



EXPLORING TRAUMA

A Brief Intervention for Men

Facilitator Guide

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Editor's note

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

The SEEDs text (pages 103–104) is adapted from *The Brain Bible: How to Stay
Vital, Productive, and Happy for a Lifetime* by John B. Arden, 2014. Reprinted
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Endorsements

“Stephanie Covington and Rob Rodriguez have written a wonderful guide to a brief trauma intervention for men. In six jam-packed sessions, they cover most of the essential elements in much longer approaches. And this is not just an adaptation of [Stephanie’s] *Healing Trauma: A Brief Intervention for Women* curriculum (though she has judiciously chosen to keep sections of that intervention that are as applicable to men as to women). The real triumph in *Exploring Trauma* is in rewriting the sections that are specifically devoted to men’s experiences. By drawing on the same relational focus that has characterized [Stephanie’s] work on women, they shed real light on the importance of relationships in men’s lives. They touch on the centrality of healthy boundaries and relationships for men as well as the power of dealing more effectively with guilt, anger, and shame. Covington and Rodriguez maintain throughout this work a positive approach that will bolster men’s strengths and their resilience as they come to terms with the impact of adversity, toxic stress, and trauma in their lives.”

Roger D. Fallot, PhD, Independent Consultant in Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care and Adjunct Faculty, Yale University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry

“Finally, a practical, useful, clear, trauma-informed program to guide facilitators in creating groups for men. Covington and Rodriguez compassionately address the ways in which a man’s previous personal history with trauma can become transformed into his own abusive behavior of others, connections that are vital if the man is to make significant change. As participants work through the material, they will learn practical ways to reclaim their own sense of safety, manage distress, and build healthier relationships.”

Sandra L. Bloom, MD, Associate Professor, Health Management & Policy, School of Public Health, Drexel University, and Author of *Sanctuary Model*

“Today, there can be no question that many men in prison and jail have themselves been affected by trauma. For too long society has treated all prisoners as alike, and as the predatory transgressor. We know now that approach has failed to reverse the criminal arc of most released prisoners’ lives. *Exploring Trauma* provides the critical means to address trauma in all its forms in the prison and community supervision setting. It is accessible and adaptable and lends itself to small group interactions that are likely to be useful in prisons, jails, and probation and parole agencies. It is an important tool in the belt and should be used widely by corrections agencies.”

Martin F. Horn, Distinguished Lecturer at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City, Former Commissioner of Correction and Probation of the City of New York, and Former Secretary of Corrections for the State of Pennsylvania

“In keeping with her groundbreaking role in integrating the treatment of trauma and addictions and providing gender-specific and gender-responsive programs, Dr. Stephanie Covington has done it again. Her new facilitator’s guide, *Exploring Trauma: A Brief Intervention for Men* (coauthored with Roberto Rodriguez), is a comprehensive resource for conducting a short-term group treatment for men. It is highly practical and references up-to-date information regarding male survivors. It is also very descriptive and supports the group leaders and participants over the course of the group. A welcome new resource!”

Christine A. Courtois, PhD, ABPP, Psychologist, Independent Practice, Washington, DC; and Author of *It’s Not You, It’s What Happened to You; Healing the Incest Wound*; and *Treating Complex Trauma: A Sequenced, Relationship-Based Approach* (with Julian Ford, PhD)

“This is a groundbreaking, inspiring guide to working successfully with men’s trauma. Based on solid scholarship and decades of the authors’ experience with men and women, it is both wise and practical, easily employed, and much needed—an essential guide for healing.”

Samuel Shem, MD, DPhil, Author of *The House of God*, *The Spirit of the Place*, and *Bill W. and Dr. Bob*

“Exploring Trauma: A Brief Intervention for Men, by Stephanie Covington and Roberto Rodriguez, is a marvelous plain-speak addition to the field of gender-specific therapies. Building with the evidence-based tools of mindfulness and cognitive-behavioral techniques, this six-session group format is pragmatic, accessible, and creative. It will be a welcome addition to the seasoned clinician’s shelf—and treatment room—as well as for less experienced practitioners who will appreciate, and benefit from, its nothing-left-to-chance format.”

Charles Atkins, MD, Author of *Co-occurring Disorders: Integrated Assessment and Treatment of Substance Use and Mental Disorders*

“Dr. Stephanie Covington has created another impressive, evidence-based program for men. *Exploring Trauma* is an adaptable, brief, and effective approach to helping men recover in the context of relational and developmental trauma and in an eminently gender-responsive manner. This program starts from the position that our world is being ravaged by the outward effects of unresolved and unacknowledged trauma. Our systems of care are impacted greatly by the effects of such overwhelming and unacknowledged trauma. But Dr. Covington and coauthor Roberto Rodriguez understand the challenges males face in a system of care that fails to acknowledge the impact of developmental trauma and gender biases. This curriculum seeks to bring change, offers a sound solution, and delivers on the promise of hope made. ‘The journey from surviving to thriving also begins when men realize there is hope and that they often possess untapped strength and resilience.’

“I find it reassuring that there are advocates and experts among us, like Dr. Covington and her colleague Roberto Rodriguez, who care enough to take on this tough work and tirelessly push back against the status quo. ‘To help men begin to recover from the effects of trauma, and to help them find ways to grow; to build resilience; to experience life more fully; and to engage in deeper, more meaningful relationships.’ A program that achieves this aim will help our systems of care and our world become safer, more evolved places to heal and to call home. I am proud to say CeDAR played a small part in helping to bring this curriculum to the field and humbled to consider Dr. Covington a friend and ally in this work.”

