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# TRAUMA INFORMED BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT

A WREP AND VNN COLLABORATION



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# About

## THIS TRAUMA INFORMED BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT

This Trauma Informed Business Development Toolkit was developed by Verified News Network (VNN) Media Services in partnership with Workforce Resilience Enhancement Project (WREP) as part of VNN's From Adversity To Entrepreneurship (FATE) Learning Series.

VNN is a social news media company comprised of three departments: VNN App Development, Independent Journalism, and Media Services. VNN Media Services specializes in multimedia consultation, digital management, and asset creation for entrepreneurs, small businesses, and organizations.

WREP is a collaboration between Chicago community-based workforce development organizations, University of Chicago Medicine's Urban Health Initiative and the University of Chicago made possible through a grant provided by AT&T. The concept was conceived in the fall of 2019 and initiated in January 2020.

FATE Articles were produced by Alexie Foster in collaboration with VNN. Alexie Foster is a licensed and trauma certified therapist dedicated to creating a healthy, supportive community for members to release stress and trauma, heal, and live happy, peaceful lives. Learn more at <http://thealexiefoster.com/>

**If you are a trauma survivor, we encourage you to take the necessary steps for your emotional safety prior to and following work with this toolkit. This may include seeking comfort from a friend or family member, calling the Crisis Line at 988, or texting the Crisis Text Line at 741741.**

# Adapting WREP research for entrepreneurs

Ever since the World Health Organization (WHO) deemed stress the “health epidemic of the 21st century”, employers have been taking stress, anxiety, and depression more seriously.

For the last few years, WREP has worked to develop resources and tools to address people's psychological and emotional well-being, maximizing their preparedness for entering, re-entering, and advancing their careers. The approach has been top-down, focused on educating employers and workforce development professionals to understand and respond to the ways cognitive, psychological, emotional, and behavioral effects of trauma can impair an employee’s abilities needed for successful employment.

Until now.

By adapting WREP resources and tools for entrepreneurs, individuals who often “wear all of the hats” including employer, development professional, and employee, this toolkit aims to serve as a resource for people to understand and respond to the ways trauma can impair their ability to run their own successful businesses.

## WHAT ADAPTED WREP RESEARCH LOOKS LIKE FOR ENTREPRENEURS

Entrepreneurs must be prepared to address the ways psychological and emotional trauma can:

- ❖ Affect their ability to focus on business opportunities
- ❖ Muster the self-motivation needed to launch a business
- ❖ Engage in the self-regulation needed to sustain a business

# WREP RESOURCE BRIEF 1:

## Being Trauma Informed

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Being trauma-informed means being aware of the impacts of stress on the body and brain.

### EFFECTS OF TRAUMA

Individuals with a history of adverse life experiences are much more likely to have:

- Poor mental and physical health
- Low self-esteem and self-confidence
- Cognitive impairment and limited education
- Substance abuse
- History of incarceration

Chronic trauma can also negatively affect:

- Fatigue
- Memory
- Concentration
- Planning
- Problem-solving and decision making

Often, people coping with trauma also have underdeveloped people skills that reduce their ability to:

- Read social cues and adjust their behavior to the expectations of the context
- Resolve conflicts
- Receive criticism
- Maintain relationships

Addressing trauma and its impacts can be very uncomfortable. Oftentimes, it may seem easier to pretend these experiences never happened, or that they don't affect you anymore. But unresolved trauma will always surface, one way or another.

Entrepreneurship has been linked to increased stress, decreased self-care, and depression. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, 72% of entrepreneurs are directly or indirectly affected by mental health issues compared to just 48% of non-entrepreneurs. But for roughly 17 percent of all Americans working as entrepreneurs, the risk is worth the reward.

By acknowledging and processing trauma, you will be able to lessen the likelihood of re-traumatizing yourself on your entrepreneurship journey and give yourself the capacity to build an enterprise in a healthy, sustainable way.

Entrepreneurs are both employer and employee. A useful first step to addressing and resolving trauma while navigating your entrepreneurship journey is a trauma self-screen.

The following information was adapted from the Blue Knot Foundation's 2018 extensive guide "Talking about Trauma: Guide to Conversations and Screening for Health and Other Service Providers".

Often Business Professionals Do Not Screen for Trauma Because:

- ❖ Trauma impacts on physical and mental health are underestimated
- ❖ Relevant questions are not part of standard business practices
- ❖ There is a lack of knowledge about how to respond to trauma
- ❖ Addressing trauma is upsetting
- ❖ The belief that treatment should focus on symptoms rather than origin
- ❖ Concerns that no treatment is available
- ❖ The belief that substance abuse issues need to be treated first
- ❖ Assessing and exploring trauma histories or symptoms takes too much time

Business Professionals Do Not Disclose Trauma to Others Because:

- ❖ They fear for their emotional and/or physical safety
- ❖ They may not trust others or fear that they will be judged
- ❖ They feel distressed and ashamed
- ❖ They may not view their experience as traumatic

Talking about trauma with others has been proven to help in the healing process. It helps with making sense of difficult situations, desensitizing traumatic memories, developing skills for processing thoughts, and reminding you you're not alone.

#### ADVERSE EXPERIENCES AND VERY STRESSFUL LIFE EVENTS SELF-SCREEN

*If you are a trauma survivor, we encourage you to take the necessary steps for your emotional safety prior to or after completing this screening exercise. This may include seeking comfort from a friend or family member, calling the Crisis Line at 988, or texting the Crisis Text Line at 741741.*

Do you feel unsafe in your current neighborhood? No \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_

What about the neighborhood you lived in growing up? No \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_

Did you or do you currently have any challenges with depression, anxiety, or other mental illnesses? No \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_

What about your parents/caregivers growing up? No \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_

Did you or do you currently have any challenges with alcohol or drugs? No \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_

What about your parents/caregivers growing up? No \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_

Have you ever felt that you were treated badly or unfairly due to your race or ethnicity? No \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_

Have you ever had a life-threatening illness and/or were in a life-threatening accident? No \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_

If yes, how old were you? \_\_\_\_

Was physical force or a weapon ever used against you in a robbery or mugging? No \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_

If yes, how old were you? \_\_\_\_

Are there times when you currently have to cut the size of meals or skip meals because there is not enough money in the budget for food? No \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_



What about while you were growing up? No \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been in foster care or without the care of your parents while growing up? No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

Has a parent, romantic partner, or family member repeatedly ridiculed you, put you down, ignored you, or told you were no good? No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

Has an immediate family member, romantic partner, or close friend died because of accident, homicide, or suicide? No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, how old were you? \_\_\_\_\_

When you were a child, did a parent, caregiver or other person ever slap you repeatedly, beat you, or otherwise attack or harm you? No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

As an adult, have you ever been kicked, beaten, slapped around or otherwise physically harmed by a romantic partner, date, family member, stranger, or someone else? No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been present when another person was killed? Seriously injured? Sexually or physically assaulted? No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, how old were you? \_\_\_\_\_

Has anyone (parent, family member, romantic partner, stranger, or someone else) ever sexually assaulted you? No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

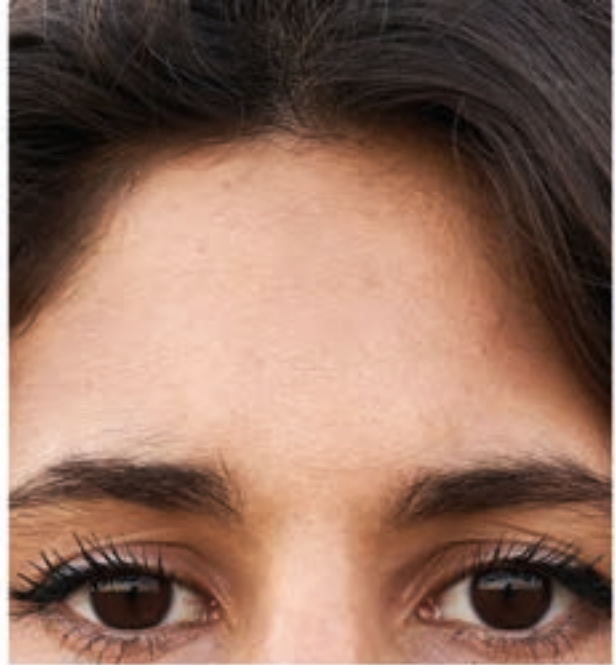
If yes, how old were you? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been in another situation(s) where you were seriously injured, or your life was in danger, or it was extremely frightening or horrifying (e.g., involved in military combat or living in a war zone)? No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, how old were you? \_\_\_\_\_

*If you are a trauma survivor, we encourage you to take the necessary steps for your emotional safety prior to or after completing this screening exercise. This may include seeking comfort from a friend or family member, calling the Crisis Line at 988, or texting the Crisis Text Line at 741741.*

# FATE STORY: Trauma and how it's processed (or not) through the brain



**(NATIONAL) Trauma is not a one size fits all experience. There are many different kinds of trauma people endure and need to resolve in order to live their best lives. Navigating trauma is also made more difficult by the fact that many trauma survivors endure chronic traumatic events, as opposed to one-time occurrences.**

When people think of trauma, oftentimes they consider the worst-case scenarios of trauma: watching someone die, physical or sexual abuse or assault, war, natural disasters, or the sudden loss of a loved one. These events are known as Type 1 trauma (major trauma events), but there are other kinds of trauma, as well, including:

Type 2 trauma (minor trauma event) is an emotionally difficult event that is not necessarily a life-or-death situation, such as going through a divorce, losing a pet or a loved one, or job loss.

