

SAMPLE

HEALING TRAUMA

A Workbook for Women

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SECOND EDITION

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Editor's note:

The first edition of this workbook was titled *Healing Trauma: Strategies for Abused Women*.

This publication is not intended as a substitute for the advice of behavioral health care professionals.

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Session 1: Welcome and Introduction to the Subject of Trauma

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Welcome to the program *Healing Trauma: A Brief Intervention for Women*. This program is designed to help you begin healing from the effects of trauma, particularly violence or other abuse. One of the first steps to healing and growth is to acknowledge the traumatic experiences in our lives and the impact they have on us.

Trauma can affect us in two primary ways. First, it affects the inner self: our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and values. For example, some women who have experienced trauma begin to believe they can't trust anyone and that the world is a very unsafe place. Second, trauma also affects the outer self: our behavior and relationships. Many women who have experienced trauma struggle with their relationships with family members, friends, and intimate partners. They may have difficulty maintaining deep and meaningful relationships. They may isolate themselves, struggle with maintaining boundaries, or develop sexual issues.

A major part of the healing process is becoming congruent. This means having your inner self (your thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and values) connected to, and consistent with, your outer self (your behavior and relationships).

If you have experienced trauma, you may struggle with questions such as: Why did this happen to me? What did I do wrong? Why do I feel so ashamed? Why did people hurt me? Why is life such a struggle? What do I do now?

In using this workbook, you will

- learn more about trauma and how widespread it is in women's lives
- become aware of the strengths you already have that can help you recover
- increase the skills you need for healing
- learn exercises and techniques that can help you feel more grounded and safe

This workbook contains information and activities related to the six sessions of this program, places for you to make notes or drawings about your experiences in the group, and recommended Between-Sessions Activities.

Your group will meet for six sessions. The sessions will cover a wide variety of topics related to troubling experiences and trauma, as well as abusive relationships and healthy relationships. The group will provide a safe place to explore your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The stories and wisdom you'll bring to the rest of the group will be valuable. You may find that many of your questions and reactions are similar to those of other women in the group. This group is a place to be heard, to share your voice, and to be supported by other women.

Realize there is hope! Today, many women are recovering from traumatic experiences. The healing journey can be challenging, but it can be made easier by the support of women in this group and others in your life. Personal growth and healing are a lifelong journey. If we give ourselves the opportunity to heal and grow, we can learn how to live happier lives in healthier relationships.

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma occurs when a threatening event overwhelms a person's normal coping skills. In other words, trauma is any stressor that occurs in a sudden and forceful way and is experienced as overwhelming. For some women, the trauma is not a one-time event but a threat that builds over time. Women who have experienced traumatic events describe feelings of intense fear, helplessness, and anxiety. These feelings are *normal* reactions to *abnormal* situations.

No two people experience trauma in the same way. Age, one's trauma history, family interactions, support systems, and so on, influence how a woman responds to traumatic experiences. What is a traumatic event for one person may not be a traumatic event for another. Sometimes trauma has occurred but may not be recognized immediately. That may be because the individual sees the abusive or violent event as normal.

Learning how to cope with adversity is an important part of healthy development. Moderate, short-lived stress responses in the body can promote growth. However, ongoing stress can become toxic to one's health. Toxic stress is a strong, unrelieved experience that can negatively affect healthy development, particularly in a child, but in adults as well. Some of you may have experienced significant and ongoing stress as children without caring adults to help you. Some of you may have experienced unrelenting stress caused by extreme poverty, neglect, or abuse. Some of you may still be experiencing very stressful events. Toxic stress can weaken us and have long-term consequences in terms of our behavior and our physical and mental health.

It often feels comforting to know there is a name for what you are experiencing. Part of the process in healing from trauma, like recovering from addiction, is developing connections and support with others. Women need support to heal from trauma. Knowing that you aren't alone and that there are people who understand can help. In your group sessions, you'll explore together your responses to different situations. Understanding trauma, and that we each respond to it differently, will help you be supportive and nonjudgmental toward one another. This will help you understand why you respond the way you do in certain situations. Together, you'll learn and teach one another new ways of responding.

