

Dear Fellow Survivor,

I want to welcome you to this space. Whatever the reasons you have found this content in your hands, I hope it offers you direction, clarity, and hope.

My name is Nate. I was diagnosed with cPTSD (complex post-traumatic stress disorder) in 2009. During that time, I had been in therapy that prevented me from healing and made my mental health worse. I stayed devoted for many years because I did not know there were other options. My hope is that by sharing these resources, we create more dialogue around what “trauma informed” means, while empowering each survivor to navigate this in a way that makes them feel safe while they heal.

In the pages that follow is the information I wish someone shared with me before I sought help.

A few important notes for you:

1. There is no one way to heal. There is not a single thing that every person can say worked well for them. The only thing that is a must is that you feel safe with any resource you find or person you are asking for help. Your safety is critical in this process.
2. As you approach healing, please do so as an equal. When we are hurting, we tend to approach needing help apologetically. Do your best to end that. Any solid therapist, fellow survivor, or helper is going to applaud your confidence in having questions and learning to advocate for what you think is best.
3. You must take breaks. There are a lot of suggestions that healing is a euphoric moment where the pain is gone and you have risen above it all. This work evolves and there are really beautiful moments with new peace. But, it is an ongoing process because we never stop growing. This is hard work. You must take breaks. You taking breaks will offer peace, relief, and rest, and those will give you much more strength when it is time to take the next step.
4. Please educate yourself and explore options before committing to one thing. That means if a therapist wants to introduce you to a specific type of trauma therapy (this is explained later), ask them for information on it, as well as their feedback on how they feel you will benefit. Do some research to understand what the therapy is. There are many options that will help you find relief and peace. Knowing what they are is important.

Lastly, I am not a mental health professional. I have much respect for those who are. However, I feel there is great need in hearing from survivors who have walked this path. With that, all of the information I am sharing with you below is from my personal experience and are my personal perspectives from being on a healing journey for 25+ years. That also means it will be limited to my exposure and my experience. Allow this guide to be a beginning for you, but make sure to add the things that help you most.

Let's begin!

A SURVIVOR'S GUIDE TO TRAUMA RECOVERY

NATE POSTLETHWAIT

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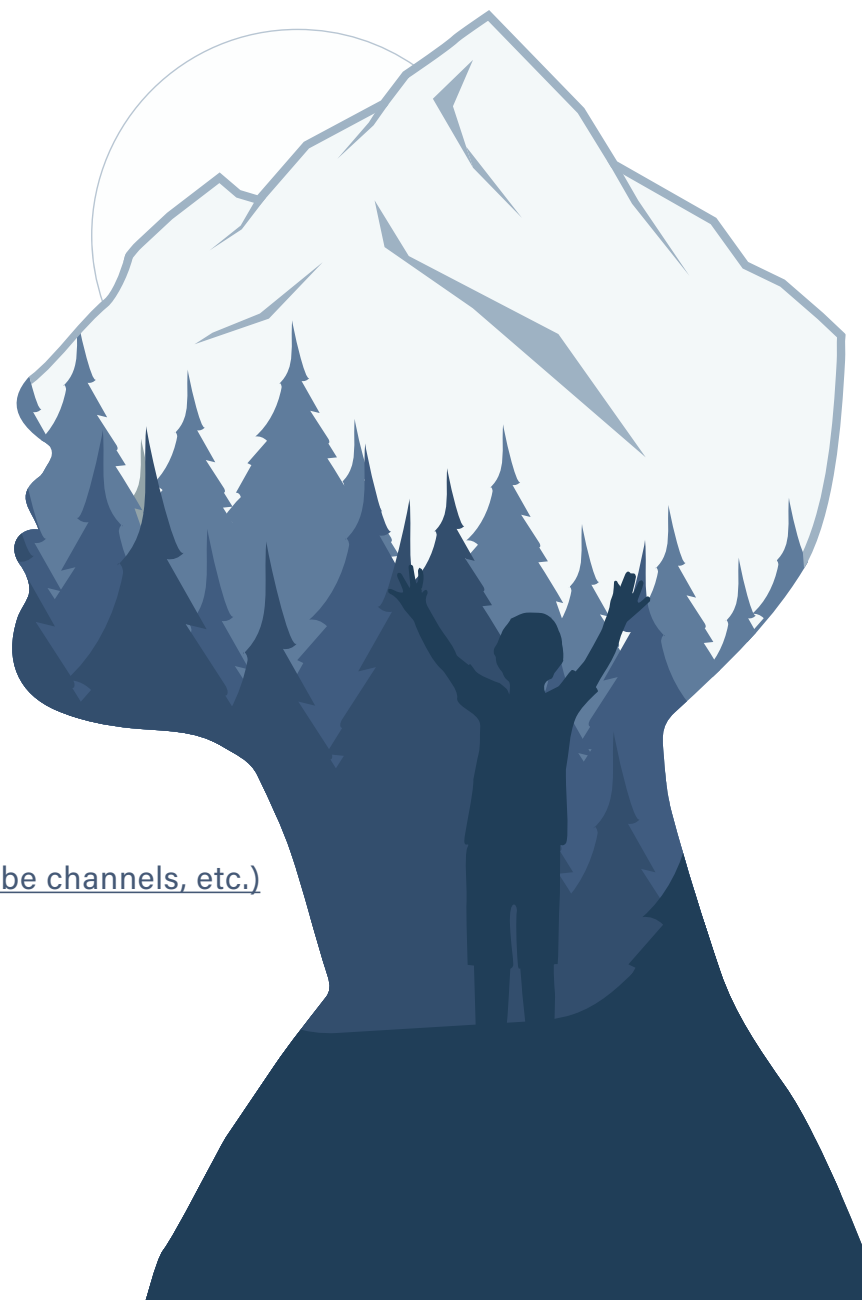
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SECTION 1

