

Overcoming Trauma

Trauma affects people differently, but there are common emotional, physical, behavioral, relational, and spiritual signs. One sign alone doesn't necessarily indicate trauma, but patterns across several areas may.

What Is Trauma?

Trauma is not just what happened to you—it's what happened inside you because of what happened to you.

Trauma occurs when an experience overwhelms your ability to cope, leaving your brain and body feeling unsafe long after the danger has passed. It's less about the event itself and more about how your nervous system responds to it.

Examples include:

- Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Divorce or abandonment
- Domestic violence
- Bullying
- Serious accidents or illness
- Loss of a loved one
- Living with addiction or mental illness in the home
- Military combat or first responder experiences
- Ongoing criticism, rejection, or humiliation

How Do I Know If I Have Unresolved Trauma?

Ask yourself these questions:

Emotionally

- Do I overreact to situations that shouldn't affect me this much?
- Do I often feel anxious, angry, ashamed, or emotionally numb?
- Do I struggle to experience peace or joy?

Mentally

- Do certain memories still trigger strong emotions?
- Do I replay painful events over and over?
- Am I constantly expecting something bad to happen?

Physically

- Do I have chronic tension, headaches, fatigue, or digestive issues?
- Do I struggle to sleep?

- Does my body feel "on alert" most of the time?

Relationally

- Is it difficult for me to trust others?
- Do I fear rejection or abandonment?
- Do I avoid conflict—or create it?
- Do I constantly people-please or try to control situations?

Behaviorally

- Do I numb my pain with food, alcohol, pornography, work, shopping, or social media?
- Am I always busy because slowing down feels uncomfortable?
- Do I avoid people, places, or conversations that remind me of the past?

Trauma Often Shows Up as Survival

Instead of asking, **"What's wrong with me?"**

Ask,

"What happened to me?"

Many behaviors are actually survival strategies.

- Perfectionism can be a search for safety.
- Anger can be a shield for fear.
- Busyness can help avoid painful emotions.
- Control can be an attempt to prevent getting hurt again.
- People-pleasing can be a way to avoid rejection.

These responses may have protected you once—but they may no longer be serving you.

A Simple Trauma Self-Check

If you answer **"Often"** to several of these, it may be worth exploring further with a trusted counselor or therapist.

- ☐ I rarely feel completely safe.
- ☐ I have strong emotional reactions I can't explain.
- ☐ My past still affects my present.
- ☐ I avoid certain memories or conversations.
- ☐ Trusting others is difficult.
- ☐ I struggle with shame or feeling "not enough."
- ☐ I constantly feel on edge.
- ☐ I use unhealthy habits to cope with stress.

The Good News

Trauma is real, **but it is not your identity.**

Research shows that the brain can change throughout life (a concept called neuroplasticity). With healthy relationships, counseling, faith, and supportive practices, many people experience profound healing. From a Christian perspective, healing often involves bringing hidden wounds into the light, renewing the mind, and experiencing God's grace in the context of safe, caring relationships.

Trauma isn't a sign that you're broken—it's often evidence that your mind and body adapted to survive. Healing begins when you recognize those adaptations, understand why they're there, and begin replacing survival patterns with healthy, life-giving ones.

What To Do If You Are Experiencing Trauma?

If you are experiencing trauma—whether from a recent event or something from your past—the goal is not to “just get over it.” Trauma affects your brain, body, emotions, relationships, and sense of safety. Healing usually begins by recognizing what is happening, reconnecting with safety, and getting support.

1. Take Steps of Faith

Many people find healing through spiritual practices alongside counseling:

- Bringing pain honestly to God
- Prayer and Scripture meditation
- Community and accountability
- Understanding that suffering is part of the human story, not evidence of abandonment

A helpful reminder:

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” —
Psalm 34:18

2. Recognize the Signs

Trauma can show up in many ways:

Emotional

- Feeling overwhelmed, fearful, angry, numb, or hopeless
- Shame, guilt, or feeling “broken”
- Difficulty trusting others

Mental

- Intrusive memories or nightmares
- Trouble concentrating
- Constantly replaying what happened
- Feeling stuck in “what if” thoughts

Physical

- Sleep problems
- Fatigue
- Muscle tension
- Increased heart rate or feeling on edge
- Changes in appetite

Behavioral

- Avoiding people, places, or conversations
- Using substances or distractions to cope
- Isolating yourself
- Losing interest in things you once enjoyed

3. Create Safety First

Your brain cannot heal while it believes you are still in danger.

Helpful steps:

- Establish predictable routines
- Get adequate sleep
- Eat nourishing food
- Exercise regularly
- Limit excessive alcohol or unhealthy coping habits
- Spend time with safe, supportive people

Ask yourself: **“What helps my body feel safe right now?”**

4. Talk About It With Someone Safe

Trauma grows in isolation but begins to heal in healthy connection.

Consider talking with:

- A trusted friend or family member
- A pastor or spiritual mentor
- A counselor or trauma-informed therapist

You do not have to tell your entire story immediately. Healing often begins by simply saying:

“Something happened to me, and I’m struggling with it.”

5. Learn to Calm Your Nervous System

Trauma often keeps the body stuck in fight, flight, or freeze.

Try:

- Slow breathing (inhale 4 seconds, exhale 6 seconds)
- Grounding exercises:
 - Name 5 things you see

- 4 things you feel
- 3 things you hear
- 2 things you smell
- 1 thing you taste
- Prayer, meditation, or quiet reflection
- Walking outdoors

6. Process the Pain—Don't Suppress It

Healing does not mean forgetting. It means the memory no longer controls you.

Healthy processing may include:

- Trauma-focused counseling
- Journaling
- Grieving what was lost
- Understanding your reactions
- Replacing shame with truth and compassion

7. Challenge Trauma Lies

Trauma often creates false beliefs:

Trauma says:

- "I am unsafe."
- "It was my fault."
- "I am alone."
- "I will never be okay."

Healing replaces them with:

- "I can learn to feel safe again."
- "What happened to me does not define me."
- "I am not alone."
- "Healing is possible."

8. Consider Professional Help

A trauma-informed counselor can help you work through experiences that feel too overwhelming to handle alone.

Evidence-based approaches include:

- EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)
- Trauma-focused CBT
- Somatic therapies
- Internal Family Systems (IFS)
- Narrative therapy

A Simple First Step Today:

Name it. Share it. Stabilize it. Process it. Heal it.

Ask yourself:

1. *What happened that still affects me today?*
2. *How is my body telling me I need help?*
3. *Who is a safe person I can talk to?*

Healing from trauma is a process, but many people do experience restoration, resilience, and renewed hope.