A woman with long brown hair, wearing a yellow patterned top, is blowing bubbles. She is holding a yellow bubble wand in her right hand. The background is a vibrant green with many small white stars and larger, colorful, out-of-focus bubbles. The title text is written in a white, cursive script in the upper right corner.

Healing the wounds from the past

by Denisse Romero, M.S., Ed.M.

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Healing the wounds from the past

Have you ever found yourself constantly **feeling sad or angry**, with negative thoughts constantly weighing on your mind?

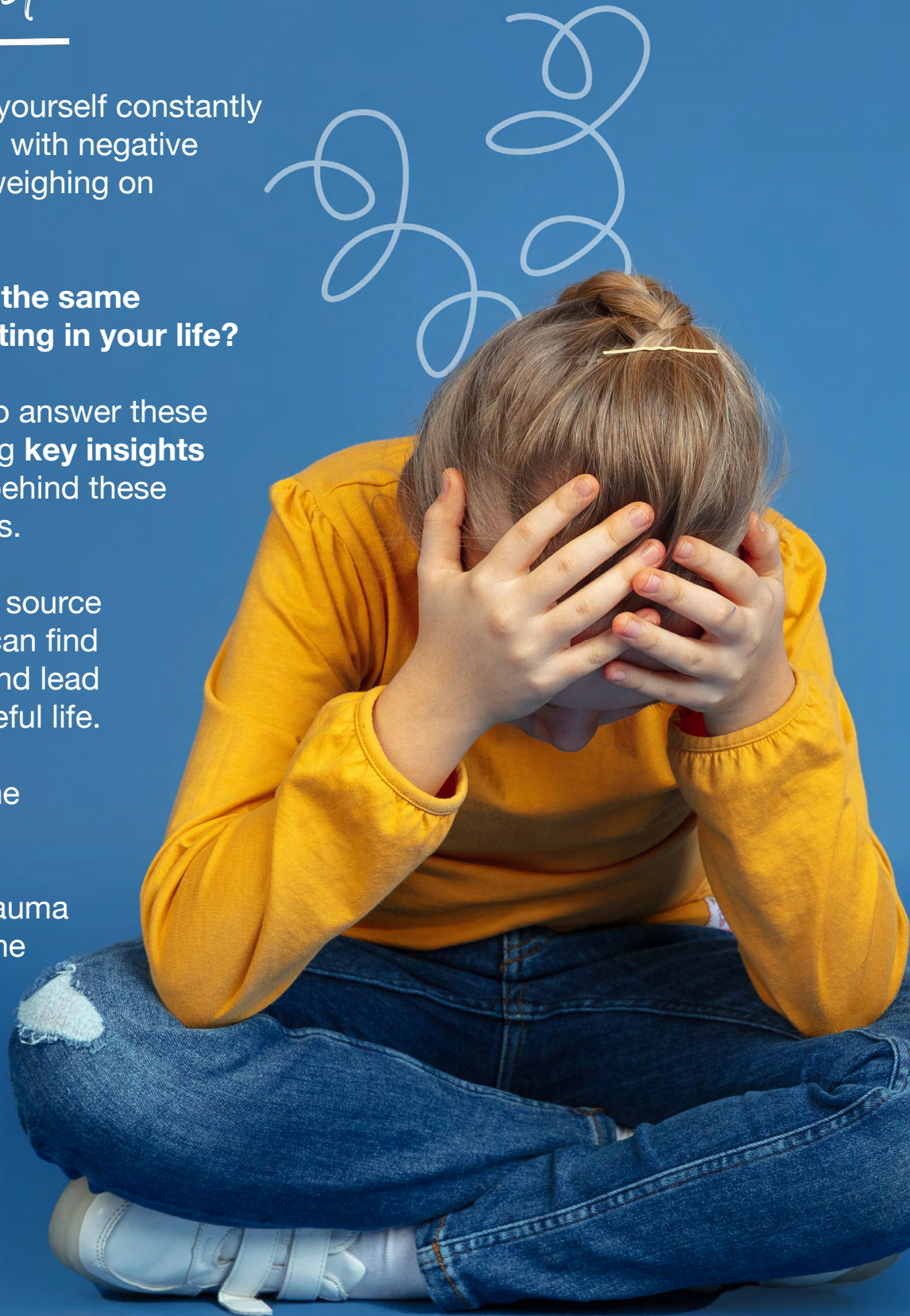
Do you wonder why the same patterns keep repeating in your life?

Our handbook aims to answer these questions by providing **key insights** into the root causes behind these emotions and patterns.

By understanding the source of our problems, we can find **effective solutions** and lead a happier, more peaceful life.

So, let's go back to the beginning.

It all starts with the trauma we experience from the womb through our early childhood years **(0 to 3 years old)**.



1 Traumas

“But where do these issues stem from?”

Many may think of traumas as only being caused by extreme experiences like war, abuse, or accidents.

However, **trauma can be defined as a physical or emotional wound that stays with us.**



“The simplest way of defining trauma is that it’s an experience we have that overwhelms our capacity to cope.”

