ADULTS & TEENS | EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

Understanding Trauma: A Beginner's Guide



WHAT THIS IS

Trauma is a lasting response to an overwhelming experience. It is about what happened to you, not what is wrong with you.

HOW TO USE IT

1. Read the guide at your own pace.
2. Notice what feels familiar. No pressure to share.
3. Continue to page 2 for what helps.

EXAMPLE

"I used to think I was overreacting. Learning about trauma helped me see my reactions made sense."

What is trauma?

Trauma is the emotional and physical response to an event or series of events that overwhelmed your ability to cope and felt threatening or unsafe. What makes something traumatic is not only the event, but how it affected you and whether you had support afterward.

Types of trauma

Single event

An accident, assault, disaster, or sudden loss

Repeated

Ongoing experiences, such as abuse or violence

Complex

Prolonged, often early in life and within relationships

Developmental

Early neglect or unsafe caregiving

How it can show up

Body

- Tension, fatigue
- Startle response
- Sleep trouble

Emotions

- Fear, anger
- Numbness
- Shame

Thoughts

- Flashbacks
- Self-blame
- Hypervigilance

Behavior

- Avoidance
- Withdrawal
- Irritability

Go at your own pace. Skip anything that feels like too much, and stop any time. Trauma education and self-help materials are not a substitute for individualized trauma-informed care.

Educational self-help resource from Therapy with Sazzy, an initiative of Beyond Boundaries Consulting, LLC. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individualized professional care. In a crisis call or text 988, or call 911.

PART 2

Understanding Trauma · What Helps

What helps recovery

- [ ] Safety and predictability
- [ ] Supportive relationships
- [ ] Sleep, food, and movement
- [ ] Learning how trauma affects the body
- [ ] Gentle routines
- [ ] Professional trauma-informed care
- [ ] Patience with yourself

What does not help

- Being told to "just get over it"
- Forcing yourself to talk before you are ready
- Isolating completely
- Using alcohol or drugs to numb
- Judging your reactions

Self-check: Have I noticed any of these lately?

- [ ] Trouble sleeping or nightmares
- [ ] Feeling on edge or easily startled
- [ ] Avoiding reminders
- [ ] Feeling numb or disconnected
- [ ] Strong guilt or shame
- [ ] Difficulty trusting
- [ ] Sudden strong emotions
- [ ] Trouble concentrating

Noticing these does not mean something is wrong with you. They are common responses. If they last or interfere with life, support can help.

When to reach out for help

- Your reactions are getting in the way of daily life or relationships
- You are having thoughts of harming yourself or others
- You are using substances to cope
- You feel stuck, hopeless, or unsafe

Call or text **988** for crisis support, or **911** in an emergency.

A reminder

Healing and growth do not have to happen all at once. Progress is not about perfection. It is about building safety and skills, one step at a time.

Go at your own pace. Skip anything that feels like too much, and stop any time. Trauma education and self-help materials are not a substitute for individualized trauma-informed care.

Educational self-help resource from Therapy with Sazzy, an initiative of Beyond Boundaries Consulting, LLC. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individualized professional care. In a crisis call or text 988, or call 911.

ADULTS & TEENS | EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

What Is Complex Trauma?



WHAT THIS IS

Complex trauma comes from repeated or long-lasting experiences, often in relationships and early in life. It can shape how we see ourselves and others.

HOW TO USE IT

1. Read about how complex trauma differs.
2. Notice patterns, not labels.
3. Consider support from a trauma-informed professional.

EXAMPLE

"I learned to stay quiet to stay safe. As an adult it made speaking up feel dangerous."

Single-event trauma

- One overwhelming event
- Clear "before and after"
- Often involves fear and flashbacks

Complex trauma

- Repeated or ongoing experiences
- Often early life, in relationships
- Can affect identity and trust
- Can affect emotional regulation

Areas it can affect

Self-view
Shame, feeling "not enough"

Relationships
Trust, closeness, boundaries

Emotions
Intensity, numbness, mood swings

Body
Chronic tension, health issues

Strengths that come from surviving

- ☐ Being observant
- ☐ Resourcefulness
- ☐ Empathy
- ☐ Independence
- ☐ Determination
- ☐ Creativity

The strategies that kept you safe made sense then. Healing means building new options.

Reflect (only if it feels okay)

What strengths helped me get through hard times?

Go at your own pace. Skip anything that feels like too much, and stop any time. Trauma education and self-help materials are not a substitute for individualized trauma-informed care.

Educational self-help resource from Therapy with Sazzy, an initiative of Beyond Boundaries Consulting, LLC. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individualized professional care. In a crisis call or text 988, or call 911.