WHAT IS TRAUMA AND TRAUMA-INFORMED?

TRAUMA (from my perspective):

An experience that was not processed in real time because of its intensity and impact. I use trauma to define moments where a person goes into survival mode for prolonged periods because of threat.

To name trauma in real time is difficult. The aftermath from trauma is what many of us are trying to name and make sense of. A few notes on defining trauma:

There should be no comparison to someone else. There are many factors that come into play when a person experiences trauma. There is no shortage of messages that promote healing in ways that are unrealistic and/or out of reach due to various factors. Your healing will be you learning to have respect for your process. The comparison piece is difficult. The quicker you decide it is not a part of your process, the quicker you have moments of deep pride for the things you are overcoming. Comparison is a distraction.

Please think of this when you are tempted to believe what many survivors tell themselves:

"Someone else would be handling this better than me."

"I am weak for not being able to shake this off."

No healing will come from either of these messages. Your experience is unique to you. There is no purpose in your experience being compared to someone else's. There is room in healing for your experience to be yours. Period.

Try this one instead:

"My experience is unique to me. There is no value (or ability) to properly compare two people who have been traumatized. Each person deserves due respect."

SECTION 1

WHAT IS TRAUMA AND TRAUMA-INFORMED?

WHAT IS TRAUMA-INFORMED?

To put it plainly: being trauma-informed means to consider the person's trauma. Trauma-informed is naming and seeing a person's experience based on what happened to them and what can help them heal. Trauma-informed would be naming the way our past experiences impact the nervous system and how the mind and body adapt to those experiences to get by. Trauma pulls a person out of safety and puts them in a stressed mental state (survival mode). Healing is exiting that state.

Examples of Trauma-Informed

- Education on the nervous system (dysregulation, window of tolerance).
- Therapists who are trained in trauma therapies (EMDR, IFS, Somatic, Brainspotting).
- Communities that acknowledge systemic issues targeting marginalized groups.
- Messages, people, and platforms that understand and validate a survivor's experience.

Examples of NOT Trauma-Informed

Quotes like:

- You create your destiny.
- You just have to let it go.
- You choose what happens to you.
- You just need to forgive and forget.
- You need to stop living in the past.
- Any form of "one size fits all" therapy or ideas.

Seeking a trauma-informed approach is important. There are many who do not understand the damage done when they use toxic positivity, or do not have an understanding of how trauma impacts a person. The vulnerability of a person looking to heal is real. It needs to be respected and handled with care.