Dan Siegel, MD

Some traumas can occur during our development phase from pregnancy through early childhood.

This can include two types of developmental trauma: **gestational trauma** during pregnancy and **preconscious trauma** from birth to three years old.

Gestational Trauma During Pregnancy

If your mother experienced anxiety, depression, stress, or negative emotions like fear or anger, **high levels of cortisol (the stress hormone) were likely passed on to you**, the developing baby, through the umbilical cord.

These high cortisol levels can impact the baby's nervous system development, making it more susceptible to dysregulation.



How a caregiver's trauma can impact a child's development

EARLY DEVELOPMENT

Caregiver with Traumatic Experience

Mother releases cortisol

Baby absorbs cortisol through placenta

Can impact baby's:

- HPA axis
- Central nervous system
- Limbic system
- Autonomic nervous system



Caregiver struggles to regulate

Attachment relationship between caregiver and child may be strained

Can impact child's:

- Development of a core sense of self
- Ability to integrate experiences
- Epigenetic expressions

ADULthood

A person who has had a caregiver with untreated trauma may:

Be more prone to Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after trauma

Struggle to repair after conflict

Struggle with relationships



Unintentionally bring out negative behaviors in others

Be emotionally detached

Be more prone to dissociate

National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine

Preconscious Development

(0 to 3 years old)

An infant cannot even scratch their own itch, let alone regulate their emotions. During the preconscious development stage, **an infant's emotions are regulated through co-regulation with caregivers**, through touch, eye contact and soothing.

If the caregiver is not regulated and calm, it can have a negative impact on the child's nervous system.

Millions of people suffer from various types of trauma, including traumas that we cannot remember because these have been stored in the subconscious... and unfortunately, we are not the exception.



Dr. Bessel Van Der Kolk, a renowned psychiatrist, trauma expert, and author of *The Body Keeps the Score*, explains the connection **between trauma and chronic illness**:

“(There is a) significant connection between trauma, including adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and chronic health conditions.

Common physical disorders and symptoms include somatic complaints; sleep disturbances; gastrointestinal, cardiovascular, neurological, musculoskeletal, respiratory, and dermatological disorders; urological problems; and substance use disorders.”

- Bessel Van der Kolk

How does the body keep the score?

Trauma can manifest in the body in different ways...



Understanding Childhood Developmental Trauma

During infancy, a baby's brain is still developing and not yet capable of regulating stress independently.

This makes the human infant one of the most vulnerable species, **fully reliant on caregivers for survival.**

Children who do not feel safe, held, or loved and who do not have their needs met **will adopt defense mechanisms in order to feel safe.**

Without a loving and secure environment, a child may **develop a nervous system primed for protection and survival.**



"But I don't remember any of that..."



Of course, you don't. All of this occurs in the crucial 0-3 year period before a child can even talk or consciously remember.

However, these experiences are deeply ingrained in the nervous system and can have lasting effects.

Let's take a closer look...

Experts agree that developmental trauma can manifest as obvious abuse and neglect in childhood, but **it can also stem from what didn't happen.**

This includes not receiving physical affection, eye contact, emotional validation, or having our needs met. It can also result from not feeling safe, having our boundaries disregarded, and not being given a voice or choices.

Even seemingly small things, like parents not attending a child's sporting event or performance, can **contribute to a sense of feeling alone, unwanted, unlovable or unworthy.**

"Well... I already forgave my parents. Nobody is born knowing how to parent."



Forgiveness is a powerful act, but simply going through the motions of forgiveness in difficult moments can be superficial.

Beneath the surface, there may be a wounded child filled with anger and pain, unsure how to make sense of it all.

This inner child has yet to discover how to really feel or show forgiveness.

It's important to recognize that your parents are not solely responsible for your pain.

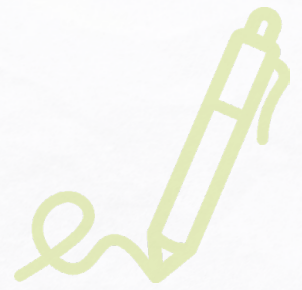
Trauma can be passed down through generations, and they too carry their own burdens. This has been scientifically studied and is referred to as trans-generational trauma.

But the key to moving forward is to first heal your inner child and show it love and understanding.

Only then can you truly integrate it into the adult you have become and find the capacity to forgive. And in order to heal, it's crucial to delve into what's truly happening beneath the surface.



Chapter 1: Understanding Our Trauma



1. What are your main takeaways from this chapter?

2. Take some time to observe your emotions as you reflect on this chapter. What emotions or feelings come up?

3. Where in your body do you feel these emotions? Identify these body sensations and write them down.

4. If you could talk to your inner child, what would you say?

2 Nervous System and Defense Mechanisms

In the previous section, we learned that the early years of a child's life have a profound impact on their nervous system, shaping it to develop defense mechanisms in order to survive.