Complex trauma refers to the experience of on-going trauma. This could be a history of on-going Type 1 and/or Type 2 traumas. In childhood, complex trauma is often experienced when there is a history of any kind of abuse (physical, emotional, sexual), neglect, or abandonment.

Historical trauma (generational trauma) refers to the group experience of trauma within a community, such as genocide, forced relocation, or enslavement.

Secondary trauma refers to experiencing a trauma response when hearing about another person's traumatic event or experience.

Recently, there was an adjustment to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (commonly referred to as the DSM-5), a book utilized by mental health and psychology professionals to diagnose mental health disorders. The DSM-5 now defines trauma as an event requiring “actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence.”

Some clinicians who specialize in trauma disagree with the current definition, firstly because this definition speaks to Type 1 trauma only.

Secondly, many believe it is not the actual event and circumstances that define a trauma, but rather the perception of danger and the brain’s response to an event or circumstance. People experience trauma when they feel unsafe in a particular situation. This doesn’t always mean the situation is an actual life or death experience. It means that’s how a person’s brain interprets it.

To understand trauma and how it affects the brain, one must first understand the “triune brain.” Before birth, the brain develops on three levels. Each of these levels of the brain houses different and very important roles for human functioning.

The first part of the brain that develops is the lower brain, often referred to as the reptilian or lizard brain. It is the most primal part of the brain, geared for survival. This is the part of the brain we tap into when we are in “survival mode.” Its job is to process as much sensory information, or information gathered through the senses, as possible.

The second level of the brain surrounds the lizard brain and is known as the limbic system. This interior area is the emotional system of the brain. It is in charge of interpreting information and processing that information as quickly as possible. It also houses the part of the brain that regulates emotions.

The third level of the brain is the cerebral cortex, or “the thinking brain”. This is where rational processing, decision making and goal making all take place. It’s where a person’s personality is developed and housed. Moving into action also takes place at this level.

In healthy brain processing, one would gather sensory information through the lower brain, process and regulate emotional responses to the stimuli through the limbic system and respond to the stimuli accordingly through the cerebral cortex.

Of course, it doesn't always happen this way. Sometimes instinct takes over. When emotions are too heightened to be regulated, a primal reaction occurs, prompted by the desire to survive. This is known as a trauma response.

When someone experiences trauma, and especially chronic trauma, the first level brain system will normalize taking over in times of stress, deeming the second and third level systems non-essential. Often times over and over again. Without emotion regulation and rational processing, mental health declines. This can even impact physical health, as everything is linked to the brain.

Different traumas present themselves in different ways, including but not limited to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or a stressor-related disorder, anxiety, depression, chronic fatigue or pain, Fibromyalgia, personality disorders such as borderline personality disorder, poor memory, strained relationships and trust, dissociative/identity disorder, or depersonalization/derealization disorder.

The good news is people have the power to overcome any and all traumas. By resolving and healing from trauma, people can lead more fulfilling and healthy lives.

# Optimal entrepreneur resilience

## RESILIENT PEOPLE

- Have a support network.
- Are self-aware, acknowledge current problems they are facing and recognize how they make them feel instead of suppressing their feelings.
- Believe they can overcome obstacles and achieve goals.
- Accept that change is a natural part of life.
- Realize they don't get to choose the situations life puts them in, but they do get to choose how they react to them and their attitude.
- Understand that not everything will be perfect.
- Strive to do their best but don't aim for perfection.
- Set realistic expectations for themselves.
- Put things in perspective: Life is a long journey with many bumps in the road.
- Use laughter and humor to clear feelings of stress.

## WREP RESOURCE BRIEF 2:

### Strengthening Emotional Capacity

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Though entrepreneurship can often be a solo journey, you will likely have to work with others at some point or another.

This is especially true if your business involves having customers, but even business networking and relationship building are made easier by a strong emotional capacity.

People are full of difficult emotions: frustration, hurt, anger, hostility.

By learning how to manage the emotional aspects of business interactions you will be able to remain calm and professional in the face of emotional triggers.

The ability to effectively regulate our emotional state can be difficult for anyone, but especially difficult for those who have experienced traumatic events. Trauma is a lingering emotional wound that leaves someone feeling hopeless, helpless, and unable to regain a sense of safety.

This section provides background on how trauma affects the ability to regulate emotions and tools you can use to help regulate your emotions on your entrepreneurship journey.

#### **Nature Of The Challenge**

Frustration, anger, and depression are just a few of the negatively charged emotions that can disrupt your ability to run a business.

You may feel insecure about your ability to do a job well, you may not get along with others, or you may simply feel overwhelmed. Insensitive interactions, unreasonable expectations, and difficult situations can make matters worse.

You also can't leave negative feelings from your personal life at home - difficult personal issues often manifest in poor business. It is difficult to keep our home lives and work lives separate. When dealing with difficult personal situations like marital problems, family health issues, financial problems, issues with children, eldercare, and much more it can feel impossible to stay focused and calm at work.

Have you ever tried to push distressing feelings away and pretend that everything is okay? Does it help?

A better solution is embracing and managing your emotions, also known as self-regulating, instead of trying to eliminate emotions, which is impossible.

When you are able to consistently act in line with your long-term goals (behavioral self-regulation) and feel calm and level-headed doing so (emotional self-regulation), you will have a better chance of success and overall well-being.

## Two Components To Self-Regulation

### *Behavioral Self-Regulation*

The ability to act in ways that are in line with your values and long-term interests. It means you can feel one way but behave in another way. An example that many of us can relate to is not wanting to work sometimes but doing so anyway. Even though we may be feeling dread or unhappiness, we don't act in line with those feelings - we act in line with our goal of providing for ourselves financially.

### *Emotional Self-Regulation*

The ability to exert influence and control over our actual emotions, not just our behavior. If you have ever calmed yourself down when someone said something that made you angry, you were using your powers of emotional self-regulation.

Self-regulation can be especially difficult for people who have experienced trauma. Those who have experienced trauma, particularly people who have been chronically exposed to fear and danger from living in an unsafe home or neighborhood, often have a threat response system that is over reactive.

Triggered fight, flight, or freeze reactions present as oppositional, defiant, aggressive, or rule-breaking behaviors. This could result in arguments with others over seemingly minor offenses. Or it could result in feeling distant or lack of motivation.

## Developing a stronger internal locus of control

The goal of strengthening emotional capacity is to move from an external (perceived outside world) to an internal (within yourself) orientation.

### People with an EXTERNAL Locus of Control

- ❖ Believe that they are not in control how they react to life's experiences
- ❖ More likely to experience anxiety
- ❖ More likely to blame outside forces for their circumstances
- ❖ Often feel hopeless or powerless in the face of difficult situations

### People with an INTERNAL Locus of Control

- ❖ Believe that they have control over how they react to life's experiences
- ❖ Have higher self-esteem
- ❖ More likely to take responsibility for their actions
- ❖ Often express confidence in the face of challenges



# Emotional Capacity Building Exercises

Self-Regulation: Relax the body to relax the mind

## Exercise 1: Quick Body Scan

This body scan technique is one you can learn to use many times throughout the day to promote emotional wellness and can also be used in intense moments of emotional distress.

## Exercise 2: Mindful Breathing

You may already be familiar with the basics of mindful breathing - simply put, it is focusing your attention on your breath, the inhale and exhale. You can do this anywhere - while standing, seated or lying down. Your eyes may be open or closed. Practice mindful breathing throughout the day and also when you're feeling particularly stressed or anxious.

## Emotional Awareness

One of the most essential factors for self-regulation is self-awareness. Being able to identify and name the emotion you are feeling can help you manage it.

Self-awareness is the ability to pull back and recognize the feeling you are having. When you have an emotional response and are able to bring it into awareness, your chances of handling it well will improve.

If you are controlled by your emotions, chances are you may feel engulfed, suppressed, or resigned.

By understanding these three elements of emotion, how to recognize them and how to manage them, you will improve your chances of successfully running a business in a healthy way.

**Engulfed.** Being engulfed by an emotion can feel like being swallowed by a wave. It can be a feeling of adrenaline rushing over you and propelling you into action. It can be hard to step back from an emotion that is engulfing you. Anger is one of the emotions most likely to function like this. In cases of anger, a cool down period is recommended so the body can process and achieve some distance from this red-hot emotion.

