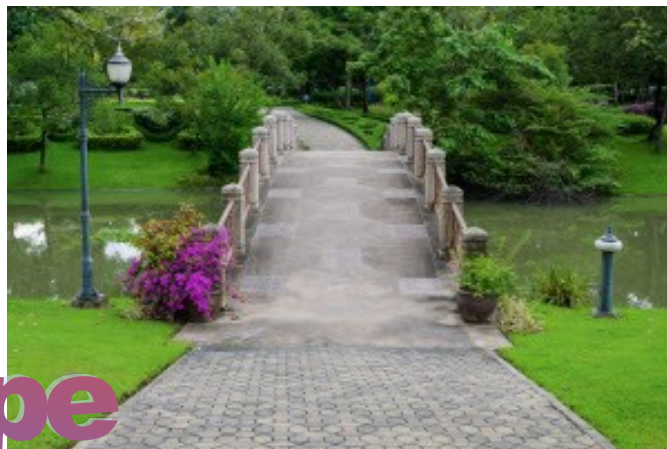


Trauma & Dissociation Bridge of Hope



Note About BoH:

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Loneliness

Lately I've struggled with loneliness. I think the long months of isolation from physical touch has crept in. Before Covid-19, I could count on hugs from friends, who are my family of choice. Now the holidays are here and no end in sight that this pandemic will end in a couple months. Who knows when a hug is in my future. So I'm left to figure out how to meet my needs for touch.

I was reading one day about physical touch. It said the brain can't tell the difference between a hug from someone and a hug from yourself. Hugging yourself is interpreted as if someone else is hugging you. While my brain may not know the difference, my emotions do. I crave the touch of a hug—of that symbol that another person cares about me or loves me enough to hug me. To just have their arms wrapped around me is comforting. I have some friends who give some amazing hugs! The kind that leaves no doubt they care.

I've been wondering what to do to help with this. I thought back to a while into my past, remembering this friend writing me a note on some beautiful stationary. It contained a note of encouragement followed by a couple pages of encouraging affirmations and scriptures. I've never forgotten it. While I don't know where it is today, I kept it for years.

I realize now that while it wasn't a physical hug, it was a big emotional hug. It makes me wonder, would my physical need for a hug be filled through wrapping my arms around myself and perhaps the emotional need be filled by "hugging" others with a card or letter to let them know how much they are cared about and valued. Even if it doesn't completely fill my needs, perhaps it will be close enough to refill my need for emotional closeness. Plus, I know I will feel better having done that.

I don't know, but I suspect that some of you who live alone may be experiencing some of the same struggles. Maybe some of you are connected to others physically are finding the emotional connection is missing. Today I would challenge you to consider finding something to try to fill your emotional need. Whether that is writing, texting, a phone call or a conversation in some manner with someone you care about. Maybe it is in gifting your talents to an organization you believe in, or even starting your own. Perhaps you love to crochet and your local hospital has many newborns in their NICU whose families could use a touch of comfort in

the form of a baby blanket. Maybe you know someone who could use some anonymous encouragement and you love to give without someone knowing that it is from you. I hope that you will find a bit of fulfillment of your emotional needs in this time that we've never experienced before.

The holidays at this time of year will be different for many of us. I know some of us have those we love but because they are so high-risk of the complications of Covid, we have chosen to limit contact by technology. Perhaps the holidays are a very difficult time for you because you are estranged from your family, your family pressures you to be at a gathering that reminds you of your trauma, or this is anniversary time of something for you. It's okay to find new traditions, to create your own "family of choice" if you need it. It's also okay to change the actual time you celebrate. Maybe Christmas is too painful to celebrate on December 25th—so you celebrate it on December 30th. Perhaps you are one who loves Christmas and have been looking for a way to give it meaning for you to heal from your past trauma at this time of year. It's okay to be creative and try new things, and to seek out support that you've not really done in the past.

Even when you may feel alone, we are here. We may not be able to meet your needs for a hug, but I hope there is something that you receive that lets you know you matter... because you do... even when it doesn't feel like it.

As we do every year, we have "Drop in" groups for Thanksgiving eve, Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas, New Year's eve and the New Year. It's okay to not be alone, even if the option is through technology this year. If you are a survivor wanting to have some extra support, please email recovery@hope4-recovery.org to ask to be added to the list for the Zoom login the evening before these Drop Ins.

Hang in there. You are worth it.