SECTION 2

TYPES OF TRAUMA THERAPY

TIPS

Below are several types of therapy that are well known. As you read through these, consider what you think would work best for you to feel safe. A few notes to consider with ALL therapy and trauma-informed approaches:

None of these should be done until the therapist has built a solid foundation of trust with the client (survivor). Rushing a client to do any of these when they feel any unease can do a lot of harm. Building a foundation where the client feels empowered to speak up on their readiness is critical.

These processes will bring up things that you do not expect. They are meant to do that. The purpose of many of these is to approach a past experience from a present place and find relief.

If at all possible, schedule these types of sessions at the end of the day, or allow a long break afterwards.

As you read through these, pay close attention to how your mind and body respond. Use this as a learning experience and not a criticism of having to know and understand all of this before taking the next step.

This is not all types of therapy. These are several that are focused on relief from trauma.

SECTION 2

TYPES OF TRAUMA THERAPY

EMDR

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) has had a tremendous impact on me. I began twelve years ago and saw immediate results from the intensity of being in survival mode. Here is more information on EMDR:

EMDR is a form of [psychotherapy](#) developed by [Francine Shapiro](#) in the 1980s that was originally designed to alleviate the distress associated with traumatic memories such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In EMDR, the person being treated recalls distressing experiences whilst doing bilateral stimulation, such as side-to-side eye movement or physical stimulation like tapping either side of the body.

EMDR is included in several evidence-based guidelines for the treatment of PTSD, with varying levels of recommendation and evidence (very low to moderate per WHO stress guidelines).

Click [here](#) to read more.

Click [here](#) to find an EMDR therapist.

Source: [Wikipedia.com](#)

SOMATIC EXPERIENCING

Somatic Experiencing (SE) is a method of alternative [therapy](#) for treating trauma and stressor-related disorders like [PTSD](#). The primary goal of SE is to modify the trauma-related stress response through bottom-up processing. The clients' attention is directed toward internal sensations, ([interoception](#), [proprioception](#) and [kinaesthesia](#)), rather than to cognitive or emotional experiences. The method was developed by Peter A. Levine.

SE sessions are normally held in person but are also available online, and involve clients tracking their physical experiences.

Click [here](#) to read more.

Click [here](#) to find somatic experiencing practitioner.

Source: [Wikipedia.com](#)

SECTION 2

TYPES OF TRAUMA THERAPY

BRAINSPOTTING

Brainspotting is a powerful, focused treatment method that works by identifying, processing, and releasing core neurophysiological sources of emotional/body pain, trauma, dissociation, and a variety of other challenging symptoms. Brainspotting is a simultaneous form of diagnosis and treatment, enhanced with Biolateral sound (different from bilateral sound), which is deep, direct, and powerful, yet focused and containing.

Click [here](#) to read more.

Click [here](#) to find a Brainspotting practitioner.

Source: Brainspotting.com

IFS (Internal Family Systems)

What is IFS?

“Internal Family Systems is a powerfully transformative, evidence-based model of psychotherapy. We believe the mind is naturally multiple and that is a good thing. Our inner parts contain valuable qualities and our core Self knows how to heal, allowing us to become integrated and whole. In IFS all parts are welcome.

IFS is a movement. A new, empowering paradigm for understanding and harmonizing the mind and, thereby, larger human systems. One that can help people heal and helps the world become a more compassionate place.

The mission of IFS Institute is to bring more Self leadership to the world.”

Click [here](#) to read more.

Click [here](#) to find an IFS practitioner.

Source: [IFS Institute](https://IFSInstitute.com)

SECTION 2

TYPES OF TRAUMA THERAPY

Talk Therapy

There are many forms of talk therapy (CBT, DBT, Psychodynamic, Humanistic).

In my experience, talk therapy can be beneficial for a limited time in laying the foundation of what trauma someone is attempting to heal. There are many therapists who advertise as trauma-informed, and do not do anything other than talk therapy. Talking about the trauma on an ongoing basis without any attempt to reprocess it or lessen its impact can be retraumatizing.

Talk therapy will be enough for some people. There will be people who need a safe spot to talk through some past experiences, and having that space held safely can be all they need. It can also leave a person in their traumatic memory, where their body and mind is remembering and needs more than talking to find a way out. This is where many of the therapy options above are beneficial.



