



# HEALING TRAUMA

*A Brief Intervention for Women*

SECOND EDITION

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Facilitator Guide

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Stephanie S. Covington, PhD  
Eileen M. Russo, MA

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#### Editor's note

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

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

The SEEDS text (page 117) is adapted from *The Brain Bible: How to Stay Vital, Productive, and Happy for a Lifetime* by John B. Arden, 2014. Reprinted with permission.

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“*Healing Trauma* is a wonderful adaptation of Stephanie Covington’s beautifully written and more comprehensive program *Beyond Trauma*. This is a hopeful guide to support the healing of women who are trauma survivors. Clinicians may be surprised by the effectiveness of such a comprehensive brief intervention.”

**Janet Surrey, PhD**, Founding Scholar,  
Jean Baker Miller Training Institute, Stone Center, Wellesley College,  
and Author of *The Buddha’s Wife: The Path of Awakening Together*

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“Throughout her career, Stephanie Covington has opened a space in our field for gender-responsive, trauma-informed services. Her work is grounded in a deep understanding of the role of power and control in women’s lives and relationships. In the second edition of *Healing Trauma: A Brief Intervention for Women*, she and Eileen Russo provide essential information and new tools to support healing through empowerment. This program is a simple-to-follow road map for women who want to take charge of their own recovery and their own lives. It should be on your bookshelf.”

**Andrea Blanch, PhD**, Senior Consultant, National Center for Trauma-Informed Care

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“Thank you, Stephanie, for creating *Healing Trauma*. This abbreviated/short-term version of *Beyond Trauma* is exactly what we need for our community mental health centers as it allows for brief intervention on this critical topic. Once again, you have helped not only our staff, but all of the women we serve.”

**Kimberly Bond**, Chief Operating Officer, Mental Health Systems

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“Healing from trauma and addiction is a long and arduous pathway that begins with admitting there is a problem and seeking help. But the next step is developing words and concepts for what one has been through. In this way, education is the window of opportunity to change our whole conception about who we are, what we have experienced, and how to make sense out of it, all of which is necessary to enable us to make better choices in our lives. In her group process work, Stephanie Covington opens wide that window with materials and processes that are accessible for anyone and especially for the women to whom Stephanie has directed her work.”

**Sandra L. Bloom, MD**, Associate Professor, School of Public Health, Drexel University

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“This second edition of *Healing Trauma: A Brief Intervention for Women* makes the *Beyond Trauma* curriculum accessible to short-term programs while maintaining the core principles. You will find this guide easy to use and a must-have for those doing gender-responsive trauma treatment with women.

The Connecticut Women’s Consortium has been impressed with the results of using this curriculum for years in both community-based and prison settings. In our experience, Stephanie Covington listens to the feedback from clinicians

and programs that use her materials. The new session entitled ‘The ACE Questionnaire and Anger’ was developed after discussions with the Connecticut Women’s Consortium and staff at York Correctional Facility and is valuable to anyone working in criminal justice programs. In this session, the women are able to work on finding words and feelings for anger, thus reducing the effects of anger triggers. As a training facility, we know that Stephanie’s expertise and trauma curriculums are on the cutting edge of research but also that she is one of the few trauma experts who consistently highlights gender.”

**Colette M. Anderson, LCSW**, Executive Director, Connecticut Women’s Consortium

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“Author Stephanie Covington, working here with the able assistance of Eileen M. Russo, has produced another wonderful work. It covers all of the absolute essentials of early trauma recovery work for women, including sessions on the process of trauma and on healthy relationships. But perhaps most importantly, Covington here emphasizes the importance of grounding skills and other wellness-facilitating abilities. With this emphasis, Covington provides something few other very brief curricula can offer: the sort of beginning-level skills that are so important for women to develop as they start their journeys of recovery. Along with her usual presentation of the sorts of guidelines that any group leader can benefit from, this adds up to a stellar work by a terrific clinician.”

