

The Thirteen R's Of Trauma-Informed Healing From Childhood Trauma

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- I. **Referral** to a trained (Christian) Life Coach or Trauma-Informed Coach or Counselor or Therapist early in the healing process can be beneficial. Coaches are not medical professionals, though, and do not treat or diagnose. They must know when it's appropriate to refer a trauma survivor to a licensed Trauma Therapist. A trauma therapist is a licensed mental health professional with explicit training, supervision, and clinical experience working directly with trauma.

There are no scientific studies of mental health issues from the time of the Bible. Therefore, the Bible does not explicitly mention counseling by a psychologist, psychiatrist, or counselor. However, many types of counseling and psychiatric care are available today, just like antibiotics and physical therapy. Various illnesses require different methods of diagnosis and treatment. There is no sin in pursuing specialized paths to care for our minds and bodies. On the contrary, maintaining our mental health is a meaningful way to care for what God has given us (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 1 Corinthians 3:9, 1 Corinthians 9:17). Consider keeping prayer and God's Word in mind when looking for Christian mental health professionals.

Please refer to my discussion on "Is It Biblical for Christians to Seek Counseling or Therapy?" at the end of Module 1.

- II. **Realize *the*** widespread impact of childhood trauma. We learned in Module 2 that childhood trauma is much more pervasive than we had imagined. Sin mingles within the stories of all children growing up. This is a quote from Kenny Weiss, "No matter what kind of childhood we've had, nobody escapes trauma while growing up." Any sinful act inflicted on a child can be traumatizing. Ecclesiastes 7:7 says, "Surely oppression destroys a wise man's reason."

When a child experiences a crisis, it does not necessarily mean that the child will develop toxic stress and become traumatized. Rather, how the child's body and brain respond to different levels of stress and whether the child is nurtured in a supportive environment can have lasting positive or negative physical and emotional effects. But first, we must understand how our bodies and brains respond to trauma. Furthermore, only by understanding how our bodies respond to stress can we see potential paths for treatment and recovery.

- III. **Recognize** signs and symptoms and risk factors of adverse childhood experiences in different age groups. In Module 3, we learned what adverse childhood experiences are. I provided evidence that adults with ACEs can have an increased risk of substance abuse disorder, mental health problems, chronic physical health issues, and a shorter life span. We now understand why adverse childhood experiences are considered the single greatest unaddressed public health threat facing our nation today. We also learned that ACEs can be prevented. One way to help prevent ACEs is to identify children and families at risk of experiencing ACEs and provide them with the support they need. We talked about risk factors on individual, family,

and community levels. Early recognition of signs and symptoms of ACE and its risk factors can lead to early identification of at-risk children and ensure early intervention.

Many families experience risk factors for ACE, some of which are beyond their control. Still, many sinful behaviors against children are damaging and must be cut off and discarded.

Matthew 18:6-9 says, "If anyone causes one of these little ones - those who believe in me- to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that caused people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come! If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell. "

As Christians, we need to be willing to give a biblical correction to those we love who are in sin or error. Without "cutting off and throwing away" sinful behavior, children can experience adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that will significantly impact their emotional and social development into adulthood. In 2 Timothy 2:23-26, Timothy shows us how to carry out the gentle art of correction.

"Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will."

We're often afraid to correct others because we're worried about how they'll react. If we know Christ, we are the Lord's servants and should correct those in sin or error. He will hold us accountable for our faithfulness to Him. We must fear God more than people and be willing to help them change course if we see them headed for a cliff.

- IV. **Refuge (safety)** must always be a top priority before any intervention occurs. Provide a safe and supportive environment where people can talk about their trauma. Many people affected by trauma find it challenging to feel emotionally, physically, and spiritually secure. When people feel insecure, they distrust others and tend to become defensive and isolated, focus only on survival, exhibit aggressive behavior, or withdraw. Social isolation can make people reluctant to seek the services they need because they don't feel safe. Security comes when one can trust another person. We help others build trust by being consistent, understanding, supportive, and patient.

Isolation causes harm. God knew this in Genesis 2:18 – "And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone."

The church, as the body of Christ, can be a safe place for trauma survivors to heal, as well as a source of positive and supportive relationships. As disciples of Christ, we are called to minister to trauma survivors and help them find hope and experience healing in God.