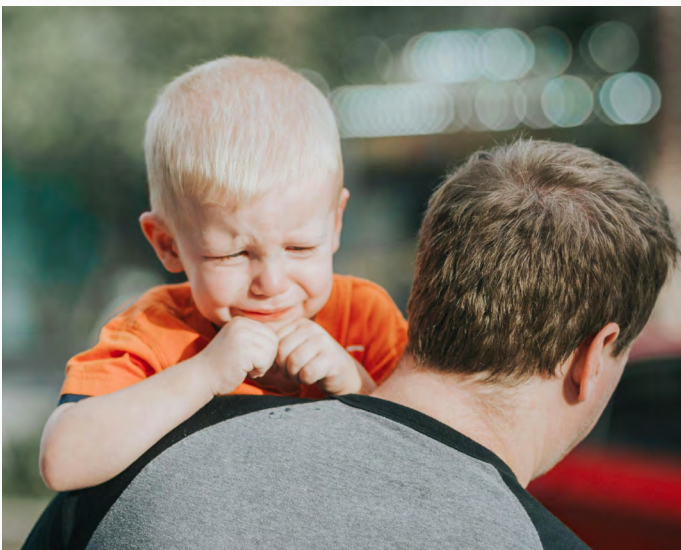
As babies, we learn to regulate our nervous systems when in the presence of our primary caregivers.

Through repeated co-regulation, the child's nervous system learns to release stress and function in a healthy manner.

However, **when this co-regulation does not occur, chronic stress can develop, hindering the ability to self-regulate and resulting in developmental trauma.**



Think back to the times when you arrived at your destination only to realize you don't remember the drive.



This is similar to how trauma operates on a subconscious level, imprinting itself in ways we may not easily recognize.

These preconscious and pre-cognitive imprints create defense mechanisms that shape our behavior without us even realizing it.

Understanding Our Defense Mechanisms

Just like our nervous system gets conditioned to drive a car automatically, **it also becomes conditioned to respond to life and relationships in certain ways when we experience trauma.**

For those who have experienced developmental trauma, this conditioned response may manifest as rage.

Their nervous system may automatically go into fight mode ready to defend themselves.

This response is often a result of the way our caregivers treated us during childhood.

For instance, if our parents constantly shut us down and withdrew love, **we may have internalized their unresolved issues and anger.**



In such cases, **our survival instinct becomes our core identity.** We build our personalities around surviving our traumatic experiences. **Essentially, our trauma response shapes who we are.**



I'd like to know more about my defense mechanisms...

Let's take a look at two common types of defense mechanisms **anger / rage** and the **inner critic**.



Chapter 2: Understanding Our Nervous System and Defense Mechanisms



1. What are your main takeaways from this chapter?

**2. Are there any activities you could adopt to regulate your nervous system?
Ex: Breathing exercises, yoga or dance practices, journaling, connecting with friends...**

3. As you reflect on this chapter, can you identify some of your defense mechanisms?

3

Our Anger is not our enemy

Anger is a powerful force that can be harnessed to set strong boundaries. It empowers us to confidently say “no” and has the potential to ignite societal and personal change.

When we learn to integrate and embrace our anger, **we also integrate its positive qualities into ourselves.**

Instead of trying to suppress or release it, we build a healthier relationship with it, **befriending and containing it when it arises.**

The essence of anger is pure power, vitality, autonomy, strength, determination, and purpose.

