



Your Body Was Trying to Protect You

Making sense of trauma and your nervous system

If something painful happened to you, the way you're feeling now makes more sense than you might think. This page is about what trauma does inside your body, and why so many of your reactions are signs of a nervous system that worked hard to keep you safe. You don't have to read it all at once. Take what helps, and leave the rest.

Trauma lives inside you, not just in the past

Trauma isn't only about what happened. It's about what happened inside you: how overwhelming it felt, how alone you were, and whether your body ever got the chance to feel safe again afterward. That's why two people can go through the same event and carry it very differently. Neither one is doing it wrong.

If something still affects you, it counts. You don't have to prove it was "bad enough."

Fight, flight, freeze: your built-in alarm system

When your brain senses danger, it doesn't stop to think. It acts. It might gear you up to push back (fight), drive you to get away (flight), or shut everything down so you go still, quiet, or numb (freeze). Some people also keep the peace to stay safe, going along and smoothing things over. That counts too.

None of these are choices. They're automatic reflexes, the same ones that have kept humans alive for a very long time. If you froze, or went along with something to survive, that was your body protecting you. It was not weakness, and it was not your fault. Your body picked the best protection it had in that moment.

The after-effects, and why they make sense

After trauma, the alarm system can stay switched on. So it's common to jump at small sounds, avoid certain places, people, or reminders, feel numb or far away from your own life, have memories or images show up uninvited, sleep badly, or blame yourself for what happened.

These are not character flaws, and they don't mean you're broken. They're a nervous system still standing guard long after the danger has passed. Even self-blame makes a sad kind of sense: sometimes the mind would rather blame itself than feel how little control it had. But what happened was not your fault.

Healing doesn't mean telling the whole story at once

A lot of people put off getting help because they dread having to relive everything, out loud, right away. That's not how good trauma therapy works. We start with safety and steadiness, we move at your pace, and you stay in charge of what you share and when. Many people begin to feel more solid before they've told much of their story at all.

Your nervous system learned that the world was dangerous. With time and support, it can learn something new. Healing happens slowly, in steps small enough to handle. And it does happen.

What helps right now

Between sessions, small repeatable things tell your nervous system: we're safe right now. Gentle routines help (regular meals, regular sleep, a short walk) because after trauma, predictability feels like safety. Safe people help too. You don't have to talk about anything; simply being near someone calm helps your body settle.

When you feel keyed up or far away, try this grounding exercise. There's no wrong way to do it, and you can stop any time. If it ever makes you feel worse, stop. That's useful information to bring to therapy, not a failure.

1. Pause and feel your feet on the floor. Press them down gently.
 2. Look around and name 5 things you can see.
 3. Name 4 things you can feel: your chair, your clothes, the air on your skin.
 4. Name 3 things you can hear.
 5. Name 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.
 6. Let out one slow breath, a little longer than the breath in. Notice where you are: here, now.
1. Where in my day do I feel even a little calmer? Just notice it. Small pockets of calm are worth knowing about.
 2. Who or what helps my body settle, even 5%? People, pets, places, music, and blankets all count.

Whatever your body did to get you through, it got you here. And here is a place where healing can begin. I'm glad you're taking care of yourself by reading this, and you don't have to figure out the next step alone.

This handout is a companion to therapy, not a replacement for it. If anything here stirs up strong feelings, please bring it to a session so we can work through it together. If you're in crisis, call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), any time, day or night.