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.

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