



WestCASA

Western Region Centre Against Sexual Assault

Client Information Booklet

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Our Vision, Mission and Aims

VISION

A world where everyone lives free from the fear of sexual assault and family violence.

MISSION

To promote the recovery of all people who have experienced sexual violence and to strive for a world free of sexual violence.

AIMS

- To create an environment in which recovery from the effects of sexual assault and related family violence can occur.
- To strengthen our practice excellence to ensure we are at the forefront of therapeutic responses to people who experience sexual assault and related family violence.
- To advance community understanding of the social conditions that allow sexual assault and related family violence to continue to occur.
- To encourage communities to take responsibility for addressing the crimes of sexual assault and related family violence.

WestCASA offers:

COUNSELLING

WestCASA provides short to medium term counselling in a safe and confidential environment. It is a free service and is available to individuals who have experienced sexual abuse either in the past and/or recently. We also offer support to families, partners and friends.

All Counsellor/Advocates at WestCASA have specialist training and experience working with the impacts of sexual abuse. We provide counselling appointments at 4 locations in the Western Metropolitan Region including Werribee (Main Office), Footscray, Melton and the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre.

ADVOCACY

Counsellor/Advocates at WestCASA can assist you with information regarding your legal and medical rights and support you in the decisions you make. We also provide information about a range of community services and assist in referrals if required.

TELEPHONE SUPPORT & INFORMATION

When you first make contact with WestCASA, you will be referred to the Intake Counsellor who is available Monday to Friday 9.30 am to 4.30 pm.

Primarily, their role is to offer telephone support and provide information.

TELEPHONE SUPPORT & INFORMATION

They may also discuss your current needs, explore counselling and support options and guide you through our intake process if you decide to come to WestCASA for counselling.

If you are already attending counselling at WestCASA you may talk with the Intake Counsellor if you are experiencing a crisis or requiring additional support and your counsellor is unavailable.

GROUP WORK

WestCASA offers groups throughout the year facilitated by experienced Counsellor/Advocates. Meeting and sharing with others that have gone through something similar can be a powerful and healing experience.

Some clients choose to take part in a group in addition to their individual counselling. If you would like to know more about our groups, please talk with your Counsellor/Advocate or the Intake Counsellor.

BODY BASED THERAPIES

At WestCASA we understand that both a person's body and mind are affected by trauma. We offer a Body Based Therapies Program which includes Trauma Informed Yoga and Shiatsu.

These programs are provided by two experienced practitioners and are options available for people interested and currently engaged in counselling at the service. These programs are run throughout the year.

WestCASA also works in partnership with Yarraville Yoga Centre to deliver an ongoing Trauma Sensitive Yoga class.

If you are interested in these body-based programs, please speak to your counsellor/advocate.

AFTER HOURS CRISIS SUPPORT AND CARE

If you or someone you know has experienced a recent sexual assault we provide after hours crisis counselling, legal information and organise medical assistance at a special unit located at Sunshine Hospital or the Werribee MDC.

To access this service please call the **Sexual Assault Crisis Line** via WestCASA's counselling line on **9216 0444** or call them directly on **1800 806 292** (free call). A telephone counsellor will offer support and help you work out what to do next.

The Sexual Assault Crisis Line also offers after hours telephone counselling and support to clients of WestCASA at times of crisis.

They are an independent service, so you may like to inform them that you are currently seeing a counsellor at WestCASA.

“I have found the staff to be warm and friendly.”

How will Trauma Informed Counselling at WestCASA help me?

WestCASA adopts a broad view of trauma in counselling people who have experienced sexual assault.

We accept that each person's experience and expression of trauma is personal and unique. Two people may respond differently to the same traumatic event. Responses are also influenced by personal history, which may include other traumatic experiences, relationship to the person who harmed them, stage of life, support networks, cultural context and messages received by society growing up.