When feeling engulfed by emotion, using a self-regulation technique, such as the body-scan or mindful breathing, is recommended.

**Suppressed.** Shutting down, not allowing yourself to feel feelings. These are situations where you have suppressed your emotions. You may be used to ignoring your feelings or pushing them away. However, becoming more aware of your emotions, and feeling your emotions, will help you become better able to manage them effectively.

**Resigned.** Resigned people know what they are feeling, however, they do little to manage their emotions. For instance, you may be aware that you are extremely angry, but not take any steps to address your anger. Despite awareness about their emotions, people who resign to their feelings don't recognize the power they have to change them.

Teaching yourself to be objective and simply state that "this is anger I am feeling" gives you the power not to act on it. Once an emotional response (like anger, or any other) comes into your awareness – once you are able to pull back and acknowledge what you are feeling – the chances of using that emotion to your advantage greatly improve.

Through emotional self-awareness, you can become more in control of your life and the actions you take. You will become more aware of the power you have to respond in positive ways.

### Exercise 3: Emotional Recognition

Being able to name the emotion that you are feeling is an important step to not being controlled by it. Familiarizing yourself with a list of emotions can help put a name to your feelings. After you become familiar with the list of emotions, write a list of what triggers three of them.

Example, what is it about other people's behavior that triggers your anger? What makes you feel anxious? Identify responses that have not been beneficial in the past. Then, identify some positive alternatives.

Self-awareness offers you freedom of choice. How will you react when you are presented with a situation? You have the power to decide.

Emotional Management Acceptance is another powerful tool in managing emotions. Learning to accept what you are feeling, instead of battling with your emotions, can help you move through them and find peace.

Acceptance does not mean resigning to feeling bad forever. Instead, it means accepting that you are experiencing an emotion and accepting that emotions will pass. Through practicing the art of acceptance, you will begin to realize you are not your anger, fear, grief or any other difficult emotion you are feeling.

Instead, you will begin to experience these emotions in a more fleeting manner, like clouds that pass by in the sky or a wave in the ocean. Emotions are not permanent states of being. They arise and then disappear. It's easy to forget this when you're in the middle of an upsetting event. Instead, encourage yourself to stay mindful about the transience of emotions. Allow yourself to witness and observe your emotions with kindness and patience, giving your emotions the latitude to morph, and in many cases, completely fade away.

#### Exercise 4: Letting Go

Observe your emotion. Acknowledge that it exists, stand back from it and get yourself unstuck from it. Experience your emotion as a wave, coming and going. You may find it helpful to concentrate on some part of the emotion, like how your body is feeling or some image about it. In conjunction with self-regulation and emotional recognition techniques, imagining emotions like a wave may help you move through painful emotions.

Emotional regulation can be difficult for those who have experienced trauma but it is always possible to learn new skills. With awareness and practice, you will begin to be able to become more relaxed, identify your emotions and manage them more effectively while running your business and in everyday life.

*Exercises Adapted from*

*[https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/mindful\\_breathing](https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/mindful_breathing)*

*<https://www.symbis.com/blog/the-importance-of-emotional-self-awareness/>*

*<https://positivepsychology.com/emotion-regulation-worksheets-strategies-dbt-skills/>*

# FATE STORY:

## Rewiring your nervous system for peace instead of panic



**(NATIONAL) Our bodies and minds are designed to survive. Hundreds of thousands of years of evolution demanded it. We learned how to make fire, take down creatures that were ten times our size, and protect ourselves and our families in the wild.**

Experts estimate 30 to 43 percent of prehistoric humans died before they were 15 years old. Even as recent as the 1500s, 1600s and 1700s, human life expectancy was only 30 to 40 years.

Today, it's double that. It's safe to say, the average American no longer needs to exist in survival mode.

According to the National Safety Council, the top ten most common ways to die in 2020 included only one unnatural cause, and that was preventable injury. Heart disease and cancer were the top causes.

Despite these facts, six percent of Americans live with repeated triggering of survival mode caused by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Nearly 5 percent will experience a panic disorder at some point in their lives.

These disorders are just two of many that can result from experiencing traumatic events.

The National Institute of Mental Health says about one half of all U.S. adults will experience at least one traumatic event in their lives. Other disorders that result from experiencing trauma include anxiety, depression, chronic fatigue or pain,

Fibromyalgia, personality disorders such as borderline personality disorder, poor memory, strained relationships and trust, dissociative/identity disorder, or depersonalization/derealization disorder.

For people dealing with the mental health conditions resulting from trauma (and their loved ones), it's important to understand the human body and ways we can work with it instead of against it.

Oftentimes, we don't know how to prevent trauma from resulting in major or long-term issues. The old adage 'time heals all wounds' is not remotely true when it comes to trauma. Simply letting time pass does not resolve it. Healing requires an active approach.

When we experience a traumatic event, our nervous system gets activated, sending a stress response throughout the body. The nervous system is comprised of two parts- the sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system.

The sympathetic nervous system is the part that gets activated during times of distress, alerting the body to what it perceives to be life or death danger. This is what we need to spring into action to avoid a car wreck on the road, or to stop our kid from running into oncoming traffic. These are actual potential life or death situations.

Unfortunately, the brain sometimes perceives a life-or-death situation that isn't one. Sometimes we go into fight or flight mode over the vague "Can we talk?" text or an email from a boss. The brain perceives these events as life or death and thus they feel that way, but they're not.

This is particularly true if we have experienced chronic, or repeated, trauma. The body has grown accustomed to survival mode and begins to default to that operating system, even during ordinary circumstances.

We also have the parasympathetic nervous system, which is in charge of calming the body system down and recovering from a stressful event. The good news is we are able to intentionally activate our parasympathetic nervous system when we find ourselves in distress over something that isn't life or death, or after we've survived a truly potential life or death situation.

Our bodies will actually practice self-soothing activities to activate the parasympathetic nervous system without even thinking about it. Some examples of this include deep breathing, wringing hands, pacing, rubbing your chest, rubbing your temples, and rubbing your neck and shoulders. Cultivating awareness of what works to calm yourself from stress and then intentionally practicing it is an effective way to deactivate survival mode.

There's a part of your brain called the Insula (directly connected to the limbic system) that assists in regulating emotions and handling stressful situations.

This part of the brain acts like a muscle, and we can exercise it to strengthen it. The stronger our Insula is, the easier it is to handle stressful events. When it's weakened or overloaded, it becomes more difficult to regulate emotions and handle these events.

One way to strengthen the Insula is to build a grounding practice, a series of exercises that help you return to your body and back to your center. These are what are referred to as "bottom-up" activities. They direct your focus on being in your body and rely on your senses versus your thoughts and mental processing. Examples of bottom-up activities include but are not limited to deep breathing exercises, meditation, yoga, sensory activities, and mindfulness exercises.

If you recognize a pattern of survival mode activation in your life and want to change it, you can also try joining a Somatic Processing Group, like the Release The Stress Group Coaching Program. This virtual group training guides you through an active approach to healing from trauma by helping you build a grounding practice that works for you. It will also assist you in strengthening your Insula so you're better able to regulate emotions and handle stressful situations. Sign up to be notified of the next enrollment period at <http://thealexiefoster.com/>

## WREP RESOURCE BRIEF 3:

### Anger Management Techniques

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Anger is a naturally occurring emotion and is not necessarily a sign of anything problematic unless it begins to have consequences or impairment for the person experiencing it.

At times, anger can even be positive, as it functions as a signal that something is not right and needs to be changed. It is an emotion that is subjectively experienced as “negative” and is usually in response to a threat. Anger has elements similar to the emotion of fear but is associated with a motivation to approach the threat rather than avoid it.

For people who have witnessed, heard about, or been involved in a traumatic event, negative emotional states are common. Their responses might include angry outbursts or physical aggression toward people or objects. The level of anger can indicate the severity of the post-traumatic symptoms.

People who have experienced early, extensive, and repeated trauma such as childhood abuse, chronic combat exposure or domestic violence tend to have the most difficulty with anger.

Why is anger related to trauma? There are two theories about the role that anger plays in a trauma response:

#### **Fear Avoidance**

This theory suggests that anger serves a specific purpose of avoiding other emotional experiences when triggered by trauma-related reminders. Moving into anger is used as a way of coping and as an alternative to more vulnerable emotions like fear, sadness, or pity.

## Survival Mode

This theory states that those who have experienced trauma more readily perceive situations, including social conflict, as threatening even when they are not. People will interpret the behaviors of others as intended to harm them more often than those without a history of trauma.

According to both of these explanations, anger serves a purpose for those who have posttraumatic difficulties: it mitigates the painful emotions triggered and bolsters the need to gain control/survive.

To the outside world, the anger reactions may be confusing and easily judged but it is important to look at what is behind these behaviors to understand the role they play for you as an individual.

## Parts of Anger

It may be helpful to break down the elements in the experience of anger in order to assist in identifying them.

