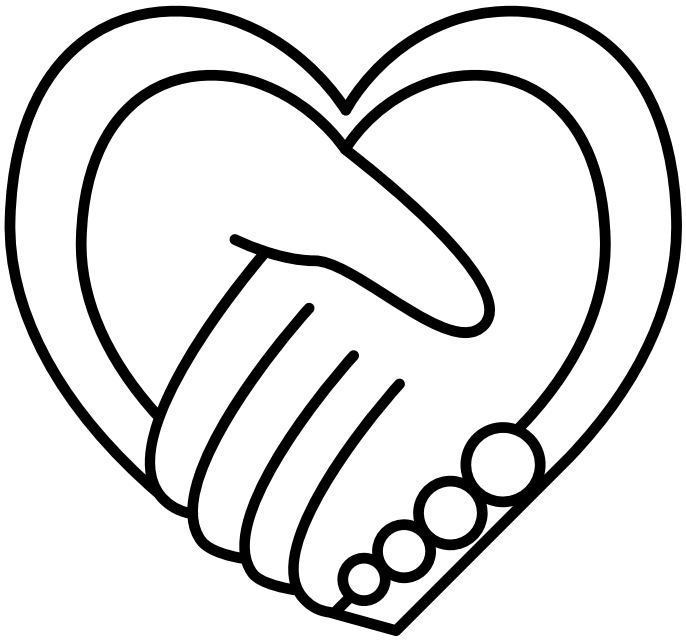
Why You Feel This Way:
A Guide to Complex PTSD



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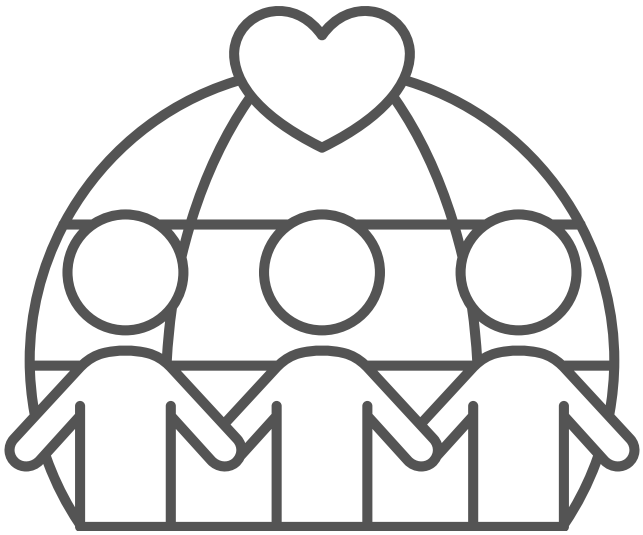
Welcome. If you've found yourself here, please know: you are not broken. And, you are not alone.

What you're experiencing has a name. And understanding what's happening inside of you can be a powerful step toward healing.

Complex PTSD (CPTSD) is a response to ongoing trauma, often in childhood, where you couldn't escape, fight back, or find safety. It's not just about what happened—it's about what your nervous system learned to do to keep you alive.

This guide is here to help you understand three main ways CPTSD shows up in our everyday lives, and to remind you that healing is possible.



Gentle Reminder: You belong and you are worthy of care, exactly as you are.

1. How We See Ourselves

When you grow up in unsafe or neglectful environments, you learn to see yourself through the lens of shame and self-blame.

- You may feel “not enough” or, at times, “too much.”
- You may carry a harsh inner critic, convinced you are defective or unworthy of love.
- Decisions can feel paralyzing, because you doubt your instincts.

This is not because something is wrong with you—it is because your early world taught you to survive by shrinking, doubting, and blaming yourself.

Gentle Reminder: Feelings of low self worth, though they feel deeply personal, are a defining feature and symptom of CPTSD—not the truth of who you are.

2. How We See Closeness and Relationships

CPTSD deeply shapes how we connect with others.

- You may long for closeness but fear it at the same time.
- You might find yourself people-pleasing or oversharing in hopes of securing connection.
- Trust can feel fragile. Boundaries may feel confusing—too rigid one day, non-existent the next.

At the root of these struggles is not a lack of capacity for love—it's that your nervous system has learned to scan constantly for danger, even in safe relationships.

Gentle Reminder: Your longing for safe, steady connection is deeply human, and it is possible to build relationships that don't require you to perform or disappear.

3. Emotional Regulation

Trauma wires the body for survival. That means your emotions may feel overwhelming, unpredictable, or hard to soothe.

- Sudden shame storms or panic may rise up without clear cause (these are often emotional flashbacks).
- You may swing between feeling numb and feeling flooded.
- Rest, play, or slowing down may feel unsafe.

None of this means you are “too emotional.” It means your body and brain are still protecting you the way they had to back then.

Gentle Reminder: Emotional regulation is a skill that can be learned and practiced. Your body is not your enemy—it can become your ally again.

The Good News: Healing Is Possible

CPTSD is not a life sentence. Healing takes time, safety, and support, but your brain and body are capable of change. Things can improve.

Some steps along the healing path include:

- Learning about trauma (understanding is powerful).
- Building safe relationships where trust grows slowly.
- Practicing grounding, self-compassion, and nervous system regulation.
- Working with a trauma-informed therapist who can walk with you.
- Pursuing medication and other medical support as needed.

A Closing Word: You've made it through this booklet—an act of courage in itself. Take a breath. You are already on the journey toward greater wholeness.