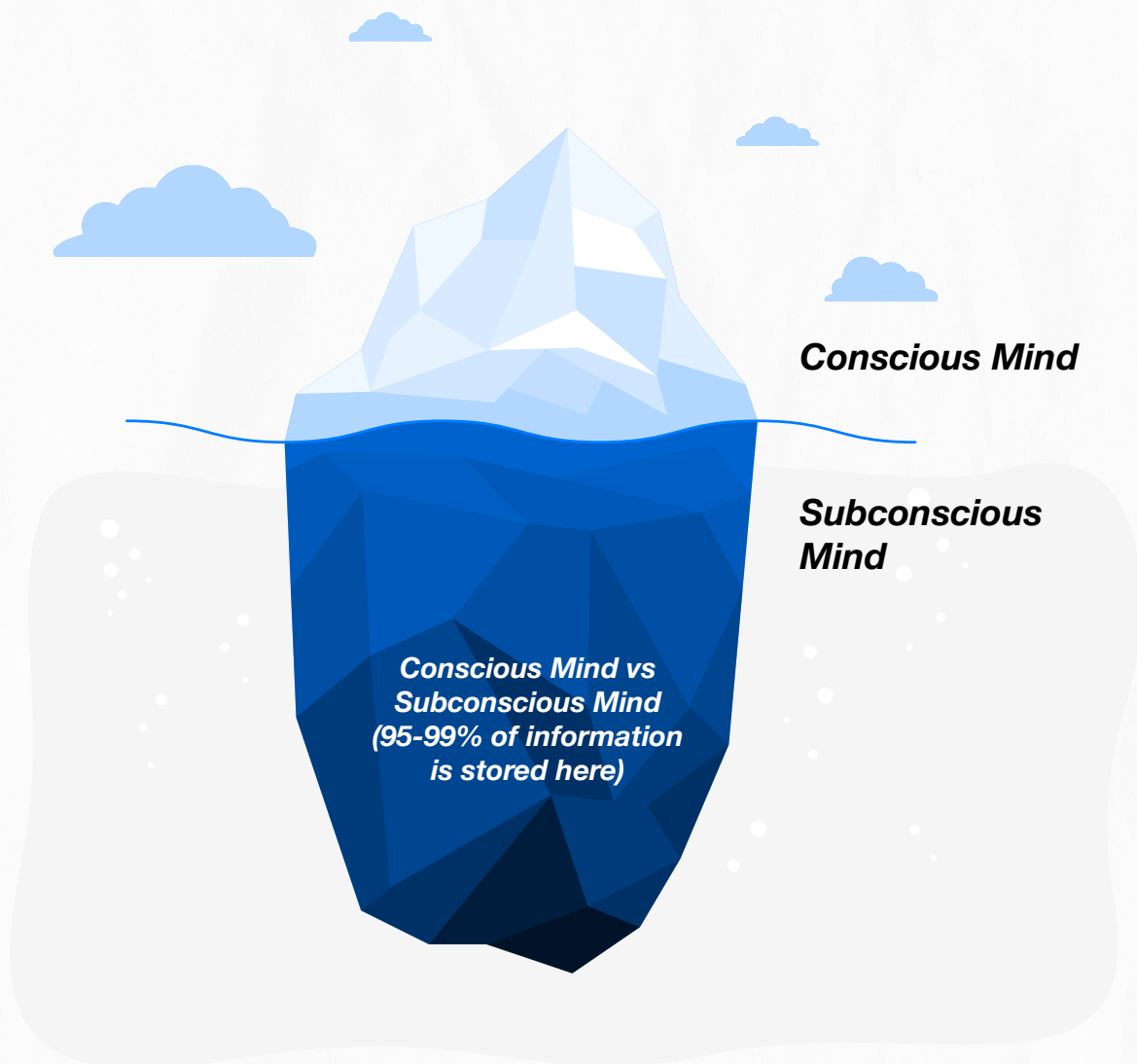
However, when it shows up as a defense mechanism, it often manifests in unhealthy ways.



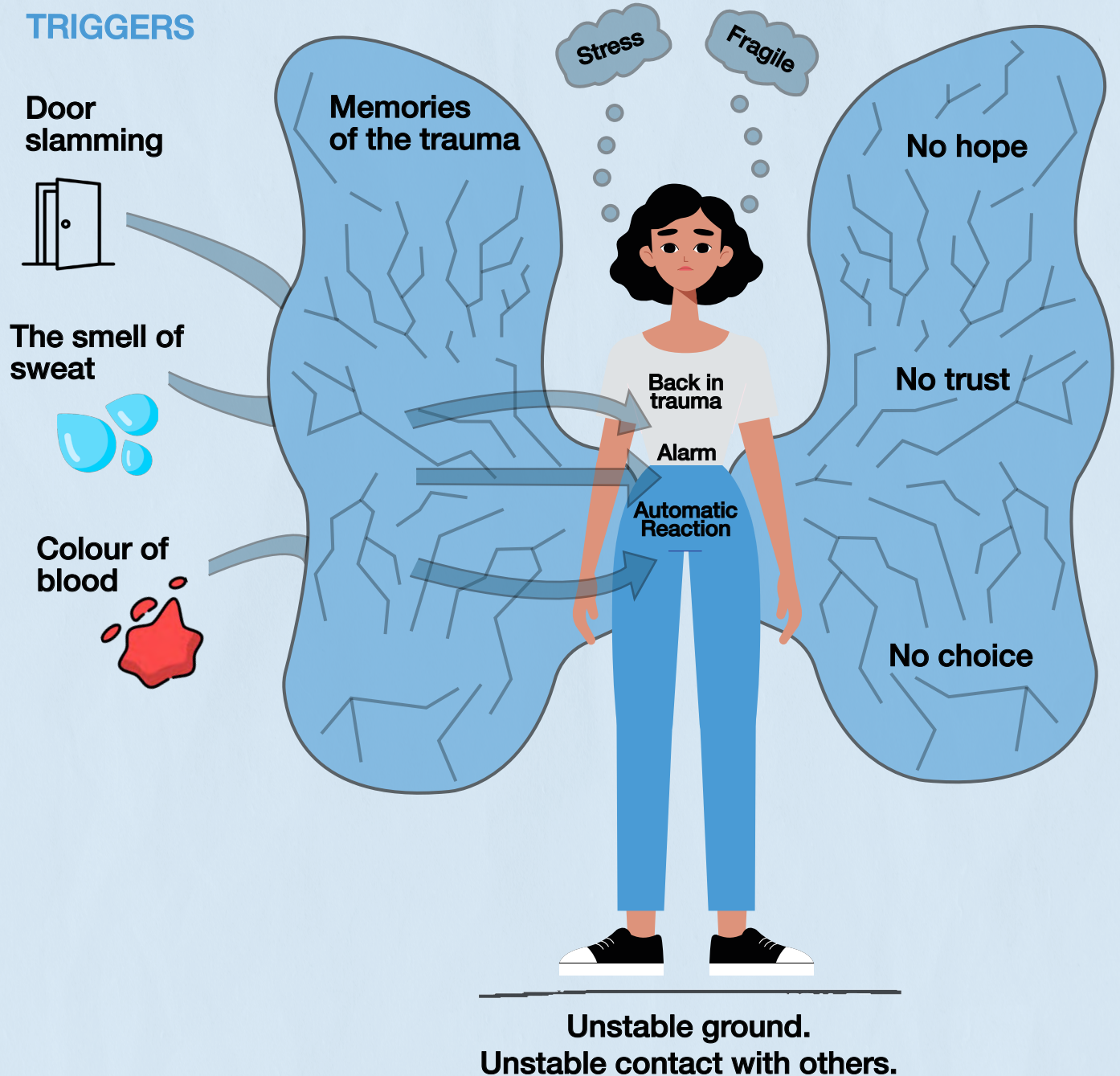
Children use anger as a survival tool in threatening environments. As adults, past traumatic experiences can trigger this defense mechanism, **even if we can't pinpoint the exact cause or dissociate during moments of anger.**

