

Building Resilience: One Step at a Time

You Need Not Be a Victim

The belief that one is a *victim* of their external circumstances can be common among those experiencing significant trauma or stress. Individuals who focus on how they feel victimized may continue to relive their trauma or stressful situations. This can interfere with recovery, damage relationships, and inhibit well-being. True resolution of traumatic stress may require a change of thinking about the past.

One's *thoughts* can be powerful change agents in both emotions and behaviors. Recognizing and replacing unhelpful thoughts can assist in meaningful changes in emotional health and well-being. Read on to identify a few strategies to change unhelpful thoughts.

“The world is out to get me.” With prolonged traumatic stress can come the feeling that one's world is filled with ill intentions toward them. Feeling this way can lead to believing it is true. These beliefs may be subtle or not noticed but can impact many, if not most, of one's interactions with others. Such thinking often grows stronger with time and can increase feelings of distrust and even danger. Exchanges may be seen through the lens of skepticism, forming a “self-proving” pattern. If traumatic experiences recur or continue, a new and harmful belief system that predicts future hurt and losses before they occur. This pattern of thought is not often objectively accurate

Although this belief may feel like the truth, it is simply not accurate. It is always possible to identify instances where trust was *not* violated. Identifying these positive experiences and interactions can provide a starting point for recovering objectivity and personal efficacy in managing emotions and navigating relationships

“My pain is my future.” When people experience traumatic stress that is significant or ongoing, they may develop the perception that the future may never become better. Such thinking can create harmful emotional difficulties that prevent recovery and well-being. In addition, external repercussions may develop in work satisfaction, quality, engagement, and maintaining meaningful relationships.

Believing there is no hope for change can lead to internalizing negative messages, self-blame, self-sabotaging behaviors, and thinking one deserves the traumatic impacts. Such thinking can quickly produce harmful outcomes in a person.

Recognizing and changing victimizing thinking is vital to growth, recovery, and well-being. Managing one's self-talk, reframing the negative and hopeless narratives into more objective and positive narratives is vitally essential to success in choosing healthy responses. This includes recognizing and naming one's negative emotions and the behaviors and reactions they produce.

You can intervene in your mind habits and self-talk cycles and train your mind to think differently. This can free you from ongoing traumatic impacts and speed your way toward recovery. The trauma that produces traumatic stress is not your fault. The greatest weapon you have to combat that stress and the negativity that accompanies it is your own mind.

For a great book on healing one's self-talk related to trauma and fear, check out “Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway” by Dr. Susan Jeffers. And don't forget the great resources at www.wellnessMN.org.