A report from the American Bible Society showed that many people suffering from trauma are open to the church's help, even if they are not regular churchgoers. Pastors who show that they are willing and able to help traumatized people tend to see an increase in the number of people who come to them for help. Most pastors believe that trauma is a problem for the church to address. They also believe that the church should extend care to its neighborhoods and communities, even if those in need are not members of its congregation.

Be a **safe** listener. Allow people to talk about their trauma openly and without any hindrances. Talking about one's trauma can help one process what happened and make sense of it. This isn't about a pity party; it's about assisting them to connect with their emotions and allow their wounds to heal.

Romans 15:1-3 – "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

When listening, we try to understand the person rather than get them to avoid talking about their pain. It is crucial that the individual feels heard and understood and that their concerns are given equal weight. They won't feel heard or taken seriously if they don't feel validated. Validating doesn't mean you agree with them or are siding with them; it just means you are taking a stand to listen to and acknowledge them.

Scripture promotes listening. James 1:19 – "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God."

Let the person know you are present for them, and you will do your best to listen in a way that honors, respects, and support them. You are letting them know that you care about them and are invested in who they are as a person.

Galatians 6:2 – "To Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."
Bearing a person's burden is not telling them to keep it to themselves, but allowing them to unload it on you, which is listening and helping them process and heal from it.

Share with them The Safe Listener's Promise.

The Safe Listener's Promise

I will listen to understand.

I will keep what you share private.

I will not minimize your pain.

I will not compare your pain with my own.

I will not give quick solutions.

I will listen again when you want to share more.

- V. **Respond** with empathy and compassion, being concerned about them, and valuing their concerns and feelings. What's most important is that you are authentic and sincere.

Ask the right questions to allow the trauma survivor to talk about their trauma because it helps them process what happened.

3 Questions To Ask Someone Who Is Hurting

What happened?

How did it make you feel?

What was the hardest part for you?

*****DO NOT SAY, "What's wrong with you?" INSTEAD, SAY, "What happened to you?"*****

"What's wrong with you?" implies judgment, blame, shame, and punishment. It is saying the person) is the problem instead of the behavior. It also equates to telling God that there is something wrong with what He created.

Psalm 139:14 – "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

Genesis 1:27 – " So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

Instead, we should focus on saying, "Can you tell me what happened to you?" This question shows empathy, compassion, understanding, and nurturing.

Here are some suggestions about how to respond after they share. These responses can be helpful because they are non-judgmental, compassionate, and can reduce shame. They meet the person's need to be heard and offer words of comfort and an apology that the victim has probably never heard before.

"Thank you for trusting me enough to share such a personal and difficult story."

"I appreciate the courage it took to share that with me."

"I don't even know what to say right now, I'm just grateful you told me."

"I want you to know that what happened wasn't your fault. You did whatever you had to do to survive."

“I am so sorry you were hurt/mistreated/harmed.”

“You deserve support. You deserve a witness for your pain. You deserve to learn strategies that can help you to heal.”

Instead of saying “you need help,” which can be misinterpreted as “there is something wrong with you,” saying, “you deserve support” can enhance ego-strengthening and empowerment.

“You are not alone. You don’t have to be alone in your healing.”

“You’ve just taken the first step. It would be my privilege to help you take the next one.”

Sometimes, it may be enough just to respond with a few words:

“I hear you.” When said with sincerity, that meets a person’s need to be heard.”

“Wow.” When said softly, that gives the speaker a sense you are listening.

After any of these initial responses, they can be encouraged to share more.

“Tell me more.” When said with sincerity, that shows you are really interested.

It is equally important to allow for silence so those messages can be absorbed.

Also, let them know you are willing to listen again.

Romans 12:15 – “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”

Respond with positive encouragement – Highlighting the accomplishments that God has accomplished through them, pointing out the strengths and gifts God has given them, comforting them, and building them up.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 – “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

VI. **Respect**, structure, and boundaries help create a trusting and safe environment.

Unfortunately, people who have been abused often were not respected, or their boundaries were intentionally crossed. Many times the abuse came to the survivors unexpectedly.

Matt 22:37-40 – “Jesus replied, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

This verse means that we are to teach children and adults to love themselves as they wish to be loved and love others the same way. Setting healthy boundaries means knowing when they need to take care of themselves and when they need to take care of others. They should always try to do both equally well. Respect the boundaries of others and value their privacy as much as their own. When they love others as they love themselves, they also treat them the way they want to be treated. This is true for children and adults alike. To learn to respect others and their boundaries, begin by cultivating love, respect, and healthy boundaries at home.