These triggers are stored in our subconscious minds, which develop between 0-3 years old.

However, they can also be stored after the age of 3, making us unaware or forgetful of them. In fact, research has shown a connection between trauma and memory loss at any age.



As long as our triggers and wounds remain unconscious and unhealed, our defense mechanisms will continue to get activated with harmful effects on our mental, physical and social well-being.



Chapter 3: Understanding Our Anger



1. Take some time to reflect on your relationship with anger

2. When does your anger show up? Could you identify some triggers?

3. What could you say to your inner child to appease some of your anger-related defense mechanisms?

**4. Try to observe your emotions and listen to your anger.
Is there a way you could befriend this emotion?**

4 The Inner Critic

As children, we hold our parents in high regard. They are our protectors and providers, and we rely on them entirely for our survival.

But what happens when we begin to realize that our parents may not be as perfect as we once thought?

Admitting that our childhood was marked by dysfunction and pain can be a difficult and tumultuous journey.

This realization can trigger defense mechanisms that follow us into our adult lives. It can bring up immense pain, making it a daunting and uncomfortable process.





In simpler terms, for our younger selves, our parents are always faultless. So when we start to see their flaws, we may be quick to blame ourselves for being unlovable and unworthy of their love.

Early experiences like these can leave us feeling unlovable, unwanted, unsupported, and alone.

They also shape our sense of self and create the inner critic that many of us struggle with as adults.

That constant and condemning voice in our head tells us we are not enough, and it stems from these common childhood experiences.

The impact of these developmental traumas is often subconscious, buried deep within us and invisible to our conscious minds.

But when we bring them to the surface, we can see how they shape our behaviors and relationships with others.

In some cases, our inner critic becomes so overpowering that it turns its judgmental gaze towards those we love the most.

NOT GOOD ENOUGH!

FRAUD

**STUPID
IDEA**

BORING



However, we must remember that we learned these defense mechanisms, and we can eventually unlearn them.

Beneath the layers of pain and adaptations lies a unique and essential expression of who we are.

Just like every star is distinct, every individual has their own unique soul that emerges more and more as we heal and grow.



Well...are we going to talk about the elephant in the room? What's the link between trauma and relationships?



Well, as it turns out, quite a lot. Let's dive deeper into this topic as we explore the connections between trauma and relationships.

Chapter 4: Understanding Our Inner Critic



1. Take some time to reflect on your relationship with anger

2. When does your anger show up? Could you identify some triggers?

3. What could you say to your inner child to appease some of your anger-related defense mechanisms?

**4. Try to observe your emotions and listen to your anger.
Is there a way you could befriend this emotion?**

5 *How Trauma Manifests in Relationships*

Our nervous system has four main responses when faced with a potential threat:

Fight, Flight, Freeze and Fawn.

As children, if we didn't meet our parents' expectations, our default may have been to freeze or collapse.

This could have resulted in us withdrawing into ourselves and **feeling helpless and small when our boundaries were breached.**

As we grow into adults, we may unconsciously develop a protective mechanism of overcompensating in the opposite direction.

Rather than collapsing, we may now respond with a fight or flight reaction, triggered by perceived threats from our partners or loved ones.

We may think our partners will leave us or reject us, perpetuating the trauma patterns within our relationships.

FIGHT



Stand your ground, defend your position, attack, dig in, persevere!

FLIGHT



Give away, retreat, discard, remove yourself, give up, move on.

