

story informed trauma therapy

Story Informed Trauma Therapy: Healing Through Narrative and Understanding

story informed trauma therapy is an innovative approach to healing that recognizes the profound power of personal narratives in processing traumatic experiences. Unlike traditional trauma therapies that may focus primarily on symptoms or behavioral changes, this method encourages individuals to explore, understand, and reshape the stories they tell about their trauma. By doing so, it allows for a deeper connection with one's emotions and memories, facilitating meaningful healing and resilience.

In today's mental health landscape, trauma therapy continues to evolve, integrating various modalities to address complex psychological wounds. Story informed trauma therapy stands out by blending the art of storytelling with clinical techniques, offering a compassionate and personalized pathway to recovery. Let's delve into what this therapy entails, why it's effective, and how it can be a valuable tool for those navigating the aftermath of trauma.

What Is Story Informed Trauma Therapy?

At its core, story informed trauma therapy is a therapeutic practice that uses the power of storytelling to help individuals process and make sense of traumatic events. It acknowledges that trauma often disrupts the narrative coherence of one's life story, leaving people feeling fragmented, confused, or stuck in painful memories.

By inviting individuals to share their experiences in their own words, therapists help them reconstruct a narrative that integrates trauma into a broader life context. This process fosters meaning-making, reduces feelings of isolation, and promotes emotional regulation.

The Role of Narrative in Healing

Humans are natural storytellers. We use stories to understand ourselves and the world around us. When trauma occurs, it can shatter the internal storyline, making it difficult to interpret events or maintain a sense of identity. Story informed trauma therapy taps into this intrinsic human tendency by:

- Allowing clients to express emotions that may be too overwhelming to confront directly.
- Helping reorganize memories in a way that reduces their emotional charge.
- Encouraging reflection that leads to new insights and perspectives.
- Supporting the rebuilding of a coherent self-concept.

This narrative approach complements other trauma-focused treatments, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) or eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), by adding a layer of personal meaning and self-expression.

How Story Informed Trauma Therapy Differs from Other Trauma Treatments

While many trauma therapies prioritize symptom reduction, story informed trauma therapy focuses on the story itself as a healing agent. This distinction makes it particularly effective for individuals who struggle to find words for their pain or feel disconnected from their experiences.

Key Characteristics of Story Informed Trauma Therapy

- **Client-Centered Narrative Exploration:** Clients lead the storytelling process, choosing what to share and how.
- **Integration of Emotions and Cognition:** The therapy balances emotional expression with cognitive reflection.
- **Validation of Personal Experience:** Therapists validate the client's unique story, countering feelings of shame or disbelief.
- **Focus on Empowerment:** Re-authoring the trauma narrative can empower clients to reclaim control over their lives.

Unlike exposure therapies that may involve reliving traumatic memories in detail, story informed trauma therapy allows for a more gradual and gentle unfolding of the trauma story, respecting the client's pace and boundaries.

Techniques Used in Story Informed Trauma Therapy

Therapists employing story informed trauma therapy utilize a range of techniques designed to facilitate narrative expression and healing. These methods can be adapted to fit the needs of different clients and trauma types.

Life Storytelling and Timeline Reconstruction

One common technique is guiding clients to create a timeline of their life events, highlighting moments of trauma and growth. This visual and verbal reconstruction helps organize memories and contextualize trauma within the broader story of their lives.

Writing and Journaling Exercises

Writing about traumatic experiences has been shown to reduce distress and improve emotional processing. Therapists may encourage clients to keep journals or write letters (sometimes unsent) to people involved in their traumatic events, fostering catharsis and insight.

Metaphor and Imagery

Using metaphorical language or imagery enables clients to express complex feelings indirectly, which can be less intimidating. For example, a client might describe their trauma as a “storm” or “dark forest,” opening pathways to discuss emotions symbolically.

Story Re-Authoring

This process involves identifying dominant, often negative narratives about the trauma (“I am broken” or “It’s my fault”) and collaboratively crafting alternative, more empowering stories. This can shift self-perception and promote healing.

Benefits of Story Informed Trauma Therapy

Integrating storytelling into trauma therapy offers several notable advantages that support recovery on multiple levels.

