

PROLOGUE



Before You Begin

IS THIS BOOK FOR YOU?

Have you experienced any of the following?

- ◆ Been in a serious accident such as a car or plane crash
- ◆ Experienced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse in childhood or as an adult
- ◆ Been a victim of crime
- ◆ Experienced the sudden or untimely death of a close friend or relative
- ◆ Survived war as a soldier or civilian
- ◆ Been diagnosed with a serious illness
- ◆ Survived a natural disaster
- ◆ Witnessed violence in your home or neighborhood
- ◆ Survived a terrorist attack

These events can be traumatic when they contradict your understanding of how things are “supposed” to be. They can disrupt your sense of yourself and others. They can shatter illusions about how safe the world really is and how much control you have in your life. When trauma is caused by another person, it can undermine a basic sense of trust in other people; it can make intimacy with others difficult; and it can disrupt your own sense of self-worth and self-esteem. If you have had any of these, or similar, experiences this book can help you.

We are psychologists with specialized training in helping people rebuild their lives after trauma, whether the experiences occurred long ago or more recently. We have found that for many people the following help a great deal: finding comfort, learning to take care of yourself, understanding the impact of what happened to you, getting support from others, and having information such as you will find in this book. This book is an effort to offer information that can most help following trauma whether immediately after or years later.

This workbook is written so you can use it on your own at home. If you wish, it can also be used as part of the psychotherapy process, but not everyone needs psychotherapy following a traumatic event. If you are already in psychotherapy, consider giving your therapist a copy of Appendix D, “How Mental Health Professionals Can Use This Workbook.” It offers suggestions for how a psychotherapist might best work with you as you use this workbook. If you are not in therapy and need more help than this workbook can offer, we encourage you to seek a psychotherapist with specialized training in treating trauma. Appendix C offers a list of resources to help you find the right therapist.

HOW THIS WORKBOOK CAN HELP YOU

This workbook is based on ideas developed by Laurie Anne Pearlman, PhD, Karen Saakvitne, PhD, Lisa McCann, PhD, and their associates. They studied the research on trauma, gathered information from colleagues, and worked extensively with trauma survivors. From this work, they developed constructivist self-development theory (CSDT). (A number of publications discuss this theory in detail; Appendix D at the end of this book lists some of them.) They came to believe that trauma affects us by undermining five basic human needs:

- ◆ The need to feel safe
- ◆ The need to trust
- ◆ The need to feel some control over one’s life
- ◆ The need to feel of value and to value others
- ◆ The need to feel close to others

When these basic needs are met, we have a psychological cushion to help us cope with life’s troubles. When met, these five needs function as buffers, protecting us through difficult times. After trauma, you may feel as though this cushion is gone. Suddenly things that were once manageable leave you feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope. You may feel uncertain how to meet your most basic needs or even how to get through the day.

✂ *Donna, a single woman of 27, saw the world as generally safe as long as she took some minor precautions. Then one evening on her way home from work, she was attacked and raped. Still shaken months after the attack, she feels afraid almost all the time. She thinks, “I don’t have any control over what happens to me.”*

Has trauma changed your ability to feel safe, to trust, to have self-worth, to be in control, or to be close to others? The premise of this workbook is that trauma disrupts you when it changes a basic belief you have about safety, trust, self-worth,

control, and intimacy. For example, before Donna was attacked, she believed she could *always* keep herself safe. Now, she feels she can *never* be safe. The attack drove home the truth that *always* being safe is an illusion. But it is just as much an illusion to believe you can *never* be safe. Donna can feel safe again although it may not be the same sense of safety she had before. She does not have to always live in fear. This book's aim is to help you find the real middle ground between always and never, where you can live a more comfortable life. In this book, we want to help you collect and weigh as much evidence as you can and then decide for yourself what you believe.

Please Read IMPORTANT!

This book is designed to help you cope in your present life right now after the trauma. We do not ask you to think about the traumatic experience itself or its details. However, some of the stories and exercises in this book may call up powerful unpleasant memories accompanied by overwhelming feelings. One of the first tasks of this workbook is to teach you how to protect yourself should this happen. We begin to help you protect yourself later in this prologue. For this reason, read through this prologue and the first four chapters of this book in sequence. Don't skip ahead until you are sure you have ways to take care of yourself when strong feelings arise.

