



WHO AM I WITHOUT THE HURT?

Understanding How Trauma Shapes Us — and Discovering Who We Are
Beyond It

Psychoeducation: When Hurt Becomes Part of Your Identity

What Is Trauma?

When people hear the word trauma, they often think about extreme experiences such as abuse, violence, accidents, death, or other frightening events.

Those experiences can certainly be traumatic.

But trauma can also develop from experiences such as:

- Repeated rejection
- Abandonment
- Emotional neglect
- Growing up around constant conflict
- Being criticized or humiliated
- Bullying
- Betrayal
- Unstable caregiving
- Feeling unwanted
- Having to grow up too quickly
- Living with an unpredictable parent or caregiver
- Losing someone important
- Repeated unhealthy relationships
- Never feeling emotionally safe

Trauma is not simply about what happened.

It is also about what happened inside of you because of what happened.

Two people can experience similar situations and respond very differently.



Trauma can influence how you see:

yourself, other people, relationships, safety, love, trust, and the future.

Trauma Can Teach You Lessons That Aren't True

When painful experiences happen repeatedly, the mind naturally tries to make sense of them.

Unfortunately, sometimes we make conclusions about ourselves based on what other people did to us.

A child who is repeatedly criticized may eventually believe:

“Something is wrong with me.”

Someone who experiences abandonment may begin believing:

“People always leave.”

Someone who experiences betrayal may decide:

“I can't trust anyone.”

Someone whose emotional needs were ignored may learn:

“My feelings don't matter.”

Someone who had to take care of everyone else may believe:

“My value comes from being useful.”

These beliefs can survive long after the original situation has ended.

That means the painful experience may be over...

but the lesson you learned from it may still be running your life.



Reflection: What Did My Hurt Teach Me?

Complete the sentences.

Because of what happened to me, I learned that people are:

Because of what happened to me, I learned that relationships are:

Because of what happened to me, I learned that love is:

Because of what happened to me, I learned that I am:

Because of what happened to me, I learned that I have to:

Now ask yourself:

Are these facts—or conclusions I developed while trying to survive?

When Survival Becomes a Personality

Trauma can create behaviors that were once necessary for survival.

Eventually, however, we may begin calling those behaviors our personality.

For example:



“I'm just independent.”

Sometimes independence is a healthy personality trait.

But sometimes independence developed because:

“Every time I depended on someone, they disappointed me.”

“I'm just a people pleaser.”

Sometimes being helpful reflects genuine kindness.

But sometimes people pleasing developed because:

“Keeping everyone happy made me feel safe.”

“I'm just quiet.”

Sometimes someone is naturally introverted.

But sometimes silence developed because:

“Speaking up caused problems.”

“I don't need anybody.”

Sometimes someone genuinely enjoys independence.

But sometimes that statement means:

“Needing people has hurt me before.”



“I always have to be in control.”

Sometimes organization is simply a strength.

But sometimes control developed because:

“My life used to feel unpredictable, and I never want to feel powerless again.”

The behavior is not automatically unhealthy.

The important question is:

Did I choose this—or did survival choose it for me?

My Survival Strategies

Place a check beside anything you recognize in yourself.

- ☐ People pleasing
- ☐ Avoiding conflict
- ☐ Staying emotionally guarded
- ☐ Overthinking
- ☐ Constantly preparing for something bad to happen
- ☐ Needing reassurance
- ☐ Becoming overly independent
- ☐ Difficulty asking for help
- ☐ Trying to control situations
- ☐ Taking responsibility for everyone



- ☐ Keeping people at a distance
- ☐ Becoming attached quickly
- ☐ Leaving before someone can leave me
- ☐ Ignoring my own needs
- ☐ Always being “the strong one”
- ☐ Trying to prove my worth through accomplishments
- ☐ Making jokes when uncomfortable
- ☐ Staying busy so I don't have to think
- ☐ Becoming emotionally numb
- ☐ Other:

Choose one behavior you checked.

How might this behavior have protected you in the past?

How might it be limiting you today?



Your Nervous System Remembers

Trauma doesn't only affect thoughts.

It can affect the body's alarm system.

After experiencing threatening, painful, or unpredictable situations, the nervous system may become especially sensitive to anything that resembles previous danger.

That can create reactions commonly described as:

Fight

Becoming angry, defensive, confrontational, or controlling.

Flight

Avoiding situations, staying extremely busy, leaving relationships, or constantly looking for an escape.

Freeze

Feeling stuck, shutting down, becoming numb, or struggling to make decisions.

Fawn

Trying to keep others happy, avoiding disagreement, apologizing excessively, or sacrificing personal needs to maintain peace.

These reactions originally exist to protect us.

The problem occurs when the body continues responding as though **past danger is still present**.

Trigger vs. Danger

A trigger is something in the present that reminds your brain or body of something painful from the past.



A trigger does not necessarily mean you are currently unsafe.

For example:

Someone who experienced abandonment may become extremely anxious when a partner doesn't answer the phone.

The unanswered phone call is happening **today**.

But the emotional reaction may also contain feelings from **yesterday**.

The nervous system may respond:

“Here we go again.”

Healing involves learning to ask:

“Is something dangerous happening right now—or is something happening right now that reminds me of something painful?”

My Triggers

Something that quickly changes my mood is:

Something that makes me feel rejected is:

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Something that makes me feel unsafe is:

Something that makes me immediately become defensive is:



Something that causes me to shut down is:

When this happens, my body usually feels:

My immediate reaction is usually:

What might my brain be trying to protect me from?