Enhanced Emotional Expression

Many trauma survivors find it difficult to verbalize their feelings. Storytelling provides a natural and safe way to access and convey emotions, reducing internal tension and fostering relief.

Improved Sense of Agency

By actively shaping their trauma narrative, clients reclaim control over their experiences and identity. This empowerment counters the helplessness often accompanying trauma.

Strengthened Therapeutic Alliance

The collaborative nature of story informed trauma therapy builds trust between therapist and client, which is crucial for effective trauma work.

Meaning-Making and Post-Traumatic Growth

Reconstructing one’s story can lead to new insights and a deeper understanding of personal strength and resilience, promoting growth beyond recovery.

Who Can Benefit from Story Informed Trauma Therapy?

This therapeutic approach can be helpful for a wide range of trauma survivors, including those dealing with:

- Childhood abuse or neglect
- Domestic violence
- Combat or military trauma
- Accidents or natural disasters
- Loss and grief
- Complex PTSD and chronic trauma

It is especially valuable for individuals who appreciate creative and verbal expression or who have found other trauma therapies too confrontational or clinical.

Considerations and Complementary Approaches

While story informed trauma therapy has many strengths, it is often most effective when integrated with other evidence-based practices. For example, combining narrative work with mindfulness or somatic therapies can address trauma's physical and psychological impacts comprehensively.

Clients with severe dissociation or intense flashbacks may require stabilization before engaging deeply with their trauma stories. Skilled therapists tailor the approach to each person's readiness and needs.

Tips for Engaging in Story Informed Trauma Therapy

If you're considering this form of therapy or currently involved in it, here are some pointers to get the most out of the experience:

1. ****Be Patient with the Process:**** Healing through storytelling takes time; allow yourself to proceed at a comfortable pace.
2. ****Embrace Vulnerability:**** Sharing your story may feel daunting, but vulnerability is a powerful catalyst for connection and growth.
3. ****Use Creative Outlets:**** Complement therapy sessions with journaling, art, or other expressive activities.
4. ****Communicate Openly with Your Therapist:**** Let your therapist know what feels helpful or challenging during the narrative work.
5. ****Recognize Small Wins:**** Celebrate moments of insight or emotional release as meaningful progress.

Future Directions and Research in Story Informed Trauma Therapy

As mental health professionals continue to explore trauma treatments, story informed trauma therapy is gaining recognition for its holistic and humanistic qualities. Ongoing research is examining its effectiveness across diverse populations and trauma types, as well as how digital storytelling and technology can enhance therapeutic outcomes.

The integration of cultural storytelling traditions and community narratives is also an exciting area of development, acknowledging the collective dimensions of trauma and healing.

Story informed trauma therapy invites us all to reconsider the stories we carry—and how reshaping them can be a profound step toward reclaiming our lives from the shadows of trauma. Whether you are a survivor, a practitioner, or simply curious about innovative healing methods, understanding this approach opens new doors to empathy, resilience, and hope.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is story informed trauma therapy?

Story informed trauma therapy is a therapeutic approach that integrates narrative techniques to help individuals process and make meaning of their traumatic experiences by reconstructing their personal stories.

How does story informed trauma therapy differ from traditional trauma therapies?

Unlike traditional trauma therapies that may focus primarily on symptoms or cognitive restructuring, story informed trauma therapy emphasizes the role of personal narrative and storytelling in healing, allowing clients to reframe and integrate their trauma within their life story.

Who can benefit from story informed trauma therapy?

Individuals who have experienced various forms of trauma, including abuse, loss, or accidents, can benefit from story informed trauma therapy as it helps them understand and process their experiences through narrative reconstruction.

What techniques are commonly used in story informed trauma therapy?

Common techniques include narrative storytelling, journaling, creating timelines, metaphor exploration, and collaborative story development between therapist and client to facilitate meaning-making and healing.

Is story informed trauma therapy evidence-based?

While narrative approaches to trauma therapy have growing empirical support, story informed trauma therapy as a specific modality is gaining recognition and research, showing promising outcomes in improving emotional processing and resilience.

Can story informed trauma therapy be combined with other therapeutic approaches?