HOW THIS WORKBOOK IS ORGANIZED

What wound did ever heal but by degrees?
—SHAKESPEARE, *Othello*

The long-term purpose of this book is to help you recover a sense of safety, trust, control, self-esteem, or intimacy—whichever of these key areas in your life has been disrupted by trauma. For many people, more than one area is affected by trauma. First, however, you must lay a solid foundation. The first three chapters in this book give you essential information and skills that you need for all the chapters that follow. *Do not skip ahead* in this book. Work through the first three chapters first so you can

- ◆ Understand you are not crazy, even though you might feel this way following the trauma
- ◆ Learn and use effective coping and self-care strategies
- ◆ Acquire the tools to think through your thoughts, feelings, and reactions

People who have had a traumatic experience often feel crazy, abnormal, not like they used to. Recognizing how these new feelings, thoughts, or behaviors result

from the trauma can help you feel less out of control. You are not as crazy as you may feel. It is normal for trauma to make people feel abnormal. Research has shown that trauma can affect the way you think, the way your body feels and reacts, your moods and emotions, and the way you behave with other people. In Chapter 1, “After Trauma: Why You Feel Thrown for a Loop,” we describe changes that can be normal reactions given a traumatic experience. You may learn that your reactions are not uncommon for people who have been through trauma.

Although you may not feel it, you probably still have areas of strength and ways of finding comfort. It is valuable to start recognizing these. Chapter 2, “Ways of Coping After the Trauma,” helps you identify your strengths and recognize your own current ways of coping, and tells you what strategies can help most. It is important that you find and use ways of coping that work for you. This is especially important when you feel overwhelmed, scared, or disoriented. These are times when your need for care is at its highest, but it is also when you are least equipped to start figuring out what you need, let alone how to get it. It is especially important to have effective strategies for self-care before taking on the work of Chapters 4 through 8. The work you do in these later chapters can help you heal, but it can also be extremely difficult. It can bring up painful recollections and unsettled feelings. Learning first how to take care of yourself not only makes this journey possible, but also helps in other aspects of your life. It is time and energy well spent.

Once you have found ways to care for and comfort yourself, you can begin to think about whether you have changed since the trauma and if so, how. You may react to situations now in ways that surprise you. Chapter 3, “Thinking Things Through,” explains how to make sense of your changed reactions. The process begins with learning how to sort out the facts of a situation from your reactions to it. When you react to a situation, you are actually reacting to what you think the facts mean. Facts cannot be wished away but they can have more than one meaning. When you look at a lawn chair while the sun is in your eyes, the chair will be backlit, a dark shape that is difficult to see. If you move around so the sun is at your back, you will be able to see the chair much more clearly. You will then see the chair’s color is not black but perhaps a bright blue. You might realize that the chair seat faces toward you rather than away as you first thought. The facts of the chair have not changed, but the way you see the chair has changed. If you have experienced a trauma, it can be like staring directly at the sun. Even after you look away, the glare seems everywhere and prevents you from seeing things clearly. It can keep you from even opening your eyes at all for a while.

After trauma, you probably see things differently and so you react to them differently. The trauma itself may be over but you drew larger lessons from it. Those lessons about yourself, other people, or the world around you now shape how you see the facts in your present day-to-day life. The lessons you drew from the trauma may be useful and valuable, but some of them may also be inaccurate and create additional problems and pain for you. The way out of this situation is to pay attention to the facts, think through your reactions, identify the lesson or belief you now have, and then weigh the evidence on it.

The basic method of this workbook has two main parts. The first is “Thinking Things Through” and the second is “Weighing the Evidence.” We have broken these down into smaller steps, and we give you forms and exercises to guide your thinking at each step. The method can be used with any awkward, troubling, or difficult situation you have encountered in your posttrauma daily life. We will warn you frequently that this process is not to be done with a traumatic situation or a trauma memory although some of the beliefs you examine may stem from your traumatic experience.

Chapters 4 to 8 help you think through each of the five needs—safety, trust, control, self-esteem, and intimacy. In each of these chapters we help you think about the meaning of a basic need. If you think each need can only mean one thing, you may be surprised. What do we need when we need safety? What can it mean to trust? Can power mean more than one thing? By what standards can we value ourselves? What do we need when we need intimacy? There are no right or wrong meanings for any of these needs. Meanings are not facts. The important thing is to figure out what *you* need. The goal of this book is to help you find ways to get enough of each need met.

