

Newsletter

Edition March 2023

£12 p.a. subscription for non-members
or organisations

free for SURVIVORs
who are Members
of CIS'ters

Charity registration:
1184857
(previously 1123125)



www.cisters.org.uk

CIS'ters IS NOT a therapy group: it is a small registered charity, run by survivors
“we might be victim/survivors, but this is not all that we are, or can be”

2023: Are You Ready?

Email: helpme@cisters.org.uk Phone: 023 80 338080 (answer phone)

Member Weekend Workshop 2023 – two places left

Flyers went out for this event last year with a reminder in our prior newsletter. It is scheduled for 20-21 May 2023.

Unlike our other services, there is a fee to access this residential event, which has been very heavily subsidised. Further reductions might be available for those travelling long distances or financial hardship.

Please note that this event is residential for one night, single rooms (ensuite). This is NOT a therapy weekend and participants are required to have a level of resilience to attend.

For further information email helpme@cisters.org.uk or leave a (clear) message on 023 80 338080

The Big Half Event – London **Sunday 3rd September 2023**

We have managed to get four CHARITY places at this major event.

For those taking part it is a 13.1-mile course that sets off by Tower Bridge in central London and finishes at the famous Cutty Sark in Greenwich

We are seeking participants who will be able to raise funds for CIS'ters.

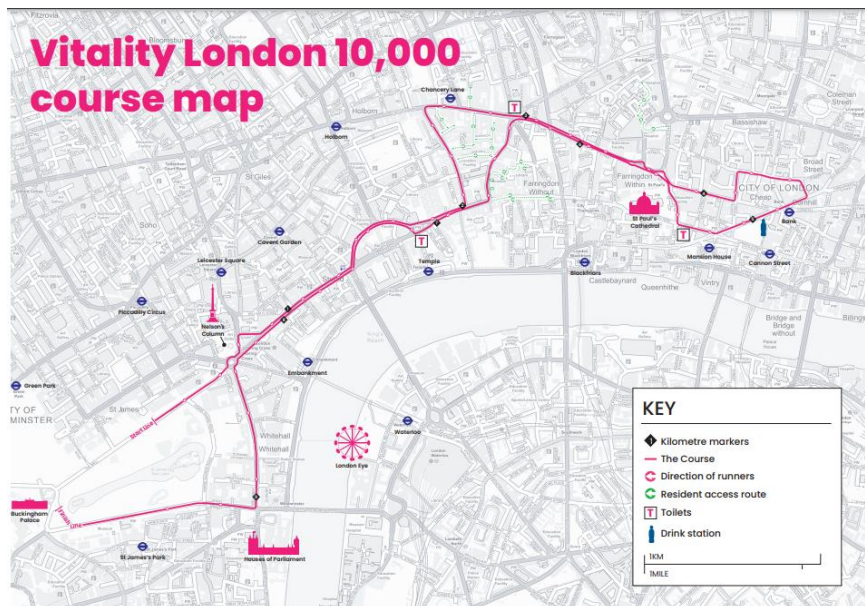
For further information on how to get one of our **four places**, email helpme@cisters.org.uk or leave a (clear) message on 023 80 338080

AND A YET ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY !

Vitality 10k Event – London Sunday 24th September 2023

We have been allocated ten places at this special fun run and we are seeking individuals who are able to take part and raise money for **CIS'ters**.

For further information on how to get one of our **ten places**, email helpme@cisters.org.uk or leave a (clear) message on 023 80 338080



Are you a member who needs some emotional support at the moment ??

Peer Support Group Sessions

Peer Support Group Sessions. These are Member only meetings (held in Hampshire) and places at each meeting are limited.

To find out more email helpme@cisters.org.uk or leave a (clear) message on 023 80 338080

Peer Support – Email or Phone Support

We continue to offer email and phone support to Members who are struggling emotionally.