“Relationships are deeply triggering to them because they always expect to be abandoned again. They expect that whoever they will come in contact with will leave them”

Ruth Lanius, MD, PHD

These reactions can manifest in different ways and are often most apparent in our intimate relationships. Our loved ones tend to be the ones who trigger these responses the most.



**As a result, our relationships can become a constant equation of:
Relationship = Threat**



This cycle perpetuates our wounds and can even cause harm to those closest to us.

If our dominant response is flight, we may distance ourselves from our loved ones in an attempt to protect ourselves from potential abandonment or rejection.

This mechanism can leave lasting damage and impact our relationships for years to come.



So, I'm no good at having relationships and I'll never be happy? Well, that's false belief. You can definitely be happy.

To break this cycle, it is crucial to understand the role of our defensive nervous system, triggers, childhood trauma, and defense mechanisms.



This self-awareness is crucial to our healing, as **50%** of it comes from the knowledge we acquire.

The other 50% requires resources and support, such as working with a trauma-informed therapist or coach who can provide a safe space for us to heal.



But why is safety so critical in this process?

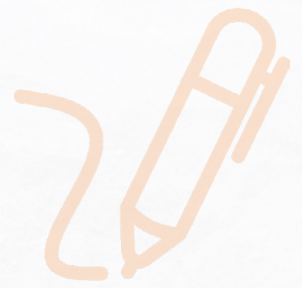
Lack of safety is a significant factor in trauma, as it can make us feel out of control, overwhelmed, alone, and unsupported during times of distress.

By creating a secure and supportive environment, we can take control of our healing and fully experience life.

Now, let's explore one more section...



Chapter 5: Understanding Our Relationships



1. What are your main takeaways from this chapter?

2. When do you feel threatened in your relationships?

3. Take some time to reflect on your main threat responses (fight, flight, freeze, fawn)

4. When do you feel safe in your relationships?

6 *Our attachment styles and how these affect our relationships*

Your attachment style is like a window into the way you connect with others in close relationships.

Shaped by your childhood experiences with caregivers, it can significantly impact your adult interactions. In fact, there are four distinct attachment styles that people commonly adopt in their relationships:

- 1. Secure Attachment**
- 2. Anxious Attachment**
- 3. Avoidant Attachment**
- 4. Disorganized Attachment**
(A blend of anxious and avoidant traits).

Each style represents a unique approach to relating to others and reflects varying levels of comfort with intimacy.

1. Secure attachment is characterized by a genuine desire for closeness and the ability to form strong, supportive relationships.

Those with a secure attachment style are often trusting, responsive, and emotionally engaged with their partners.



2. Anxious attachment

is characterized by an intense longing for closeness, coupled with feelings of insecurity and vulnerability.

Those with this style may become overly fixated on their relationships and harbor fears of abandonment or rejection. They may also exhibit clingy or dependent behavior towards their partners.

For those with an anxious attachment style, **their caregivers may have been inconsistent in their responses to their needs**, sometimes being loving and attentive, and other times being neglectful.

This can create uncertainty and anxiety for the child.



3. Avoidant attachment

is characterized by a tendency to distance oneself from others and harbor fears of intimacy.

Individuals with an avoidant attachment style may struggle to form deep and meaningful connections, preferring to keep a safe distance.

They may also shy away from or avoid closeness in relationships.

The avoidant attachment style is often the result of the emotional unavailability from caregivers.

These adults may struggle with displaying or expressing emotions and intimacy, instead choosing to remain reserved and dismissive.



4. Disorganized attachment

is characterized by a mixed or confused attitude towards others. It's generally a blend of anxious and avoidant attachment styles.

Those with this attachment style may have difficulty forming close relationships and may display erratic or unpredictable behaviors.

The disorganized attachment style is usually a result of childhood trauma or abuse.

A child usually seeks safety and comfort from their caregivers as part of their development, however, **this becomes problematic when the source of safety becomes a source of fear.**

Additionally, the inconsistent and unpredictable behavior from caregivers can shatter trust and result in long-term struggles for the child who may carry these wounds into adulthood.



Understanding your attachment style can be a powerful tool in managing your relationships more effectively.

Self-awareness is key, and knowing your attachment style can provide valuable insights into your needs and triggers in relationships. By gaining this awareness, you can improve your relationships and create more fulfilling connections with others.

Take this quiz to identify your attachment style:

<https://www.attachmentproject.com/attachment-style-quiz/>



Chapter 6: Understanding Our Attachment Styles



1. What are your main insights from this chapter?

2. Feel free to take the quiz at the end of the chapter and take some time to reflect on your main attachment style. (secure, anxious, avoidant, disorganized)

3. Observe if there are some repetitive patterns occurring in your relationships. Can these be explained by your attachment style?

4. Create a plan to learn more about your attachment style and gain more insights that could improve your relationships.

7 Next Steps

Yes, we can heal.

Yes, we can be happy.

Yes, we can have a more fulfilling life.

