This information package includes information about SACE and ways to support yourself while you are on the waitlist for counselling, as well as when you begin counselling.
At SACE, we believe that healing is possible. We offer individual and group counselling for anyone who has experienced sexual violence, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, faith, culture, social and financial status, ability, or sexual orientation. We recognize that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, people are the experts in their own lives and experiences, and healing looks different for everyone.

The counselling offered by SACE focuses on addressing the impacts of sexual violence. Trauma counselling can be hard and may not be something that everyone is ready to do, and that is okay! You may discuss this with your Client Care Specialist ahead of time, or your counsellor may work with you to determine if trauma counselling is the right thing for you right now. They may suggest other resources, such as addiction treatment, emotional regulation groups, or accessing medical or mental health services before you begin counselling. This is important because we are able to offer 15 sessions per client, and would like to work with you to get the most out of the time that you spend with SACE.

Counselling should be empowering. We believe those seeking counselling are the experts of their own healing journey, and our clients choose what they wish to share or work on. Some of the therapeutic approaches our counsellors may use in sessions include Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Emotion-Focused Therapy, Eye Movement Desensitization Regulation (EMDR), Movement Therapy, Feminist Therapy, Narrative Therapy, Play Therapy, and Somatic Experiencing.

If you have any questions about your file while you are on the waitlist, or require additional support, please contact our Client Care Specialist at 780.423.4102 or email info@sace.ca, and someone will get back to you.
Your First Appointment

Before your first appointment, you will speak to a Client Care Specialist, who will let you know your counsellor’s name, and can answer any specific questions you might have.

When you come in, you will come up to the second floor, and a receptionist will buzz you in to our reception area. Try to arrive a little early so that any delays won’t cut into your appointment time. The appointments are usually 50 minutes long, but depending on the day, may be a little bit shorter or longer.

Your very first appointment at SACE will include some information gathering, to get a sense of what you hope to get out of counselling. If you change your mind about counselling, or if for any reason the counsellor you are assigned to doesn’t feel like a good fit, please contact a Client Care Specialist at 780.423.4102 or email info@sace.ca.

SACE provides all services at no cost to our clients. We support thousands of people each year, so those seeking counselling generally have to be placed on a waitlist first. The counsellors at SACE work hard to keep this list moving.

To help us do this, we ask two things from our clients:

1. First, that if you find another counsellor, or change your mind about services, you call and let us know. You can always come back to SACE at a later time, but for now we will move on to the next person waiting for counselling.

2. Second, that you come to your appointments on time, and that if you need to reschedule, you provide at least 24 hours notice so that we can offer the spot to someone else.

By helping us out with these two things, we can keep our lists moving and continue to do our best to offer support to all who need it.

It is normal to notice changes in mood or behaviour in the days before and after counselling appointments. You may notice feeling anxious before sessions, or feelings of tenderness afterward. It is important to listen to your body and be kind to yourself throughout the counselling process, as it can be hard no matter what age you are! This resource package includes some ideas for how you can support yourself outside of counselling.
Additional Counselling Resources

**Saffron Sexual Assault Counselling Centre**
110, 222 Athabascan Ave Sherwood Park, AB

**780.449.0900**

Provides up to 20 individual sessions and group support to those affected by sexualized violence, on a sliding scale basis. Can be accessed as an alternative to SACE.

[saffroncentre.com](http://saffroncentre.com)

**YWCA Edmonton**
400, 10080 Jasper Ave Edmonton, AB

**780.423.9922**

Provides individual and group counselling on a sliding scale basis. Can address topics such as complex trauma, domestic violence, and addictions.

[YWCAofEdmonton.org](http://YWCAofEdmonton.org)

**The Family Centre**
20, 9912 106 St Edmonton, AB

Main **780.423.2831**

Counselling Intake **780.424.6103**

Provides sliding scale short term counselling to individuals, groups, families, and couples.

[familycentre.org](http://familycentre.org)

**Aboriginal Counselling Services**
204, 10010 105 St Edmonton, AB

**780.448.0378**

Provides individual and group counselling for all individuals at no cost and minimal to no wait time.

[aboriginalcounseling.com](http://aboriginalcounseling.com)
**Community Counselling Centre**
202, 10534 124 St
Edmonton, AB

**780.482.3711**
Offers individual, couples, family, and group counselling on a sliding scale.

[communitycounsellingcentre.ca](http://communitycounsellingcentre.ca)

**Drop-In YEG**
Multiple Edmonton locations

**780.423.2831**
Provides free walk-in single session counselling services to individuals, couples, and families. Various locations and times can be found on their website.