*Images:* the mental pictures that flash in the “mind’s eye” about previous experiences including any traumatic events

*Self-talk:* the steady stream of dialogue that occurs in our head which often includes blame, morally based judgments, or thoughts about revenge. These are usually not expressed aloud.

*Bodily sensations:* knotted stomach, sweating, headache, and muscle tension are common feelings in anger. Physiological arousal is a major part of a posttraumatic reaction which includes experiencing heart pounding, trouble breathing and sweating. When triggered, the sympathetic nervous system gets activated, increasing heart rate, blood pressure, respiration and decreasing the activity of the gastrointestinal system.

*Patterns of expression:* the feelings of anger can boil inside or be expressed outwardly. Aggression is the behavior that others can observe while anger is the feeling experienced internally. Aggressive behaviors can include yelling, slamming doors, breaking things, shoving people, etc.



## Anger in the Business World

Problems for people who struggle to manage their anger include lack of advancement, people being less likely to work with them, vendors or customers avoiding them or even business failure.

A person's reputation can be affected, as they may be known to lose their temper, abuse others or make errors in judgment. Anger increases relationship conflict and can decrease work time, collaboration, productivity, and commitment.

## Coping with Anger

The remainder of this section will focus on strategies you can use to identify and manage your anger while conducting business. Before proceeding, however, it is important to mention that you may continue to be triggered and respond in anger if the underlying trauma has not been addressed and/or treated.

### *Identify Triggers*

A first step to coping with anger is to identify triggers that can prompt feelings of anger or an anger episode.

### *Two Paths of Action*

Planned avoidance: planning ahead of time to stay away from a person or situation that prompts anger.

Planned escape: removing yourself from a situation after you notice there is a problem and you are starting to become angry.

Additionally, it may be helpful to identify the bodily sensations and thoughts that can signal to you that you are starting to become angry; these are considered "red flags" informing you to take a break from the situation.

This means taking a "time out" and physically removing yourself from the triggering situation.

Sometimes we need distance from a situation to be better equipped to handle it or until a more permanent solution can be found.

## *Calming Internal Urges*

One way to calm our bodies is to engage in relaxation exercises. Once the body becomes regulated, you will be better equipped to approach difficult business situations.

Another skill in managing internal urges is called “grounding” or getting present. Experiencing all of the thoughts, feelings and sensations when triggered can be overwhelming and it is difficult to get untangled from them.

Getting caught up in an emotional storm often makes it difficult to act effectively. Instead, getting back into the present moment or “dropping anchor” helps to avoid getting caught up in an angry emotional experience. It also decreases the likelihood you will act on your urges. Below are three simple ways to get present:

### **Take Ten Breaths**

This is a simple exercise to center yourself and connect with your environment. Practice it throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

1. Take ten slow, deep breaths. Focus on breathing out as slowly as possible until the lungs are completely empty—and then allow them to refill by themselves.
2. Notice the sensations of your lungs emptying. Notice them refilling. Notice your rib cage rising and falling. Notice the gentle rise and fall of your shoulders.
3. See if you can let your thoughts come and go as if they’re just passing cars, driving past outside your house.
4. Expand your awareness: simultaneously notice your breathing and your body. Then look around the room and notice what you can see, hear, smell, touch, and feel.

### **Drop Anchor (Grounding)**

This is another simple exercise to center yourself and connect with the world around you. Practice it throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

1. Plant your feet into the floor.

2. Push them down—notice the floor beneath you, supporting you.
3. Notice the muscle tension in your legs as you push your feet down.
4. Notice your entire body—and the feeling of gravity flowing down through your head, spine, and legs into your feet.
5. Now look around and notice what you can see and hear around you. Notice where you are and what you're doing.

### Notice Five Things

This is yet another simple exercise to center yourself and engage with your environment. Practice it throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

1. Pause for a moment
2. Look around and notice five things that you can see.
3. Listen carefully and notice five things that you can hear.
4. Notice five things that you can feel in contact with your body (for example, your watch against your wrist, your trousers against your legs, the air on your face, your feet upon the floor, your back against the chair).
5. Finally, do all of the above simultaneously

(Adapted from Russ Harris, ACT Made Simple)

### Mindfulness

Mindfulness skills are another way of bringing ourselves back to the present moment. Mindfulness is awareness of both our own thoughts, feelings, and sensations (internal experience) as well as the surrounding environment.

This noticing is done without judgment on whether things are “right” or “wrong” but rather letting thoughts and feelings be as they are. We are observing and letting go rather than getting all caught up in our internal experience.

It is being present in the here and now, not the past or future. Three specific behaviors put together make up mindfulness:

1. Notice X
2. Let go of your thoughts
3. Let your feelings be as they are

This takes practice but, eventually, living mindfully comes more naturally.

## Letting Go of Thoughts

For people who have experienced trauma, there can be many negative thoughts about the safety of the world, trusting others or their own worth.

You may consider all the ways in which you need to protect yourself from harm. The human mind is very busy and we can often become caught up in what it is saying. However, our thoughts are not necessarily true, wise, important, orders or threats.

What if we looked at thoughts as merely sounds, words, stories, or bits of language? See them as just thoughts, rather than believe them for exactly what they are telling us. By looking at thoughts this way, we can stop giving them so much power.

Work on not getting bullied by or acting on your angry thoughts. Here are two basic steps you can use to notice and let go of your thoughts:

1. First, notice and label them as thoughts. Adding the phrase “I’m having the thought that…” before our thoughts can instantly remind us that it is just a thought, nothing more, nothing less. It may be helpful to prompt clients by saying, “Notice what your mind is telling you right now.” We can liken the mind to a radio giving “doom and gloom,” a word machine, a judgment factory, a chatterbox, an inner critic, a demanding bully.

2. Second, imagine the thoughts moving away from our focus. There are many images that can assist in this strategy and we can visualize the thoughts as that image. It may be leaves floating down a stream (as demonstrated in the exercise below), clouds passing in the sky, cars passing on the street, bubbles rising into the air, ‘pop-ups’ on the internet or train cars coming and going on the tracks. The possibilities are endless!

## The Leaves on a Stream Exercise

Find a comfortable position, and either close your eyes or fix your eyes on a spot. Imagine you're sitting by the side of a gently flowing stream, and there are leaves flowing past on the surface of the stream.

Imagine it however you like—it's your imagination. (Pause 10 seconds.)

Now, for the next few minutes, notice each of your thoughts as it pops into your head ... then place it onto a leaf, and allow it to come and stay and go in its own good time ... Don't try to make it float away, just notice what it does ... It may float on by quickly, or it may go very slowly, or it may hang around ...

Do this regardless of whether the thoughts are positive or negative, pleasurable, or painful ... even if they're the most wonderful thoughts, place them onto a leaf ... and allow them to come and stay and go, in their own good time ... they may float by quickly, or slowly, or they may hang around ... simply notice what happens, without trying to alter it. (Pause 10 seconds.)

If your thoughts stop, just watch the stream. Sooner or later, your thoughts will start up again. (Pause 20 seconds.)

Allow the stream to flow at its own rate. Don't speed it up. You're not trying to wash the leaves away—you're allowing them to come and go in their own good time. (Pause 20 seconds.)

If your mind says, "This is stupid or I can't do it, place those thoughts on a leaf." (Pause 20 seconds.)

If a leaf gets stuck, let it hang around. Don't force it to float away. (Pause 20 seconds.)

From time to time, your thoughts will hook you, and pull you out of the exercise, so you lose track of what you are doing. This is normal and natural, and it will keep happening.

As soon as you realize it's happened, gently acknowledge it, and then start the exercise again.

## Communicating Anger Effectively

Some people who have experienced trauma may believe that it is not only okay to express their anger, but it is required in order to protect themselves. Others may believe it is not okay to express their anger due to the fear it evokes or not knowing what to say.

If the former, this may disrupt relationships. If the latter, one may keep it inside, building up resentment in the process until it finally comes tumbling in an ineffective or aggressive way.

What is assertive communication?

Using appropriate words and behavior to approach a conflict and move towards a mutually beneficial solution.

However, it must be emphasized that although communicating assertively provides the best chance of working out the issues it is not a guarantee. We can use all the skills in the world and it does not necessarily mean that we will be “successful” in getting what we need. Being assertive means that we communicate directly, honestly, and appropriately.

By using the following techniques, you can share your feelings without ruining the important business relationships you may depend on.

### “I-Statements”

“I feel \_\_\_(emotion)\_\_\_\_\_when you \_\_\_\_\_( facts of behavior)\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_(effect on your life). And I would like \_\_\_(what you would like instead)\_\_\_\_\_.”

This assertive response always begins with an emotion, a feeling (i.e., angry, upset, annoyed, confused, frustrated, hurt). Without that, it loses its efficacy. Stating something like, “I feel that you should be more respectful” implies criticism. Sharing a feeling shares information about the person: “I feel disrespected.”