Take gentle care,
Kristen

*Even when you
may feel alone,
we are here.*

Book Review—A Practical Guide to Complex PTSD

This book by Arielle Schwartz, PhD looks at the various parts of Complex PTSD that survivors experience with this diagnosis. She addresses each one head on and provides some examples of clients and then goes on to help the reader look at these areas of their lives.

Some chapters you'll find in this book are Healing Avoidance Symptoms, Healing Self-Perception Issues, as well as Overcoming Feelings of Hopelessness and Despair. While these are only three chapters, I think you may find this book helpful and informative on beginning the healing journey.

Wanting to read this book with a group? In 2021, this is one of the books we will be offering as a group book study. You can sign up to be notified of when this starts on our Program page.

Time Passing

Another day
Another year
Recovery is slow
Time passing quickly

Stepping forward
This very day
This choice made
I want to move on

Recovery ahead
Steps on the way
Turn left ahead
Go up the road

It is a bumpy trip
I'm learning a lot
It's hard to believe
I've come this far

I have friends to thank
My counselor has helped
Those who have encouraged
I am quite thankful

Submitted by:
Becky



Favorite Holiday

Christmas is my favorite holiday of the year. I would say that the lights are definitely the best part. I love lights that twinkle like stars in the night sky. This year I want to increase the number of lights I string. I want to put lights over the windows and across the top of the room.

It will be all that I can do to wait until after Thanksgiving to put them up. Maybe I won't. Maybe I'll put them up early this year! An early Christmas present to me. I'm looking forward to all the decorations and the opportunity to celebrate the birth of Jesus. I'm blessed to have this reason to celebrate. The blessing of life after this life, that is free from the pain of this planet. No more pain.

Submitted by:
Elizabeth

*Christmas is my
favorite holiday
of the year.*

I've Stopped

I spent many years cutting on myself. What started as a once every now and then coping skill became something I turned to deal with very negative emotion I faced. When I felt insecure, anxious or dirty, it's what I turned to. I hated it, but I didn't know how to stop.

I was seeing a counselor who shared with me that it had moved from being an unhealthy coping skill to an unhealthy addiction. At first I was angry, but I did some reading about addiction. I learned that many addictions are turned to, to deal with the pain of abuse. I know this was true for me. I also learned there were things I could do to find other options to cope.

One thing I learned was about finding other things to do instead. That was so hard for me. Nothing seemed to work as well as cutting did. I tried tons of distractions. The one thing I found was that bargaining with myself on time helped. I would have urges to cut and I would make a deal with myself to wait an hour. Then when I made it an hour I'd bargain for another hour. If I could get through the day, I could give myself a reward. At first I didn't get a lot of rewards. I noticed though, as I started to make progress that I could see, I started to get more rewards which reinforced my determination to make more progress.

The more days I got under my belt, the more motivation I had to stay on track and find more ways not to cut. It was a struggle for quite a while, but it did get easier as I was able to find other ways to cope.

I still struggle with dealing with my abuse, but I continue to find new ways to do that. I can't get rid of the scars, but I have thought about putting a tattoo over them that speaks to me about recovery. That's not a decision that I've made for sure, as I'm still trying to decide if it's a good idea yet. That said, today I'm free from cutting and rarely do I have any urges to do so. That is significant improvement and progress for me and I am thankful.

Submitted by
Anonymous

*The more days I
got under my
belt, the more
motivation I had
to stay on track
and find more
ways not to cut.*

Newsletter Submissions Needed

To make our newsletter as good as possible, we are looking for submissions from survivors in the form of articles, poetry and artwork or photography. Topics of abuse, sexual trauma, PTSD, Dissociation, and other related topics are welcomed.

We are also looking for submissions around eating disorders and related topics for our newsletter, Nourishing Hearts. It will be restarting in January 2021.

Managing Stress During the Holidays

This year has been pretty stressful in general with uncertainty and isolation due to the pandemic. For some of us there has been loss as well as fear of loss. Covid-19 brought us a lot of change in the way we interact and communicate with others. For some of us this has required reaching out to those we've never met before through online support groups. For others of us it has resulted in a different way to interact with friends and family.

Now heading into the holidays, we may find this to be even more stressful. This time of year can have increased stress due to the holiday responsibilities, estrangement from family, financial expenses due to holiday gatherings and Christmas presents that we may want to give to friends and family members. This can also be more stressful due to anniversaries of loss, trauma and/or changes that we experienced during his time of year.