We wrote this book because we believe that healing is possible and well worthwhile. But the work that we invite you to do in this book is difficult and sometimes painful. You might well ask, “Why do this work?” The painful messages about yourself and others that you learned from trauma may hold you back from taking in new messages with more hope and higher accuracy. As Pat Conroy wrote in his novel *Beach Music*, “I had recently become acutely aware that mistranslation, mistakes of emphasis, and the inevitability of flawed interpretation of an experience could lead to an imperfect view of things” (p. 402).

Because the work you do with this book can be difficult, it is important to take full advantage of all the ways you can make it easier. The rest of this prologue describes some of the important ways you can do this. These include knowing when to set this book aside, as well as knowing when and how to take care of yourself.

TIPS AND CAUTIONS FOR USING THIS WORKBOOK

Finding Companions: The Comfort of Others

A pleasant companion reduces the length of the journey.
—PUBLILIUS SYRUS, *Maxims*

Think of yourself as on a healing journey. Much of the journey is best taken with one or more supportive persons. Trauma is isolating and can leave you feeling disconnected and different from others. Sharing your experiences and feelings, although scary, can help. We encourage you along your way to seek support from friends, family, a therapist, and/or a support group. Opening yourself up to how you think and feel after trauma can be hard work. Saying thoughts and feelings aloud to yourself or someone else can feel frightening or wrong. But the difficulty and

the fear are actually natural and normal parts of healing. You may want to retreat at times—take courage and know that struggle is to be expected. The difficult feelings you encounter while doing this work provide opportunities for personal growth and change. But if at any point you feel stuck, or unsure of how to move ahead, we recommend that you find a helping professional who is trained in the treatment of trauma to offer additional support. Guidelines to consider as you look for a therapist are included in Appendix C.

The Importance of Self-Care Strategies

That I feed the beggar, that I forgive an insult, that I love my enemy . . . all these are undoubtedly great virtues. . . . But what if I should discover that the least amongst them all, the poorest of the beggars, the most impudent of all offenders, yea the very fiend himself—that these are within me, and that I myself stand in need of the alms of my own kindness, that I myself am the enemy who must be loved—what then?

—CARL JUNG, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*

Healing means attending to and respecting *all parts* of yourself, including the difficult parts of your emotional life. Respecting and listening to your feelings may not come naturally now but can become so with practice. The most difficult feelings are often the most important ones to listen to. Such feelings tell you when you need to care for and comfort yourself; they tell you when you are pressing against the limits of what you can handle; they tell you when you have exceeded those limits. When your feelings give you these messages, we urge you to put this workbook aside and do something special for yourself. *The Woman's Comfort Book* (good for women and men) offers a number of helpful ideas for self-care and self-soothing. This and other publications are detailed in Appendix B. Throughout the workbook we have also included relaxation exercises and made other suggestions for calming yourself.

One group of trauma survivors suggested the following ways of calming down when distressed. Try any or all of them. Add more to the list when you think of them.

- ◆ Allow yourself to cry, it provides a good release and relief.
- ◆ Write in a journal, draw, or use another medium to record your thoughts or feelings.
- ◆ Perform a monotonous, routine activity; for example, play solitaire on your computer or do a puzzle.
- ◆ Read.
- ◆ Rent a movie.
- ◆ Spend time outdoors in nature.
- ◆ Visualize the distress; put it into an imaginary or real object outside yourself such as a locked box or other container. Containers are designed to hold things.

- ◆ Exercise.
- ◆ Count to yourself. (It may help to use a watch, your pulse, or objects in the space around you.)
- ◆ Breathe deeply and fully.
- ◆ Hold an object that soothes you, for example, a stuffed animal, rock, or koosh ball.
- ◆ Go for a walk.
- ◆ Garden.
- ◆ Rock in a chair.
- ◆ Visualize a safe place; go there in your mind or in reality.
- ◆ Listen to music.
- ◆ Talk to a friend, family member, therapist, or other safe, trusted person.
- ◆ Take a warm bath or shower.
- ◆ Discover and participate in an enjoyable hobby.

