



SEXUAL CONTROL

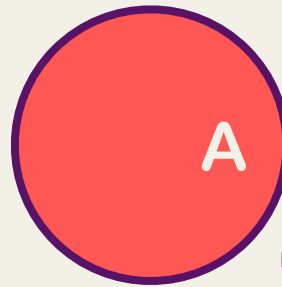
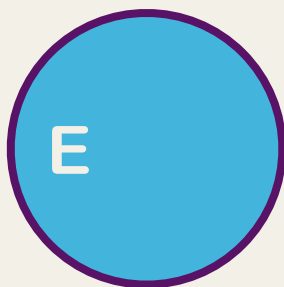
VIDEO FACT SHEET

The Sexual Control videos is part of Own My Life Session 10. Facilitators may find their organisation, manager or other stakeholders object to the use of this video with women, due to the explicit and confrontational nature of it. This fact sheet provides evidence-based guidance for using the video and associated activities; summarises trauma-informed principles, clarifying common concerns, and offering practical advocacy points.



EXPOSURE BASED APPROACHES

(when trauma-literate and carefully facilitated) allow women to **safely engage** with difficult material in a structured, supportive environment. Controlled and supportive exposure helps **reduce fear, aids meaning making and builds resilience**.



AVOIDANCE BASED APPROACHES

Minimise or omit potentially distressing material to prevent re-traumatisation. This can **reinforce fear**, extend symptoms, and hinder recovery. Research shows avoidance is a key factor in **maintaining PTSD symptoms** rather than reducing them.

What to choose?

EXPOSURE

AVOIDANCE

Components of our exposure-based approach

- ✔ **Autonomy:** Participants decide how to engage, which restores their agency, which was taken from them by the abuser/s.
- ✔ **Pacing:** Content is delivered gradually with clear boundaries and facilitator support.
- ✔ **Validation:** Distress is framed as a normal response to abnormal experiences.
- ✔ **Integration:** Women gain language and understanding, enabling recovery through processing, not suppression.
- ✔ **Meaning making:** By facing the reality of what has been done to them, women can make new meanings which place responsibility on the abuser.
- ✔ **Eradicating shame:** Shame cannot survive the light, and by exposing the reality of sexual violence and abuse, women's shame dissipates.

KEY MESSAGE: The Sexual Control video is a vital, evidence-based component of Own My Life. It enables women to name and process sexual abuse within a safe, trauma-informed framework. Avoidance undermines recovery, disempowers women, and risks replicating the control central to an abuser's tactics. With fidelity to the model, facilitators can be confident that the video promotes healing, not harm.

Potential reasons for opposition

- ✘ **Safeguarding:** Worries that exposure to graphic material may destabilise participants. Although avoidance may feel protective, research shows it maintains trauma symptoms. Safe, supported exposure reduces long-term risks and supports recovery.
- ✘ **Risk:** Omission may feel like the "safer" option. This content has been delivered to thousands of women with positive outcomes. The risk comes from altering content, not from the material itself.
- ✘ **Knowledge gaps:** Staff not trained in Own My Life may not understand the course's approach, viewing the video as a breach of trauma-informed principles. Only trained facilitators should make decisions about course delivery. Evidence-based programmes lose effectiveness if altered without consultation.
- ✘ **Comparison:** Previous use of avoidance-based models may create assumptions about best practice. Own My Life is deliberately different. It is direct and unapologetic because avoidance risks compounding shame, silence and disempowerment.

REFERENCES

- Exposure Therapy for PTSD: A Meta-analysis. (2022). Large RCT meta-analysis (n = 4,929) showing exposure-based therapies outperform wait-list and treatment-as-usual, with stable improvements in follow-ups.
- Powers, M. B., Halpern, J. M., Ferenschak, M. P., Gillman, S. J., & Foa, E. B. (2010). A meta-analytic review of prolonged exposure for post traumatic stress disorder. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 30(6), 635-641.
- Schuler, T. A., Boals, A., & Weaver, C. (2018). Trauma characteristics and post traumatic growth: The mediating role of avoidance coping, intrusive thoughts, and social support. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 10(2), 187-194. <https://mednexus.org/doi/full/10.1016/j.cptee.2022.02.001>
- Watkins, L., & Dunn, P. (2016). A Pathway to Danger? Evaluating the Freedom Programme. *Crime & Justice Matters*, 80. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09627251.2010.482230>