

# User's Guide Recovery From Childhood Trauma

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# Introduction

## Welcome

Welcome to this six session video workshop on Recovery from Childhood Trauma! I am so grateful for each of you who have found your way to this workshop. A special welcome to fellow survivors of childhood trauma. I honor your courage in pursuing your personal journey of recovery. Welcome, as well, to all who work with survivors of childhood trauma and all who love someone who is a survivor. My prayer is that this workshop will offer greater understanding and hope for each and all of you.

## What This Course Is Not

It is important to have realistic expectations of this course. This is a workshop. It is not therapy. It is simply a workshop that explores one model of recovery from childhood trauma.

This course is not intended to provide a recovery program or to replace other important resources in recovery. If you are in a therapeutic relationship, or working with a spiritual director, my prayer is that this course will enrich that relationship. If you are involved in a twelve step group or support group, or working with a sponsor, it is my hope that this course will enrich that resource as well.

## Suggestions for Using this Material on Your Own

If you are using this material on your own, I encourage you to find some way to discuss the content of each session with another person or with a small group. Although each person's recovery is different, everyone's recovery is empowered by the mutual support and encouragement that can only be found in a one-on-one or a group setting.

The course is designed to be processed and absorbed over time. It would be best to watch the six sessions over a six day or six week time span, making sure you allow time for writing and reflection after each session, using the "Questions for Reflection" found in this User's Guide. In addition to responses to the questions at the end of each session, you may want to journal other reflections you have. Whatever writing and discussing you do in response to each session will help you process and absorb the material in ways I pray will bring new hope and strength to your life.

Do be sure that you also take time to listen to the guided meditation developed to coincide with each video. You might want to use these audio meditations many times over. Meditation has been shown to be effective in quieting the post traumatic stress reactions many survivors experience long after the trauma.

## Suggestions for Using this Material in a Group: Notes for Group Facilitators

If you are using this course as the basis of a small group discussion, you will probably want to plan to meet for a six week period, viewing one video presentation and listening to the corresponding audio meditation each time you meet. It would also be possible to use this workshop series as the basis for a two day seminar—working through three sessions each day.

### Facilitating the Discussion

As a facilitator, your role is to welcome participants at the beginning of each session, show the video and give the group time to do some individual writing and reflecting. Encourage participants to respond to the questions as they can and to take time to write whatever other thoughts and reflections they might have in response to the video presentation.

It is important to allow time for participants to write and reflect on their own before spending time discussing the material as a group. Allowing time for individual reflection and writing can dramatically enrich the experience for each participant and can greatly enhance the time of sharing as a group.

For this reason, this User's Guide is set up in a workbook format with questions that are designed to help participants reflect on the content from each video. Space is provided for participants to write reflections. The graphic of the model is also included in the User's Guide for participants to review.

Your role in facilitating the discussion is simply to invite people to share from their time of writing and reflecting. Feel free to share honestly from your own reflections as well. Try to end on time, closing with the audio meditation for the session as a way to help participants experience the healing gift of guided meditation.

### Getting Started: Suggestions for the First Session

In the first session you will want to begin your time by welcoming the group and allowing time for introductions, making sure everyone in the group has met everyone and that everyone knows they are welcome.

You might also want to say a few words about the structure of your time together, including:

- the length of the video
- the time that will be allotted to write and reflect individually
- the time that will be given to group discussion
- the time for the closing audio meditation

Be sure that everyone has a copy of this User's Guide. You might have participants print one out at home before the first meeting. You might also have paper and pens available in case some do not have their Guide with them.

It is important that you reassure participants that they are not required to share in the group discussion, and that whatever they write is theirs to keep and does not have to be shared with the group. You also want to make it clear that you welcome anything that they each may have to share from their reflections on the topic being discussed.

Before you begin the video session each time, you might want to offer a simple prayer, inviting God's Spirit to bring new truth and hope and healing to each one.

If your group is larger than eight participants, you might want to break the group into smaller groups for discussion, with a designated facilitator for each group.

It can be helpful to read the simple reminders listed here with the group as you begin your first session.

1. Realize that trust grows over time. If sharing in a group setting is risky, realize that you do not have to share more than feels safe. However what you have to share will enrich the discussion. So do participate in the discussion as much as you are able.
2. Do your best to listen attentively to other participants. You do not need to share the same perspectives or experiences in order to learn from each other. In fact, our differences can enrich us and broaden our understanding.

When you share, try to stay focused on the topic at hand. And be aware of leaving plenty of time for others to share.

### **Group Guidelines**

Take a few moments to read the following guidelines out loud at the beginning of each session together.

1. Anything said in the group is considered confidential and will not be discussed outside the group unless specific permission is given to do so.
- 2 We will provide time for each person present to talk if they feel comfortable doing so.
3. We will listen attentively and respectfully to each other and will refrain from giving advice.

### **Listening to Emotional Distress**

Be aware that listening to emotional pain will be part of the experience of being a leader and a participant in this group. The goal is to simply make room for each other's expressions of distress, to honor these expressions--not by trying to "fix" or "minimize" the pain--but by acknowledging the pain that is being shared and by thanking the person for what they have shared.