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

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“Once again Dr. Covington has provided an important guide for women healing from trauma. Uniquely focused on causes rather than symptoms, this gender-specific, strength-based approach to helping women recover is a huge contribution for those suffering across systems, cultures, and communities. We will certainly reference and recommend [it] to our constituents across the country.”

**Joan Gillece, PhD**, Director, National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, Center for Innovation in Trauma-Informed Approaches

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“*Healing Trauma: A Brief Intervention for Women* is based on Dr. Covington’s highly regarded, evidence-based curriculum *Beyond Trauma: A Healing Journey for Women*. This six-session version is specifically designed for settings in which a shorter intervention is more feasible/desirable. Additional accessibility features include the ability to replicate materials from the CD-ROM and the Spanish translation of the participant workbook. More importantly, *Healing Trauma* incorporates the depth and insight of *Beyond Trauma* while focusing on healing from interpersonal abuse. Dr. Covington’s gift for drawing on the experience and strength of survivors dealing with a range of complex issues and creating a healing process that touches the multiple dimensions of what makes us human is a true contribution to the field.”

**Carole Warshaw, MD**, Director, National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health, Chicago, Illinois

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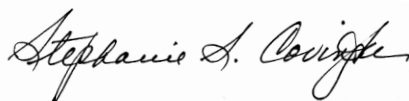
## *Acknowledgments*

First, we would like to acknowledge each other and our working together over the past ten years. We came together as colleagues in the Trauma and Gender Initiative (TAG), cosponsored by the Connecticut Women's Consortium and the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. Ours is a shared vision for and commitment to the creation of gender-responsive and trauma-informed services for those in mental health, addiction treatment, and criminal justice settings. Our work relationship has now developed into a caring and supportive friendship.

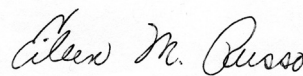
Every writing project has important people behind the scenes, and this program is no exception. We are very fortunate to be surrounded by competent and dedicated people who have supported the original and the revision of this work. We would like to acknowledge the facilitators who have provided *Healing Trauma* groups at the York Correctional Institution under Eileen's supervision and guidance. For seven years, Aili Arisco, Robin Cullen, Kate Griffith, Linda Lentini, Amy Myers, and Maureen Paecht have been available to the women who look forward to their presence and to these groups. As facilitators, they also have provided feedback for this revision.

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



Stephanie S. Covington



Eileen M. Russo

June 2016

**SAMPLE**



PART 1

SAMPLE

**SAMPLE**



## *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; 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 also is a chance for change and renewal. Today, many women and men 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. Every day in America, women are sexually harassed in the workplace, raped, and beaten by their husbands, boyfriends, and strangers. Significant numbers of our children are neglected, abused, and killed by their parents and caretakers. No institution, person, or country is free from the effects of created suffering.

One noted researcher, Bessel van der Kolk, differentiates between public and private trauma (2014). The public traumas we read about in the news—events such as school shootings or bombings by terrorists—differ from the far more private traumas that psychotherapists typically treat.

In the case of public trauma, people gather around the victim(s), there is acknowledgment of the reality of what happened, and sympathy and comfort are offered. That is very different from private traumas that involve assault, incest, rape, or domestic violence. These are hidden traumas, and the victims rarely get to publicly acknowledge what took place and rarely get the support they need to move on in their lives. When they have communities that rally around them, the victims of public traumas tend to cope or recover better. Too often, the victim of a private trauma ends up with a deep sense of shame and invisibility, along with silent rage about not being acknowledged or protected.

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, toxic stress is a strong, unrelieved experience that can negatively affect healthy development, particularly in a child. Without caring adults to buffer children, the unrelenting stress caused by extreme poverty, neglect, and/or abuse can weaken the developing brain and have long-term consequences in terms of behavior and physical and mental health (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2007).

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 trauma in our own lives. One can heal only from a problem that has been acknowledged.