Yes, story informed trauma therapy can be integrated with other modalities such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), EMDR, or somatic therapies to provide a holistic approach to trauma recovery.

How long does story informed trauma therapy typically take?

The duration varies depending on the individual's needs and the severity of trauma, but it often involves a series of sessions over weeks or months to allow for deep exploration and narrative reconstruction.

What role does the therapist play in story informed trauma therapy?

The therapist acts as a collaborative guide who helps clients explore, articulate, and reframe their trauma narratives in a safe and supportive environment, fostering empowerment and insight.

Are there any risks or challenges associated with story informed trauma therapy?

As with any trauma-focused therapy, revisiting traumatic memories can initially cause distress or emotional discomfort; therefore, it requires careful pacing and skilled therapeutic support to ensure client safety and well-being.

Additional Resources

Story Informed Trauma Therapy: A Comprehensive Review of Its Principles and Applications

Story informed trauma therapy has emerged as a compelling approach within the broader field of trauma-informed care, blending narrative techniques with evidence-based therapeutic interventions. This therapeutic modality acknowledges the profound role that personal stories and lived experiences play in shaping an individual's response to trauma. By integrating storytelling elements, clinicians aim to facilitate healing pathways that resonate deeply with clients, fostering empowerment, meaning-making, and emotional processing. As mental health professionals continually seek innovative ways to address the complex aftermath of traumatic events, story informed trauma therapy offers a nuanced framework that situates trauma within the context of personal narrative coherence and identity reconstruction.

Understanding Story Informed Trauma Therapy

Story informed trauma therapy is rooted in the recognition that trauma disrupts not only psychological well-being but also the coherent narrative through which individuals interpret their lives. Traditional trauma therapies often focus on symptom reduction and cognitive restructuring; however, story informed approaches emphasize the reconstruction of the trauma narrative as a means to restore a sense of self and continuity. This therapy operates on the premise that recounting and re-authoring one's story can help integrate fragmented memories, mitigate feelings of helplessness, and reframe traumatic experiences in a way that promotes resilience.

Unlike classic narrative therapy, which broadly explores clients' stories to identify dominant themes and problem-saturated narratives, story informed trauma therapy specifically targets trauma-related narratives and their impact on mental health. It often incorporates a multidisciplinary lens, drawing from psychology, social work, and even literary theory to understand how stories function in human cognition and healing.

Core Principles and Theoretical Foundations

At its core, story informed trauma therapy is underpinned by several key principles:

- **Trauma as Narrative Disruption:** Trauma is seen as an event that fractures an individual's life story, creating gaps or incoherencies.
- **Empowerment through Storytelling:** Clients are encouraged to reclaim authorship of their narratives, fostering agency and control.
- **Meaning-Making:** The therapeutic process supports clients in finding new meanings or perspectives about their trauma.
- **Contextualization:** Stories are explored not only for content but also for cultural, social, and relational contexts that influence trauma experience and recovery.

The theoretical foundation draws heavily from narrative psychology, which posits that identity is constructed through internalized and evolving stories. Additionally, trauma theory and attachment theory inform the understanding of how traumatic disruptions affect memory and relational patterns.

Applications and Techniques in Practice

In clinical settings, story informed trauma therapy utilizes a variety of techniques designed to facilitate narrative engagement and emotional processing. These techniques can be adapted depending on client needs, trauma type, and therapeutic goals.

Narrative Reconstruction and Re-Authoring

A primary component involves guiding clients to reconstruct their trauma narratives in a safe and supportive environment. Clients are encouraged to tell their stories in their own words, with therapists helping to identify and challenge maladaptive interpretations or self-blaming narratives. Through this re-authoring process, individuals can develop alternative storylines that emphasize strength, survival, and growth.

Use of Metaphor and Symbolism

Story informed trauma therapy often incorporates metaphorical language and symbolism to help clients express complex emotions that may be difficult to articulate directly. This approach allows for indirect access to traumatic memories and feelings, reducing the risk of re-traumatization while deepening insight.

