

YOUR RECOVERY WORKBOOK: FINDING YOUR WAY TO COPE WITH TRAUMA

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Printed in the United States of America

CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Your Recovery Workbook: Finding Your Way to Cope with Trauma

ISBN: 978-0-9961693-9-4. Health — Self-help

Revised 10-5-16

TABLE OF CONTENTS



1.	Introduction	Page 2
2.	Understand trauma's effects	Page 5
3.	Fight your trauma triggers	Page 7
4.	Explore new ways of coping	Page 9
5.	Sleep better	Page 14
6.	Know treatment options	Page 17
7.	Stay healthy	Page 19
8.	Use your coping and life skills	Page 21

A Recovery Story: A young woman felt "on edge" and insecure most of the time. She was very nervous with people she didn't know very well and felt unsafe after she had been assaulted a few years before. She often jumped with fear when people made sudden, unexpected movements. She felt panic whenever she felt trapped. Because of the distressing memories and anxiety, she went to a clinic and found out that her symptoms were from past trauma. She learned that by getting enough sleep, having counseling, learning how to cope better, and taking some medicine at bedtime, she could help control her symptoms. She had support from her family and her healthcare team. She thought, "This doesn't have to get me down. My life will be different, but it can still be good." She accepted the need to care for herself, instead of expecting other people to make sure she followed the treatment plan. Then, she was able to recover with only a few "bumps in the road" as she learned to manage her illness.



1. INTRODUCTION



- Trauma is common and it can change you. But it doesn't have to break you because you are in charge of your life and your health.
- Having traumatic experiences doesn't mean that you have post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Only a qualified mental health professional can give you a diagnosis.
- Even if you do not have PTSD, painful memories may cause problems for you. This workbook and its fictional stories can help you recover and learn more about the effects of trauma.
- Also read Finding Your Way To Manage Illness (with stories of diabetes) or Finding Your Way to Manage Mental Illness (with stories of bipolar disorder) to understand Recovery Steps and Drama Triangles.
- Instead of fighting it, learn to live well with your past. It is normal to have a hard time forgetting painful memories, especially if you think of yourself as a victim.
- Distress from trauma doesn't mean something is wrong with you. It just means something happened to you.
- Successful recovery means moving toward hope, problem-solving, empowerment, and healthy relationships as you learn to cope.
- Prepare for a journey of healing. Recovery can be more successful if you talk about how you feel and what you need.
- Take an active role that includes setting goals, planning ahead, and learning about your illness. Use a variety of treatments and coping skills for a healthy recovery.
- Talk to your doctor, provider, or healthcare team about any questions you have.

"NOTHING FIXES A THING SO INTENSELY IN THE MEMORY AS THE WISH TO FORGET IT."

~ MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ACCEPT THAT TRAUMA EXISTS



Trauma is feeling threatened by something beyond your control, with overwhelming emotion and a feeling of helplessness. (Mark the types of trauma you have had)

	Accidents			
	Natural disasters			
	Crimes			
	Surgeries or illnesses			
	Deaths or intense losses			
	Violent events or other trauma (either one time incidents or repeated events that add up over time)			
	Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) were found to be common and they can affect you during your whole life. (Mark the ACEs that you have had)			
	Physical abuse			
	Sexual abuse			
	Emotional abuse			
	Physical neglect			
	Emotional neglect			
	Mother treated violently			
	Household substance abuse			
	Household mental illness			
	Parents separated or divorced (if long term conflict or violence was involved)			
	Household member in prison			
Centers for Disease Control (CDC). (2014). Injury prevention and control. Division of violence prevention. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about_ace.html				

See childhood trauma video **ReMoved** (12:47 min) at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lOeQUwdAjE0

BE AWARE OF YOUR TRAUMA HISTORY



(Use this page to write the traumatic events in your life and what they mean to you)

Age/	Experience (Health, Fam-	Meaning (What it meant to you at the time.
Year	ily, School/Job, or other	Feelings of loneliness, pain, hurt, rejection,
	life event)	powerlessness, fear, or other)