Steven Millette, LMHC, LAC, Executive Director, The Center for Dependency, Addiction and Rehabilitation (CeDAR) at the University of Colorado Hospital

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Acknowledgments

First, we would like to acknowledge each other and our writing partnership in the creation of *Exploring Trauma: A Brief Intervention for Men*. We came together with a shared commitment and vision: to develop a program for men whose lives had been challenged by abuse and violence. We were introduced to each other by a mutual friend and began writing together although we had never met. Even with our strict deadlines and the weight of the topic, we were a well-balanced team and always in sync with each other.

Every writing project always has important people behind the scenes, and this curriculum is no exception. We are very fortunate to be surrounded by caring and competent people who have supported this new work. We would like to acknowledge Carol Ackley, Rick Dauer, Eileen Russo, and Roger Fallot, who were willing to incorporate reviewing the manuscript into their busy schedules and made suggestions that improved our work. In addition, pilot groups were conducted in three different treatment programs for men in various parts of the country. Steven Millette, Michael Barnes, and others at CeDAR (Center for Dependency, Addiction and Rehabilitation) in Colorado; Carol Ackley and the River Ridge Treatment Center staff (Minnesota); and Jennifer Kolakowski and others at the Recovery Network of Programs, Inc. (Connecticut) assisted in the piloting and vetting process. Each facilitator and each participant provided feedback for every session, and this was extremely important as we developed the final version. A special thanks to Peter Feeney, who collaborated in the adaptation of *The Healing Masks*.

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To all of you, we say thank you—for your expertise, your support, and your dedication to helping women and girls, and now men, to heal.

Stephanie S. Covington
Roberto A. Rodriguez
June 2016

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PART 1

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Introduction

It seems that our world is in crisis. We see pain and devastation everywhere. At home, we read about the growing incidence of child abuse, shootings in our schools and neighborhoods, and other violent crimes. Around the world, there is suffering and alienation: in the wars in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere; in acts of terrorism and widespread violence; in the raping of women on every continent; in the recruitment of twelve-year-old boys as soldiers in combat; and in the international sex trade. This painful destruction is mirrored by the holes in the ozone layer, the clear-cutting of timber in the rain forests, the annihilation of plant and animal species, and our polluted air and water. Violence happens in multiple ways and on many levels.

Where do we look for answers? What is the key to our survival and healing? Just as the Chinese symbol for *crisis* is made up of two characters, one representing danger and the other opportunity, each time there is a crisis there is also a chance for change and renewal. Today many men and women from all walks of life are finding the key to their survival and growth by freeing themselves from the suffering created by trauma.

Although we see violence everywhere we look, we need to make a distinction between the suffering that we create and the suffering that we encounter as a natural part of life. Certainly, we cannot avoid the suffering that comes from natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, and tornadoes. We also often experience pain during the normal course of life, as we are born, grow up, get an education, move into the workplace and relationships, age, and experience death. Although these passages can be difficult, they are the foundation stones of our identities. They challenge us and help us define who we are and what we want from our lives. We can see these kinds of experiences as part of life's journey and use them to help us grow and create meaning in our lives.

However, there is also the suffering that we, as human beings, have created—the abuse and destruction generated by violence. Significant numbers of our children are neglected, abused, and killed by their parents and caretakers. Every day, around the world, women are sexually harassed in the workplace; raped; and beaten by their husbands, boyfriends, and strangers. In many U.S. communities, boys are recruited into gangs and required to commit violent acts in order to be included. First responders witness the results of unthinkable crimes. Both men and women often feel fearful at night when out alone. No institution, person, or country is free from the effects of created suffering.

However, there is hope. Throughout the world, individuals and groups are coming together to create new ways of ending suffering. One of the first steps on this path is freeing ourselves from denial and acknowledging the impact of violence in our own lives. One can only heal from a problem that has been acknowledged.

Although a lot of emphasis has been placed on helping women and families recover from the effects of trauma, work dedicated to helping men identify trauma and recover from its effects has not been as extensive. As mentioned earlier, one of the first steps toward healing is taken when men work to free themselves from denial and acknowledge the effects of trauma in their lives. The journey from surviving to thriving also begins when men realize there is hope and that they often possess untapped strength and resilience.

Men who have witnessed or endured violence, abuse, and other adverse experiences may suffer from the effects of trauma. Trauma can be experienced in many ways and on many levels—physically, mentally, and/or emotionally. Men may witness traumatic events or directly experience them. For some men the trauma may have occurred in childhood through a seemingly normal life event, like a fall or a sports injury, or from created suffering, such as bullying or physical or sexual abuse. In their adult lives, the trauma could be the result of natural suffering, such as the loss of a loved one or a serious illness, or from created suffering, such as being a victim of a crime or serving in the military. As we are learning, a growing number of men who have served in the armed forces experience significant psychological difficulties as a result of their exposure to combat (Eisen et al. 2012). To the men undergoing these experiences, the world can feel like a dangerous place. Many think they can feel safe and survive only by striving to feel powerful and always in control. Many men diagnosed with substance use disorders are survivors of trauma and have biological, psychological, or social/relationship issues that need to be addressed in order to heal.

For some men, if they grew up in a hypermasculine culture where they were often required to subdue or hide any characteristics deemed as feminine, they can experience a series of traumatic experiences. Some men deal with trauma by denying its effects, and others act out in behaviors that are destructive to themselves and others.