[dropinyeg.ca](http://dropinyeg.ca)

**Access 24/7 Mental Health**
10959 102 St
Edmonton, AB

**780.424.2424**
Provides a single point of access for adult mental health and addiction community programs at Anderson Hall, across from the Royal Alexandra Hospital emergency department.

**Cornerstone Counselling Centre**
302, 10140 – 117 Street NW
Edmonton, AB

**780.482.6215**
Sliding scale from $50 to $200. Student counsellors available onsite at a rate of $20 per session for those without benefits and whose household income is less than $35,000 per year.

[cornerstonecounselling.com](http://cornerstonecounselling.com)

**Momentum Walk-In Counselling**
706, 5241 Calgary Trail NW
Edmonton, AB

**780.757.0900**
Offers free, single-session individual counselling services.

[momentumcounselling.org](http://momentumcounselling.org)

**Jewish Family Services**
100, 8702 Meadowlark Road,
Edmonton, AB

**780.454.1194**
Low to no cost trauma counselling available for individuals, couples, children, families or groups. Clients do not need to be Jewish.

[jfse.org/integrity](http://jfse.org/integrity)
Support Lines

SACE Support and Information Line (9am-9pm): 780.423.4121

LGBTQ2S+ Youth line (2 – 7:30pm MT Sunday-Friday): YouthLine.ca

Mental Health Help Line (24/7): 1.877.303.2642

Alberta’s One Line for Sexual Violence (9am-9pm): call or text 1.866.403.8000, or chat at sace.ca

Family Violence Info Line (24/7): 780.310.1818

Trans Lifeline (24/7): 1.877.330.6366

Central Alberta Sexual Assault Support Centre Crisis Line (24/7): call or text 1.866.956.1099

Children’s Mental Health Crisis and Response Team: 780.427.4491

Indigenous Hope for Wellness Help Line (24/7): 1.855.242.3310

Distress Line (24/7): 780.482.4357

Kids Help Phone (24/7): 1.800.668.6868, or text CONNECT to 686868

Islamic Family and Social Services Association Help-line (10am-10pm): 780.900.2777

For additional resources, visit sace.ca/help/community-resources, call 211, or visit www.ab.211.ca
When You Are Supporting Someone Who Has Experienced Sexual Violence

1. **Believe them.** Even if they sometimes doubt themselves, even if their memories are vague, even if what they tell you sounds too extreme, believe them. People don’t make up stories of sexual abuse or assault. Let them know that you are open to hearing anything they wish to share, and that although it’s painful and upsetting, you are willing to enter those difficult places with them and to receive their words with respect.

2. **Let them define their own experience and path to healing.** This includes letting someone choose the words to define their own experience (including labels like “survivor”, “victim”, “perpetrator”, or “rapist”, or choosing not to identify with any labels). Each person’s healing journey is unique, and however they choose to respond, process, or cope is valid.

3. **Don’t place blame on the person who was harmed.** Sexual violence is about control and power; the assault/abuse has nothing to do with what someone was wearing, what they were doing, or where they were. No one asks to be abused or assaulted, however they responded helped them to survive; the fault is always on the person who causes harm.

4. **Listen carefully.** Empathetic listening is very helpful at all stages of recovery. Don’t try to feed fears, minimize concerns, or solve problems. Just “be there” and let them know you’re there to listen and support them.

5. **Don’t force forgiveness.** This is another form of minimization; it encourages further denial and makes the road to recovery more difficult. Forgiveness may or may not be the end result of a process of struggle/grief/anger, etc. It is up to the person who was harmed to decide.

6. **Understand how abuse is related to adaptations for managing trauma such as alcohol, drugs, eating disorders, or self-harming.** These are ways to try to stop the pain or find comfort.

7. **Hold out hope but not easy fixes.** There is healing from memories of sexual abuse. Putting a time frame on it or making it sound easy will usually be counter-productive.

8. **Be supportive but not controlling.** This can be very triggering for people as sexual violence is about control.

9. **Don’t encourage secrecy.** Telling a survivor to keep quiet about it makes them feel like appearances or the comfort of others is more important than how they are feeling. Secrecy is usually a part of the abuse and should be broken at the right time, ideally within a therapeutic plan.

10. **Validate the survivor’s feelings: their anger, pain, and fear.** These are natural, healthy responses. They need to feel them, express them, and be heard.

11. **Don’t sympathize with the abuser.** The person you are supporting needs your absolute loyalty.