"Unlike simple stress, trauma changes your view of your life and yourself. It shatters your most basic assumptions about yourself and your world — "Life is good," "I'm safe," "People are kind," "I can trust others," "The future is likely to be good" — and replaces them with feelings like "The world is dangerous," "I can't win," "I can't trust other people," or "There's no hope." - Mark Goulston

2. UNDERSTAND TRAUMA'S EFFECTS



With trauma, there are automatic changes in primitive parts of the brain. A danger alarm "goes off," causing a response of **Fight**, **Flight**, or **Freeze**! Feeling aggressive, withdrawing, or feeling stuck like a "deer in the headlights" are normal reactions.

Body systems not needed for survival are switched off. Stress hormones are pumped, and the "survival brain" takes over the "rational brain".

Processing of memories stop. Later, the brain may try again to sort and file them. If distressing memories are too large or too hard to process, they may seem to stay as a current problem, rather than a past problem. Since people tend to avoid things that remind them of the original trauma, the processing often doesn't finish.

People don't react the same to trauma. Some people "get over it" in a short time while others may take years to feel stable again. Your recovery will proceed at your own pace. Don't expect too much too soon. Reactions can depend on:

- How intense or long-lasting the trauma was
- If you or someone close to you was hurt or lost
- How close you were to the traumatic event or the people it affected
- How strong your emotional response was
- Other trauma that happened before
- How helpless you felt
- How much help and support you got after the event
- Whether or not you allow yourself to grieve losses

After trauma, if the brain's alarm system becomes distorted and overactive, you see danger in both safe and unsafe situations. (Write example)

See **Trauma and the Brain** video by mediaco-op video (8:44 min) at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-tcKYx24aA

By knowing the effects of your past trauma, you can cope with them better.

KNOW REACTIONS TO TRAUMA



Normal physical reactions to abnormal events (Mark and describe those you have had)			
	Aches and pains		
	Sudden sweating and/or a fluttering feeling in chest		
	Changes in sleep patterns, appetite, interest in sex, or bowel habits		
	Easily startled by noises or unexpected touch		
	Having illnesses or colds more often		
	Using more alcohol, drugs, tobacco, or overeating		
N	ormal emotional reactions to trauma (Mark and describe the ones that you have had)		
	Emotional numbness or detachment, shock, or disbelief		
	Fear or anxiety (tense, jittery, hyper-alert for danger and easily startled)		
	Re-living the trauma in nightmares or flashbacks (like it is happening again)		
	Grieving a loss (being sad, tired, empty, wanting to be alone or isolated)		
	Being restless, irritable, or having sudden angry outbursts		
	Having emotional swings (crying, laughing, or other)		
	Avoiding anything related to the trauma		
	Worrying and having intrusive (repeated, unwanted) thoughts		
	Feeling helpless, out of control, or an increased need for control		
	Having problems trusting (feeling betrayed or losing faith in beliefs)		
	Feeling shame, self-blame, or survivor's guilt		
	Not wanting to burden others with your problems		
	Having trouble concentrating or remembering		
	Having depression, less interest in everyday life, or suicidal thoughts		
	Having anger with a desire for revenge		
	Unhealthy or risky behavior changes, addictions, or neglecting your health		

Modified from Levin, P. (2011). Common responses to trauma & coping strategies. Retrieved from http://www.trauma-pages.com/s/t-facts.php

3. FIGHT YOUR TRAUMA "TRIGGERS"



A "trigger" is something from one or more of your senses that sets off a memory or flashback and seems to take you back to the original traumatic event. Sights and sounds are the most common triggers. (Mark and describe the triggers you have)

Sight	Sound	Smell	Situation
Touch	Taste	Place	Other:

To fight trauma reminders, get to know your triggers and then:

- Tell your story and express your thoughts and feelings.
- Keep yourself safe. Promote positive thoughts, coping and relaxation.
- Seek help. Talk to a mental health professional, if needed, to manage symptoms.

