



*Healing the Heart Through the Creative Arts, Education & Advocacy*

Hope, Healing & Help for Trauma, Abuse & Mental Health

*“Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars”. Kahlil Gibran*

## **The Surviving Spirit Newsletter April 2020**

Hi Folks,

Obviously we are all experiencing some very trying times and this makes it hard for so many to be with others. Truly a time that we all need the healing power of human connection. Social distancing makes that extremely challenging. And yet, there are so many shining examples of people stepping up to the plate to do the right thing to help others. A few examples of that are shared in this newsletter.

I've always found it interesting how the *big things of life, the harder challenges* don't bother me as much as *the little things*, the spilled coffee, the silverware dropping into the sink or a plate falling to the floor and the resultant noise. One would think a grenade just went off. Computer frustrations or making a mistake with my TV or internet connections cause great anxiety. But a health crisis, the fire in a home, a car accident, a bully picking on someone, etc...those I have always been able to step up to the plate and feel a sense of calm in a time of great stress for others. But those little things wreck havoc upon me for a bit until I catch myself *to breathe and relax*. How the respective traumas of our lives and its impact upon our mind, body and spirit is still a wonder to me and how we all react differently to stress. I strive everyday to know more about this phenomenon and share that information with others in any way that I can.

Knowledge is power and it is freeing...For me to understand myself better and to have gained greater compassion for others lets me know that my pursuit of learning about the long term consequences of trauma, abuse and mental health challenges is a reward unto itself.

I've always joked with friends and folks that I meet if there is ever a crisis, major snow storm, loss of power, etc...just come to my home and we can ride it out for several months. My food pantry and other items of survival have always been well stocked since I became an adult. For some, it may have looked like overkill...but in a time like this, I didn't need to stress over lack of food or supplies. If someone was teasing me a bit for this overabundance, more often than not, it was not a time for me to share with this person *why* I have so much food, etc.

We don't always share of how a trauma impacted us. For me as a little boy, I went hungry many times...for a variety of reasons. Perhaps it was because the father of the home had spent his pay check on booze, gambling or women. And sometimes just out of spite and meanness, he withheld funds for food shopping. Or, it may have been my escaping out of the house as soon as I could, to get away from my parents. Going to school hungry was more the norm for me. Nah, most times we cannot always share with others why we do what we do. Our little survival skills that helped us navigate a sometimes

cruel and uncaring world are left unsaid.

Fortunately, today there is greater awareness by so many of the trauma in children's lives. And making sure meals are provided at school is an important step in healing...A connection of caring and love to a child who so desperately needs that human compassion. It shouldn't hurt to be a child or an adult and the world needs more acts of kindness like this.

I hope all is well for everyone and those you love...we will get through this. Until then, my thoughts of caring and love to all.

Speaking of gifts of love and kindness, Marla Handy is offering a free download of her book, "[No Comfort Zone: Notes on Living with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder](#)" until April 20<sup>th</sup>.

*"No Comfort Zone exposes a jagged slice of humanity that is all too present, but often shielded from our view. The author challenges us to see life as she does, so we can understand a bit of what it's like to live with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). With insight and humor, she describes the fear and unpredictability of growing up in an unstable household, the terror of being raped as a young adult, and the confusion and shame of living with perceptions and reactions that are often so very different from others'. After years of treatment for depression, a diagnosis of PTSD came as a surprise. Isn't this something that only happens to combat veterans? But it made sense. In writing this highly personal account, Marla Handy helps the rest of us understand what PTSD is and that it happens here at home, too."*

Marla Handy, Ph.D., has over 25 years of experience consulting with nonprofit and community organizations in the areas of strategic planning, governance and managerial development, and has worked domestically and in South America, Africa, Asia, the South Pacific, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. She recently retired from teaching at a large university.

And here is the rest of this month's newsletter.

***All the best, Michael Skinner***

*"Trauma is personal. It does not disappear if it is not validated. When it is ignored or invalidated the silent screams continue internally heard only by the one held captive. When someone enters the pain and hears the screams healing can begin." - Danielle Bernock*

*"Only love can heal. Start by healing yourself. LOVE!" - Abhishek Kumar*

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*“Love yourself first and everything else falls into line. You really have to love yourself to get anything done in this world.” Lucille Ball*

*“We need 4 hugs a day for survival. We need 8 hugs a day for maintenance. We need 12 hugs a day for growth.” Virginia Satir*

1] [How to strengthen your immunity during the coronavirus pandemic: Exercise, meditation, sleep and stress management](#) By Lisa Drayer, CNN

*[Lisa Drayer](#) is a nutritionist, an author and a CNN health and nutrition contributor.*

As the [coronavirus](#) situation intensifies, you might be wondering: How can I keep myself healthy?

The answer lies in following the latest guidelines on social distancing, [proper handwashing](#) and your local stay-at-home directives.

But there are also ways to strengthen your own immune system. Diet is one of them, and [we covered that here in part one](#) of our immunity boosting series.

Yet what you eat is just one factor. Being physically active, meditating and managing stress, and getting adequate sleep help, too. Keep reading to find out why those habits boost your immunity and how you can take advantage of their benefits.

### **Find time for fitness**

Engaging in regular physical activity is a great way to help manage stress and strengthen your immune system. In fact, [research shows](#) that "fit individuals" -- defined as those who partake in regular physical activity -- have a lower incidence of infection compared to inactive and sedentary individuals. What's more, being physically active [may help reduce the risk of chronic diseases](#) that could further weaken your immune system, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity.

