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**BECOM**  
**HUMAN AGAIN**

**Five Life Phases**  
**One Path**  
**Your Pace**

**Translated from Dutch by Franky D'hauwer**

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## **Colophon**

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**'Surviving Together'**

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**Dedicated to all victims  
of sexual violence**

**To those who were silent, screamed, fought, or fled.**

**To those who survived, day after day.**

**To those who are slowly becoming human again.**



## Shards that Bloom

*Something grows in the silence,  
among the shards of the past,  
where pain has written its name  
and nothing seemed to matter anymore.*

*A whisper of life  
in a breath without a voice,  
a slow step inward  
where I find myself again.*

*No road straight or clear,  
no map held in a steady hand,  
but threads of memory  
stretched across the land.*

*I learn to know the darkness  
without being afraid of what's there,  
I see the wound bloom  
into something I can accept.*

*Recovery is not forgetting,  
not erasing the suffering,  
but learning how to live  
with everything that remains.*

*And someday, on quiet days,  
I feel softness in my being  
as if, piece by piece,  
I can be myself again.*

*Franky*

# Foreword by Franky

There is so much that does not fit into words. And yet I kept writing. Not because I already knew the right words, but because I hoped to find them by writing. To understand. To heal. And above all: not to be alone anymore.

This book is not a manual. It is not a theory, not a method. It is a path. A collection of steps and silences, built from my own life journey. A path that started with listening to myself, to others, sharing experiences, and acknowledging my own pain and strength.

My first real healing began in a group where recovery, responsibility, and connection were central. There I discovered the power of sharing, of surrender, and of coming home to myself step by step. Without that experience, I would not have found this path.

Together with Nico, and thanks to other fellow survivors who entrusted me with their stories, this book grew into a guide that can now serve others. Our collaboration consisted of hours, days-long conversations. Together we shaped this book.

I hope you recognize something in it. And that it invites you to be gentle with yourself. To listen to your own story.

# Foreword by Nico

I am not a writer. My strength lies in listening, analysing, and asking questions that sometimes say more than a thousand words. Yet I struggled through this foreword, not for myself, but for you - the reader, the fellow survivor, the seeker of recovery.

My journey to healing did not begin with pen and paper, but with silences filled by the words of others. In conversations, in shared silences, in the eyes of people who understood without me having to say anything, I found the courage to face my own story.

Writing this book was a challenge. Not because I had nothing to say, but because finding the right words for deep feelings and experiences seemed almost impossible.

Fortunately, I had Franky by my side. He listened to my stories, my insights, and my silences. Together we shaped this book, with my thoughts and feelings coming to life through his pen.

I hope you find recognition in this book, that it encourages you to keep going, even in the hardest moments. And that, like me, you discover that you are not alone.



# Introduction

There is a before and an after. Before the violence, and everything it left behind. Maybe you recognize that too. Maybe you also carry something with you that barely received words. Maybe you also feel that you are more than what was done to you.

This book arose from Franky's personal life journey as a survivor of sexual violence. For years he searched for words, for meaning, for direction in what so often seemed directionless. In that search, step by step, a model grew that offered support without forcing anything.

Together with Nico, fellow fighter, survivor, and close friend, it was refined, deepened, and enriched. And above all: it was nourished by many conversations with other fellow survivors. People who, just like them, try to live with what should never have happened.

This book "Still Becoming Human," or by its more professional name: The "Five-Phase Model" of 'Surviving Together', is not a ready-made answer. Not a theoretical framework. Rather, it is a warm, human guide.

Five phases that you may go through at your own pace, in your own order. Sometimes forward, sometimes back. Sometimes slowly, sometimes hesitantly, but always with the hope that you may slowly feel again: "I am human. And I may live.

We invite you to walk this path with us. In connection. In honesty. In gentleness. Welcome. You don't have to do it alone.

N.I.