Luke 6:31 – “Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Lack of respect and boundaries usually come from a lack of understanding of how trauma affects individuals. Therefore, we should help others understand the impact of childhood trauma and not judge them for wanting to maintain their boundaries.

Matt 7:1-2 – “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”

- VII. **Relationship(s)** is the **MOST IMPORTANT** healing factor behind healing from trauma. A **positive relationship** is **how we tip the scale from negative to positive outcomes in people who have experienced ACE. ONE loving relationship** in the chaos of trauma can provide enough emotional strength for a child or adult to survive, **even just one!**

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 - Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Hebrews 10:24-25 - And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

- VIII. **Resilience** is the ***antidote to childhood trauma***. Refer to Module 7. It is the ability to bounce back from adverse experiences or the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress.

Resilience is the biblical norm for Christians. The Bible contains many admonitions to press on (Philippians 3:13-15), overcome hardship and temptation (Romans 12:21), and persevere in the face of trials (James 1:12). It also gives us numerous examples of people who suffered greatly but continued to follow God’s plan for their lives. Proverbs 24:16 could be seen as the theme verse for the resilient:

Proverbs 24:16 - “Though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again, but the wicked stumble when calamity strikes.”

James 1:2-4 – “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let

perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

Children are not born with resiliency; they learn how to be resilient. Develop self-regulation and executive function in children to help them meet their expectations. Proverb 22:6 says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he shall not depart from it.” This involves training, teaching, and instructing a child. Thus you are teaching them the skills to meet academic and societal expectations. Teaching someone how to do something is an invaluable part of their development. The Bible contains many verses about teaching, instruction, and guidance for children. Begin by setting standards for what a person can do and enforcing them. Next, set higher standards; meeting those standards will give people a sense of empowerment and control. Teaching and guiding children in the most effective way for their brain development is the key to ensuring their success.

Having structure, consistency, and predictability are helpful because they ensure clear directions that the children can follow and expectations are met. Organizational (for example, at school) or relational guidelines (like at home) make people feel safe because they are consistent, unambiguous, and predictable. Consistency and predictability aid the development and strengthening of new neural pathways in the brain, and strengthen the connection between the upstairs and downstairs brains.

- IX. **Regulation** is what we do to help regulate a child’s emotions or teach adults to self-regulate. Show them how to reconnect their primitive brain to their thinking brain so they can **relate, reason, focus, and learn**. Refer to Module 8. Help the child or adult reframe their thinking.

In Proverbs 23:7, Solomon tells us there is an intrinsic link between our minds and actions.

For as he thinks in his heart, so *is* he. “Eat and drink!” he says to you, but his heart is not with you.

We do what the mind says to do. The mind is the control center of our existence. If the mind is broken, then the whole person is broken. If the mind is organized, it is strong, and the whole person is strong. Remember that your thoughts are not who you are but what you think. Your body is like a car, and your mind is like the steering wheel. The steering wheel is responsible for directing the car. That’s why it’s so helpful to help the other person be self-regulated and “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Self-regulation is a skill that allows people to control their emotions and thoughts and strengthens their self-image. It helps us build resilience, perseverance, or forbearance under trials. Galatians 5:22-23 says that being perseverant and controlling your own behavior are good fruits of the Spirit.

Keeping a clear mind for yourself and your child can be challenging. An actual battle is going on in the brain when it's dysregulated. Hold on to God's truth and let it give you the strength you need.

Psalm 28:7-8 - The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him. The LORD is the strength of his people, a fortress of salvation for his anointed one.

- X. **Reconstructing the trauma story in a safe environment is essential in healing.** Every traumatic experience has a story. People who have experienced trauma tend to have difficulty understanding and processing emotions. When people are stressed, they only use their reptilian brain, which is the part of their brain focused on survival. During extreme stress, their thinking brain is not accessible, and many details are left out or inaccurate in their stories. Reconstructing helps the trauma survivor better understand the traumatic event and can help them identify incorrect or unhelpful thoughts.

Reconstructing helps unpair fearful associations between innocuous stimuli and actual danger or trauma. This can be helpful in cases where a person fears certain stimuli, for example, a mother cooking and the smoke alarm sounding off. However, the alarm triggers memories of her son almost dying in the intensive care unit.