(adapted from "National Standards of Practice for Services Against Sexual Violence". 2nd Edition, 2015 p17)

We are guided in our approach by **The Three Stage Approach** (Herman 1992) to trauma recovery while taking into account the client's unique needs and issues. We work at the pace of the client in one or more stages of trauma recovery:

STAGE I: Safety and Stabilisation: Increasing feelings of physical and emotional safety

As a first step, you will explore, identify and learn to understand the effects of trauma. This includes recognising common impacts and understand the meaning of overwhelming body sensations, intense emotions, and negative beliefs about self, others and the world.

The goal of this stage is to create a safe and stable "life in the here-and-now".

The aim is for you to safely remember the trauma without becoming overwhelmed and feeling as if you are re-living the trauma.

Stage II: Coming to Terms with Traumatic Memories

In this stage of counselling the focus is to overcome the fear of traumatic memories, so they can be processed and made sense of in the story of your life. You don't need to talk about the details of the trauma if you don't want to, but it is helpful to talk about how it made you feel and how it affected you. Feelings need to be safely expressed and acknowledged for them to become less intense and gradually fade into the background.

This stage of counselling also gives opportunities to notice your strengths and to appreciate where you are in your healing journey.

Stage III: Connecting and Moving On

You can now begin to work on lessening any feelings of shame and isolation you may have been left with after your trauma. The focus is on developing and strengthening a healthy relationship with yourself and others. You will be working towards creating a life which has personal meaning and the possibility of more positive feelings.

The goal is to no longer be dominated by the memories and impacts of the trauma. The trauma is part of your story, but it no longer feels like it is the main story that demands your daily attention.

Counselling provides an opportunity to:

- understand the impact of sexual abuse on your life in a supportive and safe environment
- help reduce or diminish these impacts on your daily life
- rebuild your self-esteem and encourage you to take control of your experiences and life
- develop strategies to manage strong and/or painful feelings
- enhance your sense of personal power and safety
- develop strengths, resources and choices

It is important to recognise that recovery and healing from sexual abuse is a process - there is no set time frame or correct way of doing it.

You and your counsellor will work closely together to help move you towards healing and recovery from your abuse experience.

Do I have to talk about the sexual abuse in detail?

No, there is no expectation that you will talk about your experience in detail, as we know this may be re-traumatising for you.

However, as you get to know your counsellor and build trust you may decide talking about your experience is important to your healing and recovery. Your counsellor will talk with you about how to do this safely and gently.

Remember you have choices and are in charge of the process.

Is it normal to feel nervous/anxious about coming for counselling?

Yes, especially in the beginning as you are getting to know your counsellor. However, if it continues it is important to talk with your counsellor about this, as the work may be moving too quickly or fast for you.

There may be times when you want to avoid or even cancel your appointment – again, this is normal from time to time. However, if this feeling continues we strongly encourage you to talk about this with your counsellor rather than just stop attending.

Will things get worse before they get better?

Some clients describe things getting worse before they get better. It is normal to feel this as you may be facing some painful things or experiencing some powerful emotions for the first time. Your counsellor will help create a safe environment for you to explore these things.

However, feeling worse at the beginning is not everyone's experience and depends on a number of factors including what other things may be going on in your life at the time.

What if I don't get along with my counsellor?

Counselling is like any other relationship and you may feel like things just don't 'click' between you and your counsellor. If this is your experience, we encourage you to try and talk about this with your Counsellor/Advocate first.

However, if nothing changes after this conversation or you feel this is too hard to do you may contact the Chief Executive Officer, Clinical Services Manager or Senior Counsellor/Advocate at WestCASA. They will talk with you about your experience and make the necessary arrangements to change counsellors. You can also refer to the complaints process on page 22.

Finishing Counselling

Hopefully you and your counsellor will work out together when it is the right time to finish your counselling at WestCASA.

Even if you feel good about finishing you may also feel anxious about it. This is normal and your counsellor will talk with you about gradually reducing the frequency of your appointments to help you adjust. However, it is also not unusual for some clients to just stop coming and there are many varied reasons why this may happen.

If this is your experience, please know that you may re-contact WestCASA any time in the future.