How Often Trauma Occurs

It can be helpful to look at statistics to give us an idea of how often traumatic events occur in the lives of women and girls. This can help us feel less isolated and alone, or feel less at fault for the trauma we've experienced.

- Each year in the United States, more than 1.25 million children experience maltreatment. Girls are at a higher risk of abuse than boys and are more than five times more likely to experience sexual abuse. In more than 70 percent of cases of child abuse, the abuser was the child's parent.
- More than one in nine children are exposed to family violence annually in the United States, and one in four children are exposed to family violence in their lifetimes. A vast majority of the violence witnessed is perpetrated by males. However, girls are more likely than boys to be exposed to psychological and physical intimate-partner violence throughout their lifetimes.
- One out of every four girls in the United States is sexually abused before the age of eighteen.
- Approximately 65 percent of adolescent girls are victims of physical, emotional, verbal, and/or sexual abuse from a dating partner. More than a third of girls experience such abuse from two or more dating partners during their teen years, and most are age thirteen to fifteen at the start of the abuse.
- Both girls and boys are at risk in childhood for physical and sexual abuse, especially from people they know. However, risk changes over the course of life. Adolescent boys are at particular risk for abuse if they are young men of color, gay, or gang members. Their risk is from peers, from people who dislike them, and from the police. In contrast, the risk for teenage

girls comes from those with whom they are in relationships—people they are saying “I love you” to. For adult men who serve in a branch of the military, the greatest risk is from the enemy. If a man lives in the community (a noncriminal justice setting), the risk is being a victim of a crime committed by a stranger. For a woman in the military, the greatest risk is from the men she is serving with. If she is living in a community (a noncriminal justice setting), her greatest risk is from the person to whom she is saying “I love you.”

- A majority of victims of intimate-partner violence (four out of five victims) are women.
- In 2010, there were 84,767 forcible rapes in the United States. That averages out to 233 women being raped each day and 9 women being raped every hour.
- Approximately two-thirds of women’s experiences of intimate-partner violence include physical attack. The most common forms of intimate-partner violence against women are aggravated assault and sexual assault. Women are almost three times more likely to have injuries from intimate-partner violence than men are. Of women who are homicide victims, 40 percent are murdered by their intimate partners, contrasted with only 3 percent of male homicide victims.
- Nationally, more than 6.9 million women annually are victims of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner. Correspondingly, more than 93 percent of emergency room visits for intimate-partner violence are women in need of health care.
- Women involved with the criminal justice system have experienced high rates of trauma; for example, 98 percent have experienced a general disaster, 87 percent have experienced interpersonal violence, and 75 percent have histories of childhood sexual and/or physical abuse.
- An incarcerated woman has experienced an average of six traumatic events in her lifetime, whereas a typical woman in the community has experienced an average of two traumatic events in her lifetime. Incarcerated women also have higher rates of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than women in the community (40 percent versus 12 percent) and are ten times more likely to use substances in response to trauma (64 percent versus 6 percent).

- In 2011, 94 percent of female homicide victims were killed by men they knew, a majority of whom were their husbands, boyfriends, or intimate acquaintances. Most of these homicides occurred during arguments. The average age of female victims was thirty-nine; for African American women, it was thirty-four. African American women were murdered at a rate more than two and half times higher than the rate for Caucasian women and at a rate higher than other women of color.

Trauma and Substance Use

You can see how frequently trauma occurs in women's lives. Some women use alcohol and other drugs to help ease the pain of trauma. Some overeat, overwork, or gamble. Women who have a substance use disorder are more likely to have been victims of childhood physical and sexual abuse than are men and women who don't have a substance use disorder. In addition, women who have a substance use disorder are more vulnerable to being abused. An important part of the *Healing Trauma* program is helping women find better, nonharmful ways to cope with the effects of trauma.

