
A FREE GUIDE TO RECOVERING FROM TRAUMA



By Dr. Millicent Rose

I'm Dr. Millicent Rose

About Me

Hi, I am Dr. Millicent Rose a Marriage and Family Therapist and Professor of Clinical Psychology with over 12 years of experience in treating survivors of trauma and abuse in Los Angeles, California. As a trauma specialist and survivor, I place a major focus on working with clients to help them achieve their own uniquely reflective level of healing and understanding. My approach to trauma recovery takes place in the form of holding up a hypothetical mirror to someone's experiences and showing them that the difficulties they have experienced do not have to deprive them of the growth that they are entitled to.



“The main thing I want people to know is that despite what you have been through, your peace of mind is still highly attainable. Recovery is possible, and while it isn't easy work, it is good work. You are not defined by your experiences, you are not the byproduct of a single or recurrent circumstance, you do matter, what you have been through matters, and you deserve to reclaim and reconstruct the narrative of who you are in this life”

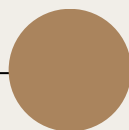
- Dr. Millicent Rose



WHAT IS TRAUMA



Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.





Our Brains and Trauma

In response to trauma exposure, our brains will convert into survival strategists who are constantly looking for perceived threats to our emotional and physical well-being. To compensate for the shift to a survival focus, our brains are likely to abandon rational thinking and behaviors to rely on instinctual and impulsive thinking and behaviors. It is this irrational thinking and behaviors that then leave us feeling isolated, disconnected, and dysfunctional.

An emphasis on survival because of trauma often looks like always thinking, planning, and expecting the worse in situations regardless of context.





Our Bodies and Trauma

To preserve themselves after trauma exposure, our bodies will immediately disconnect themselves from our minds. This creates an immediate and often long-lasting mind body disconnect wherein we may experience ourselves as physically or emotionally numb. From an outward perspective, this can look like someone whose thinking does not match or support the way they want to behave.

In addition, trauma can impair our capability to regulate our bodies to a calm and functional state when triggered by an event or situation that the brain has perceived as stressful. Therefore, many of us will often operate from a place of dysregulation. Dysregulation in our bodies, can look like constant and chronic problems with anxiety, agitation, sleeping, and eating



Trauma's Impact



Language Functioning

Depending on how old we are when we are first exposed to trauma, we know that the parts of our developing brain that are responsible for language can become impaired to the point of mutism. In adults, impairment to language functioning can look like an inability to effectively communicate and express ourselves in the presence of our traumatic memories or triggers. We may struggle to find the right words or shut down internally and externally when recounting a traumatic experience.



Memory Processing

Unlike most memories, traumatic memories are often incorrectly stored in our short-term memories. This means that they are more likely to go unprocessed in a space in our minds that holds limited capacity. Therefore, trauma can impact our day to day living as our brains will struggle to store other memories when they are in rehearsal of traumatizing thoughts and events.

In adults this often looks like someone who struggles with their ability to recall things in accuracy without prompts or assistance.



Tips to Identify Trauma Triggers

Trauma triggers are recognized as any psychological stimulus that invokes involuntary recall of a traumatic experience. Think of our minds as a categorical library that has paired association with all memories during our lifespan. The same is true for traumatic events. For most of us, these events will be categorized in accordance with our five senses (sight, smell, taste, sound, touch).

In order to identify our triggers, consider answering the following as it relates to any other time that you have felt anger, anxiety, vulnerable, frustrated, pain, increased heartbeat, or sadness in response with the recall of a previous traumatic experience.

- What was the event or situation that was going on?
- What types of situations was it (i.e., good, bad, tense)?
- What kind of emotions were you feeling (i.e. angry, anxious, vulnerable, frustration, pain, sadness)
- What thoughts were you experiencing (i.e. “I’m not good enough,” “this isn’t safe,” something bad is going to happen?”)
- What did your body feel like during this event ?



Tips to Regulate Trauma Responses



Dysregulation in response to trauma triggers is common. In order to regulate ourselves when triggered the first thing we must do is acknowledge that we are triggered and dysregulated (i.e. anxious, overthinking, agitated, sweating, shortness of breath). Next we need to implement an immediate activity that promotes regulation. Examples of this can include:

- Breathing exercises
- Grounding techniques
- Mindfulness
- Relaxation
- Self-soothing
- Physical activation
- Expressive writing



Tips to Manage A Trauma Response

Due to the impactful nature of a trauma response, positive mental preparation for difficult days is going to be important to your well-being. To decrease risk associated with negative feelings and increase the likelihood of positive takeaways, you are encouraged to consider the following steps:

1. Identify Your Strengths and Resilience

Resilience is defined as our ability to successfully overcome adversity. The simple fact that you are here speaks to your brilliance, strength, and resourcefulness. I highly recommend that you recount to yourself all the adversities you have overcome in the past, and the strengths that continue to help you prevail. Having this knowledge in your short-term memory will help to buffer against any triggers.

2. Increase Self-Care

Self-care includes simple practices like sleep, nutrition, and movement. On difficult days always consider getting a good night's rest, going for a walk/hike, and eating foods that help you to feel prime and optimal with your functioning.

3. Writing Exercise

This writing exercise is useful for releasing fears associated with your experiences. On any given day, get a piece of paper and a pen, and write all the worst things that you think could happen. Write them down in as much detail as you are comfortable with, write them down vigorously, it doesn't have to be legible just write as much as you can without judgment. Once you are done writing, read as much as you can back to yourself and then rip the paper up and place it in your outside trash with an intention to release the fears and let them go.



RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED READING

- **HOMECOMING: OVERCOME FEAR AND TRAUMA TO RECLAIM YOUR WHOLE, AUTHENTIC SELF** - THEMA BRYANT DAVIS
- **THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE: BRAIN, MIND, AND BODY IN THE HEALING OF TRAUMA** - VESSER VAN DER KOLK
- **SET BOUNDARIES, FIND PEACE: A GUIDE TO RECLAIMING YOURSELF** - NEDRA GLOVER TAWWAB
- **IN THE MEANTIME: FINDING YOURSELF AND THE LOVE YOU WANT** - IYANLA VANZANT



TRAUMA WEBSITES

- [HTTP://WWW.ACESTUDY.ORG/](http://www.cestudy.org/)
- [HTTP://WWW.THEANNAINSTITUTE.ORG/](http://www.theannainstitute.org/)
- [HTTP://WWW.CHILDTRAUMA.COM/](http://www.childtrauma.com/)
- [HTTP://MENTALHEALTH.SAMHSA.GOV/NCTIC/](http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/nctic/)
- [HTTP://WWW.TRAUMACENTER.ORG/](http://www.traumacenter.org/)
- [HTTP://WWW.RAINN.ORG/](http://www.rainn.org/)
- [HTTP://WWW.TRAUMA-PAGES.COM/](http://www.trauma-pages.com/)



DAILY AFFIRMATIONS FOR TRAUMA RECOVERY



I am safe

I am protected

I am loved

I am worthy

I am more than enough

I am bigger than my experiences

I am at peace

I can breathe

I matter

I am important

I already possess everything that I am looking for in the world

I am healing

I am home