Do you provide childcare?

Unfortunately, we are unable to provide childcare at our Werribee, Footscray and Melton locations. However, you may bring a friend, family member or support person to look after your child/ren in the waiting area or we can offer names and contact details of occasional childcare close by.

Please talk with your counsellor or reception regarding your childcare needs.

Common stress reactions to sexual assault

People who have experienced traumatic events recently or in childhood may experience strong physical and emotional reactions. Reactions like this are common and part of the process of coming to terms with a horrible event.

Sometimes the aftershocks appear immediately after traumatic events, and other times they may appear weeks, months or even years afterwards. Traumatic reactions may last for a week, months or even longer. With the right support and assistance people do heal from trauma, these reactions will decrease over time.

PHYSICAL

- Tired
- Upset stomach
- Diarrhoea
- Shaking
- Pain
- Headaches
- Chest Pain
- Sweating
- Heart racing
- Nausea
- Panic attacks
- Jumpy

BEHAVIOURAL

- Restlessness
- Sleep disturbance
- Isolating yourself
- Acting differently
- Apathy
- Increased use of drugs/alcohol
- Not able to do normal chores
- Increased or decreased sexual interest or focus
- Hurting yourself

THOUGHTS

- Nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Focusing on the event
- Difficulty concentrating
- Fear of it happening again
- Difficulty making decisions
- Fear of losing control
- Unable to understand own reactions
- Not knowing who to trust
- Self blame
- Worry that you're going crazy

FEELINGS

- Anxious
- Fearful
- Irritable
- Frustrated
- Depressed
- Guilt
- Helpless
- Sad
- Vulnerable
- Teary
- Numb
- Withdrawn
- Anger
- Shame
- Loss and Grief

Self care - recovery is a journey not an end

Recovery from sexual abuse is a unique journey for each individual and there is no right or wrong way.

However, we do know that an important key to moving forward is self-care.

Self-care may include activities that help you feel a little calmer and more grounded or support you in being gentler with yourself.

Choosing small simple steps of self-care each day can make a difference in your life.

Set simple, achievable goals for the day or week that gives you confidence to work on larger or longer-term goals

Remember that difficult feelings such as anger or sadness pass, letting them sweep in and go can release lots of tension.

Play music that lifts your spirits.

Watch or listen to something that makes you smile or laugh.

Do one small act of kindness for someone.

Do one small thing that you enjoy every day such as walking around your garden, sitting quietly with a cuppa, cherish the moment.

Keep a journal or a diary to write important things down.

Be curious and learn more about your feelings and thoughts – notice what you are doing just before you experience a positive or negative feeling or thought.

Notice when your thoughts wander to the past or to the future and bring yourself gently back to the present and the task you are doing.

Spend time with people who make you feel good.

Learn one small relaxation exercise and practice 5-10 minutes every day.

Get to know when you need time to yourself and when you need to be around people.

Read books about people who have faced big challenges in their lives and overcome them.

Eat well and don't forget to drink at least 1 litre of water a day – being dehydrated can affect your emotional wellbeing.

Write positive or inspiring messages on post-it notes and place them around the house.

Exercising regularly is great for relieving tension – even a brief brisk walk for 10 minutes or playing with children can help shift your energy.

Your rights at WestCASA

We respect your right to:

- Be heard, supported and treated with dignity and respect
- Quality care as promptly as possible
- Be supported in a way that is appropriate and sensitive to issues of culture, ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality, disability and level of development
- Accurate information regarding medical, legal and/or social action
- Participation in decision making which affects your care
- The right to consent to or to refuse a service
- A gender appropriate interpreter and/or communication aide
- A support person or independent third party in consultation with your Counsellor/Advocate
- Make a complaint on any aspect of WestCASA's services
- Discontinue counselling sessions
- Provide feedback regarding your overall experience of using the service.

“The atmosphere is calm and safe.”