How does exercise help? For one, physical activity helps to [flush bacteria out of the lungs](#), decreasing your chances of getting a cold, flu or other illness. Exercise also reduces levels of the body's stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol, explained MaryAnn Browning, CEO and founder of [Browningfitness](#). Lower levels of stress hormones may protect against illness.

"[Exercise] also stimulates the production of endorphins -- chemicals in the brain that are the body's natural painkillers and mood elevators," Browning said.

For at-home fitness essentials, Browning recommends getting a set of yellow, green and [red resistance bands](#) (the colors correspond with varying levels of resistance). "These can be used for back, bicep, triceps, shoulders and leg work," Browning said.

She also recommends [looped bands](#) to go around the calves or thighs, which strengthen the glutes and can help prevent knee and back injuries.

For an at-home cardio workout, Browning recommends jumping jacks, high knees, butt kicks, burpees and switch jumps -- during which you'll jump to turn 180 degrees and then back again -- for 15 seconds each. Then repeat the circuit five to 10 times, depending on what you can handle.

And don't forget about the joy of dancing! My girls and I love blasting our favorite tunes and engaging in impromptu dance parties for a wonderful mood-lifting indoor activity, no equipment required. Try making up fun dance routines, or have someone play DJ and compete in "freeze dance."

If you are looking for something a bit more structured, there are plenty of online options to choose from. My girls and I have enjoyed the [Yoga with Adrienne](#) YouTube channel, which offers free yoga videos. Free on-demand programs are also available at [YMCA360.org](#), and include boot camp, Barre, yoga and low-impact programs for seniors.

Another option is [Melissa Wood's Health Workouts](#), which can be accessed online or via her app. "You

can use light weights or your own body weight, and they're quick yet super effective. They have been an absolute godsend to me during this time!" said Jamie Plancher, who has a masters in emergency and disaster management and has been "tracking Covid-19 like a hawk."

"I'm obsessed with [Alexia Clark's workouts](#)," said Lindsey Schwartz, who is currently homeschooling her children in New York City. "Everyday is something different ... she's the queen of making sure you use as many muscles as possible in a circuit and knows how to keep it interesting."

While that program has a subscription-based app, you can also find [free workouts on Alexia Clark's Instagram](#) and IGTV.

## **Meditate**

If you haven't tried mediation, now might be a good time to start. A [recent review](#) involving 20 randomized, controlled trials including more than 1,600 people suggested that meditation may help keep our immune system functioning optimally.

A stressful circumstance like what we are experiencing now can negatively affect the immune system, but "a consistent meditation practice can help us better respond to stressful situations," explained Ellie Burrows Gluck, a Vedic meditation teacher and the co-founder and CEO of [MNDFL](#), a meditation studio in New York City that also offers live-streamed, at-home practices with meditation experts [at MNDFL TV](#).

"Life is messy, and although meditation isn't a cure all it can help us to remember to breathe and that we'll never be able to clean it all up," Gluck said.

To start meditating, simply bring your full attention to your breath. Sitting with uplifted posture may help, and eyes may be closed or open. When you notice your mind wanders with thoughts like, "What am I going to have for lunch?" come back to your breath without judgment.

Gluck says once you've been practicing for a while and have learned how to choose between your breath and your thoughts, you can "apply that same mechanism of choice to [your] response to stressful situations." Most studies show you need to practice a minimum of 10 minutes a day for 8 to 10 weeks to see the benefits over time, Gluck added.

When meditating, it's a good idea to aim for consistency when it comes to the style of meditation; the time of day and length of your practice; and your surroundings. You might choose your favorite spot on the couch or a designated corner with a meditation cushion, Gluck advised.

## **Manage stress**

Research dating back over 25 years has revealed that [psychological stress increases susceptibility to illness \(PDF\)](#).

Prolonged or chronic stress can negatively impact the immune system by reducing the body's ability to defend against viruses and bacteria, explained [Allison Forti](#), licensed clinical mental health counselor and associate director of the [Online Master's in Counseling Program at Wake Forest University](#).

Additionally, when under stress, it's not uncommon for people to engage in coping strategies such as

drinking excessive alcohol, smoking cigarettes, eating a poor diet, or not getting enough sleep, which can also negatively impact the immune system, Forti added.

To calm our anxiety during this stressful time, first acknowledge that it is okay to feel stressed, anxious and afraid. "It is okay to feel panicked ... look for ways to ground yourself in a safe and healthy way that does not cause harm to others," Forti said.

Maintaining a sense of connection with friends and loved ones is important. Email, call or FaceTime relatives, and have live-streaming cocktail hours with friends, like my husband and I did this past Saturday evening. (Good news: You can responsibly "drink and Zoom.") And children can benefit from staying connected, too. One of my mom friends recently organized a pajama party via Zoom for my daughter and her friends.

It's also important to avoid judging your feelings and thoughts, Forti explained. Acknowledge them with a sense of care and appreciation, and release the expectation that things should be normal right now. For example, if you are feeling stressed about not fine-tuning the perfect homeschooling schedule or web-based activities for your children, that's ok.

"Holding on to rigid patterns of thinking exacerbates stress and anxiety," Forti said. "Flexibility is required during this time of uncertainty and rapid change."

In my home, that means working with several interruptions, and allowing my girls to have some access to TikTok on my iPhone, along with some extra cookies.

For those experiencing high levels of stress or anxiety, it may be helpful to be mindful as you consume media updates. "Be aware of how the news affects you. Does it trigger your anxiety? Alternatively, does it make you feel safe because now you can choose what to do with that information?" Forti said. You may wish to ask a friend to keep you informed of major alerts so you do not have to check the media, Forti advised.