12. **Respect the time and space it takes to heal.** Healing is a slow process that can’t be hurried, and it’s not a straight line.

13. **Respect their boundaries.** People who experience sexual violence may either seem like they have no boundaries, or have very strict boundaries. Both of these responses are for their protection. As they heal, they will learn how to set and maintain healthy boundaries. Respecting their boundaries will facilitate the feeling of safety they need.

14. **Get help for yourself.** You will have many feelings about the abuse or assault. Get support for yourself. You need to take care of yourself so you can be there for the person you are supporting.
Counselling at SACE during COVID-19:

In order to support the efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19, the Counselling team at SACE is offering virtual sessions to clients who have access to technology and feel this is a good fit for them. Video sessions are available for those who are physically located in the province of Alberta at the time of their appointment.

**Helpful Information about Online Counselling**

Online counselling can feel awkward. For some people the transition can feel easy, but especially if you’ve done in-person counselling before, it can be an adjustment to transition to online.

Here are some points to keep in mind when you are considering if online counselling will be a good fit for you:

- **Access to a device with a camera and microphone is necessary to support virtual counselling**, in addition to a computer or tablet with good internet service. As much as possible, we suggest that clients do not connect to public wifi for sessions. If you do not have access to technology, but do have access to a phone, you are welcome to reach out for services. Decisions about telephone counselling as an alternate option will be made on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the counsellor you will be working with.

- Setting up a safe, private, and comfortable space for your appointment is key to getting the most out of your appointments. If possible, find a private space where you will not be interrupted for your 50-minute session. Some ideas to create privacy in shared spaces include asking anyone else you’re living with to wear headphones, taking a laptop or phone out to a yard or balcony with you, coordinating for when you can be alone, or even making a blanket fort to create a cozy, contained space.

- There are some advantages to doing counselling online. Explore them! You may make yourself cozier, with pillows, a blanket, your favourite tea, or a relaxing candle. You could have a pet join you. Sometimes it can feel easier to share when it’s through a mode with a bit of distance, so virtual counselling may help you share more. You can also share links, or write in the chat if this feels easier for some things. Online counselling may mean that your counsellor can’t read your body language as well, but this can also be a great opportunity to develop your emotional self-awareness, through describing the emotions and reactions you might have more explicitly.

- Using an online platform can involve lags, and there may be some awkwardness around this. Remember that you can talk to your counsellor about these things too. Together you may find that laughing about it can help, or find a solution that works for better for you, including a combination of text, video, and chat.

- Feel free to share feedback with your counsellor about what is and isn’t working for you, and to share about the ways that social distancing may be impacting you. Healing from trauma is hard work at any time, and struggles related to both day-to-day life and life during a pandemic are all very real and very common—so don’t minimize how other factors may be impacting your wellbeing.
What to expect for your first video appointment:

SACE uses a secure online platform called doxy.me. This appointment will be much like FaceTime, and will ensure as much privacy and confidentiality as possible. This platform does not require you to download any software. Instead, your counsellor will send you a link to follow.

In preparation for your first video session, your counsellor will send you instructions on how to sign the consent forms digitally, and provide you with the forms to be signed and sent back. If you are unable to sign the documents, or do not wish to download them, your counsellor will review the material in the session.

When you’re ready to set up for your appointment:

Click the link and log in using your initials a few minutes before your appointment, to make sure you don’t have any technical issues.

Have your phone nearby for your session. Your counsellor will call from a “No Caller ID” number if any technical issues come up.

Make sure doxy.me has access to your camera, speakers, and microphone. You will be brought to a secure, virtual waiting room. When your counsellor is ready, they will open the session.

Headphones can be helpful to ensure you can clearly hear the counsellor, and add another layer of privacy if you have people nearby/ in your home.

The first session is typically for reviewing forms, getting comfortable using the web platform, and reviewing what the process of therapy looks like. Feel free to bring any additional questions you might have to your counsellor during this session.

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### Additional Digital Resources

**Anxiety Resources:**

- www.anxietycanada.com/free-downloadable-pdf-resources/

**Dr Kristin Neff’s Self-Compassion Exercises**

- self-compassion.org/category/exercises/#exercises

**UASAC Resource Hub for additional tools for survivors**

- sites.google.com/ualberta.ca/uasacreresourcehub/

**REACH Edmonton Covid-19 Community Resources:**

Healing is not linear.