Your responsibilities at WestCASA

While attending counselling we would like you to maintain the following responsibilities to:

- Provide 24 hours' notice if unable to attend a counselling session (when possible)
- Attend all counselling appointments on time
- Discuss any concerns in relation to your counselling sessions with your Counsellor/Advocate
- Not attend counselling sessions under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Be respectful of your Counsellor/Advocate
- Be respectful of all other members of staff
- Be respectful of other clients.

Statement of Service

If WestCASA determines that you are not eligible for our service or that your needs would be better met by another agency or professional, we will offer options and/or facilitate a referral elsewhere.

If you continually miss appointments, WestCASA reserves the right to discontinue service.

Your Counsellor/Advocate's rights

- To be treated with dignity and respect
- To be provided (where possible) with 24 hours notice if you are unable to attend a counselling session
- To feel safe
- To be free of verbal, physical or sexual intimidation.

Your Counsellor/Advocate's responsibilities

- Notify you if they are unable to attend the counselling session
- Provide a friendly and welcoming environment
- Start all counselling sessions on time
- Explain the scope and limitations of the support and advocacy services provided by the agency
- Inform you of any matters relevant to your case
- Respect your privacy and confidentiality
- Provide information about counselling processes and interventions used
- Identify and work towards agreed upon counselling goals
- Retain up-to-date and current knowledge
- Participate in regular professional development
- Comply with the WestCASA Staff Code of Conduct.

How does WestCASA protect my privacy?

What information do you collect about me?

Every client that attends WestCASA has a personal file that contains:

- Name and contact details
- Statistics about your age, place of birth, language spoken etc.
- Type of assault i.e. childhood or adult
- Counsellor/Advocate's notes summarising the content of sessions

What happens if there is a breach of data?

WestCASA may be required to contact DHHS if there is a breach of confidentiality regarding your information as part of our Critical Information Management system. The Chief Executive Officer and/or Client Services Manager will be responsible for responding to this breach. You will also be informed that this has happened.

How does WestCASA use this information?

WestCASA uses the information in different ways:

Your name and contact details: We collect this information so we can contact you if you have given us permission to do so.

Statistics (your age, gender, ethnicity etc): This information is used to help us understand more about the population trends relating to those who are accessing our service and provides accountability to our funding body.

Type of assault: This information helps us understand more about the work we do at WestCASA.

Counsellor/Advocate's notes: A brief record of each counselling session is a legal requirement and also helps you and your Counsellor/Advocate to track goals and progress over time.

Is my information stored safely?

The above information is recorded electronically and kept in locked filing cabinets. If files are being transported to an outreach location, they are put into a locked briefcase and accessible only by WestCASA staff.

Archived files and personal information other than Counsellor or Advocate's notes are also stored on our computer server.

This is in accordance with the Health Records Act 2001 and the WestCASA Security and Confidentiality of Records Policy.

"I really like the casual or low-key appearance and attitude – there is no awkwardness or patronising attitudes."

Who else has access to my information?

Information from your file is confidential. It is not shared outside WestCASA unless you are consulted and agree to this happening.

There are some exceptions to this and information may be shared when:

1. A Counsellor/Advocate suspects, on reasonable grounds, that a child or young person under the age of 18 years is at risk of physical or psychological harm or neglect.
2. A Counsellor/Advocate suspects, on reasonable grounds, that a person may seriously harm themselves or another person.
3. Under new Victorian Legislation WestCASA is a Family Violence and Child Safety Information Sharing and Risk Assessment Entity.

WestCASA may receive requests from other services to share information about our clients related to risk and we can also make requests of other services. These new schemes aim to promote your safety and better manage risks of Family Violence. Wherever possible we will consult with you before asking for or sharing information.

4. You are involved in court proceedings and your file might be subpoenaed. If this happens we will engage lawyers to oppose this request to protect the privacy of your file through the provisions in the Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1958 (Vic).

However, if we are unsuccessful it means that we are legally required to hand over your file. We will try to contact you to inform you of this action.