Here are some things to consider to help manage our stress levels. Start with expectations of this year's activities. It is okay to change the expectations we place on ourselves this year. Our finances may have changed due to Covid. Perhaps our health has changed or our ability to get around has changed and our normal trips or visits aren't available at this time. It really is okay if we can't do what we normally expect of ourselves this time of year. If finances are tight, create new ways of gifting. Perhaps this is the year to make our gifts or to show our love and appreciation in a different way. Instead of an email, send a snail mail greeting. Perhaps writing isn't our thing, let's consider making a video with our express of our feelings.

Another way to reduce or manage stress is to allow ourselves extra time in our schedules. Allowing extra time for delays and unexpected needs or requirements can help to alleviate added stress at this time of the year. It's amazing what an extra allotted 30 minutes in our schedules can do.

Taking time to breathe deeply and to relax can be very helpful. Even setting aside 15 minutes in our day can make a difference. For example taking 15 minutes of our lunch break from work to do some focused breathing and progressive relaxation can make some of the tension stored in our muscles to release. Perhaps we're having an anxious time, taking the opportunity to do breathing that stimulates our vagus nerve can be very beneficial for an almost immediate calm. Looking for ways to relax, check out the self-care or Coping with PTSD workshops for ideas and skills. Another option is to slow down for 10 or 15 minutes and be more aware of the little things—a flower's smell, the colors of a bird outside our window or even the design of your favorite object. Taking this time of appreciation can be helpful. Another way to practice calming is to identify three things that we are thankful for over the course of the day. They don't have to be major events or activities, but even being thankful for the little things can generate a reduction of stress. Choose different things every day so it's not just a blah exercise but an exercise that honors our day.

Another area that can reduce stress is taking steps for positive self-care. On an average day we can find ourselves neglecting our self-care. Taking steps improve our sleep, eating regular meals that fuel our bodies, and exercise on a regular basis strengthens our immune system and reduces stress. These are just a few ideas to consider for reducing our stress levels over the holidays.

*It's amazing
what an extra
allotted 30
minutes in our
schedules can do.*

What Christmas Means to Me

Christmas was horrible growing up. If I had the opportunity to go away from home, I jumped at it! For years I never celebrated the holidays because they were painful. I didn't want to spend them with friends because they had their own families and I didn't want to be a bother. So it was a time of intentional isolation.

One day I woke up and recognized the family in front of me. I was no longer alone. It was an amazing recognition when I realized this. I was no longer alone. Christmas became a holiday to bring joy to others. Getting to see the smiles of my inside children was filling my heart. Getting to hear their giggles and hear their laughter reminded me of what Christmas was truly about— Celebration of the birth of the Christ Child. A love undeserved and more fulfilling than I could begin to understand.

I don't understand how God could love me so much that He would send His son Jesus to give His life for me, but I can understand little of His love because of how much I love my children. They make my heart full. I hope that on this Christmas God's heart is full because of His children as mine is because of mine.

Submitted by
Anonymous

*I was no longer
alone.*

Making It Through

I've found a way, not the best,
To stay alive, just holding on.

Shopping, buying things for my friends,
An early Christmas, just a small token of appreciation.

I know I'm going to pay for this, I've shopped on credit,
Not the best plan, I'll figure it out later.

Caring for others, when I don't care for me,
It gives me a reason to hold on one more day.

The blackness inside me, it's a hard place to be,
It feels so heavy, like there's no way out.

It's a struggle all the time, my mind continues to remind me,
All the pain I've been through how it hurts so much.

So today I hold on, for just one more day,
Getting through the next hour, I'll make it through the day.

Submitted by:
Just Me

Sometimes

Sometimes it feels like no one understands what I'm going through. I try to put on a good face even when I'm doing poorly. People wouldn't have a clue how much I struggle inside.

Outwardly I'm very careful to present a strong and together person. Inside I'm unsure and scared. Will I get through this? If I get through it, will I be okay then or will I always be less than? What if it doesn't get better? What if I can't keep finding enough within me to be something I want to be? What if I don't have enough in me to do what I long to do?

I have a lot of self-doubt. It's not about being smart enough to learn. It's about being able to handle it emotionally. I want to be strong and I'm working on that. I struggle to hold on to hope that I really will heal. Some days I feel like I'm going to make it. Other days I question how it is possible.

I was told to take it one day at a time. What does that really mean? Sometimes it takes me an extended period of time to know I'm going to make it through the next 5 minutes. Sometimes it hurts so bad I can't even breathe. I wish there was a pill I could take to make the stuff and pain to go away.

