

Trauma can change how the brain and body detect danger, respond to stress, and recover.

These changes are not a sign of weakness—they are survival responses.

Understanding how trauma works can reduce self-blame and open the door to healing.

1 What happens in the brain



Amygdala (alarm system): Acts like a smoke detector. It reacts quickly to danger and can set off strong fear or threat responses.



Hippocampus (memory & time): Helps organize memories and put experiences in order. Trauma can disrupt this, making memories feel scattered or “stuck.”



Prefrontal cortex (thinking & planning): Helps with focus, decision-making, problem-solving, and impulse control. Under stress, this area can go “offline,” making it harder to think clearly.

2 What happens in the body



Common trauma responses include racing heart, muscle tension, shallow breathing, stomach upset, startle response, numbness, shutdown, or feeling on edge.

Survival responses (automatic, protective):

- **Fight:** When the body prepares to confront danger.
- **Flight:** When the body tries to escape danger.
- **Freeze:** When the body becomes still to survive.
- **Fawn:** When the body tries to please or appease to stay safe.
- **Shutdown:** When the body shuts down to conserve energy and protect.

3 Why trauma symptoms can continue



The nervous system may keep acting as if danger is still present—even after the event is over. Triggers can reactivate old alarms, leading to intrusive memories, sleep problems, irritability, concentration issues, and emotional overwhelm.

4 How healing happens



Healing happens in a safe environment. It involves safety, regulation, supportive relationships, therapy, and repeated calming experiences that help the nervous system learn that you are safe.

Helpful tools include grounding, slow breathing, movement, healthy routines, EMDR/trauma-informed therapy, and faith-sensitive support when requested.

5 A simple regulation practice

Name – Notice – Next



Name: “My body is reacting to stress.”



Notice: “What am I feeling in my body right now?”



Next: “What is one safe, helpful step I can take?”

6 When to seek more support



Consider professional help if trauma symptoms interfere with sleep, work, school, relationships, parenting, or daily functioning.



If there is immediate risk of harm, call or text 988 in the U.S. or contact emergency services.



You are not alone. Your body is doing its best to protect you. With the right support, healing is possible—and your nervous system can learn safety again.