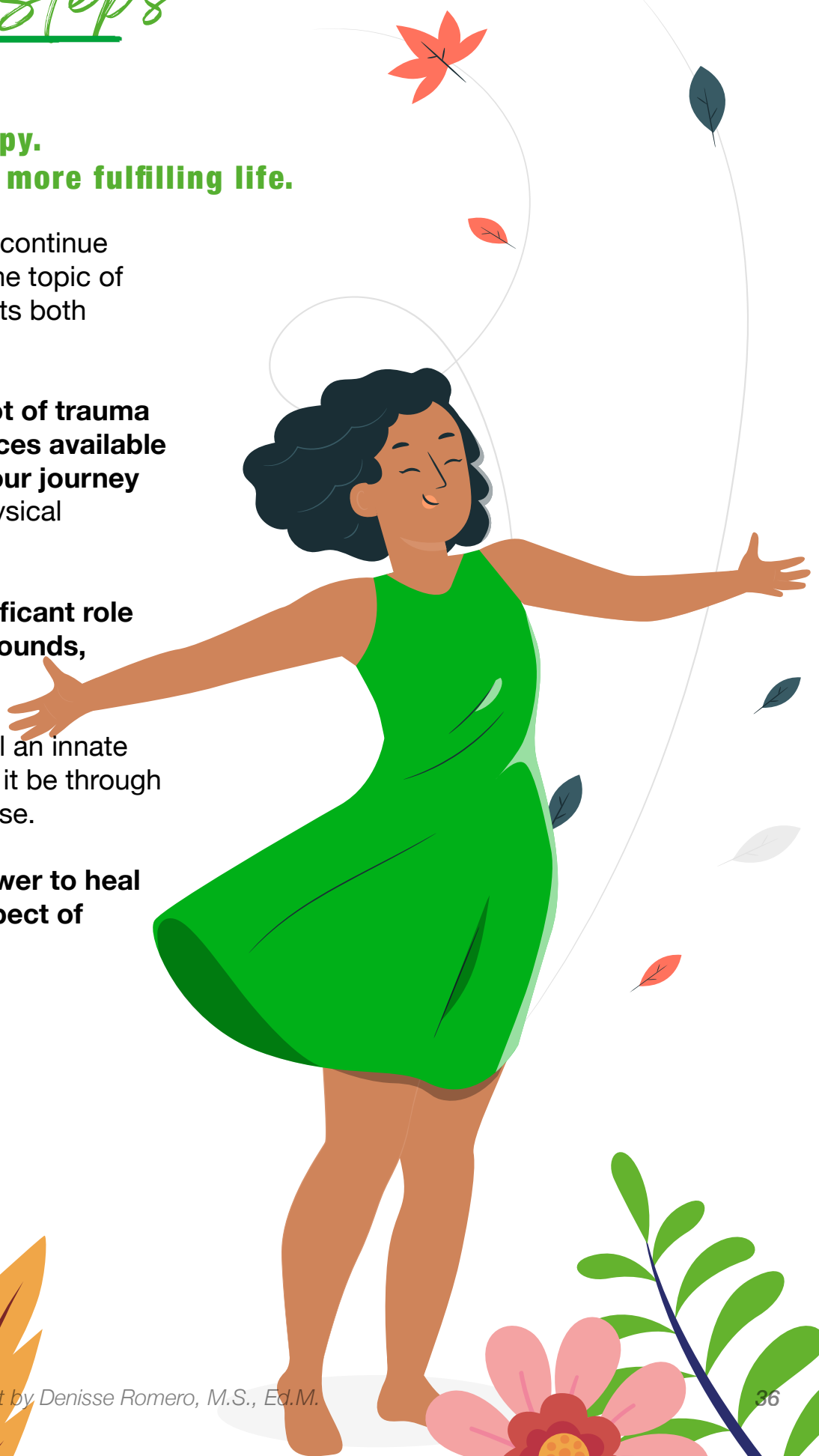
It is necessary that you continue educating yourself on the topic of trauma and how it affects both the mind and body.

Understanding the root of trauma and the various practices available to heal it is crucial in our journey towards mental and physical wellbeing.

Our body plays a significant role in resolving internal wounds, and it knows it.

That's why we often feel an innate urge to move - whether it be through sports, dance, or exercise.

Movement has the power to heal and is an essential aspect of trauma resolution.





Consider incorporating somatic practices into your healing journey, such as:

- Therapeutic movements
- Somatic Experiencing
- Somatic EMDR
- Movement-based mindfulness
- Breathing exercises
- Yoga
- Dance
- Outdoor activities
- Aerobic exercises

Many of these practices have shown to be highly effective in regulating the nervous system and resolving trauma.

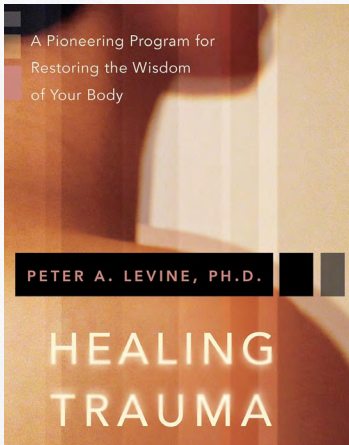
The resources section of this handbook provides books and materials that can further aid in your healing process. Feel free to explore and discover what resonates with you.