In spite of the pain and anxiety, I'm continuing to try to find my way through. Abusers should be punished to the maximum extent possible and then some. It's not fair they get a slap on the wrist while my life has been impacted forever. Sometimes I think I should advocate for firmer punishment for abusers, but I fear I would fold under the fear of telling what I've been through. So much to think about. Maybe then my life would have a purpose to move through the pain.

Submitted by:
One Scared Survivor

Celebrating Ourselves

As adults, some of us may have those in our lives who validate us, but not all of us do. It's important to become our own cheerleaders. Not everything that needs celebrated is seen by others in ourselves. Even if no one else knows we made a positive decision or took a positive step, we did. From this standpoint alone, it's important to validate the positive in our lives.

Don't confuse applauding a job well done or a positive validation to give yourself kudos with false pride. It's not false pride to recognize when you are making positive steps. Pride can be good or bad. Sometimes we've been taught that "pride" comes before a fall." Others of us have been in relationships where any good pride we had was thwarted by abusive responses from those we'd expect to validate and encourage us.

Pride that pumps us up over others is false pride. That can be hurtful to others. But if we look at what pride is we find the following definition—"a feeling or deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's own achievements, the achievements of those who one is closely associated or from qualities or possessions that are widely admired. The very first part applies here. Celebrate!

*"To catch the
reader's
attention, place
an interesting
sentence or quote
from the story
here."*



Just for Fun

A L L U M E E R K A T Q Z N O I L A E S
 L U E C H I N C H I L L A R E G I T S O
 L E O N U P Z R P I I M S A J S E A L S
 I D P O A S O E N N E E Z N A P M I H C
 G C A S O T N L W O N D Z P L E O C R U
 A N R T A G U Z A M O B E G U N M O E G
 T E D R U I N G X R I N B G X E C K N R
 O Z Z I N K I N N U B R R U T O T A Q I
 R B N C I R L A W A K E A Y D I U N A Z
 D U G H A V E N S I R N A I J A R G N Z
 D T E F B O W O W U F O L R I T T A E L
 R T F F N E D L A C M E K O B G L R Y Y
 A E H C O N E T N A D A V A B E E O H B
 P R A E N X G O Z I O L T Z P V Z O A E
 O F T L E M U R S M G I Z O M I S E R A
 E L E P H A N T D A A D N A P D E R R R
 L Y E Z O O X O C N D U C K E O W S E Z
 W Y H A R N E I I W D U N A Z P P U M A
 O X C R A N E S O K A P I C T A K P B J
 N A X A L B A E B I X A R A U G A J I B
 S D G A Z E L L E X O Z Y B A L L A W H

Alligator

Fox

Monkey

Swan

Butterfly

Gazelle

Okapi

Tiger

Caiman

Giraffe

Orangutan

Tortoise

Cat

Grizzly Bear

Ostrich

Turtle

Cheetah

Hippopotamus

Penguin

Wallaby

Chimpanzee

Hyena

Polar Bear

Zebra

Chinchila

Jaguar

Puma

Zoo

Crane

Kangaroo

Rabbit

Crocodile

Lemur

Red Panda

Dog

Leopard

Sea Lion

Duck

Lion

Seal

Elephant

Meerkat

Snow Leopard

STATEMENT OF FAITH

Psalm 147:3 He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

MISSION

The mission of Hope Recovery is to provide support and compassion in the lives of adult survivors of abuse and sexual trauma.

VISION

To offer support and compassion as survivors make their way on the journey of recovery and healing.

Hope Recovery Inc.

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Tuesday - Friday—3p—7p Eastern

Other hours by appointment.

If you're feeling **suicidal**, please contact 800-SUICIDE or if outside the US, go to www.befrienders.org

If you are being **abused**, experiencing incest or rape, please contact RAINN at 800-656-HOPE. RAINN provides links to international agencies.

If you are in a **violent relationship**, call 800-799-SAFE. For international contacts, go to www.hotpeachpages.net/a/index.html

We're on the Web

www.hope4-recovery.org

Find our newsletters at <http://www.hope4-recovery.org/publications.html>

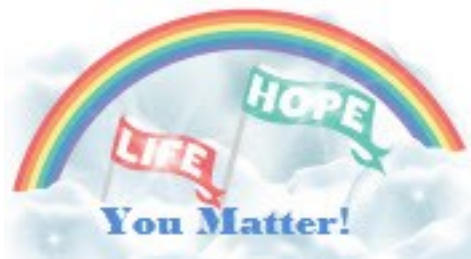
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**You Are
Not Alone!**



When all seems like a struggle, there is hope.