When sharing the behavior that upsets you, it is important to share it in as objective terms as possible, just the facts. It may be tempting to begin judging the other person but that will only distract attention from your purpose.

The part of sharing the effect on your life assists the other person in understanding why it caused the feelings that it did. And lastly, it is more helpful to provide the other person with something that could be done in place of the previous behavior rather than something they need to take away (i.e., "Stop talking over me).

Here's what it looks like all together:

"I feel disrespected when you talk over me because it makes it hard to share my full point of view. And I would like you to wait until I stop talking before you start talking."

# Additional Tips For Resolving Conflicts With Others

*When having a conflict with someone, consider using the following strategy:*

**Identify the problem.** Identify the person you are having trouble with. Figure out the specific behavior or attitude that is bothering you and how frequently it occurs.

**Look at the relationships.** Examine how the person interacts with others. Is it similar to the way s/he interacts with you? What makes him/her act that way? Figuring out the causes of someone's behavior helps point the way toward possible solutions.

**Determine the costs.** How does that behavior affect others? Does it cause people to lose morale? Does it affect productivity? Does it make everyone uncomfortable?

**Plan an approach.** Once you identify that the person's behavior does affect you and others, you need to have a discussion with the person. Plan an approach that fits the nature of the problem, the personality of the person involved, and your relationship with that person.

**Describe the behavior.** When you do meet with that person describe the behavior in a non-accusatory manner and explain why it bothers you. Use "I" statements. For example, "Today during the meeting when I was talking about the budget and you interrupted me before I had finished my sentence, I felt really cut down."

**State what you want.** Next, be clear about what you want. "I hope that the next time I talk that I won't get interrupted".

**Seek agreement:** Be sure the person understands and try to get a commitment to change. "Do you see things the same way that I do?"



## WREP RESOURCE BRIEF 4:

# Reducing Trauma Stigmas

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Stigma presents a major barrier for people with mental health concerns to seek help to address those very concerns.

### What is Stigma?

Stigma is a collection of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination against individuals or groups presenting differences identified as negative. Stereotypes may be defined as harmful and disrespectful beliefs about a group. Prejudice reflects agreement with negative stereotypes, leading to emotional consequences and beliefs. Discrimination is behavior resulting from those prejudicial beliefs.

Mental health stigma has been described as having worse consequences than mental health conditions themselves. People with mental health concerns face discrimination and marginalization in multiple ways, as do many people exposed to potentially traumatic events.

Individuals who have been exposed to potentially traumatic events may encounter multiple layers of stigma. They may experience stigma from the trauma itself or surrounding circumstances, as well as stigma related to the psychological consequences of the traumatic event. These sources of stigma may be compounded by prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination associated with race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, or other cultural factors.

### Types of Stigma

- ❖ Public stigma refers to negative stereotypes or discriminatory attitudes endorsed by the general public about mental health conditions
- ❖ Self-stigma refers to individuals internalizing public stigma about mental illness,

often resulting in shame and negative self-perceptions

- ❖ Stigma by association or affiliate stigma refers to prejudice or discrimination extended to close friends or family associated with individuals with mental illness
- ❖ Structural stigma reflects social and institutional policies that limit opportunities for people with mental health concerns

Examples of Trauma Stereotypes and Prejudice: People with mental health concerns are dangerous, incompetent, to blame for their disorder, unpredictable

Examples of Trauma Discrimination: People with mental health concerns are undeserving of benefits and quality care

*Adapted from Corrigan, et al.*

## Stigma and Avoidance of Treatment for Trauma

Multiple research studies demonstrate that stigma prevents people from seeking treatment from mental health professionals or contributes to people ending treatment prematurely. Less than half of the adults in the U.S. who need services and treatment get the help they need.

Stigma may worsen isolation, guilt, and shame which are common in many mental health conditions associated with trauma, like depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Stigma and discrimination can also worsen mental health conditions in several ways. First, stigma itself may contribute to worsening symptoms. A comprehensive [review](#) of research demonstrates that self-stigma leads to negative effects on recovery among people diagnosed with psychiatric diagnoses:

In addition to contributing to mental health symptoms, stigma also plays a significant role in delaying or preventing people from getting treatment.

Some negative effects attributed to stigma include:

- ❖ Reduced hope
- ❖ Decrease in self-esteem
- ❖ Increase in mental health symptoms
- ❖ Difficulties with social relationships
- ❖ Reduced likelihood of completing treatment
- ❖ Increased difficulties at work

Stigma regarding mental health problems disproportionately affects care seeking in communities of color. People from racial/ethnic minority groups are less likely to receive mental health care for multiple reasons, which may include public, self, and structural stigma.

Racial/ethnic minority youth with behavioral health issues are more frequently referred to the juvenile justice system than to specialty healthcare, compared with white youth. Mental health problems are common among people in the criminal justice system, which has a disproportionate representation of racial/ ethnic minorities.

Black and Latinx youth, disproportionately affected by trauma and community violence, are less likely to participate in mental health services. Youth who are most likely to be exposed to trauma are the least likely to receive the services that could offset its effects.

In addition to limited availability or access to culturally informed trauma focused treatments, many members of diverse communities experience stigma against mental health conditions and treatments. Asian Americans are among the least likely to seek mental health treatment, despite similar rates of mental health concerns as other individuals. This is in part due to public and self-stigma in communities of color, and in part due to structural stigma experienced by these communities related to institutions and systems of healthcare.

## Social Consequences of Stigma

Stigma has significant social and economic consequences, leading to shrinking social networks, exposure to bullying or discrimination, or limitations in career development.

Some social consequences of stigma include:

- ❖ Social isolation or limited ability to form strong social networks
- ❖ Lack of understanding by family, friends, coworkers, or others
- ❖ Considered as an "other" or being alienated
- ❖ Fewer opportunities for work or social activities
- ❖ Being misunderstood as irresponsible or inability to make their own decisions
- ❖ Exposure to bullying, physical violence, or harassment
- ❖ Perception as being dangerous
- ❖ Less likely to be hired or promoted

- ❖ Less likely to get safe housing
- ❖ More likely to be criminalized than offered health care services
- ❖ Fear of rejection or low self-perception preventing pursuit of new opportunities
- ❖ Reluctance to seek help when referred due to fear of rejection or job loss

*Source: Adapted from Mayo Clinic and National Alliance for Mental Illness*

In addition, here are steps Mayo Clinic recommends to cope with stigma:

### **Get treatment.**

You may be reluctant to admit you need treatment. Don't let the fear of being labeled with a mental illness prevent you from seeking help. Treatment can provide relief by identifying what's wrong and reducing symptoms that interfere with your work and personal life.

### **Don't let stigma create self-doubt and shame.**

Stigma doesn't just come from others. You may mistakenly believe that your condition is a sign of personal weakness or that you should be able to control it without help. Seeking counseling, educating yourself about your condition and connecting with others who have mental illness can help you gain self-esteem and overcome destructive self-judgment.

### **Don't isolate yourself.**

If you have a mental illness, you may be reluctant to tell anyone about it. Your family, friends, clergy or members of your community can offer you support if they know about your mental illness. Reach out to people you trust for the compassion, support and understanding you need.

### **Don't equate yourself with your illness.**

You are not an illness. So instead of saying "I'm bipolar," say "I have bipolar disorder." Instead of calling yourself "a schizophrenic," say "I have schizophrenia."

## Join a support group.

Some local and national groups, such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), offer local programs and internet resources that help reduce stigma by educating people who have mental illness, their families and the general public. Some state and federal agencies and programs, such as those that focus on vocational rehabilitation and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), offer support for people with mental illness.

## Get help at school.

If you or your child has a mental illness that affects learning, find out what plans and programs might help. Discrimination against students because of a mental illness is against the law, and educators at primary, secondary and college levels are required to accommodate students as best they can. Talk to teachers, professors or administrators about the best approach and resources. If a teacher doesn't know about a student's disability, it can lead to discrimination, barriers to learning and poor grades.

## Speak out against stigma.

Consider expressing your opinions at events, in letters to the editor or on the internet. It can help instill courage in others facing similar challenges and educate the public about mental illness.

## WREP RESOURCE BRIEF 5:

### Overcoming Community Violence

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The prevalence and ongoing threat of violent crime in communities affects the health and emotional well-being of those who live in them.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network defines Community Violence as “interpersonal violence committed in public areas by individuals who are not intimately related to the victim”. This may include fights, shootings, or ongoing conflicts between groups.

In neighborhoods with high levels of violence, it is not uncommon for residents to have been injured, witnessed shootings, or lost a loved one to violent death. These experiences can lead to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) at rates comparable to those seen in combat veterans. Whether or not violent episodes lead to the development of PTSD, living with the ongoing threat of violence has a pervasive effect on people’s day-to-day lives and functioning.