To find out more email helpme@cisters.org.uk or leave a (clear) message on 023 80 338080

Tolly's Self Help Toolkit 2023 (an update since the last newsletter)

This is a self-help toolkit which we are developing and is currently being piloted by six members. Feedback is promising and we are appreciative of the time being taken by both the development team and also the initial participants, to create something that will help many in the future.

Further information will be available in future newsletters.

We are seeking resilient and robust Members to join our new Forum

Places still available on our Virtual Member Forum (will meet online quarterly)

In recognition that nearly 50% of our Members do NOT live in Hampshire, we are in the process of setting up a forum, with initially ten members, who will meet quarterly **on-line**. This forum will be tasked with providing trustees with insights/updates and reports on the kind of issues and challenges that Members are encountering in their wider worlds. This can also inform and expand the awareness work that is undertaken by **CIS'ters**.

When applying to join this forum it will be important for individuals to appreciate that this is not a therapy group. It will have a formal role to discuss and debate key issues that have either been requested by the Trust Board, via the Manager, or issues that the forum itself considers important at that time.

The forum will be Chaired by a Member designated by the Trust Board. Terms of Reference will be established for the forum, and there will be a recruitment process. We will also be seeking a balance of not less than six members (out of the ten) who live outside of Hampshire.

For further information email helpme@cisters.org.uk or leave a (clear) message on 023 80 338080

An Update – recruitment of CIS'ters new Manager

We know from emails that many members are anxious about the planned retirement of Gillian, from the role as Manager. She was the founder of **CIS'ters** in 1995, and has been a passionate and visible ambassador for our small charity ever since.

We want to reassure Members, and others, that Gillian is not disappearing completely – she will continue as one of our Trustees and will be involved in various projects and meetings as part of that ongoing role.

Trustees intention is that the new Manager will be in post by October, or not long after, with an initial contract for one year.

Care will be taken during recruitment and interview process and will include member representatives who will help trustees to make the appointment decision.

Trauma Victim – Card

Often we want to be able to alert a health, or other professional, to a situation we might find or anticipate as a difficult or triggering experience.



Healthwatch Essex has produced a card which can be kept in your purse – and which can be shown to someone if you need to communicate a vulnerability. For example, arranging a smear test, or going to the optician. The card does NOT name the trauma, and therefore leaves a personal option on how much to disclose at the time.

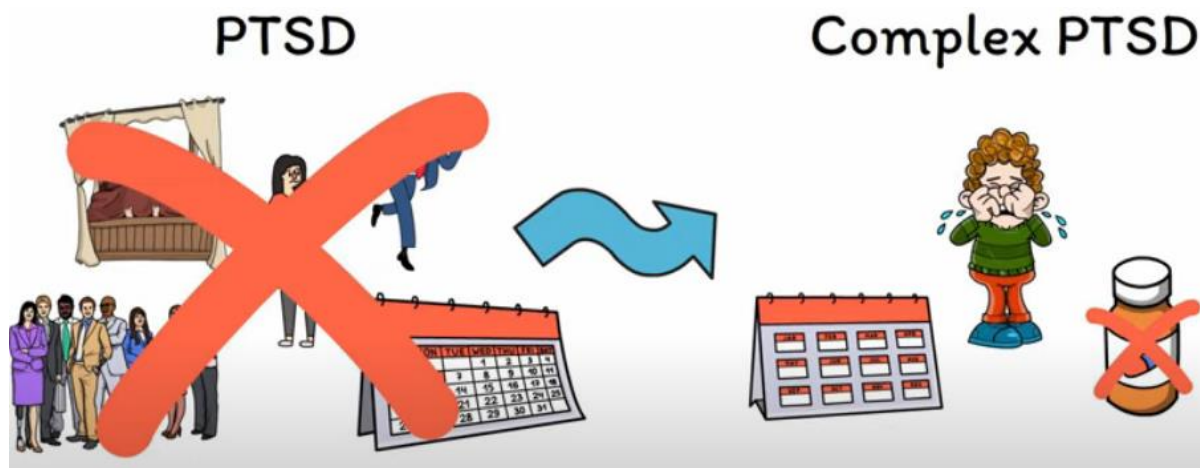
Even though the card is 'Essex' the information on it is universal – and so the card can be used anywhere. For those with smart phones, there is also a QRcode which means that the reader is able to access

comprehensive information on how trauma can affect individuals.