### **Don't skimp on sleep**

Lastly, get your z's. Not doing so can negatively affect your immune system, according to the [National Sleep Foundation](#).

To keep your immune system strong, the NSF advises aiming for seven to eight hours of sleep each night. But if your mind has been keeping you up or you simply can't get that amount, fill in the gaps with naps.

According to the NSF, taking two naps that are no longer than 30 minutes each - one in the morning and one in the afternoon - has been shown to help decrease stress and offset the negative effects that sleep deprivation has on the immune system. If that's not realistic, a 20-minute catnap during a lunch break or before dinner can help too.

*"Don't stress the could haves, if it should have, it would have." - Unknown*

*"Life is made up, not of great sacrifices or duties, but of little things, in which smiles, and kindness,*

*and small obligations, given habitually are what win and preserve the heart and secure comfort.” - Humphrey Davy*

2] [Reconnecting to your Body after Peritraumatic Dissociation @ CPTSDfoundation.org](https://www.cptsdfoundation.org) by Raffaella Milner

*Raffaella Milner is a pro MMA fighter, coach, kickboxer, and BJJ purple belt. She has a degree in physics from Heidelberg, and most recently focuses on traveling, training, coaching, and studying trauma therapy.*

*She is working towards starting a trauma healing center and offering trauma informed martial arts classes.*

In this article, we will talk about one of the most common symptoms of complex post-traumatic stress disorder – dissociation. We will explore different methods and tools that help us to reconnect with our body in the long term. Since one of those tools is therapy, we will also talk about the limits of talk therapy, and address how working with our body directly can teach us new and healthier responses when we are overwhelmed.

### **Definition and Explanation of Dissociation**

For every trauma survivor, dissociation looks differently and has varying levels of intensity. Some of us might only experience dissociation in difficult moments or as part of a flashback, while others can live in a state of persistent dissociation.

There are different definitions of dissociation. When we look at what they all have in common, we can say that dissociation is a form of the fight, flight, or freeze response. Dissociation can happen when we experience a threatening situation which we cannot escape from, and also cannot resolve or change. As an adaptive response, a form of detachment from that experienced reality takes place. That detachment can be from our surroundings, from our emotions or our body, and, in severe cases, reveal in a complete shut down; a freeze.

In the article, *The association between peritraumatic dissociation and PTSD symptoms: the mediating role of negative beliefs about the self*, Thompson-Hollands points out the relation between peritraumatic dissociation and the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder:

“Peritraumatic dissociation, a term used to describe a complex array of reactions to trauma, including depersonalization, derealization, and emotional numbness, has been associated with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms across a number of studies.”

In other words, dissociation is a form of coping with intensely overwhelming, overpowering, or traumatic experiences. Since the perception of such an experience is individual – depending on our individual coping disposition and skill, the state of our nervous system, and our personal history of trauma – anything can cause that response in an individual.

Dissociation is a completely normal response to traumatic events and was needed at that point in time. There is nothing wrong with you if you responded or still respond in that way. We are just talking about it to learn to manage our responses in a way that supports our healing.

In general, a mild form of dissociation can be healthy and helpful to tolerate stress for a limited amount of time. Dissociation becomes a problem when it gets out of our conscious control and starts limiting our life. Not everyone diagnosed with complex post-traumatic stress disorder experiences dissociation, but for those who do, it can show itself in the following ways:

### **Symptoms of Dissociation**

- Lack of memory (for some people, this can be a very long timespan or even most of their childhood years)
- A general feeling of disconnection
- Not knowing how you feel and struggling to engage with emotions
- Not feeling your body or only noticing strong stimuli like pain and stress
- Speaking about emotions in a monotone voice and having difficulty making eye contact
- Depression, anxiety, or both
- Being overwhelmed by emotional or physical intimacy
- Experiences of fragmented reality
- A general feeling of disorientation or difficulty orienting within surroundings
- Trouble getting “out of your head”

As mentioned above, dissociation becomes a problem when we cannot use it deliberately and in our favor. Instead, our organism reacts with it in a situation where we want to or need to stay connected. For example, we could get overwhelmed by intimacy in a relationship. When that is the case, our coping mechanism becomes a mechanism of self-sabotage.

### **How Dissociation inhibits Healing**

Dissociation is the opposite of association or connection. Since most processes in our brain are associative, recurrent states of dissociation interfere with our ability to process information in a healthy way.

Connection, intimacy, emotional integration – these are all only possible in an associative state.

As important and necessary as cognitive elaboration and integration of the traumatic memory is, healing of complex trauma can ultimately only be achieved by creating and therefore experiencing a different reality. Creating a new pattern requires us to be present. Experiencing is also only possible in an associative state. If we dissociate in a moment where we had a chance to experience connection, intimacy, or safety because we were overwhelmed, that reinforces negative patterns and thoughts.

At the same time, it is so difficult to stay connected in these important moments, because we struggle with emotional regulation.

This is why dissociation might intensify posttraumatic symptoms and inhibit the recovery process. It repeats past experiences and feelings by disabling the connection to the emotions of the present moment.

## **Emotional Regulation, Homeostasis, and Healing**

Healing is a long-term process of repetitive adaptation to new stimuli that overwhelm us, by exposing ourselves to a level that we can handle without dissociating, while our ability to regulate our emotions improves. If we let it overwhelm us too much, the cycle described above occurs. Dissociation and confused emotional regulation bring our body out of homeostasis.