Example: A young woman felt scared and her heart pounded harder whenever certain songs came on the radio. Upsetting memories overtook her no matter what she was doing and interfered with whatever she was doing at home or at work. After talking to a counselor about her triggers, she found out that her reaction was from past trauma because those songs played on the radio while she was being assaulted.

Instead of feeling overwhelmed or upset with herself for "going to pieces" and not being able to concentrate, she could change the music or leave the room and do some deep breathing whenever she felt triggered. She started to feel more in control.

What intrusive thoughts or flashbacks have you (or someone you know) had?

People who work in law enforcement, healthcare, or in the military see trauma often or talk to people with intense trauma. They may suffer from the trauma of others.

"THE EXPECTATION THAT WE CAN BE IMMERSED IN SUFFERING AND NOT BE TOUCHED BY IT IS AS UNREALISTIC AS
EXPECTING TO BE ABLE TO WALK THROUGH WATER
WITHOUT GETTING WET." - RACHEL REMEN

KNOW YOUR EFFECTS OF TRAUMA



You may be overwhelmed after a trauma, but that is natural. Trying to avoid your feelings or keeping them secret can make you feel worse.

After traumatic events are experienced, the healing that comes after them changes			
people. Not all of the changes are bad. (Mark any positive changes that you see in yourself)			
☐ Being more aware of things around you			
☐ Gaining more confidence. Knowing that you can ge	t through tough times		
☐ Feeling closer to your family or friends.			
☐ Knowing who your true friends are			
☐ Being interested in new things rather than things that	t you used to care about		
□ Focusing on self-care or healing and understanding	more about your health		
☐ Meeting some new people and gaining insight to hel	p you help others		
What other changes have happened to you along with trauma?			
What skills and plans have you already used to heal and to stay safe?			

PEOPLE WHO DENY DISTRESSING FEELINGS CAUSED BY TRAUMA MAY AVOID TALKING ABOUT THEM.

ACCEPTING YOUR MEMORIES AND COPING WITH THEM CAN HELP YOU.

INSTEAD OF FEELING SADNESS, GUILT, OR SHAME, BE KIND TO YOURSELF AND TAKE STEPS TOWARD HEALING AND RECOVERY.

4. EXPLORE NEW WAYS OF COPING



Accept that you have been changed by trauma and seek treatment. You can't change the past. Focus on your future recovery. It may help to tell yourself "It is as it is".

As you learn to manage anxiety by coping and relaxation techniques, you have more "tools" to help you heal and recover. If they don't help, you can use grounding and other skills on the following pages.

Download and print **Your Recovery Workbook: Coping and Relaxation** free on http://www.healthvista.net/store/ or the Recovery Resources page. Practice relaxation skills. If they don't seem to work the first time, try them again.

Use coping and relaxation skills while also making efforts to solve your problems. But, if you are having an emergency, **get help**.

We all hate being anxious. It's a horrible, disturbing feeling, and we avoid things that might make us anxious, or by doing things that help us feel safe.

	If you're not willing to have it, you will [have anxiety].
	Some anxiety is normal. We all feel it and will all continue to feel it our whole lives.
	Try to be more willing to feel your anxiety by learning how to manage it. For PTSD, follow the treatment plan of your provider for a gradual recovery.
To	accept anxiety:
	Notice the normal body response
	Don't struggle or fight with the feelings and thoughts, just let them be
	Take some deep breaths and tell yourself that it will pass.
	chelle Ayres & Carol Vivyan 2010. Adapted from Steven Hayes 2005. Retrieved from http://www.get.gg/cs/AcceptingAnxiety.pdf

"...HUMAN BEINGS, BY CHANGING THE INNER ATTITUDES OF THEIR MINDS, CAN TRANSFORM THE OUTER ASPECTS OF THEIR LIVES."