SECTION 3

HOW AND WHERE TO FIND A THERAPIST

TIPS

Questions

Ask if your therapist is able to offer a few minutes on a call before you commit. Depending on state or provincial guidelines, some may not be allowed to do so. However, if you are able to have a conversation before filling out their intake forms, it makes the process a lot less draining than finding out after the first session they are not the right fit.

A few questions that can help you know if the therapist is a good fit for you:

- What made you want to become a therapist?
- How do you handle situations where you see a client is feeling lost or afraid?
- How do you close out each session?

Their responses and how they respond are often a good indicator on them being a good fit. **I can't stress enough to look for a compassionate therapist.**

Insurance

If you are going through your insurance to find a practitioner, your insurance provider will be able to send you to their network of options.

A note on insurance:

- Many therapists do not accept insurance because the companies put them through a rigorous administrative cycle to get their fee paid. This requires extensive time that they are not compensated for.
- Insurance companies often do not allow raised rates, so over time the therapist has an increased cost of living, and the insurance company will not cover the increase.

You can read more on this [here](#).

SECTION 3

HOW AND WHERE TO FIND A THERAPIST

How and Where to Find a Therapist

There are many online searches based on the type of therapy you are looking for. These all have great directions by zip code or postal code:

The logo for Psychology Today, featuring the words "Psychology Today" in a blue, sans-serif font.

Click [here](#) to learn more about Psychology Today



CREATING GLOBAL HEALING, HEALTH & HOPE

Click [here](#) to learn more about EMDR International Association



Click [here](#) to learn more about Somatic Experiencing International



Click [here](#) to learn more about IFS Institute

I have a full list of many other types of therapists you can search based on location, as well as organizations that specialize in marginalized communities, on my website:

[Click here to see more.](#)

SECTION 4

FOR THERAPISTS

FOR THERAPISTS

I am grateful for how many therapists support my online spaces. To see them promote a survivor's perspective means a lot, but especially to those of us who have been traumatized by therapy.

I wanted to share a few notes for therapists that I hope help them create a healthy and safe dynamic between themselves and their clients:

Please remind yourself daily that your mental health matters a great deal.

Showing up without offering yourself what you are offering your clients will hurt over time. You deserve to hold space from a grounded place within yourself.

Each year, put time aside to see if you are working with the clients you know you can help and feel like you have the tools that are building the practice you envisioned.

Pay very close attention to any specific topic that you resonate with well and tend to have a deeper understanding of. A lot of therapists get stuck because they fill their work calendars, and over time, they have gotten further away from who they can help most. If there is a specific topic you are drawn to, please consider making that topic a focus. That will align you with clients who can benefit most from what you offer, while honoring your passions and strengths.

Please normalize letting a client know you are not the right fit for them.

This needs to be a clearer conversation in this work, because a therapist knows their limitations and should respect that. Honoring your limitations is a big part of you having a practice that is sustainable.

If you need to let a client go, please do so in a way that shows your humanity and respects that the person who reached out for help is in a vulnerable position where shame, neglect, etc. have often been a big part of their stories. Being able to express their bravery in coming to you can be coupled with acknowledging you are not going to be able to offer them what they need at that time. If you can help guide them to a resource or person you think would be a better fit, that would be a gift to them.

SECTION 4

FOR THERAPISTS

How you close out each session matters.

If you can begin to help your clients understand that you would like to check in with them on everything they discussed at least 5 to 10 minutes before their session ends, it will save many from anxiety and confusion from their time with you. Be mindful of what the person is experiencing as they share, and that after they share, they are going back to an environment where those stories have not been told. Having several minutes to close out each session helps them preserve the tenderness of going back out in the world. Closing out may look like:

- Asking them how they are feeling about what they shared.
- Offering them supportive feedback about their session.
- Asking them to do a body scan to see how they are feeling.
- Being able to help soothe them when they are having a hard time leaving the session.
- Always thanking them for trusting you with what they have shared.

I have heard this often and have personally had experiences that caused extensive damage from not realizing the time was up and not having proper closure from the conversation.

SECTION 5

IMPORTANT TOOLS AND RESOURCES

There are several tools that are an essential part of healing. Therapy is very helpful. Safe relationships are too. With both, learning to find ways to navigate your mind and body on your own are also important.