Integration with Other Trauma Therapies

While story informed trauma therapy can stand alone, it is frequently integrated with other evidence-based modalities such as Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), and somatic therapies. This integrative approach enhances therapeutic flexibility and addresses trauma's multifaceted effects on cognition, emotion, and physiology.

Comparative Insights: Story Informed Trauma Therapy versus Other Modalities

When compared to conventional trauma therapies, story informed trauma therapy presents distinct advantages and challenges.

- **Advantages:** Its emphasis on narrative coherence and identity reconstruction often leads to deeper emotional processing and long-term integration of trauma. It aligns well with clients who value meaning-making and personal growth beyond symptom relief.
- **Challenges:** Some clients may find the narrative focus emotionally overwhelming or struggle with verbal expression, necessitating adjunctive techniques or alternative communication methods.

Contrastingly, therapies like CBT prioritize symptom management through cognitive restructuring and behavioral changes, which may provide quicker relief but do not always address the underlying narrative disruptions caused by trauma. EMDR focuses on processing traumatic memories through bilateral stimulation but may not engage clients in the same depth of personal storytelling.

Evidence Base and Outcomes

Despite its growing popularity, story informed trauma therapy is still developing a robust empirical foundation. Preliminary studies indicate positive outcomes in terms of reduced PTSD symptoms, increased self-efficacy, and improved emotional regulation. For example, a 2021 pilot study published in the *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* found that clients engaging in narrative-focused trauma therapy reported greater narrative coherence and decreased avoidance behaviors compared to controls.

However, more randomized controlled trials and longitudinal research are necessary to establish standardized protocols and to compare efficacy across diverse populations and trauma types.

Considerations for Practitioners and Clients

Implementing story informed trauma therapy requires clinicians to be skilled in trauma-sensitive communication and cultural competence. Because trauma narratives are deeply personal and often intertwined with complex social factors, therapists must navigate ethical considerations around confidentiality, client readiness, and potential retraumatization.

Clients considering this therapy should be informed about the process and potential emotional intensity involved. It may be particularly suitable for those who have reached a stage where they can engage actively with their trauma narrative and seek to integrate their experiences into a broader life story.

- Therapists should assess client's narrative capacity and emotional resilience before initiating intensive narrative work.
- Combining story informed trauma therapy with somatic or grounding techniques can enhance safety and emotional regulation.
- Ongoing supervision and training in narrative trauma work are recommended to maintain best practices.

Future Directions and Innovations

Advancements in digital storytelling and virtual reality present exciting possibilities for story informed trauma therapy. Emerging platforms allow clients to craft multimedia narratives that integrate visual, auditory, and textual elements, potentially enhancing engagement and therapeutic impact. Additionally, community-based narrative interventions are gaining traction, emphasizing collective storytelling as a tool for healing in populations affected by mass trauma or displacement.

In parallel, interdisciplinary collaborations with neuroscientists are deepening understanding of how narrative processes influence brain function and memory reconsolidation, which may inform more

targeted interventions.

Story informed trauma therapy, with its holistic focus on narrative reconstruction and identity restoration, thus represents a dynamic and evolving approach within trauma care. As research expands and clinical innovations emerge, it holds promise for enriching the therapeutic landscape and offering survivors pathways to reclaim their stories and lives.

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story informed trauma therapy: *Treating Sexual Abuse and Trauma with Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults with Developmental Disabilities* Vanessa Houdek, Jennifer Gibson, 2017-03-20 This workbook was written to promote a standard in the field for clinicians to increase confidence, competence, and effectiveness in addressing child sexual abuse and trauma treatment with children, adolescents, and young adults with developmental disabilities. The workbook is divided into two parts: the first part is focused on research and education regarding trauma treatment, developmental disabilities, and a module for treatment within this population, while the second part of the workbook presents examples of interventions, worksheets, and therapeutic activities for use with clients. Disorders such as Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, Autistic Spectrum Disorders, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Nonverbal Learning Disorder, and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or Effects are reviewed in this manual. Additionally, motor, communication, sensory, and feeding problems are briefly discussed. This manual is not intended to provide detailed information on all developmental disabilities but rather provide a general overview of more common developmental disorders to increase understanding of assessment and treatment interventions discussed. It is intended for use with individuals with a moderate to high functioning level. The workbook can be used as a guide for masters and doctoral-level clinicians who are either licensed or are in training and under the supervision of a licensed mental health professional. It will also be a valuable resource for researchers, scholars, special educators, counselors, social workers, and professionals who work with sexual abuse survivors.