Reconstructing may also help trauma survivors forgive themselves and those who have harmed them.

Matthew 5:7 - "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

Matthew 6:12 - "And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors."

Colossians 3:13 - "Forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."

Take comfort in knowing that Jesus promises in Colossians 3:25 that, "the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality."

A Christian trauma specialist should guide the reconstruction process because it is delicate and sensitive. To change their beliefs, a person must first address their deeply held beliefs about themselves in the world. They must challenge those beliefs and create a meaningful narrative that reflects their true identity in the world and the image of Christ. A therapist can help them work through their feelings and feel more in control of their lives. If the trauma story is not reconstructed in the correct order, the memories of the trauma can feel like a chaotic mess of images, sounds, and emotions.

- XI. **Restore** the connection between survivors and their community. Refer to Module 1. People who have experienced trauma often feel isolated or alone. They need to know that others care about them and want to help. Coming back into a community after being away for a while can be a stressful and fearful experience, as they are stepping back into a space of vulnerability and hope. The benefits of a welcoming church community and a network of friends are greater than any individual can do on their own. This is a critical time for the church to be supportive of survivors.

Isolation can cause harm. God knew this when He stated back in....

Genesis 2:18 – “And the LORD God said, “It is not good that man should be alone.”

God created us to be communal beings. From the moment humanity was created, God noted that it was not good for us to be alone.

Scripture tells us that community is essential for many reasons:

1. It is evidence that we walk in the light (1 John 1:7). We fulfill Christ’s commands by helping those in our faith community (Galatians 6:2).
2. It provides us with prayer support for our healing, which is not found elsewhere (James 5:16). It is where we can challenge each other and help each other grow to maturity (Proverbs 27:17).
3. It is where Christ promises His presence would be (Matthew 18:20). It is where we can be encouraged by each other’s faith in times of abundance, as well as in times of difficulty (Romans 1:11-12).
4. We are not just individuals but part of the Body of Christ, and part of our calling is to show concern for the other members of that Body (1 Corinthians 12:25-27).
5. Christ calls us to this one Body, and He expects us to be in unity with that Body (Ephesians 4:2-6). We can use God’s gifts, loving and serving others without complaining or resentment (1 Peter 4:8-11).

XII. **Resist** Re-Traumatization. Refer to Module 8. Trauma can cause deep wounds. We need to be cautious so that we don’t cause more wounds in our attempts to help people heal. “Re-traumatizing refers to inadvertently recreating some conditions of a person’s previous trauma, causing them to relive it at the moment.”

XIII. **Regeneration** (or post-traumatic growth) is the process of creating and experiencing positive outcomes following a traumatic event. They can experience a sense of new possibilities, change in relationships, increased personal strength, a new-found purpose, a heightened appreciation for life in general, and a religious awakening and awareness.

There are five possible growth results from post-traumatic growth:

1. An increased appreciation of life and a sense of what is truly meaningful.
The person develops increasing existential awareness and experiences a heightened perception of commonplace experiences. They pay more attention to things previously seen as "small" or "insignificant," such as the color of the sky.

Ecclesiastes 6:9 - Enjoy what you have rather than desiring what you don’t have. Just dreaming about nice things is meaningless—like chasing the wind.

Hebrews 13:5 – Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

1 Timothy 6:6-8 - Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

2. Closer and more meaningful relationships.

Because of trauma, the person may need to reach out to others in new ways to receive support. This process can open up the person to new ways of relating, specifically, increased emotional connection and sharing of negative experiences. In addition, the person may strengthen existing relationships.

God's will is for us to reach out to others and bear one another's burdens.

Hebrews 13:16 – “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”

Philippians 2:4 – “Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others.”

1 Thessalonians 5:11 – “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

Romans 15:5 – “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus.”

3. A sense of greater personal strength.

Some trauma survivors can identify differences between their perceived skills and strengths before and after the trauma.

When we believe and trust in Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross for us, and by accepting His abundance of grace and His gift of righteousness through faith, we can heal through His strength and do everything through Christ who gives us strength.

Philippines 4:13 – “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

Isaiah 41:10 – “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

4. An identification of new possibilities for a person's life and a sense of purpose.

The person discovers new possibilities in life. This discovery creates a new life path and perception or philosophy about life that changes that person's past assumptions and beliefs.