We suggest that you create and post a list of activities for self-care in a prominent place at home, for example, near your bed or on the refrigerator. The more distressed you become at a given time, the more difficult it can be to take care of yourself. This list can remind you of things that help. The sooner you notice strong or difficult feelings emerging, the easier it will be to calm and comfort yourself.

Make a list now of self-care strategies that have worked for you in the past, or that you imagine could bring you comfort:

❧

My Self-Care Activities

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Affirmations and Soothing Self-Talk

An affirmation is a positive statement you say about yourself or others. You say it to yourself either silently or out loud. Affirmations can help you restore a sense of safety, security, and calm. Repeated saying of affirmations can also counteract the effects of negative thoughts that go through your mind, sometimes automatically. Given time, affirmations can help you shift some of your basic ideas about yourself.

Focusing on an affirming thought takes practice; it can be difficult to remember a positive statement over the internal noise of trauma-related thoughts and feelings. This is why we recommend you prepare affirmations ahead of time. Write them down so you have them ready to read when you need them. To be effective, affirmations need to have the following two qualities: (1) they are phrased in positive terms and (2) they are possible to achieve.

A positive affirmation is about something you have or can do. A statement about something you *do not want* or *will not allow* is not positive. If it has a “not” in it, it’s probably not an affirmation. For example, the statement, “I have safe and loving people around me” is an affirmation but the following is not: “I will not let people who I am uncomfortable around into my life.”

Affirmations must be possible. They must be something you can really imagine operating in your life. For example, if you recently experienced a trauma that has left you feeling totally unsafe, the statement “I have safe and loving people around me” may be a comforting affirmation of your situation. The statement “I am totally safe, wherever I am” would directly contradict your actual trauma experience. For good reason, it would be difficult to believe and so you would be unlikely to find much comfort in the message. Table P.1 gives some examples of negative thoughts and possible affirmations to counter them.

Like an affirmation, soothing self-talk can help you become calm. It is particularly helpful in the face of difficult emotions. Much as a parent soothes a child or close friends comfort one another, you can learn to speak kindly and gently to yourself. This can also help in times when you feel critical and harsh toward yourself. When Kerri felt overwhelmed by childhood memories of her father’s abusing her, she said the following to herself in a gentle way:

“I am safe here. My father is very far away. He can’t hurt me anymore. I’m grown up, and know how to take care of myself now. There are people around me who help keep me safe.”

In some of the later chapters we will refer again to affirmations and soothing self-talk and how they can help you.

Caution: When to Set the Workbook Aside

It is normal to feel the full spectrum of emotions as you go through this workbook. You may at times feel strong and able to move ahead. At other times, you may feel

TABLE P.I. Examples of Negative Thoughts and Possible Affirmations

Painful thought	Possible affirmations
<i>I'm so alone.</i>	I can reach out to others if I choose. There are people who can understand me. I am a part of the world; I belong.
<i>Nobody cares about me.</i>	My [parent/partner/friend] loves me. I am lovable. I am a worthwhile person.
<i>Nothing ever works out.</i>	I can get through this. Sometimes things work out.
<i>Something terrible is going to happen.</i>	I'm OK; I'll be OK. I'm safe here and now. I can handle what comes up. The odds are, everything's going to be OK. I can survive and heal from great hardship.

vulnerable, tired, or anxious. These varying states are a natural part of the healing process. It is important to respect your emotional reactions. You can learn from your feelings.

Throughout this book, we include brief descriptions of trauma survivors' experiences as examples. We believe these can help you better understand how your own trauma experience has affected you. But you may find the examples distressing. If you find this happening, *skip* the examples. You can identify them easily because they are italicized within the text, and set off by the symbol ⌘.

Emotions—like the senses of hearing, smell, touch, taste, and sight—offer cues that can keep us safe. If you touch a hot stove, the feeling of pain signals you to pull your hand away quickly. Similarly, if you feel anxious or upset it can also be a cue to pull away. Pay attention to those feelings before you forge ahead with this workbook. Put the workbook aside if you need to. You may need only a brief respite. But other times, you may need more extended periods for a break or self-care. The following is a checklist of warning signs that you might need a break from this workbook.

**Caution! If You Have One or More of These Signs,
Take a Break from This Workbook**

- ◆ You begin to have times, or you have more times, when you do not feel completely present in your body or surroundings, or you lose time (also known as dissociation).