# What is Recovery?

Much has been written about the consequences of sexual violence, but real help for victims on their path to recovery is still painfully scarce.

Within the field of psychology, people often get stuck offering general tools, intended for grief processing or trauma in general. That is not surprising. Sexual violence, however, cuts deeper. It not only touches physical boundaries, but also undermines trust in people, in life, and often in yourself.

Recovery from sexual violence cannot be captured in fixed steps or universal schemes. Every victim carries a unique story. Every survival mechanism is personal, born out of necessity, not choice. Every attempt at recovery is therefore a search. A personal path, winding between hope and despair, between falling and getting up, between silence and voice.

Many victims who stand at the beginning of their processing journey may also have a wrong idea of recovery. They hope or long to “get rid of it.” They want to undo the abuse, in one way or another. As if recovery is something you can complete, check off, forget. But it doesn’t work that way. The past cannot be erased. The experience cannot be undone.

So the question arises: what is recovery?

Recovery is not erasing the wound but learning to live with the scar.

An optimal situation would be: “learning to deal with the experience in such a way that it no longer negatively influences daily life.” But even that is too big a first goal for many. Much is already gained if someone can pick up the thread of daily life again, without destructive survival mechanisms such as isolation, loss of control, dissociation, or shame taking over.

Recovery is first and foremost recognizing those mechanisms. Then comes learning to understand why they arose, learning to deal with them, and ultimately: developing new ways to cope with life. Not despite the past, but with the past.

Recovery is also: finding yourself again, bit by bit. Not as you once were, but as you want to be now. With scars, yes. But also, with strength. With memories, yes. But also, with choices. With sadness, yes. But also, with hope.

That is why recovery is more than therapy. It is not an intervention from the outside. It is a growth process from within.

The Five-Phase Model as we propose it, born from our own experiences, is not a universal recipe. But it offers a framework, a support, on which everyone can hang their own story. It gives language to what often seems unspeakable. It offers space to build, step by step, to what is possible.

**Recovery is not: forgetting.**  
**Recovery is being able to live on.**  
**Not as it was, but again and differently.**

# **The Five-Phase Model FROM SUFFERING TO LIVING**

## **Introduction to the Five-Phase Model**

Sexual violence leaves deep traces. In the body. In the mind. In the soul. It takes away our sense of safety, autonomy, and self-worth. It turns our world upside down and often leaves us with a confusing mix of pain, shame, guilt, anger, fear, and loneliness.

Whoever survives sexual violence is not only a victim of what was done to them. Often, one also becomes a victim of misunderstanding, of silence, of judgment or denial. And even of the own desire to “just move on,” while everything inside is stuck or screaming.

### **Recovery is not a straight line.**

It is a path of falling and getting up. Of searching and finding. Of daring and shrinking back. Of loss and of regained strength. These fifteen steps are not a mandatory path, not a checklist or crash course. They are invitations. Signposts.

They invite you to pause, feel, connect, grow, choose, at your own pace. Alone and together. They recognize that recovery is not an isolating task, but a process in relation to others, to life itself.

That is why these steps are bundled into five phases, each expressing a fundamental aspect of the recovery process:

## **PHASE 1: SURVIVAL**

In this phase, everything revolves around (acknowledging) victimhood and seeking safety.

Recognizing what happened. Admitting that you need help. And allowing yourself to feel that your boundaries matter.

### **Steps 1, 2, 3:**

- ✓ I admit that I am a victim of sexual violence.
- ✓ I acknowledge that I cannot do it alone.
- ✓ I choose to seek and create safety in my life.

## **PHASE 2: UNDERSTANDING**

Here, the inner world begins to speak. The consequences of the trauma become more tangible. Not to identify with them, but to understand and soften their grip.

### **Steps 4, 5, 6:**

1. I reflect on the consequences of the abuse on my body, mind, and soul.
2. I learn to better understand myself and my reactions.
3. I acknowledge my pain without identifying with it.