Research shows better mental health in trauma survivors when they perceive one or more positive outcomes from a traumatic event. People who found a purpose for what they experienced had lower levels of depression and a higher perception of well-being.

Some survivors find purpose in helping others who have experienced similar trauma.

God wants to use us to guide others to Himself. In loving others and as we heal, we will discover the incredible satisfaction of helping others who are also lost and hurting be found and healed. Incredible passion and joy come from seeing a life transformed through the Spirit working in us.

In Mark 12:31, Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Ephesians 5:1-2 says, "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Acts 26:16 says, "Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me."

Whatever our purpose is, God has a plan for us, and it will be fulfilled. We need to have faith in God that what He started in our lives will be completed. God will never abandon or forsake us. The good work God is doing in us aligns with His purpose for our lives.

1 Peter 5:10 – "And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."

Know that God is always in control and is always with you. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

Philippians 1:6 – "And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

5. Drawing closer to God.

Post-traumatic growth could be called "with-Jesus transformation." As Christians, we can listen compassionately to trauma survivors and help them reinterpret God's presence in their experiences because we have the Holy Spirit in us. Jesus sees, hears, and understands their pain. Jesus experienced the most horrific pain through the crucifixion, suffered alienation from the Father, and experienced death. Yet, Christ responded to the most horrendous pain with honest grief, faith, and love—love for his Father and us.

Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection helped believers to put their faith and hope confidently in God. "Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And because God raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory, your faith and hope can be placed confidently in God" (1 Peter 1:21 NLT).

We can model Christ's response to trauma and be examples of how trauma survivors can believe in God's promise and be on a faith-fueled path of resiliency. We can guide them to grow in knowing who Jesus is and understand that their pain becomes His. His resilience, faith, and love become theirs in a process that promotes wholeness and healing. In leaning on Jesus, their burdens become lighter. His power allows them to choose a different path and experience true transformation.

Look at what Jesus has done: His life, death, and resurrection are models for our lives! When we look at ourselves (our weaknesses) and our unfavorable circumstances, it is easy to feel anxious, afraid, and discouraged. That's why God wants us to focus on Jesus rather than on ourselves. In the eyes of God, because he puts us in Christ, the reality of Jesus is our reality today – “As he is so are we in this world!” Don't focus on our weaknesses or how we are lacking in life – instead, be grateful for what we have. Jesus is at the Father's right hand, full of life, peace, joy, and favor. All of heaven's resources are at his disposal. He is greatly blessed, highly favored, and deeply loved by the father, and so are we! To be Jesus-occupied means to see things from God's perspective. When we view life from the perspective of God, we will find that his abundant grace and provision always cover any need we have.

Ephesians 2:4-6 says, “But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Jesus Christ.”

1 Peter 1:3 says, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

The gospel of new life in Christ can enable people to respond to sin done against them and horrific circumstances by seeking God for comfort, strength, and wisdom to obey and trust Him. Christ is their hope of glory, and His power allows them to choose a different path. By the doctrine of Christ's cross, the dominion of sin is broken in them, and they are fortified against that which feeds their pain and sorrow.

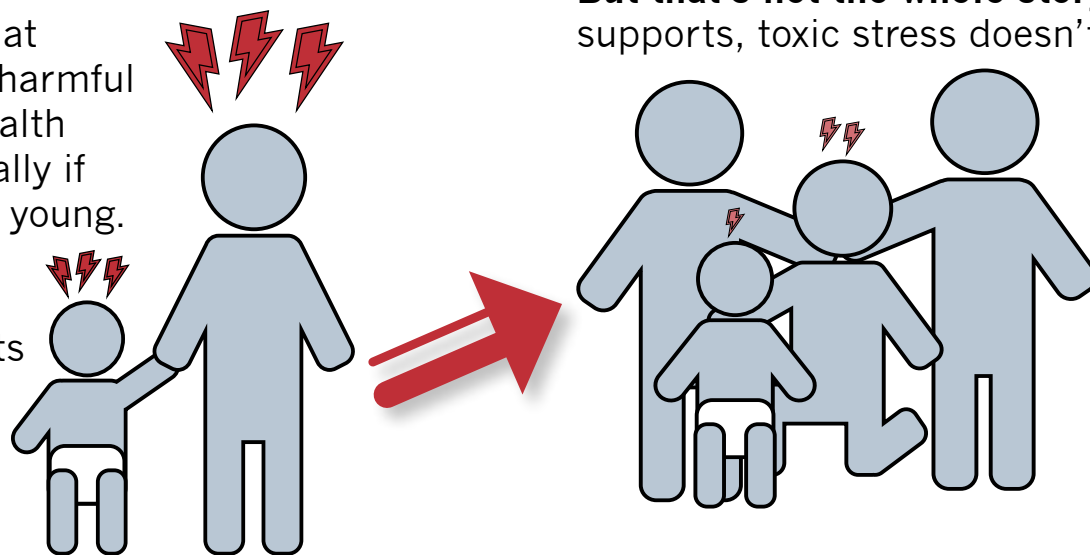
This is *true* post-traumatic growth!

WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT TOXIC STRESS

FROM SURVIVING TO COPING TO RESILIENCE

Building resilience and strength in families and communities is one of the most important investments we can make as a society. But what does that mean?

Experiencing stress that doesn't let up can be harmful to people's lifelong health and wellbeing, especially if it begins when they're young. Without supportive relationships, it can become what scientists call "toxic stress." Nobody knows this better than those who have experienced it.

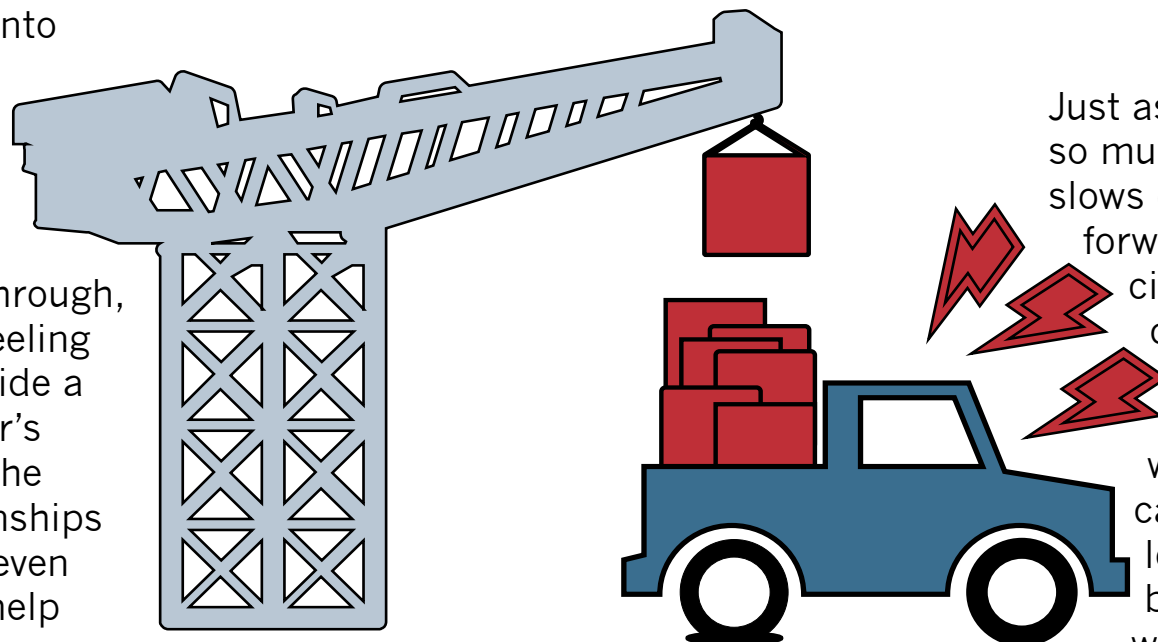


But that's not the whole story. With the right supports, toxic stress doesn't have to lead to bad outcomes. We all know that everyone copes with stress differently—even children. Understanding how stress affects each of us is the first step toward making changes in our communities and our own lives that can help everyone thrive.

TOXIC STRESS CAN FEEL LIKE A HEAVY WEIGHT, BUT COMMUNITIES CAN SHARE THE LOAD.