Sometimes flashbacks or other trauma symptoms come back or worsen, weeks or even years after a traumatic experience. This can feel defeating or frustrating, like we haven’t progressed or healed at all. It’s important to understand that this is normal, and the brain’s way of reprocessing or reorganizing old memories. While this can present a short-term setback, the mind is reorganizing the memories from a different perspective, with more distance from the event and informed by the current situation or growth that may have happened since. If trauma memories or symptoms come up for someone again, it can be a sign that we they need more self-care or supports, or additional counselling to support the work the subconscious is doing.
How Trauma Can Impact the Brain

Trauma can impact us in various ways, including physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. The following outlines how it affects three crucial parts of our brain and the resulting impacts.

1. Amygdala: Alarm System

The amygdala is helpful and protective in dangerous situations because it turns on before we even know it, putting us on alert to keep ourselves safe. Sometimes, though, the amygdala can have a tough time turning off, when our brain continues to think we may be in danger. When this happens, our bodies can experience things like anxiety, hypervigilance (feeling on edge all the time), avoidance of things that remind us of the trauma, or becoming easily startled or scared. When we are constantly on guard, it can be hard to do things like let our guard down even when we are safe or need to sleep.

2. Hippocampus and Limbic System: Emotional Brain

The hippocampus is responsible for memory and learning in the brain: it works like a librarian, marking memories with context by recording when and where things happened. When we have a traumatic experience, the hippocampus may be impacted. The time, location, or order of events may not be marked correctly, leaving us with “fuzzy” memories, things that don’t make sense, or missing memories. When we experience triggers that remind us of the traumatic event, it can feel like the event is happening again (flashbacks, or nightmares if we are sleeping). The hippocampus can have trouble calming down the amygdala because the danger feels real during a flashback.

3. Pre-Frontal Cortex: Thinking Brain

The Pre-Frontal Cortex is responsible for controlling behaviour, emotions, impulses, decision-making, empathy, and awareness of others and ourselves. Usually this part of our brain lets us think clearly, make rational decisions, and have awareness in our day-to-day life. After something traumatic happens, this part of the brain is underactivated. This may leave someone who has experienced trauma feeling irritable, numb, with less control over anger, struggling to concentrate or pay attention, and making more impulsive decisions.

It is important to remember that these impacts on the brain are not permanent. It is possible to move forward and heal from the trauma over time. In counselling, you will learn about strategies to work toward this, including skills to calm down (called grounding), such as breathing, relaxation, distraction, mindfulness, and meditation.
Self-care, including self-soothing and looking after yourself, is helpful for managing everyday stresses. It’s particularly important after a traumatic experience, or when doing trauma counselling. Try to engage in self-care when and if possible. This can look different for everyone, so choose activities that feel right for you and your body. These are just some suggestions to get you started, what works for each person will be different.
Self-Care Wheel

**Personal**
- get “me” time
- learn who you are
- figure out what you want in life
- plan short and long-term goals
- make a vision board
- help others
- foster friendships
- go on dates
- get out of debt
- just relax
- spend time with your family
- cook
- learn something new
- chat with a friend

**Physical**
- keep or find safe housing
- preserve a calm home or space
- get regular medical care
- eat healthy
- exercise
- be sexual
- get enough sleep
- take a bath
- take a walk
- turn off your cell phone
- engage your senses
- rest your legs up on a wall
- take deep belly breaths
- notice your sensations
- take a bike ride
- do some gentle stretches
- get a massage or acupuncture

**Professional**
- take time for lunch
- set boundaries
- take all your vacation and sick days
- do not work overtime
- leave work at work
- do not work during your time off
- get support from colleagues and supervisors
- take mental health days
- learn to say no
- plan your next career move
- take a class

**Emotional**
- practice affirmations
- cry
- learn relaxation or stress management techniques
- check your negative self-talk
- practice self-compassion
- laugh
- say “I love you”
- find a hobby
- flirt
- read or watch something funny
- buy yourself a present
- let out a sigh
- give thanks for something big or small
- cuddle
- ask for nurture

**Psychological**
- therapy
- take time for self-reflection
- journal
- draw
- paint
- craft
- go to the movies or a show
- relax in the sun
- garden
- read a self-help or inspiring book
- join a support group
- think about your positive qualities
- practice asking for and receiving help
- sit in nature
- buy some flowers
- observe and work on your positive and negative self-talk

**Spiritual**
- take time to sit with your thoughts
- be inspired
- go into nature
- self-cherish
- find spiritual community
- meditate
- sing
- dance
- do yoga
- play with children
- watch sunsets
- pray
- find a spiritual mentor
- volunteer for a cause
- light a candle
- watch the stars
- practice self-forgiveness