- ◆ You begin to have flashbacks (images) or more frequent flashbacks of the trauma.
- ◆ You have feelings that seem unmanageable or flood you.
- ◆ You experience irritability, strong anger, depression, fear, anxiety, sadness, or other feelings, particularly if they feel out of control or you do not understand their source.
- ◆ You begin to injure yourself or you injure yourself more frequently (including cutting, scratching, burning, substance abuse).
- ◆ You are behaving more compulsively, such as with eating, working, or sexual activity.
- ◆ You feel numb, unable to feel any emotion.
- ◆ You want to withdraw and avoid others.
- ◆ There is a dramatic change in your sleeping or eating patterns.

If you experience any of these signs, step back to consider what you might need, then take care of yourself before continuing in this workbook. For weeks, months, or years following a trauma, you may find that you cannot cope with as much stress as you could before. You may now need to take care of yourself at times and in ways that you did not need to before the trauma. This is a common response to trauma that does not reflect poor willpower or weakness; it is a part of the way that traumatic events can change you. The self-care ideas throughout the workbook provide helpful ways to respond to stress.

Coping with Triggers of Past Traumas

Reminders of past experience, whether positive or negative, are called *triggers*. Something in the present triggers a memory of the past. The trigger is often in the form of something you see, hear, taste, or feel. For example, a particular song can suddenly put you back in time with a good friend. But if the triggered memory is of a traumatic experience, you may feel afraid, trapped, or helpless. You may feel as if you are back in the traumatic situation.

Reminders of your traumatic experience may be everywhere or only occur occasionally. A car accident victim may flash back to the accident each time she hears tires screeching on a road. An assault victim may suddenly feel like he is back in the midst of the attack when he is unexpectedly approached from behind. The smell of alcohol on someone's breath may remind a victim of her attacker. Emotions themselves can trigger the memory of a past trauma; for example, fearing the loss of an adult relationship can evoke a flood of painful feelings from the loss of a parent long ago. Feelings can quickly bring you back to a past experience when you felt a similar emotion. A strong reaction to a present situation can leave you feeling puzzled until you recognize the connection to the past. Often, the connection to the past may not be obvious, and at times you may not be able to figure it out right

away. The more you learn about your emotions from the trauma, the easier it will become to know when past emotions get triggered in the present.

Reading this workbook may trigger difficult feelings and memories at times. If this happens, take time out to care for yourself. You may find this difficult to do—*but do it anyway*. Even a trigger that appears to be small or inconsequential can expand rapidly into the big reservoir of feelings associated with the traumatic memory. Paying attention to your feelings and then caring for yourself are the key ways you learn to stop becoming overwhelmed or retraumatized.

Recognizing what things are triggers for which negative feelings puts you in a better position to shift out of the negative feeling state. These are times that self-care strategies can be helpful and you can begin to plan for them in advance. For example, if feelings of fear get triggered, finding ways to feel safer will help.

✂ *When Kerri thought about her abusive father, she often felt terrified. Although he lived several states away, she felt in immediate danger. She was unable to convince herself that he was far away, and she would feel his presence close by.*

Kerri developed the following plan for times when this occurred for her:

Trigger for fear	Self-care plan
Receiving letters from her father	Talk to husband about feelings Listen to favorite music
Christmas holidays	Wrap self in comfortable blanket and lie down in bed for a while Work on computer (distraction) Soothing self-talk Call a friend Schedule extra time with therapist for additional support

You can create a self-care plan for your own triggers by answering the following two questions:

1. What events or experiences trigger bad feelings or memories for you?
2. What self-care strategies would be useful at those times?

Consider your answers, then write these things down in the box headed “My Self-Care Plan for Triggers.” Make a copy and put it in an accessible place, such as on your refrigerator or taped up somewhere in your bedroom.



My Self-Care Plan for Triggers

Triggers	Ways to Self-Care/Self-Comfort
1. _____	_____ _____ _____
2. _____	_____ _____ _____
3. _____	_____ _____ _____

If you are unable to complete this exercise now, feel free to return to it later. As you go through the workbook and think about your experiences you are likely to become more aware of how trigger events might apply to you. Add to the list over time as additional triggers and self-care strategies occur to you.

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