The majority of our members receive their newsletter via post, and we have enclosed a card for you. If, however, you receive your newsletter via email – the information about the card can be accessed via <https://healthwatchessex.org.uk/trauma/>

Prior to to Healthwatch Essex producing their Trauma Card, The Survivors Trust offered a trauma card but it visibly connected the trauma to be that of sexual violence or abuse. This meant it couldn't be used by anyone who didn't want the nature of the trauma to be disclosed. Since our feedback, and presumably from others, they have designed a 2nd card which now excludes the direct link to sexual violence. <https://www.thesurvivorstrust.org/nhs-checkwithmefirst-resources-for-survivors>

The Importance of Complex PTSD diagnosis to victims of sexual abuse



There is an increasing amount of information on the internet about the diagnosis of complex post traumatic stress disorder. Some of it is helpful and some clearly aimed at clinicians. But, it is important that survivors of sexual abuse during childhood are aware of Complex PTSD and we know that many of our Members are now receiving this diagnosis. C-PTSD is more relatable than some of the prior mental health labels that have been received in prior years.

If you think that you might have C-PTSD we suggest you ask your GP for an assessment.

This short video might be helpful: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHDhY56NWJo>



Feedback from Elaine (who joined in 2018)

Thanks for providing the prior link to the polyvagal theory. I've often wondered if my immune system responses in my health are related to past trauma. It was really interesting to learn how trauma affects the nervous system not just after the event but years after. I find being a Member of CIS'ters helps me to feel less alone, reminds me of how far I have come, I feel valued and heard, and a feeling of belonging.

Feedback from Marie H (who joined in 2021)

The peer support from **CIS'ters** along with 1:2:1 therapy (sourced elsewhere), has given me the strength to make tough decisions that I don't think I'd have had the courage to make alone. There is something very meaningful in communicating with another survivor from **CIS'ters**. It enables trust which is usually very difficult elsewhere.

Feedback from Sinead (who joined in 2005)

Being a member and receiving the newsletter helps me feel connected and not so alone. It provides me with valuable info; research; coping strategies; heartfelt accounts from other people.

Feedback from Tierra (who joined in 2022)

I find it helpful to read about other Members and how they have been helped.





First violence against women and girls benchmark published

<https://news.npcc.police.uk/releases/first-benchmark-of-police-performance-on-tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-published>

In December 2021, National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and College of Policing set out priority actions for all police forces in England and Wales to bring consistently high standards to the police response to violence against women and girls.

The first assessment of police performance was published on 23rd March 2023 providing a critical baseline based on data gathered between October 2021 and March 2022. NPCC intention is that subsequent national assessments will be published annually.

A key area identified by NPCC of focus in the national framework is responding to allegations of police-perpetrated abuse and addressing sexism and misogyny within policing.

The complaint and conduct cases they use are categorised against a range of definitions from the Independent Office of Police Conduct (IOPC), which includes sexual harassment (defined as unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature, including sexual comments, propositions, leering and sexual posts on social media), discreditable conduct (defined as behaviours that occur while not in the execution of their duty) and sexual assault.

The recent report highlights that almost two-thirds of the public complaints were categorised as use of force (63 per cent). In these cases, women will have complained about the use of force in handcuffing or arrest for example. Next most common was overbearing or harassing behaviour at nine per cent. Sexual assault complaints made up six per cent of the total. The most common definitions for conduct cases were:

- discreditable conduct 48 per cent
- sexual assault 19 per cent
- sexual harassment 13 per cent

Within this newsletter please find a copy of the letter that Maggie Blyth (the National Police Lead for Violence Against Women and Girls) which was sent to organisations like **CIS'ters**. Interesting to read.