This curriculum, *Healing Trauma: A Brief Intervention for Women*, is designed to be part of the solution by helping women recover from the effects of trauma in their lives. The curriculum focuses on the kinds of created suffering that women are most at risk of experiencing: childhood abuse, rape, battering, and other forms of interpersonal violence. However, the coping skills that are presented in this curriculum can also be useful for other types of traumatic events.

*Healing Trauma* presents an integrated approach to women's trauma treatment, based on theory, research, and clinical experience. It can be used in any setting—outpatient, residential, therapeutic community, criminal justice, and private practice. In developing effective treatment for women, we must include the experience and impact of living as a female in a male-based society as part of the clinical perspective. The term *gender-responsive* describes this type of treatment approach; it is defined as follows: creating an environment—through site selection, staff selection, program development, and program content and materials—that reflects an understanding of the realities of women's and girls' lives and that addresses and responds to their challenges and strengths (Covington 2002).

*Healing Trauma* is a gender-responsive curriculum, and this newly revised, six-session (ninety minutes each) edition is an adaptation of the newly revised, twelve-session curriculum *Beyond Trauma: A Healing Journey for Women* (Covington 2016). It is especially designed for settings in which a short-term intervention is needed. Examples are a community-based program, such as a mental health center; an addiction treatment program; a private practice setting; a correctional facility (jail or prison); and an agency addressing domestic violence. This new edition of *Healing Trauma* includes

- new and updated foundational information for the facilitator in part 1
- new statistics about abuse and other forms of trauma in part 1 and in the sessions
- new discoveries, publications, and insights in the field; particularly neuroscience
- an additional session, which includes more new lectures and activities for the participants that reflect current thinking and practice
- a variety of yoga poses, grounding activities, and self-soothing activities

This curriculum promotes a strength-based approach that seeks to empower women and increase their sense of self. In using this kind of model, you, the facilitator, will help the women in the group see the strengths they have and increase the skills they need for healing. The curriculum also focuses on emotional development. Dealing with the expression and containment of feelings is a critical part of trauma work. You will be using psychoeducational and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques, expressive arts, body-focused exercises, mindfulness, and relational therapy.

As has been mentioned, one of the first steps to healing and growth is to free ourselves from denial and to acknowledge the impact of violence in our lives. This program is designed to help women begin to recover from the effects of trauma and to help them find ways to grow, flourish, and enjoy healthy relationships and happier lives. Also mentioned previously, the coping skills that it presents can be useful in dealing with a variety of traumatic events, although the emphasis is on interpersonal violence.

You will help the women in the group deal with their feelings in healthy ways. The women in the group will go through a process of understanding what has happened to them and exploring how abuse has affected them. They will learn more about what abuse is and how widespread it is in women's lives. They also will learn coping mechanisms (activities and techniques) to help them feel grounded and safe.

This facilitator guide contains some background information about trauma and session outlines that are like lesson plans. The six sessions in the program are:

- Session 1: Welcome and Introduction to the Subject of Trauma
- Session 2: Power and Abuse
- Session 3: The Process of Trauma and Self-Care
- Session 4: The ACE Questionnaire and Anger
- Session 5: Healthy Relationships
- Session 6: Love, Endings, and Certificates

### THE WORLD WOMEN LIVE IN

The following statistics illustrate how pervasive trauma, particularly interpersonal violence, is in the lives of women and girls. (All statistics refer to rates of violence in the United States, unless otherwise stated.)

- 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. More than 90 percent of children who are exposed to intimate-partner violence actually see the violence. 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 (Hamby et al. 2011).
- Based on an analysis of studies from across the world, one in six girls and one in fourteen boys experience childhood sexual abuse (Stoltenborgh et al. 2011).
- Within the United States specifically, approximately 16 percent of men and 25 percent of women report having experienced childhood sexual abuse, and those who experienced sexual abuse also had higher rates of childhood physical abuse, maltreatment, and neglect (Pérez-Fuentes et al. 2013).
- 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 (Bonomi et al. 2013).