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Jones, Lori A. Russell-Chapin, 2024-03-28 As professional counselors learn more about neuroscience, they need guidance on how to integrate this new knowledge into counselor education and counseling practice with clients. The purpose of this updated edition is to provide a comprehensive resource for translating and applying neuroscientific concepts to the theory and practice of counseling. The authors provide guidance as to how counselors integrate neuroscience into their work, with the hope of better understanding and identifying methods for effectively and responsibly incorporating key principles of neuroscience into the profession. This new edition incorporates the 2024 CACREP Standards as markers of learning, to ensure that CACREP-accredited programs have the information needed to apply neuroscientific concepts to all the major areas of counseling practice. This volume addresses the 2024 entry-level educational standards of the main accrediting body of the counseling profession, CACREP. Each of the eight common core areas of counseling knowledge and skills are covered (professional counseling orientation, social and cultural foundations, human growth and development, career development, helping relationships, group counseling and group work, testing and assessment, research and program evaluation). Several 2024 CACREP Standards that are integrated into the eight common core standards, such as the impact of crises, disaster, and traumatic events; the neurobiology of addictions; wellness and optimal performance; and psychopharmacology are also addressed. Some chapters also focus on doctoral-level 2024 CACREP standards for counselor education and supervision. To purchase print copies, please visit the ACA Store. Reproduction requests for material from books published by ACA or any other questions about ACA Publications should be directed to publications@counseling.org. ACA no longer provides complimentary print desk copies. Digital evaluation copies may be requested from Wiley by clicking the link above and completing the details about your institution and course.

story informed trauma therapy: Handbook of Play Therapy Kevin J. O'Connor, Charles E. Schaefer, Lisa D. Braverman, 2015-10-19 A complete, comprehensive play therapy resource for mental health professionals Handbook of Play Therapy is the one-stop resource for play therapists with coverage of all major aspects written by experts in the field. This edition consolidates the coverage of both previous volumes into one book, updated to reflect the newest findings and practices of the field. Useful for new and experienced practitioners alike, this guide provides a comprehensive introduction and overview of play therapy including, theory and technique, special populations, nontraditional settings, professional and contemporary issues. Edited by the founders of the field, each chapter is written by well-known and respected academics and practitioners in each topic area and includes research, assessment, strategies, and clinical application. This guide covers all areas required for credentialing from the Association for Play Therapy, making it uniquely qualified as the one resource for certification preparation. Learn the core theories and techniques of play therapy Apply play therapy to special populations and in nontraditional settings Understand the history and emerging issues in the field Explore the research and evidence base, clinical applications, and more Psychologists, counselors, marriage and family therapists, social workers, and psychiatric nurses regularly utilize play therapy techniques to facilitate more productive sessions and promote better outcomes for patients. Handbook of Play Therapy provides the deep, practical understanding needed to incorporate these techniques into practice.

story informed trauma therapy: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Art Therapy Amy Backos, 2021-01-21 This book focusses on art therapy as a treatment of PTSD in both theory and practice. It includes an in-depth look at what PTSD is, how it develops, and how art therapists should approach and treat it, with a focus on furthering social justice. The chapters cover a wide variety of contexts, including adults at a rape crisis centre, veterans, children in group homes and patients at substance use facilities. The second section of the book includes invaluable practical strategies and interventions based on the author's decades of experience in the field. It also discusses more complex concepts, including the impact of avoidance in maintaining symptoms of PTSD, and considers how Acceptance and Commitment Therapy can guide art therapy interventions.