Peter Levine, who is a somatic trauma therapist, describes it as follows:

“The failure to restore homeostasis is at the basis for the maladaptive and debilitating symptoms of trauma.”

Homeostasis is the state in which our organism functions optimally and has access to its own internal healing and recovering abilities. For people with complex post-traumatic stress disorder, that mainly refers to a balanced state of their nervous system.

As a person who struggled with severe and long term dissociation myself, I find this a challenging and painful reality. It is not our fault that our organism trained itself to be in a state like that, but we have to deal with the consequences. Simultaneously, only we have the power to change that. For me, it sometimes is frustrating to face that reality, because it feels unfair. On the other hand, there is something empowering behind that responsibility; we can change it. We are not dependent on the choices of other people in the same way anymore, but on our own. We can make a promise to ourselves: go through the uncomfortable process of change and reconnect with our organism.

Recovering from complex trauma and from post-traumatic stress disorder takes time because those responses need to be managed in a sustainable way; a way that lets our organism restore homeostasis. And that takes a lot of practice in emotional regulation, which includes preventing and managing dissociation.

## **Potential Limitations of Talk Therapy and the Body Oriented Approach**

Bessel van der Kolk and Peter Levine, both trauma therapists, agree that the processing and reintegration of traumatic memories and emotions are crucial to healing. It is important to feel those emotions that do not want to be felt, to reframe the experience and integrate them.

The key is to do that in a safe and productive way that does not cause retraumatization or dissociation. We will explore some safe ways to do that later.

Talk therapy is a great tool for many of us and as much as it can help with various steps in the process of reframing and reintegrating our memories, it has a risk to cause dissociation or retraumatization when we have not learned how to stay connected while regulating those emotions.

Talking about a traumatic event or the emotions associated with it can be so overwhelming that we can only do that while switching to a dissociated state, which then inhibits integration. Alternatively, we can become so overwhelmed that everything just bursts out and we may emotionally re-experience that trauma. For those of us who struggle with that, a body-oriented form of therapy can be a helpful tool. Body oriented means that the focus is on creating a state of connection to the older parts of our brain through the body and then working from there, instead of being more frontal lobe oriented. Such a

method is designed to, and could, prevent dissociation.

If this is something you struggle with, here are a few body-oriented methods to manage dissociation.

### **Breathwork**

Taking some time each day to breathe deeply into your belly teaches the organism to restore homeostasis and therefore balances the nervous system. You can put a hand on your chest and the other hand on your belly. Now focus on deep belly breathing instead of breathing into the chest.

- **Meditation**

Meditating regularly changes your relationship with your thoughts. You can sit with them, let them be, feel yourself and focus on your breathing. Meditating a few minutes daily helps in being aware and connected to the present. It also shuts down the negative voices in the head over time because when you start feeling that you are not your thoughts, those negative voices lose their power.

- **Mindfulness**

Practicing being fully connected to the present moment. You can do that in many ways– In a conversation with a friend, spending time with family or children and really focusing on the present moment, being in nature, meditation; what comes to your mind? The key is not being on ‘autopilot’ but as engaged as you can. A few examples to connect with the present moment: Take a walk in the park, take a shower and feel the warm or cold water, focus on your surroundings and feel/hear/smell five things

- **Moving your body consciously**

We experience life and every emotion through our body. We feel with our body. Moving while consciously tuning into our body and focusing on how that movement feels rebuilds the relationship with the body. You can take some time each morning and practice getting into your body. Do you feel differently during the day?

- **Actively asking yourself how you feel**

We can practice being in touch with our feelings and awareness by slowing down a few times each day and ask ourselves how we feel. You can set an alarm or a reminder on your phone to do that. If you find out that you are not feeling well, keep in mind that it is ok. Do not judge yourself for not feeling well or for feeling disconnected. Noticing how you feel is an important step in healing. It takes time. It is okay to take little steps and to take a step back when needed.

- **Yoga and Martial Arts**

Yoga and Martial Arts are both ways to engage in physical activity that requires us to be very aware of how we feel. Both bring up emotions, help with emotional regulation and integration and also involve our mind. Yoga helps with reconnecting body and mind. Martial Arts helps with widening one’s window of tolerance and creating new and positive scenarios, as well as building up self-esteem and self-confidence.

- **Dancing, singing, and music**

Creative activities that involve movement help us getting into an associative state. It is simply easier to train ourselves to get and stay in associative states with joyful activities. The more often we are in an associative state, the easier it gets to stay connected.

- **Being in nature**

Nature has a very positive effect on our well being. Being in nature makes us feel present, more connected and more grounded. Also walking barefoot on grass is especially grounding.

- **Consciously focusing and experiencing your senses and sensations**

Similarly to asking yourself how you feel; consciously focusing on our senses and sensations connects us to our internal experience and to our immediate surroundings. Sometimes emotions or thoughts can be a part of our old patterns. When we consciously connect to our present sensations and our surroundings we might process that experience differently and have a better orientation. It helps in creating new experiences. It is okay to not feel a rapid improvement. Give yourself time and trust the process. It will come.

- **Journaling**

My current journaling routine is that I take some time every morning and write down what I am grateful for. Then I check in with my inner child and ask it how I can be there for it today. I end my routine by checking in with my future self – what can I do today to become my future self? Every part of this routine is about today with the goal to fully ground myself with intention and awareness in the present moment to start my day centered and connected.

