How Trauma Affects You: Finding a Path to Healing

Do nightmares wake you up at night? Does a sound make your stomach lurch? Does the sight of someone who reminds you of a person who hurt you flood you with panic? If so, you may be struggling with trauma, but you're not alone. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), nearly 64 percent of U.S. adults have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE). Trauma can negatively affect how you manage emotions, respond to stress, and form relationships. Here are four ways to better understand trauma and find a path to healing.

1. **Understand how trauma affects your mind and body.** If you struggle with trauma, you may feel anxious and constantly on guard. It may be hard to concentrate. There are times when you might feel emotionally numb. Your muscles may feel tense. You may have difficulty sleeping or startle easily.
2. **Recognize your trauma responses and emotional triggers**. You may go through life having a fight, flight, freeze, or fawn response. For example, a fight response may be getting angry. A flight response may be avoiding confrontations. A freeze response may be feeling shut down. Finally, a fawn response may be trying to please others.
3. **Get rid of guilt, shame, and other negative self-beliefs.** Understand that what happened to you does not have to define you. Recognize any false self-beliefs that you may have and replace them with God's truth. For example, if you've always told yourself, "I'm unworthy of love," you can tell yourself, "I'm worthy of love because God has made me worthy."

   "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." —Romans 5:8 (NIV)
4. **Learn to manage trauma triggers.** Your trauma—if left unaddressed—can affect your relationships. The first step is to notice when it triggers your body and emotions. Ask yourself, "Where do I feel it in my body?" Then consider another question such as, "What do I need to feel safe in my relationships?" It may be that you need to feel more secure. Find someone safe and share your needs with them. You might say, "I feel anxious when…happens, and I need… from you to feel secure." By bringing your needs into a safe relationship, you will begin to heal.

Struggling With Trauma? Call 800-NEW-LIFE (639-5433) to Find a Counselor.