<https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/>

If you are dissatisfied with a criminal investigation that the police are currently carrying out or have finished carrying out, you can make a complaint about the conduct of any police officer or member of police staff. However, this would not necessarily lead to a review of the criminal investigation itself. The IOPC does not have any control over the police handling of a criminal matter. They cannot review the results or instruct the police to reinvestigate a criminal allegation.

However, they can review the process against a back drop of 'best practice' and make recommendations to a single police force or across the 44 police forces in the UK.

TACKLING MALE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS

Victim Survivors Police Experience Survey for rape and other sexual offences

A very **important survey** on **Victim Survivors Police Experience Survey** for rape and other sexual offences is now live and can be accessed using the link below which **closes** at the **end of June 2023**. <http://www.tinyurl.com/1experiencesurvey>

As part of Operation Soteria Bluestone – a national scheme aimed at transforming the policing response to rape and other sexual offences – academics at City University London, have launched a police experience survey for victims of rape and other sexual offences.

It is hoped that this will improve the ways in which police forces engage with victims of rape and other sexual offences, and thereby improves the victim-survivor experience of the police investigation and criminal justice process.

If appropriate please do undertake this survey, which does not ask for contact details. **If you wish to undertake this online survey >>>>** <http://www.tinyurl.com/1experiencesurvey>

More information on Operation Soteria Bluestone and wider project: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/operation-soteria-year-one-report/operation-soteria-bluestone-year-one-report-accessible-version>

Thank you to Louise (joined 2003) who sent us these:



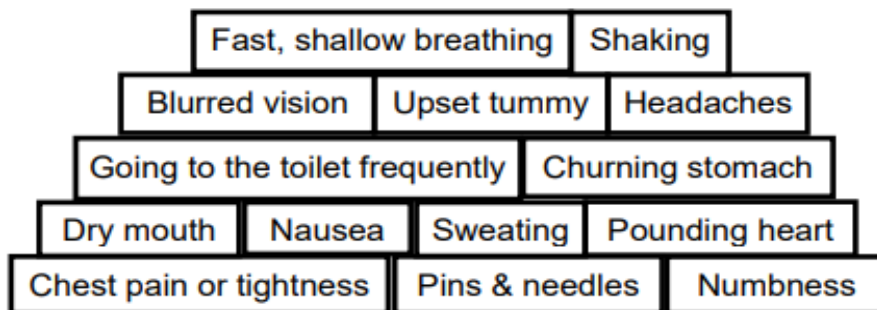
Cycle of breathlessness and anxiety

The human body has a built-in survival mechanism which helps us to deal with stressful situations. This is called our '**flight**' or '**fight**' response, where we react to the situation either by running away from it or by staying and tackling it.

This is a normal, usually controllable, reaction and once we have been introduced to the new experience then the nervousness and trepidation will settle down.

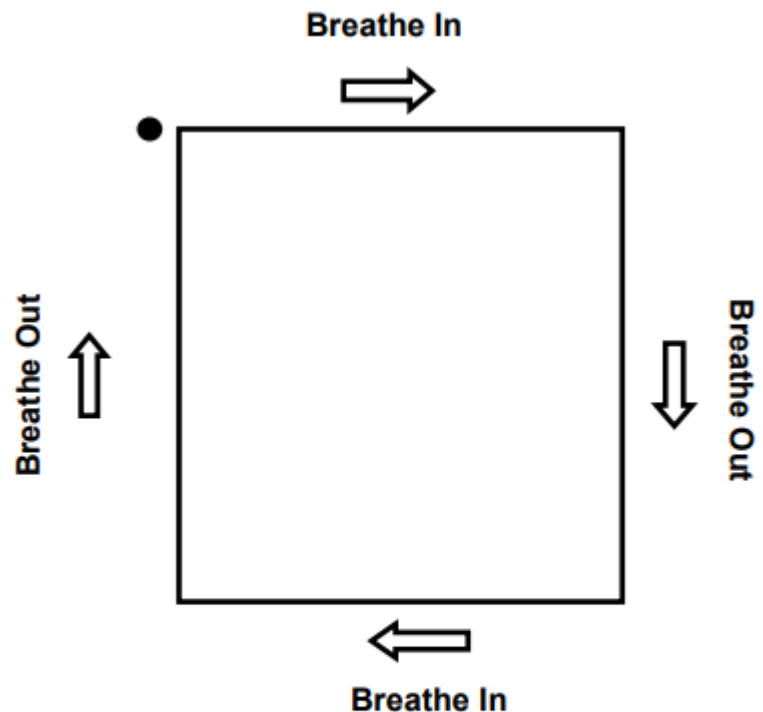
However, sometimes this normal reaction, and the feelings associated with it, are triggered frequently and can become out of control, turning into a vicious cycle of ever-increasing breathlessness and anxiety, each problem very much feeding the other.