ADULTS & TEENS | EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

Understanding Fight, Flight, Freeze, and Fawn



WHAT THIS IS

When your brain senses danger, it can automatically respond in one of four ways. These are survival reactions, not character flaws.

HOW TO USE IT

1. Read the four responses.
2. Circle the ones you notice in yourself.
3. Note what helps you shift back to safe.

EXAMPLE

"I always say yes to everything. I learned it's a fawn response, a way I kept the peace."

Fight

- Anger, irritability
- Arguing, controlling
- Feeling tense and ready to defend

Helps: Safe ways to release energy, assertive communication

Flight

- Anxiety, restlessness
- Staying busy, perfectionism
- Avoiding or escaping

Helps: Slowing down, grounding, facing small steps

Freeze

- Feeling stuck or numb
- Going blank, spacing out
- Difficulty acting or speaking

Helps: Gentle movement, orienting, warmth, safe company

Fawn

- People-pleasing
- Difficulty saying no
- Putting others' needs first to stay safe

Helps: Practicing boundaries, naming your needs

The response I notice most in me

What helps me come back to safe

Go at your own pace. Skip anything that feels like too much, and stop any time. Trauma education and self-help materials are not a substitute for individualized trauma-informed care.

Educational self-help resource from Therapy with Sazzy, an initiative of Beyond Boundaries Consulting, LLC. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individualized professional care. In a crisis call or text 988, or call 911.

ADULTS & TEENS | PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Understanding Emotional Triggers



WHAT THIS IS

A trigger is a reminder, often outside of awareness, that sets off a strong reaction tied to past experiences. Tracing the chain gives you more choice.

HOW TO USE IT

1. Notice a strong reaction.
2. Trace the chain step by step.
3. Choose a grounding tool and a kind response.

EXAMPLE

"The smell of smoke (trigger) made my heart race and I felt unsafe. I used the 5-4-3-2-1 skill."

1	→	2	→	3	→	4
A reminder (sight, sound, smell, words)		My body reacts (heart, tension, stomach)		My mind tells a story ("I'm in danger")		I react (shut down, snap, escape)

What reminded me	What my body did	What my mind said	What I did	What could help

Common triggers (check any)

- ☐ Certain places
- ☐ Smells or sounds
- ☐ Anniversaries
- ☐ Raised voices
- ☐ Feeling trapped
- ☐ Being touched unexpectedly

Patterns I notice

Go at your own pace. Skip anything that feels like too much, and stop any time. Trauma education and self-help materials are not a substitute for individualized trauma-informed care.

Educational self-help resource from Therapy with Sazzy, an initiative of Beyond Boundaries Consulting, LLC. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individualized professional care. In a crisis call or text 988, or call 911.

ADULTS & TEENS | EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

Grounding Techniques for Emotional Distress



WHAT THIS IS

Grounding brings your attention to the present, where you are safe now. Practice when you are calm so the skills are ready when you need them.

HOW TO USE IT

1. Rate your distress from 0 to 10.
2. Try a technique for 1 to 3 minutes.
3. Rate again and note what helped.

EXAMPLE

"*Distress 8. I did cold water and feet on the floor. After: 5.*"

1 5-4-3-2-1

Name 5 things you see, 4 you feel, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, 1 you taste.

2 Feet on the floor

Press your feet down. Notice the floor holding you.

3 Cool it down

Hold something cold or splash cool water on your face.

4 Orient to the room

Slowly look around. Name where you are and today's date.

5 Longer exhale

Breathe in for 4, out for 6 to 8. Repeat 5 times.

6 Hold an object

Choose a small item. Describe its texture, weight, and color.

7 Categories

Pick a category (animals, cities). Name as many as you can.

8 Butterfly hug

Cross arms over chest. Tap alternate hands slowly.

Practice log

What I used	Distress before (0-10)	Distress after (0-10)	What I noticed

My top 3 grounding tools:

_____

Go at your own pace. Skip anything that feels like too much, and stop any time. Trauma education and self-help materials are not a substitute for individualized trauma-informed care.

Educational self-help resource from Therapy with Sazzy, an initiative of Beyond Boundaries Consulting, LLC. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individualized professional care. In a crisis call or text 988, or call 911.

ADULTS & TEENS | EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

The Window of Tolerance

WHAT THIS IS

The window of tolerance is the zone where you can feel your emotions and think clearly. Stress and trauma can push you out of it, in either direction.

HOW TO USE IT

1. Find where you are right now.
2. Note signs of being above or below the window.
3. Choose a tool to return.

EXAMPLE

"I'm above my window: racing heart, snapping. A long exhale and a walk helped."