- WILLIAM JAMES

5. LEARN GROUNDING AND COPING



Breathing and relaxation can help you cope. But sometimes they can trigger flash-backs with PTSD (To avoid that, you can look down instead of closing your eyes). Grounding, centering, or distraction from the inner pain can be better. Grounding focuses attention on the outside world rather than on distressing memories, feelings of splitting from reality, or from addictive cravings.

Examples of mental grounding:

- Describe objects in your environment in detail, using all your senses.
- Describe details of an everyday activity, such as eating or driving to work.
- Use a grounding statement. "I am (say your name). I am safe here, today is ..."
- Say the alphabet slowly, or count backwards from 20.

Examples of physical grounding:

- Run cool or warm water over your hands.
- Press your heels into the floor. Stretch.
- Touch objects around you as you say their names.
- Jump up and down. Or, be as upright as possible—Sit or stand straighter.
- When inhaling say "in." When exhaling say "out," "calm," "easy," or "safe".

Examples of soothing grounding:

- Rub nice smelling lotion slowly into hands and arms. Focus on its feel and smell.
- Say encouraging self-statements such as "It's okay, I'll get through this".
- Think of your favorite things, (e.g., cars, flowers, or animals).
- Think of a place where you felt calm and peaceful. Describe it in great detail.
- Plan something nice for yourself, like a bath or a good meal.

Adapted from: Najavits LM. Seeking safety: A treatment manual for PTSD and substance abuse. New York: The Guildford Press; 2002.

• Think backwards – Try to say what you had to eat for your last meal. Then think of and say what you ate for the meal before that, and before that. Continue thinking backward until you feel like you are "on solid ground" again.

If relaxation and grounding doesn't help for flashbacks, losing connection to reality, self-harm urges, or sleep problems, see the next pages for more ways to cope.

COPE WITH FLASHBACKS



Flashbacks can be normal if you've had trauma in your past. Remind yourself that:

- You are safe now. "That was then. This is now."
- You survived it when it happened, so you can get through the memories now.
- You are not crazy. Flashbacks may be memories processing as you heal.
- Flashbacks can drain your energy, so take care of yourself and be kind to yourself. Vivyan, C. In handout adapted from Bristol Crisis Service for Women. (1999). Coping with flashbacks. Retrieved from http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/CopingwithFlashbacks.pdf

You have options when you have an oncoming flashback. You can decide to:

- Accept the flashback at full force (if you are in a safe place)
- **Control** the flashback by interrupting the thought processes (such as electrical impulses in the brain) and replace them with other thoughts.
- **Escape** or put it off until you are in a safer place (which may not be possible). Try to hold an ice cube tightly in your hand or recite a song lyric or poem. Or, you could look at 4 or 5 brightly colored items in the room and move your focus between them in random order, stopping briefly at each one.

See more techniques for dealing with flashbacks in the following handout: Bennick, S. (2009). Coping with flashbacks: Goals and techniques for handling the memories. Retrieved from http://mental-health-matters.com/coping-with-flashbacks-goals-and-techniques-for-handling-the-memories/

Laurie Stiers-Foltz, a nurse practitioner and clinical herbalist recommends:

- Be careful to get adequate nutrition and extra vitamins and minerals
- Wrap up securely in a blanket, as if to swaddle yourself
- Sing aloud or do voice exercises (such as what you learn at voice lessons) to release emotions and encourage the body into relaxation
- Dance, do guided physical movements such as yoga or tai chi, or enjoy other creative arts

If possible, don't be alone during flashbacks. Tell others what you need them to do. You can't expect them to just know, since everyone's needs are different.

To avoid feeling isolated, reach out and connect with others. (Not to fix your problems or make your feelings go away, but to use your support system and to feel safe.)

