manifestations of the unresolved abuse can be depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Eating disorders, Sleep Disorders, Suicide, Panic attacks, and self-harm. (1) There are many healing modalities one can turn to; Psychology, counseling, meditation, light therapy and EFT. However, sound healing is one of the most effective, natural and ancient traditions for returning to balance and flow. It provides a holistic, safe alternative that uses instruments and voice toning to gently unearth and heal the physical and emotional scars of sexual assault.

The healing process begins when we start to come back to the body. It is where the traumas are stored. This blocked energy usually results in disease in the body. We have cut ourselves off from feeling deeply and we value our minds, as they try to figure things out, get them right, or maneuver through situations. We do anything to avoid feeling the pain.

Each of us needs to feel safe, affirmed and connected. Most of us have experienced trauma as children. This could be beatings, emotional, psychological or sexual abuse. Since we are not usually taught how to process trauma in a healthy way, we, instead, internalize the abuse and become our own abusers. Sometimes we abuse others. We develop survival plans which may include grabbing for attention, interrupting, always needing to be right or to be the center of attention. When we do this, it is not inclusive. We are unaware of the needs of others and will hurt those around us in order to get our needs met. This is not intentional. A lot of our behaviors are unconscious.

Through the sound bath, we are invited to inhabit our bodies. To come back to ourselves. Back to our hearts. To loving ourselves and our bodies. Sound can calm the

autonomic nervous system so that you do not always feel as though you are on high alert. The stress of always being “on” causes fatigue to the adrenal glands and cortisol is being released into the body. There is heightened awareness and fear constantly running even if on the unconscious level. Through breath work and sound with soft instruments, there can be a breakthrough or release. This could be experienced as crying, shaking, shouting, sighing or toning. There is a connection between the body and heart. When we connect with our hearts, we feel more centered and grounded. Our hearts start to open. It may feel painful at first. Beneath the pain is where the love resides. We inhabit our bodies in a new way and we start to trust ourselves again. This is crucial as we may have felt that our bodies betrayed us and led to the assault. Or we have formed other unconscious beliefs. With guidance, we start to believe life is good. To let go of the victim mentality and to realize we have choices.

“Sound has been a tool for promoting the physical and emotional health of the body for as long as history can account for, deeply rooted in ancient cultures and civilizations. The ancient Egyptians used vowel sound chants in healing because they believed vowels were sacred. Tibetan monks take advantage of singing bowls, which they believe to be “a symbol of the unknowable” whose “vibrations have been described as the sound of the universe manifesting.” Also When some American Indian medicine men and women were called upon to heal an ailing tribesmember, they would fast in order to receive a song in dream or vision instructing them in how to carry out the treatment of their patient.” (3)

Sound healing offers us a way to find our voice; to speak up for ourselves; to express and allow others to express without feeling intimidated or unheard. When we are centered and grounded, we can be present and speak our truth in love. If we have been taught to keep quiet, or that we don’t have a good singing voice, we are less likely to use our voices to express our own thoughts and opinions. If a person uses his own voice for toning, it is the most restorative. Sometimes we need to start with someone speaking to us in soft tones, creating a safe environment.

Using sound healing can have far reaching results. The recipient will eventually stop abusing themselves and others. When we heal, we are healing generationally so that the violence will not perpetuate. Sound therapy has been used in some prisons in the U.S. and abroad. We could use this therapy with sex offenders as they were, in most cases, victims of assault themselves. There are 917,771 registered sex offenders in the United States.(4) It would reduce the recidivism rate. The long range hope would be to end any sexual or violent assault. To end child trafficking and sexual enslavement.

Using sound to heal and free us from the effects of being abused results in our having a larger capacity to be loving and to be there for others. We become better friends and people as we are able to meet our own needs. Start by being gentle with yourself, and

using your voice. Peace on earth begins with each of us finding that peace within. It is on purpose. It is a choice. It is to be practiced daily.

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Sources:

1. Rainn.org website whose statistics come from Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. Bureau of Justice Statistics. National Crime Victimization survey, 2018 2019. Note. RAINN applies a 5-year rolling average to adjust for changes in the year-to-year NCVS survey data.
2. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>
3. Article from 2017 <https://www.medicinanarrativa.eu/sound-therapy-and-well-being-some-scientific-studies>
4. Security.org whose statistics come from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

Protocol for Working with Sensitive Clients

Recommendations for using sound to help bring a person back to his/her body:

1. Be gentle. Speak in low soft tones. Be respectful of their body and sensitivity to touch or sounds.
2. Ask if they would like a blanket – this often helps to feel safe or comforted. Lying on a table is a very vulnerable position for someone who has been sexually assaulted.
3. If at any point you will be using touch, or laying bowls on their body, or using tuning forks on the body, ask permission before you begin.
4. Let them know that if they are inclined to make sounds or sing with you during the process they may do so. (Many are not sure if they have permission to do so)
5. Any loud or jarring sounds will immediately put the client on high alert.
6. Ask the client to put their hand on their heart and to take a breath and feel their heart beating.
7. Ask them to say their first name while keeping their hand on their heart.
8. Ask them to say, “I love you” – still with hand on heart.
9. Ask them to make the sound of that. If they are reluctant, do not push.
10. After a minute let them know they may put their hands in any comfortable position as you start with the instruments.
11. Use even tones and calming instruments.
12. Watch their face and body for signs of tensing or relaxing. Sometimes you will see a smile.
13. Have tissues handy prior to beginning so that if there is an emotional release, there is not a break in the process.
14. When there is an emotional release, assure the client it is safe to let go. This is a part of the process.
15. Allow for breaks with silence.
16. When the sound process is complete and you have closed the container, let the client know they may lie there and take a few minutes and when they feel ready, to gently open their eyes and pat their body to come back into the room.
17. The sound healing therapy moves a lot of energy. Advise the client to drink a lot of water. You may even offer them some.
18. Advise them that the integration process may take about three days. Get plenty of rest and drink water. Pay attention to what their body needs.
19. Make sure they are steady when getting off the table. Offer to assist – do not grab.
20. Ask how they feel after the session. Did they experience more peace?
21. Let them know if they so choose, they can use steps 6-9 at home or any time throughout the day.

To someone who has not experienced this type of abuse, this may seem as though you are coddling a child. Yes, it is true that during this process, the healing of the wounded child takes place. We all need to feel safe, connected and affirmed.