Anyone who is physically injured, witnesses violent episodes, or has friends or loved ones killed or injured, must then every day navigate unsafe areas that are constant reminders of traumatic events. Even when directly unscathed by such events, individuals may frequently worry about their own safety and that of their loved ones.

PTSD and other common trauma reactions can make meeting business demands a complex challenge, especially when working in areas where there is ongoing violence. In order to meet the demands of daily life, work, and relationships, it is natural for people to avoid thinking about trauma or to numb their feelings.

Although people may appear unaffected or minimize the impact of violence or traumatic loss, it is important to remember that one carries these experiences with

them. Past trauma continues to shape how people perceive and respond to what is happening around them in the present.

Despite the fact that neighborhood violence has a major impact on individuals, families, and communities, most areas struggling with high levels of violence have inadequate resources in many domains, including a dearth of support and services to help residents cope with the trauma of the violence around them. Due to this lack of support and the tendency we all have to avoid talking about trauma, many people feel that they must deal with the stress of violence on their own.

Individual effects of community violence like those described above are common and cause significant distress, but it is important to remember that high levels of violence also do not occur in a vacuum. Violence is highest in racially and economically segregated areas where residents must also cope with the effects of historical trauma and the intergenerational legacy of racism.

Individual traumas and their effects interact with forces of systemic or structural violence (e.g., mass incarceration; lack of accessible health care/mental health care; lack of opportunities to earn a living wage) to create a vicious cycle that perpetuates violence and undermines the community fabric.

When dealing with the effects of community violence, it is important to understand that, in addition to the impact of past experiences, many people are also dealing with ongoing conflict and violence in their neighborhoods, or Continuous Traumatic Stress.

Trauma experts in South Africa developed the concept of Continuous Traumatic Stress (CTS) to describe the psychological impact of living in conditions in which there is a realistic threat of present and future danger, rather than only experiences of past traumatic events (a distinction to the “post” in PTSD).

Realistic current and ongoing dangers can be political or civil conflict, or pervasive community violence. Many people also face additional threats of harm from systems of oppression, such as mass incarceration and the possibility of police violence.

The CTS framework recognizes that people who experience such stress often lack safe places to heal or recover. Therefore, people need to develop coping strategies to help them function within realistic conditions of ongoing danger as well as advocate for changes to the conditions causing the ongoing traumatic stress.

## Common Reactions to Community Violence & Continuous Traumatic Stress

In unsupportive environments, trauma reactions and grief related to traumatic loss can lead to difficulties in daily functioning, such as getting along with others, or meeting the demands of daily life.

People affected by violence may struggle in one or more of the following ways (excerpted from trauma self-care):

### COGNITIVE

- Difficulty remembering things
- Hard time making decisions and planning
- Trouble concentrating, paying attention, or following complex directions
- Threatened assumptions (that the world is not safe or less safe than before)
- Intrusive thoughts

### PSYCHOLOGICAL

- Feeling helpless, hopeless or powerless
- Feelings of guilt or shame (e.g., survivor guilt)
- Anxiety about performance or interaction with others
- Grief/numbness
- Increased substance use

### PHYSICAL

- Fatigue/change in sleep habits
- Eating/appetite problems
- Headaches
- Startle reactions

### SPIRITUAL

- Loss of faith
- Spiritual doubts
- Withdrawal from church community
- Despair

### RELATIONAL

- Withdrawing from others
- Alienation from friends, family, co-workers who "don't understand"
- Difficulty trusting others
- False or distorted generalizations about others



Not everyone who is affected by community violence will respond or cope in the same way. Despite differences in what individuals may have experienced or how they reacted, there are common strategies, typically used in psychotherapies, that can be universally implemented to help manage trauma-related thoughts, feelings, and reactions.

After trauma and violence, it is natural to want to avoid thinking and talking about what has happened. As a result, violence can lead to isolation and the feeling that, “I need to handle it on my own.”

One of the most important factors in cultivating a supportive environment is directly acknowledging trauma that has occurred or is occurring and understanding that many people have gone through similar experiences.

## Validating

Emotional validation is the process of learning about, understanding, and expressing acceptance of one’s emotional experience. Regardless of whether or not you actually agree with the content, you are genuinely respecting the legitimate expression of these feelings, rather than being marginalizing or dismissive. This may be done through interactions with others, or even just accepting your own feelings as valid.

## Prioritize Safety

Feeling physically, socially, or emotionally unsafe may cause extreme anxiety and/or depression in a person who has experienced trauma, potentially causing re-traumatization. Therefore, creating a safe environment is fundamental to business success.

*Internal Sense of Safety:* Employ relaxation techniques, often accompanied by guided imagery of places that represent safety.

*External Safe Spaces:* In the context of community violence, it is useful to map out what parts of your environment you can afford to engage in activities without being “on guard” and to also map out external safe spaces you can occupy and relax.

*Social-Emotional Environment:* To avoid or minimize re-traumatization, attending to your own social and emotional needs is important to promote safety.

Examples include maintaining interpersonal boundaries and managing conflict appropriately; keeping consistent schedules and procedures; and maintaining communication that is consistent, open, respectful, and compassionate.

*Real Danger vs. Trauma Reminder:* Many people who experience continuous traumatic stress have difficulty distinguishing between real and perceived danger because they are in a state of constant hyperarousal. Ongoing trauma tends to reinforce clients' distortions or unhelpful thoughts about safety. Challenging unhelpful thoughts can help you better differentiate between real and perceived danger.

## Self- Care

Take care of yourself by practicing healthy coping strategies in order to prevent normal, though challenging, reactions from progressing into mental health concerns.

- ❖ Turn off the news: Limit news consumption. Whether one watches, listens to, or reads the news, being overexposed to it can cause negative emotions to resurface and increase stress and anxiety.
- ❖ Talk to others: Reach out to your support system. Talk about the event and your reaction to it if you want to, though the most important thing is to spend time with friends and family and stay connected to other people. The compassion and support you receive from those who care about you helps to maintain a sense of well-being.
- ❖ Balance your perspective: Distressing events can leave you with a negative outlook towards the world around you. Take some time to think about the positive moments, events, and people in your life. Doing so can help counteract negative thinking and balance your perspective.
- ❖ Get some sleep: Lack of sleep can have an adverse effect on your physical and mental wellbeing even when life is going well. Aim to keep a sleep schedule that will provide you with an adequate amount of sleep every night. Limit screen time and create a soothing environment. Keep electronics away from your bedroom and create a cool, dark, and clean atmosphere. If you experience sleeplessness, try applying some relaxation techniques.
- ❖ Practice relaxation: Taking deep breaths, listening to soothing music, or meditating can reduce your stress and anxiety, and promote relaxation. You can

even try active relaxation techniques, such as taking a walk, stretching, or practicing yoga.

- ❖ Engage in physical activity: Make exercise part of your lifestyle. A regular fitness routine not only builds your physical resilience and strength, but it can also burn away stress hormones and promote the release of endorphins that make you feel good.
- ❖ Do something positive and meaningful: Try to schedule an activity that you look forward to each day or find ways that you can help in your community. Volunteering and helping those in need is an excellent way of making a positive difference and will help you feel better too.
- ❖ Routines and Rituals: Routines and rituals provide a sense of safety, predictability, and consistency. It allows individuals to have a sense of control in a chaotic world. Think about your common routines (exercising, going for walks) and rituals (e.g., spiritual care, daily affirmations) and establish a plan to implement or maintain routines and rituals.

## Problem Solving

Problem-solving is a basic coping strategy. When done correctly, it can help you experience a greater sense of control and predictability with regard to a problem. As a result, stress and anxiety may be reduced. There are five steps to problem-solving:

- ❖ Identify the Problem: The first step in solving a problem is to recognize what the problem is. This might sound like common sense; however, this is a very important step. Describe the problem as objectively as possible, as opposed to focusing on the potential consequences or implications of the problem. This can give you a better sense of what you are specifically dealing with.
- ❖ Define and Analyze the Problem: In this step, you will need to figure out what caused the problem, what the problem looks like at this moment and the urgency of addressing the problem. You will also need to learn as much as you can about the problem. Do research on the problem. Look at the problem from different perspectives. Evaluate all of the different ways in which the problem could impact you.
- ❖ Generate Potential Solutions: Brainstorm and come up with as many solutions as possible for the problem. Be creative and don't focus at this point on how feasible

the solutions may be. List a number of different options to choose from. This process of generating solutions can also help you look at the problem from multiple perspectives. Keep in mind that it may be impossible to address all areas of a problem. When this is the case, break the problem down and try to generate solutions for parts of the problem (as opposed to the problem as a whole).

❖ **Decision-Making:** In this step, evaluate the solutions that came up in the previous step. Weigh the short and long-term pros and cons of each solution. In addition, in this step, start to evaluate how feasible each solution is. That is, how easily can you implement the solution to the problem?