KEEP IT TOGETHER



Your inner experiences can be powerful. Coping helps you be more "together". **Integration** – A person's personality should be a unified whole. It includes knowing who you are and the difference between the past and the present. When you feel more safe and secure, you feel more like, "I am me in good times and when I am overwhelmed. My behaviors, emotions, and memories belong to me." **Dissociation** – A lack of integration, when your sense of self and your personality changes. Experiences or perceptions can disturb the ability to "keep it together." Painful memories can divide your sense of self. You might feel like, "Those aren't my experiences. I am not like that." When you are extremely tired, stressed or seriously ill, your thoughts, feelings and behaviors may not feel like your own. It is harder to "shift gears" smoothly. (Mark possible causes for dissociation experiences you have had) Intrusive thoughts, like flashbacks of past traumatic events Sudden feelings, thoughts, impulses or behaviors that come "out of the blue." Jarring inner experiences that don't feel like your own, such as pain or other sensations, feeling physically controlled, or hearing disturbing voices. Dissociation can be hard to describe, but there are some common symptoms: Feeling foggy, fuzzy or spacey and losing a firm connection with the present reality Having strong negative images, feelings or thoughts (either from the past or about the future) that preoccupy your mind Feeling like you are "watching yourself" and not being in control of your actions Retreating to daydreams when life feels too stressful or losing track of time Being in a place without knowing how you got there Hearing yourself talking when it seems like the thoughts and words you hear are not your "own" Having body sensations that don't feel like they belong to you Hearing voices in your head that talk to you or to each other

Modified from Boon, S., Steele, K. & Van Der Hart, O. (2011). Coping with trauma-related dissociation: Skills training for patients and therapists. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Some people with a history of trauma also have urges to cut or to harm themselves.

COPE WITH DISTRESSING THOUGHTS



When overwhelmed or unable to put deep distress into words, some people distract themselves or release emotional pain and tension by cutting or harming themselves.

They might tell themselves, "It's better than feeling nothing" and believe the emotional pain changes into physical pain. But, it also causes feelings such as shame and guilt. The painful emotions come back again and again. Self-harm does not solve problems. It creates more problems. You simply can't be well if you hurt yourself.

Hiding what you feel is a heavy, lonely burden. It can make you feel trapped. Self-harm can feel like an addiction. You need help to overcome it and to feel better.

The first step is to confide in someone. Find someone you trust. Focus on the feelings and situations leading up to self-harm. Pay attention to your feelings as they come and go. Don't numb them or be afraid.

Find new coping techniques – Try healthier ways to respond to distress:

- To express pain and intense, deep emotions you can paint, draw, or scribble on paper. Write a poem, story, or song about how you feel. Listen to music that expresses what you are feeling.
 To calm and soothe yourself, take a bath or hot shower, pet or cuddle with a dog or cat, wrap yourself in a warm blanket, massage your neck, hands, and feet, or listen to calming music.
 If you feel disconnected and numb, call a friend. Take a cold shower, hold an ice cube in the crook of your arm or leg, or chew something with strong taste (chili peppers, peppermint, or grapefruit peel). Go online to a self-help website.
 To release tension or vent anger, exercise − run, dance, jump rope, or hit a
- punching bag, cushion or mattress. Scream into a pillow, squeeze a ball, or squish clay. Rip sheets of paper or make some noise (play an instrument, bang on drums).
- □ **To find a substitute for cutting**, use a felt-tip pen to mark your skin. Snap rubber bands on wrists, arms, or legs.
- ☐ Get **professional treatment.** Get to the root of why you want to hurt yourself.

Alderman T. (1997). Self-help: Organized and otherwise. Retrieved June 14, 2013 from http://www.selfharm.net/fself.html

It is common to have poor sleep after having trauma. The next page lists some ways to prepare for a healthier night's sleep.

5. SLEEP BETTER



Don't go to bed until you are drowsy. Most people who have trouble sleeping go to bed before they are sleepy because they have been tired during the day and want to "catch up" on lost sleep time. If they go to bed and aren't able to sleep, they worry about what is going on in their lives and they begin to dread the poor sleep they expect to have. Worries cause the body to be even more awake and prevent sleep from coming easily.