TOO MUCH: hyper-arousal

fight / flight, panic, anger, racing thoughts



THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

calm, present, able to think and feel at the same time

TOO LITTLE: hypo-arousal

freeze, numb, shut down, spaced out, exhausted

Too much

Tools that calm down

- Long exhale
- Cool water
- Slow walking

In the window

Tools that keep you here

- Routines
- Connection
- Rest
- Mindfulness

Too little

Tools that gently activate

- Stretching
- Music
- Talking to someone
- Cold or sensory cues

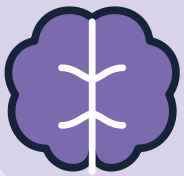
Signs I am above my window

Signs I am below my window

Go at your own pace. Skip anything that feels like too much, and stop any time. Trauma education and self-help materials are not a substitute for individualized trauma-informed care.

ADULTS & TEENS | EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

Understanding Dissociation



WHAT THIS IS

Dissociation is the mind's way of creating distance from overwhelming experiences. It can feel like spacing out, numbness, or being detached from yourself or surroundings.

HOW TO USE IT

1. Read the spectrum.
2. Notice what triggers it for you.
3. Practice gentle ways to come back.

EXAMPLE

"When I'm overwhelmed, I go blank. Naming objects in the room helps me come back."

A spectrum, from common to more intense

Daydreaming	Zoning out	Feeling numb	Feeling detached or unreal

What it can feel like

- Spacing out, going blank
- Feeling numb or far away
- Time passing strangely
- Feeling like things are not real
- Gaps in memory

Ways to come back gently

- Feel your feet and hands
- Name 5 things you see
- Hold something cold
- Say your name, date, and place
- Move slowly: stretch, walk

What tends to lead to it for me

_____

_____

_____

What helps me return

_____

_____

_____

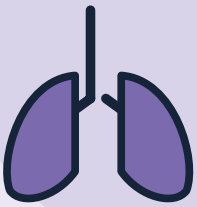
When to seek help: If dissociation is frequent, long-lasting, or affects daily life or safety, talk with a trauma-informed professional.

Go at your own pace. Skip anything that feels like too much, and stop any time. Trauma education and self-help materials are not a substitute for individualized trauma-informed care.

Educational self-help resource from Therapy with Sazzy, an initiative of Beyond Boundaries Consulting, LLC. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individualized professional care. In a crisis call or text 988, or call 911.

ADULTS & TEENS | ACTIVITY

Reconnecting With Your Body



WHAT THIS IS

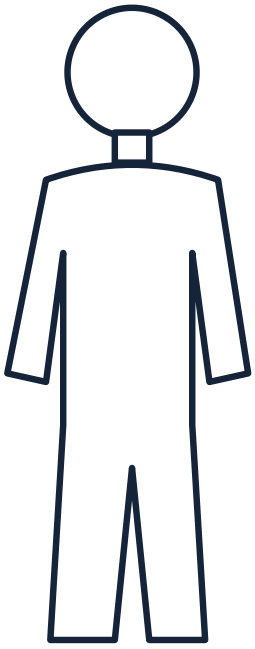
After trauma, the body can feel unsafe or numb. Gentle, choice-based practices can rebuild trust with your body, a little at a time.

HOW TO USE IT

1. Choose one practice and a comfortable length.
2. Notice sensations without judging.
3. Stop whenever you want. You are in charge.

EXAMPLE

"I noticed my hands were warm. It was the first calm sensation I felt all week."



Mark areas that feel okay (✓), neutral (○), or uncomfortable (×).

1 Feel your feet
Press them down; notice weight and temperature.

2 Notice your hands
Rub palms together. Feel warmth and texture.

3 Follow your breath
Without changing it, notice where it moves.

4 Orient
Slowly look around and name what feels safe.

5 Gentle movement
Stretch, sway, or walk slowly.

A part of my body that feels okay

_____

_____

What I noticed after practicing

_____

_____

Go at your own pace. Skip anything that feels like too much, and stop any time. Trauma education and self-help materials are not a substitute for individualized trauma-informed care.

Educational self-help resource from Therapy with Sazzy, an initiative of Beyond Boundaries Consulting, LLC. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individualized professional care. In a crisis call or text 988, or call 911.

ADULTS & TEENS | PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Building Emotional Safety



WHAT THIS IS

Healing happens in safety. Safety is built in three places: in your body and mind, in your surroundings, and in your relationships.

HOW TO USE IT

1. Check what already helps you feel safe.
2. Pick one thing to add in each area.
3. Revisit as your needs change.

EXAMPLE

"Safe space: my bedroom with soft lighting. Safe person: my cousin. Inner: a calming phrase."