From my experience, I want to share the way I have learned to regulate (calm) my nervous system:

If I am high anxiety (heat in the body, high heart rate, face flushed), I cannot sit still. Nothing helps me more than a brisk walk (especially in cold temperatures) while listening to classical music. In those moments, a podcast is too much because I do not have the bandwidth to hear. Sitting still is not enough because I am desperate to find immediate relief. Fast movement with instruments in my ears has been the perfect resource and works every time.

This is also a reminder that what some will need is the exact opposite. It is learning to understand how your mind and body work.

Here are a few great resources to learn about:

Breathwork

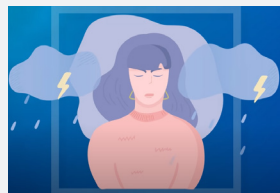
This is a New Age term for various breathing practices in which the conscious control of breathing is said to influence a person's mental, emotional, or physical state, with a claimed therapeutic effect. During a breathwork session, individuals will typically lie down and be instructed to breathe using particular methods, depending on the subtype of breathwork. Most breathwork sessions last around an hour. Breathwork practitioners believe that an individual's particular pattern of passive breathing can lead to insights about their unconscious mind.

To read more on breathwork, go [here](#).

Here are some video examples of breathwork:



Click [here](#) for a popular TED talk on breathwork.



Click [here](#) for a video on Box Breathing by Sunnybrook Hospital.



Click [here](#) for a guided breathwork video by Fitbit.

SECTION 5

IMPORTANT TOOLS AND RESOURCES

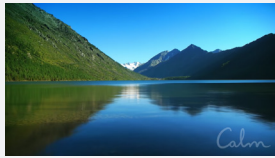
Meditation

is a practice in which an individual uses a technique—such as mindfulness, or focusing the mind on a particular object, thought, or activity—to train attention and awareness, and achieve a mentally clear and emotionally calm and stable state.

Meditation may significantly reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and pain and enhance peace, perception, self-concept, and well-being. Research is ongoing to better understand the effects of meditation on health (psychological, neurological, and cardiovascular) and other areas.

To read more on meditation click [here](#).

Two great resources for meditation are these apps: [Calm](#) and [Headspace](#)



Click [here](#) for a video example of meditation with Calm.



Click [here](#) for a video example of meditation with Headspace.

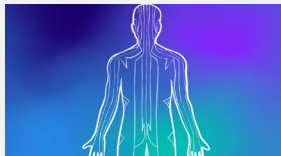
EFT Tapping

EFT Tapping: Emotional freedom technique (EFT) is an alternative treatment for physical pain and emotional distress. It's also referred to as tapping or psychological acupressure.

People who use this technique believe tapping the body can create a balance in your energy system and treat pain. According to its developer, [Gary Craig](#), a disruption in energy is the cause of all negative emotions and pain.

Though still being researched, EFT tapping has been used to treat people with anxiety and people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Click [here](#) for an in-depth look at EFT tapping.



Click [here](#) for a video example of EFT Tapping.



Click [here](#) for a video example of EFT Tapping.

Source: Policy Research Associates, Nick Ortner/Virgin Radio UK

SECTION 5

IMPORTANT TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Trauma-informed yoga

Yoga can be a great tool for survivors to experience their bodies, empowerment, and safe connection with movement. Trauma freezes much of our body function, and yoga is a great resource to create movement around the freeze. Here are some links to learn about trauma-informed yoga:



[What Is Trauma-Informed Yoga?](#)

Source: eomega.org



[Trauma-Informed Yoga: A Guide](#)

Source: psychcentral.com



[Trauma Sensitive Yoga](#)

Source: traumasensitiveyoga.com



SECTION 6

WHAT IF THERAPY IS OUT OF REACH?

I was ignorant to how inaccessible therapy is to many until I started building an online community. There are many dynamics at play. It is important to highlight as many possible resources for those who are not able to afford therapy.

First and foremost, someone not being able to afford therapy has nothing to do with them deserving to have access to it.