- **Experiencing Joy**

Joy is the experience of flow. When we feel joy, we are in a highly connected state. Trauma survivors might have difficulties to be joyful even years later. But being joyful can be relearned. Think about all the memories of joy you had in your life and try to connect with that feeling. Maybe write them down. Consciously do something that you associate with that state every day. In the past, I struggled a lot with dissociation while being in talk therapy and a more body-oriented approach was a significant step in my healing process. I am still practicing grounding and connecting to my organism every day because it brings more happiness into my life.

Reconnecting to yourself and others can be scary and uncomfortable in the beginning but it so important for our healing. I encourage and invite you to try it out.

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2a] [Author's site - Raffaella Milner](#)

I'm Raffaella Milner, a mixed martial artist and purple Belt in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. I write about [Martial Arts](#), integrating them with [trauma therapy](#), and [a variety of other topics](#) that interest me, and also host my [podcast](#) here. I hope you find something that connects with you here!

2b] [The Association Between Peritraumatic Dissociation and PTSD Symptoms](#): The Mediating Role of Negative Beliefs About the Self by [Johanna Thompson-Hollands](#),<sup>1,2</sup> [Janie J. Jun](#),<sup>1</sup> and [Denise M. Sloan](#)<sup>1,2</sup>

Peritraumatic dissociation, a term used to describe a complex array of reactions to trauma, including depersonalization, derealization, and emotional numbness, has been associated with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms across a number of studies. Cognitive theory suggests that interpretations of traumatic events and reactions underlie the persistence of PTSD. The present study examined the associations among peritraumatic dissociation, posttraumatic cognitions, and PTSD symptoms in a group of trauma-exposed adults ( $N = 169$ ). Results indicated that, after accounting for overall symptom severity and current dissociative tendencies, peritraumatic dissociation was significantly predictive of negative beliefs about the self ( $R^2 = .06, p < .001$ ). Other categories of maladaptive posttraumatic cognitions did not show a similar relationship ( $R^2 = .01$  to  $.02$ , nonsignificant). Negative thoughts about the self partially mediated the association between peritraumatic dissociation and PTSD severity (completely standardized indirect effect =  $.25$ ). These findings lend support to cognitive theories of PTSD and point to an important area for clinical intervention. [Read the entire article](#)

*"I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it." - Maya Angelou*

*"They say time heals all wounds, but that presumes the source of the grief is finite" - Cassandra Clare*

3] [CPTSD Foundation](#) - *Successfully equipping complex trauma survivors and practitioners with compassionate support, skills, and trauma-informed education since 2014.*

"Complex PTSD comes in response to chronic traumatization over the course of months or, more often, years. This can include emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuses, domestic violence, living in a war zone, being held captive, human trafficking, and other organized rings of abuse, and more. While there are exceptional circumstances where adults develop C-PTSD, it is most often seen in those whose trauma occurred in childhood". [Learn More...](#)

3a] [Call for Writers @ CPTSDfoundation.org](#) - *Are You Passionate About Inspiring Others in Their Healing Journey, Through Your Writing?*

If you're passionate about writing and inspiring others, we want to hear from you!

The blog here at CPTSD Foundation focuses on all aspects of complex trauma recovery, as well as

educating, inspiring, and raising awareness about the mental health struggles that survivors of trauma face on a daily basis.

If you have a knack for writing and want to make a difference in someone's life, through the power of the written word, then please read on to learn more about writing for us, and fill out our contact form at the bottom of the page.

*We look forward to collaborating with you!*

*"You have trust in what you think. If you splinter yourself and try to please everyone, you can't." - Annie Leibovitz*

*"I have learned silence from the talkative, toleration from the intolerant, and kindness from the unkind; yet strange, I am ungrateful to these teachers." - Kahlil Gibran*

#### 4] [The Arc - For People With Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#)

ADVOCACY & INNOVATION - For and with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD)

**Our Mission** - Promoting and protecting the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively supporting their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes.

With your help, we are working every day to build a future of inclusive work, play, worship, community, travel, and more.

69 Years – Driving change and protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities

600+ Local Chapters

1,000+ National and Community Programs

#### **Our Core Values**

**People First** - The Arc believes that all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are defined by their own strengths, abilities, and inherent value — not by their disability.

**Equity** - The Arc believes that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are entitled to the respect, dignity, equality, safety, and security accorded to other members of society, and are equal before the law.

**Community** - The Arc believes that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities belong in the community and have fundamental moral, civil, and constitutional rights to be fully included and actively participate in all aspects of society.

**Self-determination** - The Arc believes in self-determination and self-advocacy. People with

intellectual and developmental disabilities, with appropriate resources and supports, can make decisions about their own lives and must be heard on issues that affect their well-being.

**Diversity-** The Arc believes that society in general and The Arc in particular benefit from the contributions of people with diverse personal characteristics (including but not limited to race, ethnicity, religion, age, geographic location, sexual orientation, gender, and type of disability).

### [COVID-19 Resources for People With Disabilities, Families, and Service Providers](#)

The Arc is greatly concerned about the threat of COVID-19 to people with disabilities, their families, and the workforce that supports them. We are compiling resources to help people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD), their families, and service providers to understand this global pandemic.

*“How we perceive a situation and how we react to it is the basis of our stress. If you focus on the negative in any situation, you can expect high stress levels. However, if you try and see the good in the situation, your stress levels will greatly diminish.” – Catherine Pulsifer*

*“The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them. That's the essence of inhumanity.” - George Bernard Shaw*

5] [The Definition of Insanity @ PBS](#) - Premieres April 14, 2020

The Miami-Dade Criminal Mental Health Project (CMHP) comes to life in this documentary, following a team of dedicated public servants working through the courts to steer people with mental illness - as their court cases hang in the balance - on a path from incarceration to recovery.