5. WestCASA participates in a quality accreditation process every three years to ensure our services are of a satisfactory standard. As part of this process we are required to have client files audited by independent assessors. The assessors work under the same confidentiality provisions as your counsellor.
6. You may also be asked to participate in a written evaluation or interview regarding your experience of our service as part of our quality practices. You have the right to decline the offer to participate without any impact on the service being provided to you.

Can I see my file?

In accordance with the Health Records Act 2001, you have the right to access your information held by WestCASA. No other person has the right to access to your file without your permission.

If you would like to access your file, then please ask your Counsellor/Advocate. You may be asked to make the request in writing.

You can access your file in a number of ways: by reading it, having a copy or a summary.

The original of your file is, however, the property of WestCASA. It may not be removed from the building.

WestCASA recommends that you access your file with your Counsellor/Advocate so that they can answer any questions you might have.

You are entitled to make changes to the file if you believe that the information in the file is inaccurate or misleading. These changes will be noted on the file. You can access your file after you have finished your counselling with WestCASA and should ask to speak with the Clinical Services Manager about this.

What laws protect my information?

The Victorian Health Records Act 2001 and the Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988 both have principles that govern how your information is collected, used, stored, disclosed and destroyed that WestCASA abide by.

WestCASA has policies that guide how we enact these principles in our particular service.

“You immediately get a sense of belonging and trust because of the conduct of the session.”

What if I am unhappy with the service at WestCASA?

Your rights if you make a complaint

- You have the right to continue receiving counselling and support free of judgement or repercussions
- You have the right to have all outcomes regarding the complaint communicated to you
- If you have a disability, WestCASA will provide you with a Public Advocate through the Victorian Office of the Public Advocate at your request
- If you are Aboriginal or Torres strait Islander, you have the right to a cultural representative or support person present at your request
- You have the right to a support person present at your request

Complaints Procedure

STEP ONE

In the first instance, you are encouraged to discuss any concerns or complaints you may have directly with your Counsellor/Advocate.

You may do so either in your scheduled appointment or you may call and make a time to meet with your Counsellor/Advocate.

The Counsellor/Advocate will try to resolve the situation. If you are dissatisfied with your Counsellor/Advocate's response or you do not feel comfortable completing step one you should complete step two.

STEP TWO

You are encouraged to speak to the Clinical Services Manager of WestCASA who may ask you to put your complaint in writing. She will seek to resolve your complaint within seven (7) days.

The Clinical Services Manager may contact you to schedule a meeting or to discuss the issue over the phone. The Clinical Services Manager will do their utmost to resolve the complaint. The Clinical Services Manager will contact you with the resolution reached.

If you are dissatisfied with the Clinical Services Manager's response or you do not feel comfortable completing step two you should complete step three.

STEP THREE

You are encouraged to forward your complaint in writing to the Chief Executive Officer/Board of Governance who will investigate the matter at the next scheduled Board of Governance meeting. The Chief Executive Officer/Board of Governance may contact you to schedule a meeting to discuss your concerns.

The Chief Executive Officer/Board of Governance will do their utmost to resolve the complaint. The Chief Executive Officer will contact you with the resolution reached.

Please forward your written complaint to:

Chief Executive Officer, WestCASA,
236 Hoppers Lane, Werribee, VIC 3030.

If you remain dissatisfied with the resolution you may contact the Health Services Commissioner and/or the Regional Director of the Department of Human Services.

Providing Feedback

If you have any feedback regarding the services provided to you by WestCASA we would like to hear about it.

You can forward any feedback in writing to our Chief Executive Officer at:

WestCASA

236 Hoppers Lane

Werribee, VIC 3030

or speak to her directly on 9216 0411.

If you attend our MDC or Footscray locations, there are feedback books located in the Waiting Rooms. Please feel free to write in the book during your next visit, your feedback is always welcome.

On a regular basis, WestCASA will seek your feedback regarding the quality of service provided to you.

Your Counsellor/Advocate will ask you if you wish to participate in our client feedback process. Any feedback we receive will be treated in the strictest of confidence.