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Adolescents is the book so many expressive arts and trauma therapists have been waiting for. Not only does it lay out an organized, thorough framework for applying varied expressive arts modalities, it provides clear directions for the application of these modalities at different phases of treatment. Both beginning and experienced clinicians and students will appreciate the thoughtful analyses of ways for introducing expressive arts to clients, engaging clients with their art, being present to the art that is created, and working within a particular session structure that guides the treatment process. Readers will also receive more specific learning regarding the process of using body-focused and sensory-based language and skills in the process of trauma treatment over time. They'll pick up more than 60 priceless expressive-arts assessment and treatment interventions that are sure to serve them well for years to come. The appendices features these interventions as photocopiable handouts that will guide the therapist working with youth through each phase of treatment.

story informed trauma therapy: International Advances in Art Therapy Research and Practice Val Huet, Lynn Kapitan, 2021-05-06 Art therapists work with diverse people experiencing life-changing distress that cannot be expressed verbally. From its early beginnings in the UK and USA, art therapy is now attracting international interest and recognition. To meet ever-changing needs in uncertain times, art therapists worldwide are currently advancing socially just and culturally relevant practice and research. This book presents original contributions, highlighting innovative research and culturally diverse practices that are transforming art therapy with new insights and knowledge. It captures an internationally vibrant and truly client-centred profession, and will be of interest to arts therapists, artists in healthcare, psychotherapists, counsellors, and professionals who use art therapeutically in their practice.

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story informed trauma therapy: The Transparent Brain in Couple and Family Therapy Suzanne Midori Hanna, 2013-09-05 Why should family therapists care about brain research? Are there invisible connections between the breakdown of our relationships and the breakdown of our cells? To answer these questions, author Suzanne Hanna paints pictures of ancient principles coming together with contemporary research as a context for why basic concepts of neuroscience are relevant to couple and family therapy. She illustrates the reciprocal nature of the body and relationships in a book that simplifies and demystifies brain science for therapists. Using the latest findings from affective and cognitive neuroscience, she highlights 6 brain-friendly family therapy approaches and introduces the concept of biological empathy. This analysis enables practitioners to harness the power of mindfulness toward brain development and interpersonal healing. Client-friendly language allows busy therapists to educate without jargon. Applications of family therapy begin with the self of the therapist and advance through the interpersonal layers of attachment, pair-bonding, and community. Chapters include topics on: • Whole body awareness • A narrative approach to neuroanatomy and physiology • 5 basic principles of neuroscience • Basics of trauma treatment • Male/female brain differences in couples therapy • The ancient concept of tribe and a community frontal lobe Each chapter summarizes with principles and guidelines for clinicians.

Numerous illustrations make the brain transparent, while surveys, worksheets, and tables make therapeutic process transparent. The last chapter illustrates concepts and interventions through a full-length case story and applies addiction treatment as a case study for program development. The Transparent Brain includes case examples from all walks of life, highlighting heroic acts of survival. Clinicians can use 5 basic principles of neuroscience to bring relief more quickly, for more people from more diverse backgrounds. It is a revolutionary read and a must-have reference for any mental health professional.

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story informed trauma therapy: *The Oxford Textbook of Palliative Social Work* Terry Altiglio, Shirley Otis-Green, John G. Cagle, 2022 It is so important to advocate for things that may not always seem possible. Getting to work with patients/families at the end of their life is the ultimate honor. - Lauren G Markham, MSW, LCSW, APHSW-C In this work, one witnesses both depths of human suffering and heights of human transcendence that can inspire both awe and fear. At those times, I have found that surrendering my need to be an expert and instead, allow myself to simply be a human is the wisest action. - Kerry Irish, LCSW, OSW-C, FAOSW--

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school-based professionals, social workers, psychologists and others committed to working with traumatized children will find the book chock-full of game-changing ideas for their practice.

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story informed trauma therapy: Navigating Through Trauma Dr Anna Dos Santos, 2025-02-25 Trauma is knitted into the fabric of our human existence and Christians are not exempt from it. This book is meant for Bible-believing people who have experienced trauma and want to understand more about the chaos it leaves in its wake. More than that, they also want to address their emotional pain in a biblically sound and responsible way. The book is also for counsellors and pastors who must help believers who have suffered trauma. Research has shown that reflective artmaking is one of the most effective ways to process trauma. In the last chapters of the book, readers will get the opportunity to process their trauma wounding with creative artmaking reflections, derived from principles taken from the story of Creation. The same story God told Job after he suffered severe loss and trauma.

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