[The Definition of Insanity – Trailer](#) 2:12 minutes

Shocked by how people with mental illness were treated in his county’s jails, a judge sets out to work with a team of dedicated public servants to help people with mental illness navigate the sometimes cruel system, and live lives full of possibilities.

[The Definition of Insanity - Facing Mental Health Struggles in Prison – Justin’s Story](#) 1:27 minutes

Peer counselor Justin Volpe describes his own experience of facing the mental health system while also serving time in the Dade County Jail 11 years ago. He explains why the very broken system is difficult to navigate, and why many who suffer from mental illness struggle to get out.

[Justin Volpe - How Did You Become Involved with the Jail Diversion Program?](#) - YouTube 1 minute

Want to learn more about The Definition of Insanity and the Jail Diversion Program? Check out our exclusive, in-depth interviews with Judge Steven Leifman, Judge Andrea Wolfson, the filmmakers' Charlie Sodoff & Gabe London, the founders of The Matthew Harris Ornstein Memorial Foundation, and more!

[Watch Now](#)

*“Mental illness is not something you misunderstand in this era. Get educated because bias is no different than racism.” - Shannon L. Alder*

*“Today's reminder – I will not get so bogged down in dealing with old wounds that I forget about new growth.” Courage to Change*

*“The past is but the beginning of a beginning.” - H.G. Wells*

6] [Compassionate Approaches to Crisis Webinar Series](#) - National Empowerment Center [NEC]

Over the next several months, the [National Empowerment Center](#) will be offering several webinars on peer-run services serving individuals experiencing an emotional crisis. Topics covered will include peer-staffed warmlines, peer respites, and clinical approaches informed by peer values.

The first webinar in the series is scheduled for **Tuesday, April 14th, at 1:00pm Eastern, 10:00am Pacific**. The webinar will introduce participants to the role that peer-staffed warmlines can play in addressing mental health crises.

[Registration](#)

Whether coping with life challenges, battling isolation, struggling with substance use, or managing complicated relationships, sometimes people just need a person to talk to, someone who has "been there." Peer-staffed warmlines can be a major source of support in a crisis. Peer specialists are prepared to listen, provide support, validate experiences and explore each caller's story in a confidential non-judgmental conversation. While many peer services are delivered face to face, telephonic services are a low-barrier and accessible support that offers a pathway into peer relationships. This webinar will give an overview of the history of warmlines, their evolution, and the variety of functions they serve. Participants will leave with an understanding of the diverse functions of warmlines, their differences from hotlines and clinical crisis services, the evidence base for these services, and funding strategies. They will also learn how warmlines can provide support and serve to alleviate social isolation during this time of physical distancing.

**Presented By:**

Jess Stohlmann Rainey is a researcher, trainer, and advocate serving as the Director of Program Development at Rocky Mountain Crisis Partners. She has focused her career on creating pathways to intersectional, justice-based, emotional support for marginalized communities. Her specialties include designing and scaling sustainable programs, upstream approaches to prevention work, and empowering leaders to create positive change in the places we live, work, and learn. Jess has presented and trained nationally and internationally about suicide and violence prevention, diversity, gender, and leadership.

Jess's work has been published/featured in [Mad in America](#), the [RMIRECC's Short Takes on Suicide Prevention](#), [No Restraints with Rudy Caseras](#), [Postvention in Action: The International Handbook of Suicide Bereavement](#), and [The Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#).

Jess centers her lived expertise as an ex-patient and suicide attempt and loss survivor in her work.

6a] [NEC Response to COVID-19: Emotional CPR goes online](#)

For listings of online and phone supports during this time check out [PeerGalaxy](#), [Western Mass RLC's Listing of Online and Phone Supports](#), and [Peerly Human](#).

In these times of fear, uncertainty and increased isolation, NEC believes our society needs more than ever to connect and feel empowered. Social distancing has been recommended as an important way to slow the spread of COVID-19. We need to distinguish between physical distancing of at least 6 feet and social distancing. Physical distancing is recommended now, but social distancing can be damaging and retraumatizing, especially to vulnerable individuals. However, even when we are physically distant we can socially connect online. Those of us with lived experience of severe emotional distress are well prepared for this disaster because we have long known that our healing and resilience are enhanced by our connecting at a heart-to-heart level. So we need not turn physical distancing into social isolation. We have developed Emotional CPR (eCPR) as a way to enhance everyone's capacity to Connect, emPower, and Revitalize each other through mutual support. To adapt to present life, we have developed an online version of eCPR which we are rolling out now. We are now offering online eCPR certification trainings, support groups, and communities of practice. These efforts are helping to alleviate the trauma of social isolation through physical distancing and lay the foundation for healing.

Email [info@emotional-cpr.org](mailto:info@emotional-cpr.org) if you want to participate in these Emotional CPR offerings and check [www.emotional-cpr.org](http://www.emotional-cpr.org) for updates.

*"Just like there's always time for pain, there's always time for healing." - Jennifer Brown*

*"Yes, I understand why things had to happen this way. I understand his reason for causing me pain. But mere understanding does not chase away the hurt. It does not call upon the sun when dark clouds have loomed over me. Let the rain come then if it must come! And let it wash away the dust that hurt my eyes!" - Jocelyn Soriano,*

7] [Broken Places Film](#) A film by Roger Weisberg

*"The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places." - Ernest Hemingway*

***explores why some children are severely damaged by early adversity while others are able to thrive***

By revisiting some of the abused and neglected children we profiled decades ago, we're able to dramatically illustrate how early trauma shaped their lives as adults. BROKEN PLACES interweaves these longitudinal narratives with commentary from a few nationally renowned experts to help viewers better understand the devastating impact of childhood adversity as well as the inspiring characteristics of resilience.

