



# THE JOURNEY TO HEALING

Here in the paradise we call home, we or those close to us are experiencing unprecedented challenges in the aftermath of Hurricane Ian. Individually and collectively, we are grieving the loss of what once was, all while experiencing the overwhelming trauma of it all.

Trauma is a very personal emotional response to a negative, life-altering event. It occurs when one feels emotionally or mentally hurt, threatened, afraid and/or powerless. Trauma is not the event itself but, rather, the body's or mind's response to it. Traumatic stress affects our brain, which makes it so

important to take the steps to move forward in recovery and mitigate the negative effects as much as we can.

There is no official roadmap for moving forward through trauma. Each person's journey is uniquely their own. The process, at times, is not pretty or linear; likely, there are delays and detours, and that is okay. The purpose of walking through grief and loss is to figure out how to feel better. The following tools and steps may prove helpful along the way to returning to a sense of well-being. Please seek the help of trained therapists,

psychologists and/or those specializing in trauma recovery for additional help if stress becomes immobilizing and crippling in your life.

## Connect

Connection with others is key to our happiness as humans. Although we may initially want to isolate, doing so may lead to depression. Bring awareness and a willingness to share stories and feelings with someone safe — someone who allows you to feel with acceptance and patience, honoring who you are and your unique processing journey.

## Make Time for Movement

Experts say exercise is one of the most effective ways to handle the aftereffects of a traumatic event. Endorphins, the much-needed, feel-good brain chemicals, directly help healing. Deep breathing and walking are good choices. Listen to your body and move when you can.

## Feel the Feels

Sitting with the wide range of emotions and allowing the feelings to come and pass will greatly help the healing process. We often tend to avoid difficult feelings and numb them with distraction, denial or substances. Allowing the full and varied range of feelings by either sharing, journaling or simply sitting with them will help the healing process.

## Listen to Your Body

Regularly do things that simply feel good. Take small actions to do things that are loving toward yourself like a walk, a nap, a movie, a shared cup of coffee, taking time to halt from work and simply finding small ways to relax and care for yourself. Healing through trauma takes energy, so frequent rest is helpful. Eat healthy foods, hydrate, make time with friends, and rest when you can.

## Change Your Breath

During times of stress, our breathing often becomes shallow. To induce relaxation, try inhaling deeply for 5 seconds, holding the breath for another 5 seconds and slowly exhaling for 7 seconds (through nose or mouth, whichever is most comfortable). Try repeating this throughout the day or while in moments of stress for a cycle of 10, and your body will respond with greater relaxation.

## Replace the Word "Only" with "Already"

Grief slows us down. In seasons of loss, where every day may seem like a chore, try replacing the word "only" with "already." You may be using the word "only" in a way that is diminishing what you are actually doing... Maybe you say, "I only got one thing accomplished today. I only did \_\_\_\_\_ today." Instead of saying, "I can only work for a few minutes before losing focus and feeling tired," try saying, "I already have worked for 15 minutes with focus." Instead of, "I only made one insurance call today," say, "I already called the insurance company today." Making this tiny shift can be transformative. Bring awareness to your self-talk.

## For the Helpers

Finally, if you are in the role of being a helper and supporter of someone who has experienced trauma, it will be most beneficial for those in your care for you to offer extra grace, time and patience. Allow those suffering to feel and express at their pace, and simply sit alongside them, allowing them the space and time to simply be. We don't always need words to fix another, to "blow sunshine" or offer flowery words of better days on the horizon. As helpers and supporters, let's use extra care to allow others to feel their feelings in their way and in their time. Honoring grief and loss is vital to the process of moving forward.

It is my hope that these tools and offerings provide a little bit of help, some light in the darkness, a new possibility, a shift that may bring about a new thought, an opportunity to feel and know you are not alone on your journey to healing.



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