The physical sensations (or symptoms) of anxiety are not harmful but can be very frightening if you do not know what caused them or how to control them.



Window breathing

- Place your finger on the 'dot' in the top left of the rectangle.
- Breathe in as you follow the line in the direction of the arrow to the next corner.
- Then breathe out along the next side.
- Continue around the rectangle following the instructions.



This breathing technique is helpful for getting your breathing into a more rhythmical pattern (breath in slightly shorter than your breath out).

It is also very helpful as a distraction technique for when you have an episode of breathlessness or anxiety.

THE DEBATE ON MANDATORY REPORTING REMAINS UNRESOLVED

It is clear from some of the recent media articles and also items on social media, following government announcements relating to potential introduction of Mandatory Reporting (MR), that many have been previously unaware that there is currently no legislative requirement to report sexual abuse when disclosed, for example, in a school or similar **regulated** organisation.

Within the UK the one organisation that does have a comprehensive understanding of the nuances of Mandatory Reporting and the evidence to support this, is called <https://mandatenow.org.uk> – who have been recognised as the national voice of adult survivors seeking the introduction of MR. Since 2005, they have been providing past and current governments (across political divides), with the unquestionable evidence to formally introduce Mandatory Reporting. This is a topic we should all have an opinion on, as the failure to introduce MR, or the introduction of a not-fit-for-purpose framework – will affect us all, and continue to fail children in the future.

To learn more about Mandate Now and also view the film that provides the background to 'why' MR is important, please watch this award winning film: <https://youtu.be/WoOzqebOU1k>

Under the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act, it is now illegal (in England and Wales) to get married under the age of 18.

The Marriage & Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act came into force on 27th February 2023, following a long and arduous journey through the parliamentary process which commenced in April 2022. Previously, individuals could get married at age 16 or 17 if they had parental consent and additionally there was no law against *ceremonies* for younger children which were not registered with local councils.

Previously forced marriage was only an offence if coercion, such as threats, were used. But under this new legislation, it is now illegal to arrange for children to marry under any circumstance, whether or not force is used. Those found guilty of the offence can be sent to prison for up to seven years.

The changes do not apply in Scotland and Northern Ireland, where the minimum age for marriage remains 16. In Scotland parental consent is not required. Ministers in Northern Ireland have previously indicated that they plan to increase the minimum age to 18, but have yet to do this. They currently require parental consent.

To explore the time line to attain the new minimum age <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2900#timeline>

Editorial Statement: We welcome letters from Survivors and from those who support them such as friends/allies/counsellors/social workers etc. While every effort will be made to keep contributions complete and unedited we reserve the right to make amendments when necessary, and will note it as 'edited'. Decisions about the inclusion & amendment of contributions are the responsibility of the Editorial Team, and are final. Contributions do not necessarily reflect the views & opinions of **CIS'ters**, members of the Trust Board, or the Editorial Team. Inclusion of any reference to an individual, book list, or organisation resource is not a recommendation.

The contents of this newsletter are for information and support purposes only.

This newsletter is not a substitute for individual therapy or professional supervision.

CIS'ters, PO Box 119, Eastleigh, Hants, SO50 9ZF Tel: 023 80 338080 www.cisters.org.uk

CIS'ters: an experience in learning, sharing, growing – individually and together
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