I am also available for any questions you may have or to inquire about my trauma-informed coaching services. Let us work together towards a healthier and happier you.

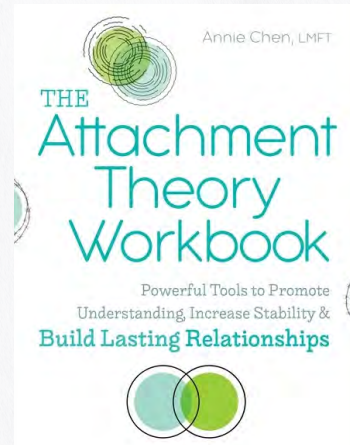
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livelovemind.com

Resources

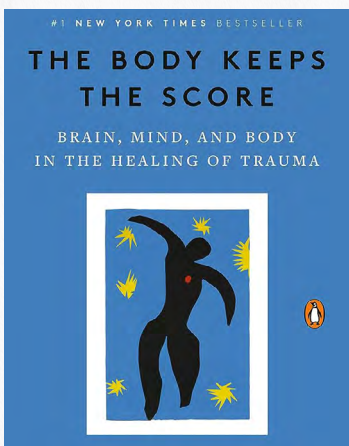
The following books and materials, available on Amazon and other bookstores, can be helpful in your healing journey:



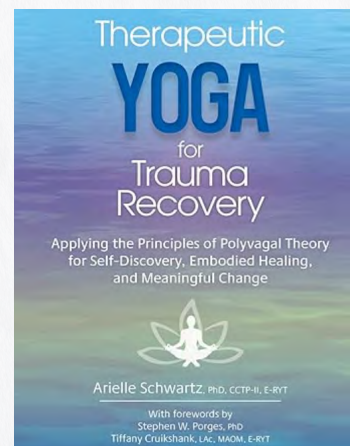
**Healing Trauma:
A Pioneering
Program for
Restoring the
Wisdom of Your Body**
Author: Dr. Peter A.
Levine, PhD



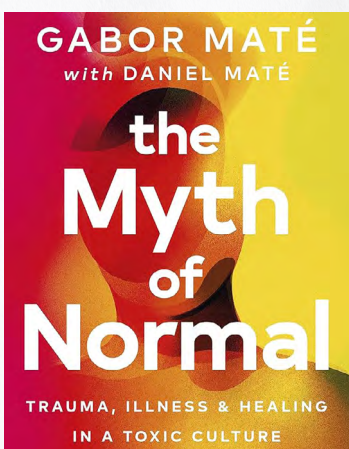
**The Attachment
Theory Workbook:
Powerful Tools
to Promote
Understanding,
Increase Stability &
Build Lasting
Relationships**
Author: Annie Chen,
LMFT



**The Body Keeps the
Score: Brain, Mind
and Body in the
Healing of Trauma**
Author: Dr. Bessel Van
Der Kolk, MD



**Therapeutic Yoga
for Trauma Recovery:
Applying the Principles
of Polyvagal Theory
for Self-Discovery,
Embodied Healing,
and Meaningful
Change**
Author: Dr. Arielle
Schwartz, PhD



**The Myth of Normal:
Trauma, Illness and
Healing in a Toxic
Culture**
Author: Dr. Gabor
Maté, MD



**Coloring for Inner
Child Healing: Relax
and Free Yourself
from Stress, Triggers
and Self Sabotage**
Author: Caldwell
Ramsey

Chapter 7: Next Steps



I will take a look at these books and resources:

**I will try these activities that regulate my nervous system:
Ex: Mindfulness, yoga, dance lessons, outdoor activities, etc.**

I will take a course or learn more about these topics:

I will reach out to these psychological and coaching resources:

Healing the Wound of the Past

About the Author



Denisse Romero is an international educator and Life Transitions Coach who helps individuals from around the globe transform their lives and heal from past experiences. She specializes in supporting clients through career changes, entrepreneurship, international relocation, and personal relationship transitions.

Denisse's coaching services provide a welcoming and encouraging space for individuals seeking to make positive changes in their lives.

With a Master's degree in Education and Developmental Psychology from Harvard University, Executive Coaching Certificates from the University of Cambridge, and multiple certifications in psychology, trauma, and somatic practices, Denisse offers a wealth of knowledge and expertise to guide her clients towards a more fulfilling life.

Learn more at: <https://livelovemind.com/about>


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- The Healing Centre Australia: Trauma-Informed Certificate for Coaches
- Trauma Healing Online Conferences. Interviews by Dr. Bessel Van Der Kolk, Dr. Peter Levine, Dr. Gabor Maté, Dr. Arielle Schwartz, Dr. Richard Schwartz, Dr. Frank Anderson.

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