## **PHASE 3: RECOVERY**

In this phase, space is created for recovery. That recovery requires active effort, but also gentleness. It is about learning to feel what you need, setting boundaries, and learning to trust again.

### **Steps 7, 8, 9:**

4. I work actively on recovery, at my own pace.

5. I learn to set healthy boundaries and recognize my own needs.
6. I gradually build trust in myself, in others, in life.

#### **PHASE 4: GROWTH**

There comes a moment when you notice: I am more than a victim. You begin to live from a strength that has grown through the pain. You take ownership in your own way. And you discover a new freedom to shape who you are.

##### **Steps 10, 11, 12:**

7. I choose not to continue living as a victim.
8. I take responsibility for my recovery process.
9. I choose to live lovingly, in connection with myself and the world.

#### **PHASE 5: LIVING ON**

The last phase may be the most existential. Here, space is created to bring your story into the world, not as a fighter, but as a human being. It is a phase of giving meaning, without justifying the past. Of speaking, sharing, serving, and ultimately: living, with gentleness for yourself.

##### **Steps 13, 14, 15:**

10. I see my story as a source of strength for myself and perhaps for others.
11. I am allowed to mean something to others, without losing myself.
12. I give meaning to my suffering.

## **To conclude**

Every step in this workbook is lovingly worked out, with a warm introduction, inviting reflection themes, a piece of poetry, and three deepening theme articles that provide extra support along the way.

Know that you do not have to walk this path alone. Maybe you take small steps, maybe you turn back for a while, or pause to catch your breath.

Everything is allowed. Everything counts. You set the pace. You carry the fire.

Whatever you have experienced: you are worth it.

**To recover.**

**To live.**

**To be free.**

# PHASE 1

## SURVIVAL



Acknowledgment and  
seeking safety

# Survival

*What was done to me, so quietly,  
sank into years without a name.  
Until I dared, against my will,  
the child in me to rise again.*

*I carried his voice, buried deep,  
an echo in an empty room.  
No one who knew, no mouth that called,  
what was imprisoned in me remained silent.*

*But in the darkness, hope grew,  
a whisper, a small beginning.  
A hand, a look, a word, so soft and unexpected,  
a ray of light broke through my silence.*

*Franky*



# Survival

Survival is the very first and most fundamental phase in the recovery process after sexual violence. It is a period in which the person is in the ‘storm’ of the violence, or has just come out of it, and the world is completely disrupted. Literally, survival means that you are still here, that you keep yourself alive, even when everything inside and outside threatens to break.

This phase is characterized by extreme vulnerability, but also shows an invisible, inner strength. Survival requires a courage you may not be aware of, and a resilience that keeps you breathing, even when the pain seems unbearable.

In this initial phase, you often feel trapped in your own body. The body carries the memories and traces of the violence, which cannot simply be switched off. Common symptoms are nightmares, startle reactions, inexplicable physical complaints, or dissociation, where you feel disconnected from reality. Thoughts can endlessly circle around guilt, shame, and disbelief. The world feels unsafe, as if the familiar has disappeared. Relationships with loved ones may come under pressure, because they may not be able to comprehend what you are going through. Speaking about the experience is often difficult, for fear of not being believed or getting hurt even more.

Survival is not only about physical presence, but also about emotionally and mentally getting through the day. This can manifest in small, seemingly simple actions, such as getting up, getting dressed, trying to eat, and functioning in small steps. It is a constant struggle not to sink completely into the darkness left by the trauma. At the same time, survival is also a form of resilience and self-protection: the ability to hide, to shut yourself off, to dissociate, or to wait silently until there is a moment of rest.

This survival mode, however, is not passive. It is a fundamental expression of the will to live, of an inner source of strength that continues to manifest itself despite everything. It is the first and perhaps most important step in the recovery process, because without survival there can be no next step. From the outside world, this requires patience, respect, and a listening ear. But above all, it asks of the person themselves a gentle look and recognition of all they have already endured. It is a slow process of learning that body and mind can be safe again, at your own pace and on your own terms.