1. Remember that you are not responsible to take the pain away. People in helping relationships often feel that they are being asked to make the other person feel better. When we are in distress, having others try to "make us feel better" actually serves to make us feel alone, minimized, and even disrespected.
2. Not only are you not responsible to take the pain away, one of the things people need most is an opportunity to face and to experience the pain in their life. They have usually spent years denying their pain and running from it. Healing can come when we are able to face our pain in the presence of someone who cares about us. Rather than trying to take the pain away, then, commit yourself to listening attentively as it is expressed.

3. Realize that some group members may not feel comfortable with other participants' expressions of sadness or distress. You may want to acknowledge at the beginning of the first group meeting that such emotions are uncomfortable, but you can remind the group that part of healing is to learn to feel and to allow others to feel.
4. Be very cautious about giving answers and advice. Advice and answers can minimize peoples' experiences. Simple solutions rarely work, and they can easily communicate "You should be better now" or "You shouldn't really be talking about this."
5. Be sure to communicate direct affirmation any time people talk about their painful emotions. It takes courage to talk about our pain because it creates anxiety for us. It is a great gift to be trusted by those who are struggling.

## Course Outline

Session One: Video: Introduction  
Audio Meditation: Focused Breathing

Session Two: Video: Overview of a Model for Recovery from Childhood Trauma  
Audio Meditation: Resting in a Peaceful Place

Session Three: Video: Developing Awareness  
Audio Meditation: Resting in a Peaceful Place in the Light of God's Presence

Session Four: Video: Acknowledging and Taking Ownership  
Audio Meditation: Resting in a Peaceful Place with Jesus and Your Younger Self

Session Five: Video: Integration  
Audio Meditation: Jesus Inviting the Children to Come to Him

Session Six: Video: Closing Comments  
Audio Meditation: Listening to Jesus' Words of Blessing Over You

## Session One

### Introduction to Childhood Trauma

Whenever we are faced with difficulties of any kind we experience extra doses of adrenaline pulsing through our bodies. We are on alert. We are all charged up. This extra adrenaline often leaves us feeling anxious and wired. Small amounts of adrenaline help us learn, help keep us focused on a task, and even help us do well through surgeries. But too much adrenaline makes it difficult to learn or focus on anything. And it wears us out. So the question is, what do we do about all this extra adrenaline? How do we take care of ourselves when we are under stress?

There are two things that seem to help me the most. First, it helps me to be still every day for a period of time. And second, it helps me to keep moving. It helps me to get outside and walk, to go to the gym for a workout, to run around and play outside with our grandson.

It might be helpful to brainstorm ways that you enjoy being still and ways you enjoy being active. Consider posting these two lists somewhere so you can refer to them easily during times when you are too tired or too agitated to remember them.

A list of quiet activities might include listening to calming music, soaking in the bath, breathing slowly and easily for several minutes, meditating, reading, praying, or simply being still and quiet. A list of moving activities could include walking, biking, hiking, gardening, going for a run, dancing, going to the gym.

It is clear that both being still and being active take time. This means that taking care of ourselves in these ways will need to become a priority. This is often not an easy thing for us to do. We often live our lives responding to other people's needs and being unaware of our own. But it is always a gift—not only to ourselves but to everyone in our lives—when we take good care of ourselves. In fact, when we don't take care of ourselves we are not really able to care well for others. So we need to be willing to say no to some of the demands in our lives (including our own demands of ourselves) in order to find time to be still and to keep moving.

Take good care of you. You are God's beloved child. You are of infinite value. Find time to be still and time to move.

from *Keep Breathing: What To Do When You Don't Know What To Do* by Juanita Ryan

**Questions for reflection:**

1. What do you do to take care of yourself?

2. In what way might you be neglecting self care?

3. What might you do to take better care of yourself this coming week?

4. What physical and emotional reactions do you sometimes experience when you are triggered? (“Being triggered” is the experience of having old feelings of fear and shame reactivated by a current situation or event, causing us to “overreact” or shut down.)