**BROKEN PLACES**, our 33rd documentary, poses the complex question of why some children are severely damaged by early adversity while others are able to thrive. To help answer this question, we dug into 40 years of our film archives to update a few of the stories of children growing up in difficult circumstances that we filmed decades ago. It turns out that some of these children were so scarred by

abuse and neglect that they are now in mental institutions, correctional facilities, or drug rehabilitation centers. A few died prematurely. However, there are others who managed to overcome comparable childhood stress and are now healthy, self-sufficient adults. Viewers are given a unique time-lapse perspective, witnessing how a few of these troubled children evolved into the adults they are today. BROKEN PLACES is written, produced and directed by Roger Weisberg, whose previous productions have won over a hundred and fifty awards including Emmy, duPont-Columbia, and Peabody awards, as well as two Academy Award nominations.

[Broken Places Trailer on Vimeo](#) – 2 minutes

[Official Trailer - Broken Places - PBS](#) – YouTube 30 seconds

Acquire film for educational & institutional use - [RoCo Films Educational](#)

Stream or download the film for home use – [Prime Video](#)

*“What drains your spirit drains your body. What fuels your spirit fuels your body.” - Carolyn Myss*

*“But no matter how much evil I see, I think it’s important for everyone to understand that there is much more light than darkness.” - Robert Uttaro*

8] [Childhood hardship has lasting effects up to old age](#) - By [AGENCY](#) @ The Star Online

*Having emotionally cold or absent parents, especially mothers, can greatly affect one’s entire life, right up to old age.*

From being raised by an emotionally cold mother to experiencing violence, war and bereavement, difficult life events have a profound effect on our physical and mental well-being in later life, according to research from the University of East Anglia (UEA), United Kingdom.

A new study, published on March 11 (2020) in the *Journal of Public Health*, shows how a range of life inequalities and hardships are linked to physical and mental health inequalities in later life.

These stressful and often heartbreaking life inequalities included having emotionally cold parents, poor educational opportunities, losing an unborn child, financial hardship, involvement in conflict, violence and experiencing a natural disaster.

The research team found that people who experienced the greatest levels of hardship, stress and personal loss, were five times more likely to experience a lower quality of life, with significantly more health and physical difficulties in later life.

Those brought up by an emotionally cold mother were also significantly less likely to experience a good quality of life and more likely to experience problems in later life such as anxiety, psychiatric problems and social detachment.

The researchers say that policies aimed at reducing inequalities in older age should consider events across the life course.

Dr Nick Steel from UEA's Norwich Medical School, said: "Everybody lives a unique life that is shaped by events, experiences and their environment.

"We know that inequalities in exposure to different events over a lifetime are associated with inequalities in health trajectories, particularly when it comes to events in childhood such as poverty, bereavement or exposure to violence.

"While the impact of adverse childhood events is well recognised for children and young people, the negative events that shape our entire life courses are rarely discussed for older people.

"We wanted to better understand the effects of events over a life course – to find out how adverse events over a person's lifetime affect their physical, mental and social health in later life.

"As well as looking at single life events, we also identified groups or patterns of events."

The research team studied data taken from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, a longitudinal study of adults over 50 living in England. Participants were invited to answer a life history questionnaire.

The research team took into account responses from 7,555 participants to questions that represented broad topics in life history.

Some of these questions were around their upbringing, such as whether a parent had been emotionally cold and the estimated number of books in their home at 10 years of age.

Other questions focused on events in adult life, such as whether they had fought in a war or lost an unborn child.

The researchers analysed the responses to identify patterns of life events, and also took into account factors such as age, ethnicity, sex and socioeconomic status.

Lead researcher Oby Enwo, said: "We looked at the life history of each participant and compared it to their quality of life and how well they can perform activities like dressing themselves, bathing, preparing hot meals, doing gardening and money management.

"We also studied whether the participants had a long standing illness, or suffered from anxiety or depression, or other psychiatric problems like schizophrenia and psychosis.

"Participants were also asked about their social networks, friendships and general health.

"We started to see some really strong patterns and associations emerging between exposure to life events that affect physical and mental well-being in later life."

The researchers grouped the participants into four main groups: those who reported few life events, those with an emotionally cold mother, those who had experienced violence in combat and those who had experienced a number of difficult life events.

“We found that people who had suffered many difficult life events were significantly less likely to experience a good quality of life than those who had lived easier lives.

“They were three times more likely to suffer psychiatric problems, twice as likely to be detached from social networks and twice as likely to have long-standing illness.

“People raised by an emotionally cold mother were also significantly less likely to experience a good quality of life, and were more likely to report psychiatric problems and be detached from social networks, compared to people who had experienced few difficult life events.”

The researchers now hope that clinicians working with older people will start to consider the impact of life course events on health and well-being as part of a patient-centred approach.

They say that policymakers should also take a long-term perspective and target life events that could be changed, e.g. teaching and improving parenting skills to avoid emotionally negative experiences, and targeting gun and knife crime to limit people’s exposure to violence.

