

THE TRAUMA STORY POCKET CARD

The Trauma Story is the centerpiece of healing the visible and invisible wounds of violence and traumatic life experiences.

- 1. CENTRALITY OF THE TRAUMA STORY:** The universal experience of tragedy, including the suffering associated with grief, illness, and violent events.
- 2. COMMON MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS:** Depression, grief, anxiety, insomnia, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and traumatic brain injuries are often associated with traumatic life experiences.
- 3. COMMON PHYSICAL PROBLEMS:** “The body is impacted by history”, e.g., over 25 medical diagnoses (e.g., pelvic pain, infertility, infection) are associated with sexual violence and abuse.
- 4. PRIMARY HEALTH CARE IS ESSENTIAL:** Routine appointments with your primary care doctor(s) can help identify and treat health problems stemming from trauma.
- 5. EARLY HEALTH PROMOTION IS NECESSARY:** The ACE (Adverse Childhood Events) studies and HPRT studies reveal the serious long-term chronic diseases associated with trauma.
- 6. HUMILIATION:** The major instrument of violence used to create the state of humiliation, including feelings of shame, guilt, betrayal, uncleanness, and loss of dignity.
- 7. “LOSING THE WORLD”:** Everything the survivor is taught to be morally correct is “turned upside down”. They become a “stranger in a strange world”.
- 8. CULTURAL ANNIHILATION:** Major goal of mass violence, war, and ethnic conflict is to eliminate the person, their family, their community, and their society.
- 9. LISTENING TO THE TRAUMA STORY IS A KEY TO HEALING: USE THE NEXT STEPS AS A GUIDE...**
 - a. STEP 1 - TIMING:** Go slowly; Do not try to “dig up buried treasure”. Wait until trust is established.
 - b. STEP 2 - “A LITTLE BIT, A LOT, OVER A LONG PERIOD OF TIME”:** The *Trauma Story* can be told in brief, small pieces (e.g.,

10 minutes or less each session) consistently over time.

- c. STEP 3 - DEEP LISTENING:** Listen closely to the conversation, as well as the silence. Pay attention to the body’s reaction to the storytelling; monitor the empathic response.
 - d. STEP 4 - EMPATHIC REGULATION:** Begin storytelling session with deep breathing which calms the listener and storyteller; monitor empathic distress; cool high emotional arousal down by taking a break or do more deep breathing.
 - e. STEP 5 - AVOID THE TOXIC TRAUMA STORY:** Stay away from the telling of brutal facts with high emotional arousal.
 - f. STEP 6 - CREATE A NEW POSITIVE NARRATIVE:** The healer (listener) can assist the survivor (storyteller) in creating a new positive and hopeful worldview together.
- 10. BUILD ON SELF-HEALING:** The survivor is the teacher; the healer is the student. Create and build on self-healing and self-care efforts.
 - 11. RECOMMEND AND SUPPORT:** Altruism, work/school, social connectedness, and spirituality – are major key factors for resiliency and wellness.
 - 12. HEAL THE PHYSICAL BODY:** Promote yoga, meditation, mindfulness, deep breathing, walking, exercise, and massage.
 - 13. USE THE HEALING POWER OF NATURE:** Recommend connecting with nature, plants, and animals; Take up gardening or caring for houseplants.
 - 14. NO HEALING WITHOUT JUSTICE:** Explore what justice is possible and obtainable.
 - 15. NO HEALING WITHOUT BEAUTY:** Engage beauty at all levels of storytelling and reflection; See the beauty in the healing journey; Healing activities include poetry, haiku-writing, reflective writing, singing, making music, dance, visual arts and more.

Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma

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