Survival is the foundation of everything, a silent act of heroism that remains invisible to the outside world but is accomplished every day. From this place, the path begins that gradually leads to understanding, recovery, growth, and ultimately, living on.

# **Step I**

## **I Admit That I Am a Victim of Sexual Violence**

**“I no longer minimize what has been done to me.”**

### **Introduction**

#### **The Gateway to Recognition**

The first crucial step on our journey toward healing and recovery is one that requires courage and honesty. It is often a very difficult step to take: the step of recognition.

There is a moment in every survivor’s journey when time seems to stand still—a moment when the reality of what we have been through can no longer be ignored. It is that inescapable realization that sometimes comes after years of denial, hiding, or minimizing.

Maybe you recognize it: that feeling of carrying something with you for so long, deep inside. Something that settles in your body, haunts your nights, affects your relationships, and feeds your fears. These are the invisible scars of sexual violence, the silent witnesses of a painful truth. And then comes that moment—the moment you look at yourself in the mirror and, with a trembling voice and perhaps tears in your eyes, speak the words: “It’s true. It really happened. And I was the victim.”

#### **That Recognition Is a Raw and Painful Process**

It’s as if an old wound is being reopened, as if a cesspool of emotions is unleashed. Grief, anger, shame, fear—they can all surface at once. But within that pain lies a paradoxical liberation. For as long as we pretend it

was “just something from the past,” as long as we downplay it as “not so bad compared to others,” or as long as we blame ourselves by thinking “maybe it was my own fault,” we remain trapped in a suffocating web of lies and denial.

We keep dancing to the tune of a story imposed on us, a story that belittles us and invalidates our experiences.

## **Survival Mechanisms: A Double-Edged Sword**

Many of us, survivors of sexual violence, have developed survival mechanisms over time. We have learned to stay silent, to minimize our feelings, to rationalize the events as if we could find a logical explanation for them. We have built walls around ourselves, shut ourselves off from our emotions, pretended nothing was wrong. These mechanisms existed for a reason. They were a way to survive in an unbearable situation. Sometimes they were even necessary - lifesaving. They allowed us to get through the day, to function in a world that could be so harsh and incomprehensible.

But in the process of recovery, in the search for a healthier and less restricted life, we must learn that what once protected us might now be holding us back. The walls we built not only keep out the pain, but also love, intimacy, and joy. That silence suffocates our voice, which longs to be heard. Those rationalizations keep us trapped in a web of self-blame and denial.

We are allowed to stop shrinking our story. We are allowed to stop trivializing our experiences. We are allowed to take ourselves and our feelings seriously.

## **The Power of Recognition**

Admitting that you are a victim is not a sign of weakness. It does not mean you are wallowing in self-pity or that you will forever remain in the

role of victim. On the contrary, it is an act of immense strength. It is a way to see yourself, to believe yourself, to grant yourself the truth. It is a way to put the responsibility back where it belongs: with the perpetrator. It also means you no longer have to carry alone what was never yours to bear.

You are not alone. You are not broken. You are a survivor, and you deserve recognition and healing.

This first step, no matter how difficult, is like a key. A key that opens the door to a new beginning, to understanding yourself and your process, to gentleness in dealing with your own pain, to connection with others who understand what you have been through. It is the key that clears the way for real change. Because only when we dare to recognize what has happened, with all its pain and complexity, can we consciously choose what is yet to come. Only then can we take back control over our own lives and create a future that is no longer determined by the past.

## Reflections

✓ **What does it mean to me to be a ‘victim’?**

What thoughts or emotions does that word evoke?

Do I feel resistance, shame, sadness, anger, or something else?

✓ **How have I told or hidden my story up to now?**

Which parts did I dare to name, and which not?

What words did I use to describe it before?

