

Sense of Agency

Part of the trauma of abuse is *losing your sense of agency*. Your sense of agency is the sense of power and control over yourself and your choices. It is ownership and responsibility for your thoughts, feelings and actions. Abuse creates helplessness in people, and a loss of control. It erodes a person's sense of agency by causing them to feel that others are in control of/responsible for their thoughts, feelings and actions, or that they are in control of/responsible for the thoughts, feelings and actions of others.

It can be hard to take responsibility for our own behavior or choices, especially if we have been mistreated and abused. When you are hurt, being asked to take responsibility can feel like blame. It's very important to understand that you are not and have never been responsible for the behavior of others. You were never “asking for” abuse and did not cause it. These beliefs came about because the situation has taken your sense of agency from you and the only way to get it back is by owning your thoughts, feelings and actions – and disowning responsibility of these things for others. It's hard and it hurts, because we might have to face things that we find unpleasant about ourselves, but as long as we believe we are helpless, we will be.

I am responsible for:

- **my thoughts**
- **my actions**
- **my feelings**

I am not responsible for and do not control:

- **the thoughts of others**
- **the actions of others**
- **the feelings of others**

Others do not control:

- **my thoughts**
- **my actions**
- **my feelings**

If you believe that any of these statements are false, you've lost your sense of agency. It can be regained, and a big part of how we do that is by taking responsibility for both the good and bad choices we've made, for both the pleasant and painful feelings, for both the helpful and self-sabotaging thoughts. Remember again that *taking responsibility doesn't mean taking blame*. Your wounds are not your fault, but addressing them is your responsibility.