Know the difference between fatigue and drowsiness. Go to bed when you are sleepy-tired, rather than just fatigued. Stay up for a while, enjoying a quiet activity, and head to bed when the time seems right. It is best to wait until you are drowsy because it increases the chances of falling asleep, and it helps your body associate the bed with sleepiness. No one likes lying in bed awake, tossing and turning.

Get up at the same time each morning. It is important to maintain the body's time habits for the sleep-wake cycle (Circadian rhythm). Waking at different times causes sleep trouble even for people who usually sleep well.

Do not take naps. Napping can disturb the sleep-wake cycle, especially if it's more than 10 hours after you wake up. Try doing gentle exercises instead of taking a nap. Avoid hard exercising after 6:00 PM.

Reduce the use of caffeine, or quit drinking caffeine. Don't drink or eat anything that contains caffeine after 4:00 PM. Eat a light snack like crackers and milk.

Adapted with permission from Dr. Robyn. G. Clark's sleep hygiene handout. Retrieved from http://www.healthvista.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/HelpYourselfSleepBetter.pdf

Talk to your doctor if your sleep continues to be a problem. Get tested for sleep disorders if needed, and discuss potential treatments for nightmares. Some research shows that a medication called prozosin may be able to reduce nightmares from PTSD. Treatment called Imagery Rehearsal Therapy may help people create a new, non-scary ending to nightmares.

U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs. (2015). Nightmares and PTSD. Retrieved from http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/problems/nightmares.asp

TRAUMA STORY CONTINUED



A young woman felt unsafe and afraid to trust other people after a date rape. She often had negative thoughts in her head saying that she wasn't good enough. She didn't expect friendship or respect from others. Whenever she made a mistake or had a problem, she would panic with worry that she would be fired.

She hadn't reported the assault to the police, and didn't even tell her friends and family about it. Her past affected her relationships because she half-expected to be treated badly by others. She didn't take good care of her health and her symptoms got in the way of her life. She felt like a victim, out of control and powerless.

When intrusive thoughts caused high anxiety that affected her job, she decided to go to a clinic for help. She learned more about the effects of trauma and ways to manage it, even though she did not have a diagnosis of PTSD. Goals included to get at least 6 hours of sleep at night, and to have less anxiety at work. She talked to a therapist regularly, and took some medicine at bedtime. She started to feel more hopeful.

She talked to someone after any upsetting situations instead of dwelling on it later. Debriefing (as developed by Gary Robbins Ph.D., Psychologist) can be very helpful:

- What you saw (Recount events) _______

She learned how to cope better and feel more in control. She used essential oils and massage therapy for self-care. She read self-help books and found a trauma support group in her area. She told her family, friends, and healthcare providers about her situation so they could support her.

She accepted that she had been changed by trauma. that being with the person who assaulted her did not mean that she had "asked for it" or deserved it. She tried to let go of the past hurts. She tried to forgive the person who assaulted her (to make herself feel better), without ever having to see him or tell him. Her pain and hurt, guilt and sadness was less when she thought of him as sick, empty, and unable to have a real relationship.

USE POSITIVE EXPRESSION



If you open up your heart to more positive feelings, it can change you. Continue to avoid the person who hurt you. Just change your way of thinking.

Draw or describe how you see the person or group that hurt you and caused the trauma:	Draw what could be if they were no longer tormented or sick. You may feel sorry for them, instead of feeling cold or bitter:

You can be resilient and "bounce back". You may even learn and grow from trauma.

THE CHINESE CHARACTER FOR CRISIS IS A COMBINATION OF THE WORDS DANGER AND **OPPORTUNITY**.