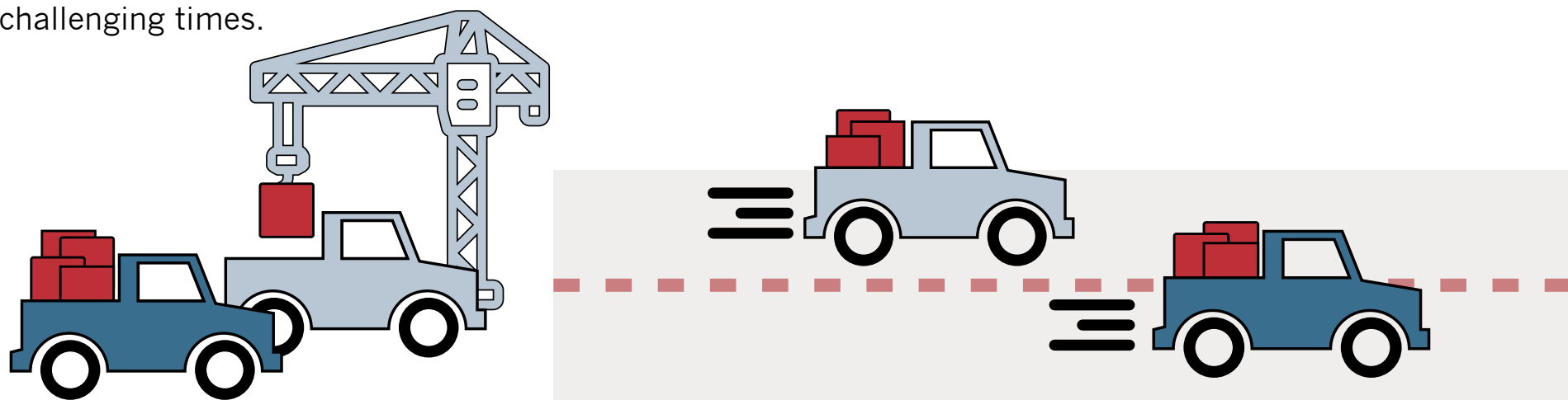
As adults, the effects of stress caused by things like experiencing violence, or not having enough food or a place to live, can feel heavy, like a burden that makes it hard to get through life. This stress can put a person into

a constant state of "fight or flight" response, which makes it unusually difficult to plan or follow through, or to stay calm. Feeling this way can override a parent or caregiver's ability to provide the supportive relationships children need, or even to do things that help relieve the burden.



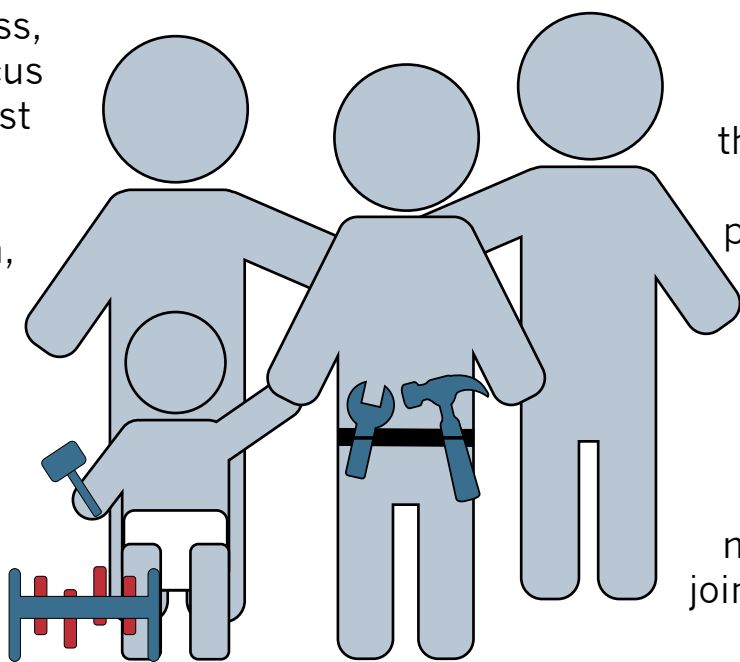
Just as a truck can only bear so much weight before it slows down or stops moving forward, challenging life circumstances can weigh caregivers down and make it hard to do the things they need and want to do. And just as carrying too much for too long can cause a truck to break down, people can wear down from being overburdened without support.

But just as we can remove cargo from an overloaded truck, we can provide supports and services that allow caregivers to focus on caring for themselves and their children. And just as we can do regular maintenance to keep a truck in good shape, regular access to these services can help families manage the load during challenging times.