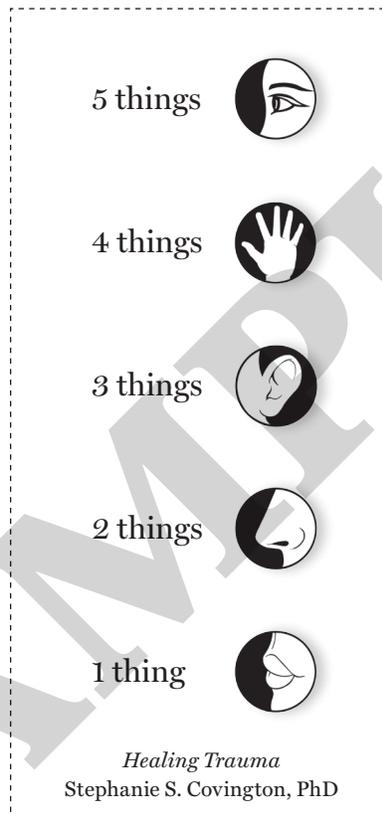
GROUP AGREEMENTS

To ensure that your group is safe, comfortable, and supportive, it's important to have some mutual agreements about behavior.

Please list your group's agreements here:

BETWEEN-SESSIONS ACTIVITY

Take time between now and the next session to practice the Five Senses grounding technique at least once per day. Be ready to share about your experience with this in the next session.



1. Identify five things you can see around you.
2. Identify four things you can touch.
3. Identify three things you can hear.
4. Identify two things you can smell.
5. Identify what you can taste right now.

Session 2: Power and Abuse

In the first session, your group began to look at trauma, particularly violence and other forms of abuse in women's lives and the negative consequences that result from them. You may have realized that you are not alone in your journey. The next step is to understand how the differences between women and men affect their chances of experiencing a particular form of trauma—being abused.

TRAUMATIC EVENTS

Trauma can take many emotional and physical forms. Trauma includes:

- abandonment or neglect (especially for small children)
- accidents (automobile, bicycle, falls on the playground or elsewhere, work-related)
- war and combat
- domestic violence
- emotional, sexual, or physical abuse
- serious injuries and illnesses
- extremely painful and/or frightening medical procedures
- kidnapping
- sex trafficking
- loss of a loved one (family member, friend, colleague, even a pet)
- immigration
- mugging, robbery
- natural disasters (earthquakes, tornadoes, fires, floods)
- being arrested
- rape or assault
- witnessing violence or murder
- witnessing violence between parents
- intergenerational or cultural trauma

The definition of *intergenerational or cultural trauma* is the emotional and psychological wounding, spanning generations, which comes from a massive group trauma. In the United States, this type of trauma is often experienced by our Native American and African American populations.

In your group, you talked about triggers because even the discussion of trauma can create discomfort. A trigger is a word, sight, sound, smell, feeling, behavior, place, or person who reminds someone of a traumatic event and brings back the feelings she had when the event occurred. This is why practicing the Five Senses activity and learning other grounding skills is an important part of your group experience.

GENDER EXPECTATIONS

Your facilitator explained the distinction between sexual differences and gender differences. *Sexual* differences are physical or biological. *Gender* is the experience of being raised as female or male and the different messages that girls and boys receive about their roles in life. Transgender people are those who are born with the body of one sex but feel that they are actually the other sex.

Gender expectations begin when we are infants. They are defined by a person's society, culture, religion, family, peers, and so on. Because of our gender, we're expected to *act* and *be* certain ways. Gender expectations influence the ways we act and the choices we make throughout our lives. Take some time to answer these questions:

1. How are boys and girls treated differently as children?

2. Social messages come from family members, communities, teachers, movies, music, and video games. What are the social messages that boys get? How are boys supposed to act?

3. What are the social messages that girls get? How are girls supposed to act?