INSIDE ME

- [ ] Slow breathing
- [ ] Calming phrases
- [ ] Self-kindness
- [ ] Grounding tools
- [ ] Rest

AROUND ME

- [ ] A safe place
- [ ] Predictable routine
- [ ] Locks and lighting
- [ ] Limited triggers
- [ ] Comfort items

WITH OTHERS

- [ ] A trusted person
- [ ] Clear boundaries
- [ ] Respectful listeners
- [ ] Support groups
- [ ] Professional help

My safe place (describe or draw)

Safe people I can turn to

_____

_____

_____

A calming phrase I can use:

_____

One thing I will add this week to feel safer:

_____

_____

Go at your own pace. Skip anything that feels like too much, and stop any time. Trauma education and self-help materials are not a substitute for individualized trauma-informed care.

Educational self-help resource from Therapy with Sazzy, an initiative of Beyond Boundaries Consulting, LLC. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individualized professional care. In a crisis call or text 988, or call 911.

ADULTS & TEENS | EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

Understanding Attachment and Relationships



WHAT THIS IS

Attachment patterns form early and shape how we connect as adults. They are not fixed. Relationships and healing can change them.

HOW TO USE IT

1. Read the four common patterns.
2. Notice which feel familiar, perhaps in different relationships.
3. Think about what helps you feel secure.

EXAMPLE

"I tend to pull away when things get close. Now I tell my partner, 'I need a little space, and I'm not going anywhere.'"

SECURE

Looks like: Comfortable with closeness and independence
Often: Trusting, communicates needs

ANXIOUS

Looks like: Worries about being left or not enough
Often: Seeks reassurance, fears distance

AVOIDANT

Looks like: Values independence, uneasy with closeness
Often: Withdraws when things get intense

FEARFUL

Looks like: Wants closeness but fears getting hurt
Often: Mixed signals, pulls close then away

Patterns I notice in my relationships

_____

_____

_____

What helps me feel secure

- [ ] Clear communication
- [ ] Consistency
- [ ] Space and closeness
- [ ] Reassurance
- [ ] Honesty
- [ ] Repair after conflict

These are common patterns, not labels or diagnoses. Most people show different patterns in different relationships. Therapy can help you build more secure ways of connecting.

Go at your own pace. Skip anything that feels like too much, and stop any time. Trauma education and self-help materials are not a substitute for individualized trauma-informed care.

Educational self-help resource from Therapy with Sazzy, an initiative of Beyond Boundaries Consulting, LLC. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individualized professional care. In a crisis call or text 988, or call 911.

ADULTS & TEENS | PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Developing a Personal Safety Plan



WHAT THIS IS

A safety plan is a short list of steps you can follow when distress feels too big. Make it when you are calm, ideally with a trusted person or counselor.

HOW TO USE IT

1. Fill it out step by step.
2. Share it with someone you trust.
3. Keep it somewhere you can reach quickly.

EXAMPLE

"*Step 2: put on my headphones and walk. Step 4: call Maria.*"

1. **My warning signs (thoughts, feelings, situations)**

2. **Things I can do on my own to calm down**

3. **People and places that help me feel better**

4. **People I can ask for help (names and numbers)**

5. **Professionals I can contact**

6. **How I will make my space safer**

7. **My reasons for living / what matters to me**

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: call or text **988** any time. **Crisis Text Line:** text HOME to **741741**. **Emergency:** call **911** or go to your nearest emergency department.

Go at your own pace. Skip anything that feels like too much, and stop any time. Trauma education and self-help materials are not a substitute for individualized trauma-informed care.

Educational self-help resource from Therapy with Sazzy, an initiative of Beyond Boundaries Consulting, LLC. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individualized professional care. In a crisis call or text 988, or call 911.

ADULTS & TEENS | PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Creating a Self-Care and Recovery Plan



WHAT THIS IS

Recovery is built through small, steady habits. A plan helps you protect your energy and notice progress.

HOW TO USE IT

1. Choose one action per area.
2. Schedule it into your week.
3. Review monthly and adjust.

EXAMPLE

"Physical: 10-minute walk after lunch. Social: Sunday call with my sister."

Area of care	One action I will take	When
Physical Sleep, food, movement, medical care		
Emotional Feelings, journaling, therapy, creative outlets		
Social Connection, boundaries, support groups		
Spiritual / meaning Faith, values, nature, purpose		
Practical Routines, finances, organization, safety		
Rest & joy Play, hobbies, quiet, laughter		

Signs I am doing better

_____

_____

_____

Signs I need extra support

_____

_____

_____

A kind message to myself on hard days:

_____

_____

Go at your own pace. Skip anything that feels like too much, and stop any time. Trauma education and self-help materials are not a substitute for individualized trauma-informed care.

Educational self-help resource from Therapy with Sazzy, an initiative of Beyond Boundaries Consulting, LLC. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individualized professional care. In a crisis call or text 988, or call 911.