Five gentle supports

Low cost, low risk, minutes each. None of them is treatment, and none of them fixes a situation. Choose one, not five.

Treasured Vessels Girls' Centre · Walukuba-Masese Road, Jinja, Uganda · treasuredvesselsuganda.org

Read this first if someone is hurting you

Almost all advice about looking after yourself assumes you control your own day. If somebody else controls it, some of this advice can cost you.

Walking alone can be something you are punished for. A journal can be found and read. A phone call leaves a record on a handset that may not really be yours.

Your first need is a safety plan, not relaxation: where you would go, who you would tell, what you would take, how you would get out. Two of the five below still work meanwhile, the safe person and the breathing. The rest can wait.

1. One anchor in the day

Not a schedule. One thing that happens at roughly the same time, whatever else does not. Tea at six. Sweeping the step. It works better if it is small enough that a bad day cannot cancel it.

It will not lift depression. It is the difference between a difficult day and a day that disappears.

2. One safe person

Not a support network. One person you can be honest with. Tell them a small true thing rather than the whole thing. **"I have not been sleeping" is enough to start with.** You are not asking them to fix anything.

A friend is not a counsellor, and it is not fair to either of you to treat them as one.

3. Two minutes of grounding

The only one that works during the moment itself. Slow the out-breath six times, push your feet into the floor, then name what you can see and hear. The full sequence is on page two.

It lasts minutes. Used during a flashback it genuinely helps. Used instead of treatment it is a way of coping with something that should be treated.

4. One thing that means something

Rest, movement, or something made with your hands. Whichever of the three is actually available. Movement counts even when it is not exercise, and absorbing work does more than pass the time.

Being unable to face any of it is itself a sign, not a failure of will.

5. Qualified help, when it persists

Ask for it when distress has lasted weeks rather than days, when you cannot manage washing, eating or caring for your child, when fear is running the day, or at any point when there are thoughts of not being alive. Numbers are on page two.

This is the one that makes the other four honest.

Grounding, and when to get help

For the moment itself, and for the point at which none of this is enough.

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Grounding, in two minutes

1. **Slow the breath out.** Breathe in normally. Breathe out slowly, for longer than you breathed in. Do it six times. The long out-breath is the part that does the work, and the part people skip.
2. **Come back into your body.** Push your feet into the floor. Straighten your back. Stretch your arms. Notice the chair or the ground holding you up.
3. **Come back into the room.** Name these silently. Ordinary things count.

   5 things you can see

   4 you can hear

   3 you can touch

   2 you can smell

   1 you can taste

Signs that it needs a professional

- **Hopelessness that persists** for weeks, not a bad few days.
- **Withdrawal from everything**, including what she used to enjoy.
- **Sleep that will not come right**, for weeks, or sleeping most of the day.
- **Unable to function:** washing, eating, caring for her child, getting through a day.
- **Fear that dominates**, or alcohol and drugs appearing where they were not before.
- **Self-harm, or any talk of not wanting to be alive.** This one does not wait for a pattern.

If someone is at risk right now

Do not leave her alone. Ask directly: are you thinking about ending your life? Asking does not put the idea in anyone's head.

Mental Health Uganda 0800 21 21 21

Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 5:00pm. Confidential counsellors and referral, with a menu in several Ugandan languages.

Anyone under 18: Uganda Child Helpline 116

Free from any network, 24 hours.

If she has harmed herself or taken something, that is a medical emergency. Go to a health facility now and say what has happened. Outside helpline hours, go to a facility and ask for the mental health worker.

If the danger is another person, that is not a mental health call. The Child and Family Protection Unit at the nearest police station also handles domestic violence.

Nothing here is a diagnosis, and reading a list of symptoms is not an assessment. Treasured Vessels does not employ clinicians and does not provide counselling. We can sit with you, and we can get you to someone who can.