Tips

- Check with your county or municipal services for local trauma recovery groups and free short-term therapy. Child protection services is a great place to start to ask about resources.
- Check with your local university to see what program they offer to the public for research, open groups, etc.
- When you speak to a therapist that only has a waitlist option, ask them if they have anyone they could recommend or an organization you could contact.

On my website there are several organizations, non-profits, sliding scale options, etc :

[Click here](#)

Also, there is a list of hotlines on my website:

[Click here](#)

Make sure to check the next section for online resources as well.

SECTION 7

RESOURCES (WEBSITES, YOUTUBE CHANNELS, REDDIT GROUPS, ETC.)

My online community has been instrumental in providing the resources that have helped them most. After multiple polls, I am sharing the most shared responses. These vary in what they offer and their scope, but all have played a significant role in helping others heal. Many of these websites offer courses and have extensive resources:

Path Recovery Groups



[Website](#)

PATH is an international non-profit organization centered on improving the lives of people all over the world struggling with addiction and trauma. As a voice for recovery, we bring individuals together, creating compassionate, HEART-centered communities where people can grow and thrive by HEaling from Addiction and Recovering from Trauma.

We are guided by Internal Family Systems, Mindful Self-Compassion, body-oriented healing, and trauma-informed practices, seeking to embody a sense of safety and care as we heal.

Trauma Research Foundation



[Website](#)

Bessel van der Kolk (author of *The Body Keeps the Score*) is the co-founder of this organization. Their involvement, teachings, and community offerings are outstanding.

Make sure to check out their book resource page [here](#).

National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine (NICABM)



[Website](#)

NICABM has a plethora of courses for mental health professionals, coaches, therapists, helpers, and those looking for help. They pull many well-known and well-versed professionals to provide extensive training and education.

SECTION 7

RESOURCES (WEBSITES, YOUTUBE CHANNELS, REDDIT GROUPS, ETC.)

Adult Survivors of Child Abuse

[Website](#)

Adult Children of Alcoholics & Dysfunctional Families

[Website](#)

Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers

[Website](#)

National Alliance on Mental Illness

[Website](#)

Survivors of Incest Anonymous

[Website](#)

Online Forums/Groups

Reddit is a great platform to learn about varying topics (cPTSD, estrangement, abuse, recovery) as well as join groups:

Adult children estranged from their parents: [Website](#)

Learn about narcissistic abuse: [Website](#)

Traumatic childhood: [Website](#)

Domestic Violence: [Website](#)

cPTSD (complex post-traumatic stress disorder): [Website](#)

Here are two **Facebook** groups:





cPTSD & Me Facebook Group: [Website](#)

Estranged and Thriving (this is a private group on Facebook): [Website](#)

SECTION 7

RESOURCES (WEBSITES, YOUTUBE CHANNELS, REDDIT GROUPS, ETC.)

Other Popular Resources Recommended from My Online Spaces

 <p>Click here to learn more about Insight Timer</p>	 <p>Click here to learn more about EFT Tapping</p>
 <p>Click here to learn more about Calm</p>	 <p>Click here to learn more about Headspace</p>

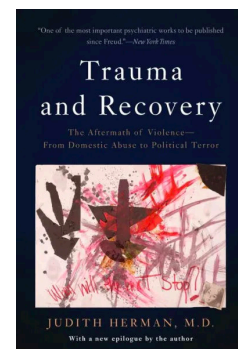
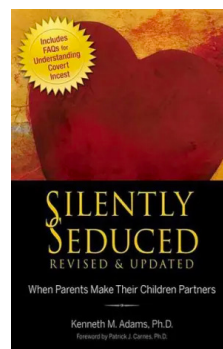
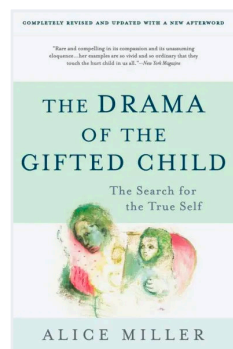
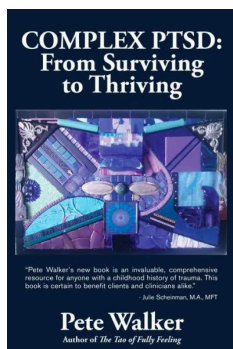
YouTube Channels

Patrick Teahan (Childhood Trauma Specialist): [Website](#)

The Crappy Childhood Fairy (Anna Runkle): [Website](#)

Dr. Ramani (Focus on narcissistic abuse but covers A LOT): [Website](#)

Some of My Favorite Books



[View the FULL list here](#)

SECTION 8

MESSAGES FOR YOU FROM OTHER SURVIVORS

Speaking of online spaces, I asked mine to send you a message. Below are words from other survivors who wanted you to know they are out here healing too. They wanted to send you some input on what you can expect. I hope this brings comfort and helps you know you are not alone!