- “Something happened to me”

- had a difficult childhood”

- ...

✓ **What has minimizing brought me? What has it cost me?**

What protective mechanisms do I notice in myself?

Can I be gentle with myself for needing them?

✓ **What changes if I do allow myself to say it?**

If I speak, write, or think - that I am a victim of sexual violence:

- What do I feel in my body?

- What happens to my breathing, my heartbeat, my eyes, my stomach?

✓ **What would my life look like if I fully acknowledged myself in this story?**

What would become possible?

What could become softer?

## Poem for This Step

### The First Truth

*I carried my pain in silent defiance,  
as something I most wanted to put away.  
I often laughed and said nothing,  
for who believes a child that no one hears?  
But deep inside the anger glowed,  
a wound that never truly heals.  
Until I began to name  
what I wanted to cover with flowers.  
I spoke it out, broke through the shame,  
and placed words next to my dream.  
No more shame, no command to be silent,  
my truth stands, even without a lock.  
It happened, I carry it with me,  
but it does not define me, not my whole sea.  
Now I say out loud what was kept quiet,  
and feel this is a first blessing.*

*Franky*

## Literature Themes

- ✓ Sexual violence: an invisible but deeply impactful problem
- ✓ The process of self-recognition as a victim of sexual violence
- ✓ Why recognition is important for recovery

# **THEME**

## **Sexual Violence An Invisible but Deeply Impactful Problem**

Sexual violence includes any sexual act against someone's will. This can be done by a stranger, but often the perpetrator is someone the victim knows or trusts, such as a partner, family member, colleague, teacher, or priest. Both men and women can be victims or perpetrators. Sexual violence occurs in all kinds of situations, including within relationships or marriages.

### **What is Sexual Violence?**

Sexual violence takes many forms, with or without physical contact. Examples include:

- ✓ Unwanted kissing or touching, above or under clothing.
- ✓ Sending, asking for, or receiving sexually explicit messages without consent.
- ✓ Forcing someone to be naked, shower together, or perform sexual acts.
- ✓ Showing or sending unsolicited pornographic material.
- ✓ Coercing sexual acts such as oral sex, masturbation, or penetration.

Consent must always be given freely and without pressure. Even if someone previously said 'yes,' they can always change their mind. Consent for a kiss does not automatically mean consent for something else. Moreover, a power relationship (for example, between a teacher and student) can undermine voluntariness.



## **Sexual Violence Against Children**

Sexual violence against children is especially distressing. Children cannot give informed consent to sexual acts, and any form of sexual interaction with a child is boundary-crossing and punishable by law. Examples of sexual violence against children include:

- ✓ Unwanted kissing or touching.
- ✓ Forcing or pressuring a child to show themselves naked.
- ✓ Forcing a child to perform or undergo sexual acts.
- ✓ Making sexual remarks or confronting a child with sexually explicit material.
- ✓ Having a child participate in sexual activities, physically or online.
- ✓ Creating, distributing, or possessing child pornographic material.

Often, the perpetrator is someone the child knows and trusts: a family member, teacher, youth leader, coach, priest, or another adult with authority. This abuse can be long-term and repetitive. Children often do not dare to speak out because of fear, shame, or because the perpetrator manipulates or threatens them.

## **The Impact on Victims**

Sexual violence leaves deep scars, both in children and adults. Victims often struggle with guilt, shame, and doubt, even though responsibility always lies with the perpetrator. Sexual violence can later lead to psychological and emotional problems such as anxiety, depression, and difficulties in relationships.

## **Protection and Taking Action**

It is crucial that we remain vigilant and do not ignore sexual violence. Adults must be alert to signs of abuse and always listen seriously when someone - especially a child - speaks about it.

Are you unsure whether a situation crosses the line? When in doubt: report it. No one should feel alone in this struggle.

Sexual violence can have a devastating impact, but you are not alone. Help and support are available. Together, we can help victims and fight sexual violence.