*“Often it's the deepest pain which empowers you to grow into your higher self.” - Unknown*

*“You didn't make a mistake by loving them. You should never regret loving. You didn't make a mistake by giving them a chance. That's a reason of strength, not shame. You didn't make a mistake by trusting them, believe them or being there for them. Do you know why? Your actions reflect you. You would do this for anyone that comes your way. It just happened that those were not appreciative of your pure intentions. You didn't make a mistake. The mistake was their choice to make by not respecting and appreciating your beautiful heart.” - Mandy Hale*

[9\] Brave and Unbroken](#) - Pennie Saum, author & advocate

[Blog Posts:](#)

**Surviving in silence** *“Being quiet and hidden is no longer an option.” - Pennie Saum*

I have been doing a lot of work around what angle of my story do I need to tell. I can talk all day about all the incidences that happened throughout my childhood, but I am not convince that my story alone is going to help others. I do believe though, what my background and history is, is vital to the entire picture. But more importantly is how I personally made it through the trauma, how I am surviving day to day life and what I havre done to continue to heal and make a difference in the world. So here we are, now I am trying to figure out what that fully means.

I don't have all the answers, but I do know the work that I have done to get where I am today. I am no billionaire, I don't have some executive mucky-muck job, but I am a mom, I have a decent job, and I have created some spaces for victims and survivors to move to the next level, and I am thriving in small daily ways.

It wasn't always easy and there are days and moments that are definitely not easy even today, 26 years later. It is too easy, in our society, to be re-victimized and to experience victim blaming. I wish it were as easy as pulling up your boot straps and moving on. For some, I think it is possible, but for many, it's a journey.

I love reading other survivors memoirs and self-help books. You never know what you will learn. Everyone's journey is so different, I am constantly learning something new that helps me get to the next level. One consistent way to begin and continue healing (I have experienced as well as read in many self-help books), in many forms of trauma, is to write. Write, write, write and write again. For me, the act of writing, being able to get the thoughts out of my head on paper, really began the healing process. This isn't for everyone. But there is something cathartic about writing.

If you are looking for a first step in your healing, no matter what the trauma is - addiction, grief, loss, abuse, childhood trauma - try writing. Here are some links to help you with some prompts to get your started.

[15 Journaling Exercises to Help You Heal, Grow, and Thrive](#) @ Psychology Today

[Brave and Unbroken: The True Story of Survival After Incest and Loss](#) @ GoodReads Books

It started with a photograph, a lump and a diagnosis. Like so many other families, hers would never be the same. But her family never was like others...

In *Brave and Unbroken*, Pennie Saum weaves an unforgettable story of sacrifice and hope. Years of being shuffled between army bases left Pennie, her mom, and brother rootless and vulnerable to the manipulations of a truly evil man. Against the odds, Pennie learned to negotiate a childhood filled with a terror no one should know while caring for the only protector she ever had.

This heart-wrenching tale illustrates the manipulation and abuse that shaped Pennie as she transitioned from child to mother. Her story shows us how abuse, shame, and silence has the power to echo through generations, but also how with awareness, it can be stopped in its tracks.

*“Pennie Saum’s memoir is an overwhelmingly powerful and honest retelling of a horrific tormented childhood. She steps out of the silence that comes with childhood sexual abuse and brings forward the reality of the impact of trauma such as this. She has intertwined her childhood past with her mother’s battle and how the two stories relate. Brave and Unbroken is a perfect title for Pennie’s story. Her ability to share her voice, overcome horrific trauma and help make change for others is a true testament of her bravery and a story that everyone should read.” - Marilyn Van Derbur,*

[Author of Miss America By Day](#)

[Podcasts](#) - *Let's Stop the silence Here to help you find YOUR VOICE!!*

*“Life is too short not to create, not to love, and not to lend a helping hand to our brothers and sisters.”*  
– Eric Maisel

*“Dare to reach out your hand into the darkness, to pull another hand into the light.”* – Norman B. Rice

10] [Healthcare Heroes Sing "You've Got a Friend" to Show Support During COVID-19 Pandemic](#) - YouTube 4:35 minutes

MedStar Health - Our orthopedic sports medicine surgeon, Dr. Richard Hinton, gathered nearly two

dozen of our very own Healthcare Heroes to pull together this beautiful song and share an important message of support - you got a friend. We're so proud of all our associates who have stepped up to the challenges of COVID-19.

10a] [Coronavirus outbreak: How music is connecting people amid the COVID-19 pandemic](#) – YouTube 2:18minutes

For those of you singing the self-isolation blues during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are some creative ways for you to tune in with your communities. As Reggie Cecchini explains, music is playing a major key in helping people connect responsibly.

*“You need to be aware of what others are doing, applaud their efforts, acknowledge their successes, and encourage them in their pursuits. When we all help one another, everybody wins.” – Jim Stovall*

*“Nothing liberates our greatness like the desire to help, the desire to serve.” – Marianne Williamson*

***Thank you & Take care, Michael***

PS. Please share this with your friends & if you have received this in error, please let me know – [mikeskinner@comcast.net](mailto:mikeskinner@comcast.net)

***Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. Martin Luther King, Jr.***

***A diagnosis is not a destiny***

[The Surviving Spirit](#) - Healing the Heart Through the Creative Arts, Education & Advocacy - Hope, Healing & Help for Trauma, Abuse & Mental Health

[The Surviving Spirit Facebook Page](#)

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[@SurvivinSpirit](#) Twitter

[Michael Skinner Music](#) - Hope, Healing, & Help for Trauma, Abuse & Mental Health - Music, Resources, & Advocacy

Live performance of "Joy", "Brush Away Your Tears" & more @ [Michael Skinner – You Tube](#)

***"BE the change you want to see in the world." Mohandas Gandhi***