“I don’t have to love people who hurt me harder in order to heal. I have to love me harder.”

“There is no timeline or destination.”

“It is going to take awhile. It will feel like forever, but that does not mean you are a failure. You are a badass!”

“This is going to be lonely. But, I prefer the loneliness so there are no longer interruptions.”

“You are doing brave work. There are so many that will be here for you!”

“You won’t always see your progress even though it’s real.”

“You don’t need to convince anyone how bad your abuser is. Either they believe your story or they don’t.”

“You are going to have ups and downs, but everything is temporary.”

“You might have to leave people who hurt you.”

“I was not able to heal while still trying to fix a relationship with my abuser.”

“You can pause.”

“You will find that you are stronger than you think. You are worth it!”

“Other people don’t know about you, more than you.”

“Learn about love bombing, trauma bonding, and co-dependency.”

“Remembering the events will feel like it is hurting you, but it is healing you.”

“You will only be able to save yourself.”

“You don’t need apologies in order to heal.”

“Don’t try to achieve what others achieve. Focus on your path, your growth.”

“This is when your life starts. Not after you have healed. Now.”

“This is hard because it’s hard. You aren’t doing it wrong. It’s just hard.”

SECTION 8

MESSAGES FOR YOU FROM OTHER SURVIVORS

“Accept that being traumatized was not your fault.”

“There will come a time where you feel peace and acceptance over what happened.”

“You survived!”

“You will lose people you can't imagine living without. And, you will be fine.”

“Not every therapist will be a good fit, and that's ok.”

“The way you were treated has nothing to do with who you are or your worth.”

“Your perspective on everything will most likely change.”

“This takes time, but it is BEAUTIFUL.”

“It will be hard to forgive the younger you for not knowing what to do. But, they deserve forgiveness.”

“Allow yourself to feel all the feelings without judgment.”

“You will feel painful emotions, but you will also experience ease and joy more authentically.”

“What you are feeling makes sense.”

“Healing happens in the mind and body. Don't forget the body.”

“It is not about being fixed. It is about being ok.”

“You are not crazy and your feelings are valid.”

“Random, unexplained hard days are normal.”

“It's a practice, not a plateau.”

“It is going to be harder than you thought, but better than you expected.”

“Learn everything you can about the vagus nerve.”

“You will find that what others taught you were character flaws were symptoms of cPTSD.”

“There are SO many people like us.”

“You will have really hard days, and you will get through them.”

SECTION 8

MESSAGES FOR YOU FROM OTHER SURVIVORS

“Give yourself permission to grieve over the time loss in survival mode.”

“You are the expert on your own experience!”

“Feelings aren’t facts but they show up to tell us something.”

“I suffered way longer than I needed too because I was honoring my parents.”

“This process is very exhausting physically, mentally, and emotionally.”

“Be cautious of people who do more harm than good by knowing your story.”

“Many people will not understand your story. Trying to explain more will hurt you.”

“I know it feels like no one feels what you feel, but actually all of those feelings are what so many of us feel. We are out here!”

“Please don’t look for healing from your abusers.”

“Comfort and safety should be your priority in therapy. It is ok to stop if you feel dismissed.”

“Accept being misunderstood.”

“Learn everything you can about the nervous system.”

“Being cured is not the goal. Being integrated and present is.”

“People will not like your healthy changes. That is not a reason to stop healing.”

“Losing relationships is a normal part of this work sometimes.”

“You will learn skills to manage your symptoms, but it takes time.”

“You will find out so many amazing things about yourself as you heal!”

“It’s ok to be angry. It’s also ok to let go of anger if/when it no longer serves you.”

“I wish you didn’t have to heal in the first place, but I am glad you’re here!”