❖ **Implement a Solution and Evaluate its Success:** In this final step, choose a solution and implement it. Act. In choosing a solution, weigh the pros and cons of each potential solution. It is generally a good idea to start out with a solution that is associated with low risk and that is compatible with your priorities and future goals. Once the solution has been implemented, evaluate how it was and was not successful. If the solution did not completely address the problem, then move back through some of the different stages to address other areas of the problem or pick another solution to implement.

### **Build, Enhance, or Restore Social Support Networks**

Social support is a crucial factor in reducing the impact of trauma. In the case of post trauma and CTS, it is evident that broader relational networks are generally non-functional for a range of reasons and that trusting others and one's environment have been severely compromised, not only through direct violations but also through the failure of designated social structures to prevent, protect and sanction.

It is important to encourage the (re)building of social relationships and networks based on what is environmentally possible and appropriate. Not only are such relationships likely to alleviate isolation and reduce time for rumination of anxious or negative thoughts, but they may normalize through shared confirmation of difficulties and perceptions and may create the possibility of collective agency in some instances.

**Making contact** with others can help reduce feelings of distress.

**Children and adolescents** can benefit from spending some time with other similar-age peers.

**Connections** can be with family, friends, or others who are coping with the same traumatic event.

## CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

# Seeking Social Support

## Social Support Options

- Spouse or partner
- Trusted family member
- Close friend
- Priest, Rabbi, or other clergy
- Doctor or nurse
- Crisis counselor or other counselor
- Support group
- Co-worker
- Pet

## Do ...

- Decide carefully whom to talk to
- Decide ahead of time what you want to discuss
- Choose the right time and place
- Start by talking about practical things
- Let others know you need to talk or just to be with them
- Talk about painful thoughts and feelings when you're ready
- Ask others if it's a good time to talk
- Tell others you appreciate them listening
- Tell others what you need or how they could help—one main thing that would help you right now

## Don't ...

- Keep quiet because you don't want to upset others
- Keep quiet because you're worried about being a burden
- Assume that others don't want to listen
- Wait until you're so stressed or exhausted that you can't fully benefit from help

## Ways to Get Connected

- Calling friends or family on the phone
- Increasing contact with existing acquaintances and friends
- Renewing or beginning involvement in church, synagogue, or other religious group activities
- Getting involved with a support group
- Getting involved in community recovery activities



# Be Your Own Advocate

Advocate for your own safety and well-being.

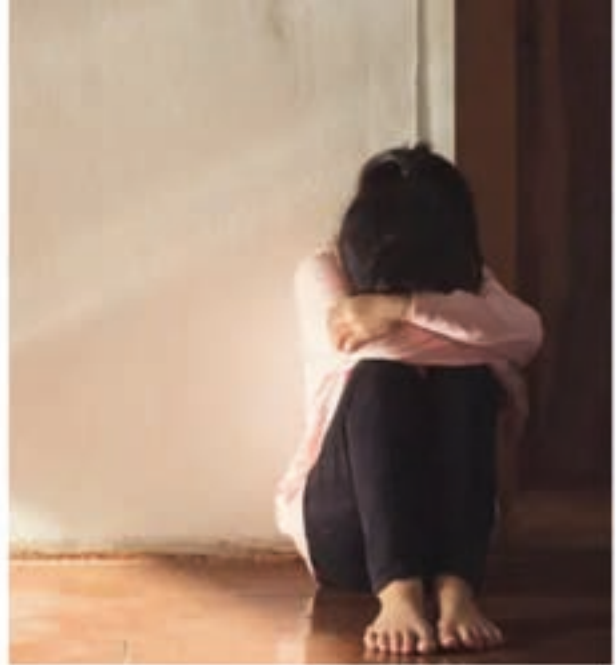
Advocacy efforts may vary in different settings and can include:

- ❖ Learn how to gain access to services (e.g., educational, health, shelter, food, sanitation, etc.)
- ❖ Identify a list of organizations that provide different social services or spiritual care
- ❖ Engage in and supporting social justice efforts that prevent violence and promote equity, in health, education, employment opportunities, etc.

## 5 Key Messages to Support Community Violence Trauma Recovery

1. It is not happening now.
2. You are safe here.
3. What's inside you (thoughts, feelings, dreams, impulses) cannot harm you or others.
4. You are good. Whatever you have had to do to survive, you are a good, strong person who can contribute to your community.
5. You have a future.

# FATE STORY: Understanding childhood trauma as an adult



**(NATIONAL) We're born, we grow up. Simple, right? When it comes to the brain, not so much. The brain is the most complex organ within the human body, and the development of lifelong systems begins even before we are born.**

It's said that this time in the womb as well as a child's first three years are the most crucial to brain development, affecting all future learning, behavior, and health. The human brain doesn't finish developing until mid-to-late 20s.

Trauma, described by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) as an event or circumstance resulting in physical harm, emotional harm and/or life-threatening harm, hinders brain development in children.

When it comes to childhood trauma, it's important to consider the needs a child has in those formative years to better understand types of events that might register as traumatic in the young brain. Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist, created a widely accepted theory known as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs that categorizes those needs into different levels.

Maslow's five areas of need build upon one another. They include Physiological needs (at the bottom), Safety needs, Belongingness, Esteem, and Self-Actualization (at the top). When one or more of these is not met, the functioning of an individual suffers. When one or more of these is not met in childhood, it disrupts healthy development.

Physiological needs refer to basic needs for survival. This includes food, water, shelter, and clothing. It also includes clean breathing air and adequate sleep.

Children growing up in poverty often go without one or more of these needs. Unfortunately, without these basic needs, it can be very difficult for a child to focus on the learning process at school. Their young brains are more concerned about basic survival.

Safety needs refer to feeling physically and emotionally safe in an environment, as well as having good health. For a child growing up in a physically or emotionally abusive environment, their learning abilities might be limited because their brain is in survival mode. A child who experiences chronic illness might also feel unsafe in their own body, which can result in medical or health trauma and can create a belief that one cannot even rely on their own body.

While these basic needs are at the bottom of the hierarchy, confidence is second to the top. Learning is considered to be at the very top. In addition to other adverse health effects, a child living with current or unresolved trauma, not having their basic needs met, may adopt the belief they are unintelligent because they're unable to grasp certain concepts, or hit developmental milestones. This child could then grow up limiting themselves because they don't believe they have the ability to pursue or achieve certain things, when in actuality their young brain was really experiencing the trauma of not having their basic needs met.

Belongingness, the center of the hierarchy, refers to belonging in a relationship. For children, this starts with the type of relationship and attachment they have with their initial caregivers. When a child doesn't feel loved, secure, and safe with their initial caregivers, it creates trust issues in developing other relationships with peers, teachers, and other community members. As the child grows and becomes an adult, it can make healthy, secure friendships and intimate relationships difficult to establish.

Esteem refers to the esteem of oneself. This oftentimes is boosted when achievements are made and confidence levels are up. There is a strong correlation between being able to problem solve and having healthy self-esteem. Children who are not allowed to explore and pursue their own solutions to problems can be left feeling inadequate or incapable, which can keep them from trying new things and pursuing areas of interest they might otherwise be interested in.

Self-Actualization, the top of the hierarchy, refers to the awareness someone has of themselves. It includes an understanding of how someone thinks, feels, behaves, and aids in better decision making in life. This level is where people have the ability to explore and develop their morals and pursue creative endeavors. Without the previous needs being met, this stage is extremely difficult to experience.

Thankfully, people whose childhoods lacked in any of these areas are not resigned to experiencing difficulty for the rest of their lives. It's true that lacking in any of these areas can make things more difficult, but that doesn't have to be the end of the story. Through awareness and active dedication to change, it is possible to heal and resolve areas of trauma created by lack of needs being met.



# Adverse Childhood Experiences

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have a tremendous impact on future violence victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunity. These potentially traumatic experiences occur in childhood and adolescence and may include issues like:

- ❖ experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect
- ❖ witnessing violence in the home or community and
- ❖ having a family member attempt or die by suicide.

Other factors related to the child's environment that undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding such as growing up in a house with substance misuse, mental health problems, and instability due to parental separation or household members being in jail or prison are other types of ACEs.

Overall, ACEs are relatively common in the general population.

ACEs are associated with lasting, negative effects on health and wellbeing, including future mental health problems, chronic disease, the capacity to form healthy relationships, develop stable work history, and navigate socio-economic challenges.

## Adverse Childhood Experiences (“ACEs”) Questionnaire



## WREP RESOURCE BRIEF 6:

### Helping Yourself As You Help Others

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Professionals who work with high-needs and underserved populations with exposure to trauma are vulnerable to indirect or secondary trauma.

This is also known as vicarious traumatization (VT) or Compassion Fatigue (CF).

People who work with trauma survivors with openness, engagement, and empathy are usually extraordinarily committed to others and feel responsible for helping them by alleviating their distress and addressing their many needs. VT/CF is a form of empathic strain and an unfortunate byproduct of working with trauma survivors.

When trauma providers experience VT/CF, they may report symptoms that are similar to those reported by their clients including intrusive images, physiological reactivity, relational disruptions, and difficulties with emotion regulation.