6. KNOW TREATMENT OPTIONS



Dealing with the past can be hard when you have a history of trauma or PTSD. Instead of keeping your feelings bottled up, talk with a therapist. And learn about the effective treatments available for coping with trauma. (*Mark those you have tried*)

- □ Research shows that **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy** (CBT) counseling is the most effective type of counseling for PTSD. Your therapist helps you to:
 - Understand and change how you think about your trauma and its aftermath
 - Identify thoughts that make you feel upset or afraid
 - Avoid blaming yourself for things you couldn't have changed
- A similar therapy called **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing** (EMDR) can help change your reaction to memories. While talking about your trauma, you focus on other things like eye movements, hand taps, or sounds. You may be asked to follow the therapist's hand movements with your eyes.
- In **Exposure Therapy** the goal is to have less fear about your memories. By talking about your trauma repeatedly with a therapist, you'll learn to get better control of your thoughts and feelings. Over time, you'll feel less overwhelmed. Your therapist can help you change how you react to stressful memories. In a place where you feel secure, focus on memories that are less upsetting first. This allows you to deal with bad memories a little bit at a time.
- □ **Medications** have been shown to be effective because brain chemicals can affect the way you feel. A type of drug known as a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are antidepressant medicines that can help you feel less sad and worried. SSRIs include citalopram (Celexa), fluoxetine (such as Prozac), paroxetine (Paxil), and sertraline (Zoloft). There are other medications that have been used with some success. Talk to your doctor about which medications are right for you.

Veteran's Administration. (2016). Treatment of PTSD-PTSD: National Center for PTSD. Retrieved from http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/treatment/therapy-med/treatment-ptsd.asp

Don't stop medication or therapy unless your provider is aware and guiding changes.

OTHER TREATMENTS



Other kinds of counseling may also be helpful. However, more evidence is needed to support their use for PTSD. (*Mark the ones you have tried*)

- In **group therapy**, people talk about their trauma with others who have had similar experiences. Sharing your story with others may help you:
- Feel more comfortable talking about the trauma. Build self-confidence and trust.
- Cope with your symptoms, memories, and other parts of your life.
- Build relationships with others who understand what you've been through.
- Deal with emotions such as shame, guilt, anger, rage, and fear.
- Focus on your present life, rather than feeling overwhelmed by the past.
- □ **Family therapy** involves your whole family since your trauma or PTSD also affects them. Your kids, parents, or your partner may not understand and they may feel scared, guilty, or even angry about your condition or behavior.
- A therapist helps you and your family to communicate, maintain good relationships, and cope with tough emotions. Your family can learn more about PTSD and how it is treated. Each person can honestly express his or her fears and concerns.
- You can talk about your symptoms and what triggers them. You can also discuss your treatment and recovery so your family will be better prepared to help you.

You can use both individual therapy and family therapy to help with relationships.

It is very common to have PTSD at the same time as depression, alcohol or drug abuse problems, panic attacks, or anxiety disorders. Treatment for the trauma can also help the other disorders, especially if both are treated at the same time.

Veteran's Administration. (2016). Treatment of PTSD-PTSD: National Center for PTSD. Retrieved from http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/treatment/therapy-med/treatment-ptsd.asp

You can gain insight into what has happened to you and to find ways to deal with the emotional impact of trauma. The goal is to help you move forward in your life.

7. STAY HEALTHY



Use your basic personal values as strengths. They can be very powerful.

It is a good idea to seek therapy if you struggle with trauma symptoms or if important things in your life are going off track. It is not a sign of weakness if you seek help. It shows that you have enough courage and strength to focus your energy toward healing and recovery. Some common warning signs to seek help are below.