SUPPORTING EACH OTHER, BUILDING RESILIENCE

Under this kind of stress, it can be difficult to focus on the fact that the most important thing your children need is love, affection, and attention, along with clear limit-setting. Spending more time playing and snuggling with them, talking to them, or taking walks and exploring together are tools you can use to help connect.



If your stress is making it hard to do these things—if your truck is just too overloaded—reach out for help. Resources like food pantries or free activities can help lift stress. Connect with parents, friends, or family who care, or seek help from a professional so you can get back to nurturing your kids. And when you're out of crisis, you can help others in your community, by letting other parents know that their loving attention can make the biggest difference for their kids, or joining in advocacy to expand family supports.

The threads that connect us all can grow stronger when taking on difficult challenges, and those ties can lessen the burden of toxic stress. No person is an island; everyone needs the help of others in difficult times. And toxic stress is not the end of anyone's story.

Five key truths the scriptures teach us about trauma and suffering

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Firstly, God is present and in control of our suffering. In times of great suffering and pain, we often feel the farthest from God. Where is He? Has He forgotten me? How could He let this happen? This was also the case in the lives of great men of faith in the Bible. Look at David ([Psalm 13:1](#)), Jeremiah ([Lamentations 3:8](#)) and Job ([Job 9:16](#)). Jesus at the height of his pain cries out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” ([Matthew 27:46](#)). From our limited human perspective, pain and suffering seem contrary to our idea of a sovereign God who is good and loving. We think that God blinked and couldn’t stop this traumatic event, or He isn’t really a loving God. We forget that Adam chose to sin and that we live in a fallen world, full of suffering. Suffering should not cause us to question God’s sovereignty, as Job so clearly understood ([Job 2:10](#)). God is sovereign despite our circumstances. He created all things and He controls all things ([1 Chronicles 29:11](#); [Colossians 1:15-17](#)). He allows us to experience the consequences of sin while remaining fully in control of all things including Satan, who can only bring suffering into our lives if God allows it ([Job 1:12](#)). God is in control of our circumstances, and He wants to transform us into the very image of His Son.

Secondly, God is good and cares for us. We have all heard this statement, “How could a loving God allow _____?” Fill in the blank with any horribly traumatic event that occurs here on planet Earth. People often use this statement to argue against not only the love of God but also the very existence of God. But God does love us and that is evident in our redemptive history. The creator of the world made a way for disobedient, powerless creatures to come into an eternal relationship with Him. He is patient and gracious. He became one of us ([John 3:16](#)) and then sacrificed Himself for us ([1 John 3:16](#)). Self-sacrifice is the ultimate act of love ([John 15:13](#)). God is indeed good, and He longs to be in an ever deepening relationship with us.

In [James 1:2](#), we are told to “consider it pure joy” when we go through difficult times. What kind of strange mental gymnastics does God want me to do? I’m supposed to be happy when I’m in pain? No, not at all. Even Jesus was sad when he went through difficult times — at Lazarus’s grave, in the garden of Gethsemane, and on the cross. **The third truth** we are called to recognize is that **through our trails and suffering we have an opportunity to draw closer to God.** James tells us that persevering through the difficult times develops a mature and complete faith ([James 1:4](#)). We are ever being conformed into the image of Christ and suffering is a necessary part of that transformation ([Romans 8:29](#); [Philippians 1:29](#); [1 Peter 2:21](#)).

Jesus understands what it is to suffer is the fourth truth. We do not worship a distant, unapproachable God. We worship a God that knows what it is to be human ([Hebrews 4:15](#)). He knows what it is to suffer ([Hebrews 2:17-18](#)). Just think about Jesus' life for a moment. He didn't experience just one traumatic event during His time on Earth. His whole life was full of suffering. We can take great comfort in the fact that God can relate to us on our level, He understands what it is to suffer.

Finally, our identity is not defined by traumatic events or suffering but is grounded in Christ.

God does not see you as a victim. He sees you as His child. The scriptures tell us that as children of God, we were chosen before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless adopted sons and daughters, lavished with grace, redeemed, forgiven, given spiritual wisdom and understanding and marked with the Holy Spirit ([Ephesians 1:4-14](#)). We are in Christ! We sit at the right hand of the Father! We have His righteousness! We must not allow tragedy or circumstances to define who we are or how we live. We have His very life within us, and we must choose to live out of that truth.