Indirect trauma may negatively impact individuals as well as their families, friends, and clients. Therefore, it is necessary for you to be aware of your risk of VT/CF and its implications for burnout, difficulties setting boundaries, and potential disillusionment at your job, the world, and the future.

What can you do? Your investment in your profession is a gift to the people you serve. However, in order to continue to do this very important and potentially exhausting work, it is important to take care of yourself.

The best metaphor is the instruction to put on your own oxygen mask on a plane before you help the person in the seat next to you. If you don't attend to your own emotional and physical health, you will not be able to provide appropriate care for your clients without significant costs to yourself.

## Components of Service Provider Self-Care

1. Acknowledge and name problems, then solve them.
2. Recognize and emotionally validate your responses to your work.
3. Attend to your basic needs: Diet, exercise, sleep, rest, medical care, and down time.
4. Prioritize your relationships outside work: Family, friends, pets, and others.
5. Have interests outside work: Hobbies, spirituality, sports/fitness, music, art, crafts, volunteering, etc.
6. It takes a village! Find people who support you personally and professionally. Colleagues, supervisors, and consultants will understand the challenges of your job.
7. Get adequate training, consultation, and supervision for the hard work you do!
8. Make services all about YOU!
9. Find hope and meaning in your life—you will bring these elements into the lives of others.

## Professional Quality of Life Measure



# OPTIMAL ENTREPRENEUR CHARACTER

Every day is a new day to build stronger foundations.

01

## Foundation #1: Trustworthiness

Be honest

Be reliable

Do what you say you will do

Have the courage to do the right thing

Build a good reputation

02

## Foundation #2: Respect

Treat others with respect

Respect differences

Use appropriate language

Be considerate of the feelings of others

Deal peacefully with conflict and anger

03

## Foundation #3: Responsibility

Do what you are responsible for

Always do your best

Be self-disciplined

Think before you act

Consider the consequences of your actions

04

## Foundation #4: Fairness

Be open-minded

Listen to others

Don't blame carelessly

05

## Foundation #5: Caring

Be considerate

Show that you care

Express gratitude

Help others

## WREP RESOURCE BRIEF 7:

### Building Confidence and Self-Esteem

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# Building yourself up is an important aspect of successful entrepreneurship.

Experiencing trauma often results in poor self-esteem and lack of confidence.

#### **What is self-esteem?**

It is important to understand the concept of self-esteem, which is defined by the Oxford dictionary as “confidence in one’s own abilities.”

Self-esteem, often referred to as self-worth or self-respect, is experienced in many domains across an individual’s life and is a valuable psychological resource. Like most things, self-esteem in moderation is essential.

Individuals who overestimate their own importance and confidence may be seen as grandiose, excessively self-focused, and exploitative.

Too little self-esteem leaves one vulnerable to experiences of doubt, depression, anxiety, and to make choices that further create situations associated with helplessness, powerlessness, and worthlessness.

A healthy sense of self-esteem, therefore, is balanced— individuals have accurate and realistic perceptions of themselves and their own abilities, essential for success during your entrepreneurship journey.

#### **What is Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy?**

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is rooted in the idea that how we view a situation (thoughts) influences how we feel (emotions), what we do (behaviors), and what we experience in our bodies (physical sensations).

As an entrepreneur, you can use CBT to feel better about yourself and your capabilities.

## Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy Steps

**Automatic Thoughts:** CBT highlights that it is not the situation itself that causes emotions and behaviors, but rather how we interpret a situation. When we focus on thoughts that are not realistic and based on evidence, we are more prone to experience negative emotions and engage in maladaptive behaviors.

Therefore, the first step in CBT is to look at the thoughts that just pop into your head in any given situation, referred to as “automatic thoughts.” When something happens, ask yourself: “What is going through my mind?” The answer to this question will help you identify your thoughts and understand their impact on your emotions, behaviors, and physical sensations.

**Cognitive Distortions:** Once you have identified these thoughts, the next step is to evaluate those thoughts. Realistic thoughts are based on evidence. Often, we have negative thoughts that are merely predictions of the future, even if we don’t really know that these events might in fact, occur (e.g., “I’m going to mess this up”).

Research and clinical practice have demonstrated that these unrealistic negative thoughts, especially in stressful or distressing situations, are not usually based in logic or reason. These systematic errors in processing information are defined as “cognitive distortions” or “thinking errors.”

**Cognitive Restructuring:** Once we recognize that our thoughts are distorted, we can adapt these thoughts in order to reflect more realistic thinking patterns. This process is called cognitive restructuring and is one of the most basic techniques in CBT. The quickest way to restructure a thought is to ask yourself: “Is this a thought or a fact?”

If a thought is not a fact, it is likely that the thought is not based on evidence or reality, but rather, is an opinion or a judgment. You will then have the opportunity to reframe the thought so that it is based on evidence.

For example: “Ugh...tomorrow’s Monday, I’ll never make it through the week!” is a thought, not a fact. Restructuring this thought might look like this: “It’s hard to go back to work after a weekend and I have a busy week ahead.”

❖ Remember, that we are not trying to replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts, but to reframe negative thoughts so that they are more realistic.

There are different ways to restructure thoughts. A powerful and appropriate restructured thought is one that is short, believable, realistic, and based on evidence. Focusing on restructured thoughts will usually decrease the intensity of negative emotions in a particular situation.

The goal of CBT is not to get rid of negative emotions. All emotions, positive and negative, are necessary and have functions. Even negative emotions have value, teach us important things about life and what is important to us, and prepare us for the future. For example, if someone is anxious about not doing a good job, this anxious energy motivates them to work hard.

### How can we apply CBT principles and strategies to self-esteem?

Self-esteem inherently reflects the way that we view ourselves. These perceptions are derived from many sources including, but not limited to our own past experiences, the way we view situations in general, how we experience other people's abilities and motivations, and our expectations for the future.

Thus, self-esteem is reflected in how we approach the world in terms of our perceptions of our own worth and how we anticipate coping with negative situations and adversity. Self-esteem is evident in thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

### Additional strategies to improve self-esteem and build confidence

*Self-Monitoring:* Tracking your thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and physical sensations in situations you experience as distressing. The first step in changing thoughts is to recognize when they occur and to understand their impact on emotions and behaviors. Sample thought logs may be found online.  
[http://infosheets.mindovermood.com/08\\_ThoughtRecord7Col\\_PersonalUseOnly.pdf](http://infosheets.mindovermood.com/08_ThoughtRecord7Col_PersonalUseOnly.pdf)

*Behavior Activation:* Change the way you feel by changing your behavior. The problem with avoidance is that it is often helpful in the short run (i.e., if you avoid something that causes you to feel anxious, you feel less anxious!), but becomes more problematic in the long-term (i.e., your life becomes more limited and the consequences of avoidance of necessary activities become more serious). Instead, create more positive routines and stick to them.

*Graded Task Assignment:* Sometimes, when a task is very complex and challenging, it is so overwhelming that it is difficult to know where to even start. Graded task assignment involves breaking a large task down into smaller components that are more manageable. Addressing these components one at a time builds a sense of mastery and competence and improves self-esteem. Remember: One step at a time! And with every step, you are closer to your goal than when you started.

*Mindfulness:* No matter how chaotic your life appears; you can always start with mindfulness. When you feel overwhelmed, take a moment to breathe deeply. Count 1-2-3 as you inhale, count 4-5-6 as you hold your breath, and count 7-8-9-10 as you exhale. Repeat this exercise 5 times. As you focus on your breath, don't be discouraged if your mind wanders...just gently bring it back to the counting and the sensation of breathing. You can use mindfulness in many other forms. For example, think of 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, and 3 things you can hear. Mindfulness engages all your senses in the present moment. Practice, practice, practice!

*Acceptance:* Negative internal states are a normal part of life. Pain is therefore inevitable. When we combine pain with lack of acceptance, we experience suffering. Before we can manage pain, we first need to acknowledge its existence. Acceptance involves being open to your experiences, both positive and negative, and often goes hand-in-hand with mindfulness.

*Values:* Think about the most important aspects of your life. Why do we do what we do? What matters? How and why do we keep going when things are difficult? The answers to these questions lie in your values. Living a life that is consistent with your values makes difficult experiences more tolerable and increases your sense of meaning and resilience.

*Self-compassion:* Before we can be compassionate with others, we must learn to be kind and compassionate to ourselves. Adjust your expectations! Cut yourself some slack! Forget about perfectionism! Ask for help and support from the people who care about you. Model this behavior for others and remember that self-compassion is a lifelong practice.

*Gratitude:* It is easy to lose track of the many blessings we have during challenging times. Creating a culture of gratitude and expressing it boosts your health, improves your relationships, and is a gift that keeps on giving! The next time you thank someone, further explain what you are thanking them for...explicitly practicing gratitude is a learned behavior.





✓ Learn More

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