- Relationship or parenting problems
- Work, school, or other problems
- Distressing nightmares
- Trauma reminders with extreme anxiety
- Self-harm such as cutting, burning, or taking too much medication
- Thoughts or threats of suicide

- Substance abuse or risky behaviors
- Behavior or mood changes
- Extreme anger or irritability
- Doing things that are unhealthy or against your values
- Abusing others or being abused
- Feeling helpless or "stuck"

EVERYTHING IS NOT BLACK-AND-WHITE. I'M REALLY INTERESTED IN THE GRAY AREA - NOT JUSTIFYING IT, NOT GLORIFYING IT, NOT CONDONING IT, BUT AT LEAST HAVING PEOPLE SEE THERE'S A GENESIS FOR EVERY EVENT IN OUR LIVES. THERE'S SOME DIVINE ORDER TO IT, WHETHER IT'S UGLY OR BEAUTIFUL. - ISAIAH WASHINGTON

(Use the outline below to write some ideas for other ways to respond to 3 of your distressing thoughts)

When I experience this:	I usually respond by:	Instead, I will try:	What others can do to help:
1.			
2.			

Be serious about your health and find your way to stay healthy!

BE ACTIVE AND "STAY REAL"



Fo	ocus on your health and self-care – (Mark one or more ways you help yourself have strength
	Just keep moving forward. The only way out is through.
	"Change the channel" by distracting yourself, grounding, or walking away.
	Examine the evidence. "Look at both sides" to see reality.
	Try planning ahead and thinking it out (It's the opposite of being impulsive).
	Be kind to yourself. Make your thoughts less harsh.
	Setbacks are not failures. "They are just setbacks."
	Tolerate the feeling. "No feeling is final." Just get through it safely.
	Start changing your actions and thoughts to help change the way you feel.
	Make healing your most important goal.
	lapted from: Najavits LM. Seeking safety: A treatment manual for PTSD and substance abuse. New York: The nildford Press; 2002.
	Calm your mind and body with relaxation skills, meditation, or prayer.
	Tap into protection and guidance from an accepting, peaceful spiritual source (God, Yahweh, Great Spirit, etc.) that is present and can hear us.
	Commit to something personally meaningful and important every day.
	Hug the people and pets that you love. Be socially active.
	Do not isolate yourself, but allow yourself to cry.
	Write about your experiences in a journal
W	hich grounding and/or relaxation skills do you plan to use?
"(Check in" with yourself. What self-care do you need?
Ιf	you feel shame or self-blame, how can you take yourself "off the hook"?

8. USE YOUR COPING AND LIFE SKILLS



Use Essential Life Skills to build personal strength (Circle what you want to work on)				
□ Know and Love Yourself	Be True To Yourself	Have Humor		
□ See the Big Picture	Have a Personal Value System	Accept		
□ Put Things in Perspective	Have an Open Mind	Have Resilience		
Used with permission from Hereford, Z. (200 self-realization. Mandz Publishing: Tecumseh	07). Nine essential life skills: A guide for person , Ontario, Canada.	nal development and		
How can you develop one of your life sk	eills?			
How can you learn about your treatmen	at and medicines?			
What lifestyle changes are you thinking about?				
Discuss your plan for a healthy recovery with someone on your healthcare team. Who?				
The woman in the story was able to cope better after accepting her trauma history and getting treatment. She took responsibility for her health and found ways to cope and heal. She stayed more calm and balanced after beginning to understand how her traumatic experiences affected her. When she felt unsafe, she didn't over-react based on the past, but grew to trust her instincts again. This also helped her to have healthier relationships and less anxiety at home and at work.				

- Self-confidence and trust build slowly. It's best to be patient and take small steps at your own pace. That is good enough to get where you are going. Ups and downs along the way are to be expected. **Use help and support** to get back on track.
- Recovery after trauma is not easy, but you can do it!

"ALTHOUGH THE WORLD IS FULL OF SUFFERING, IT IS FULL
ALSO OF THE OVERCOMING OF IT."
- HELEN KELLER



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary B. Knutson is a Registered Nurse with a Master's Degree as a Nurse Educator. She has worked to improve education resources in academic settings, hospitals (including psychiatric units), in homes and other community healthcare settings with the goal of empowering people and helping them toward better self-care. A collection of health education resources can be found online at www.healthvista.net.

Visit **healthvista.net** for more recovery resources.

Cover photo and other photos by Mary Knutson of La Crescent, MN

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ISBN: 978-0-9961693-9-4