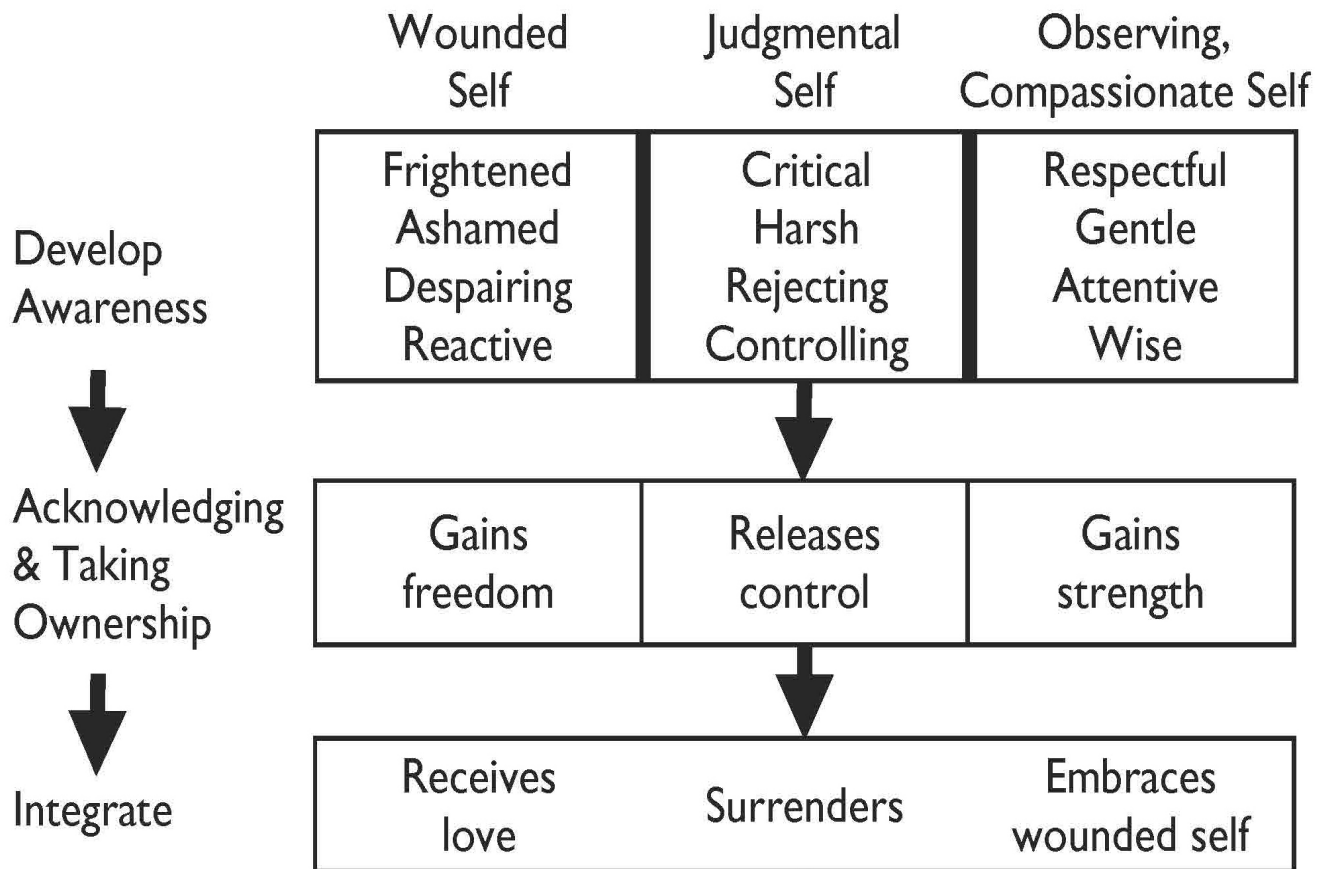
5. What constructive things do you do to calm and soothe yourself?

6. Who are the people in your life who support and care about you? Make a plan for letting one or more of them know you are working through this video workshop. Make a plan to check in with one or more of them during this time.



## Session Two: Overview of a Model for Recovery from Childhood Trauma

Recovery from childhood trauma involves owning the experiences we have disowned. It includes owning parts of ourselves that we continue to want to push away. This is a painful process because it means that we will need to embrace painful realities. Everything in us (and often around us) tells us that this is not the right path to take. But it is always truth, no matter how painful, that frees us. Embracing our life experiences and their ongoing impact on us is the path to freedom and wholeness.



### Questions for Reflection:

1. What are you hoping to gain from this workshop?

2. What thoughts do you have as you look at this model for recovery from childhood trauma?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What do you see yourself doing (consciously or unconsciously) to push painful experiences away?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What gives you the strength and courage you need to face painful realities in your life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Write a prayer telling God whatever is on your mind and inviting God to bring greater healing into your life as you engage in this workshop.

## Session Three Developing Awareness

We begin the first healing process by getting the support we need to look inside. This help might come from a therapist or a support group. It might come as well from a few other people who love us and listen to us and pray for us. But the basic truth is that we need the help of at least one other person to even begin this journey.

When we embark on this healing journey, we often have little awareness of what is happening internally. We may be aware that we are anxious or depressed. We may be aware that we are exhausted from trying so hard to make life work. We may be aware that we feel lonely even when we are with others because we are perpetually detached and numb. But we are often unaware of the degree of fear and shame and resentment we carry, or of the internal trap in which we are caught.

	Wounded Self	Judgmental Self	Observing, Compassionate Self
Develop Awareness	Frightened Ashamed Despairing Reactive	Critical Harsh Rejecting Controlling	Respectful Gentle Attentive Wise

### Questions for Reflection:

1. Notice the part of you that is able to observe your thoughts and feelings. Let this observing part of you notice whatever is going on in your body right now. Describe what you notice.
  
2. Are you aware of feelings of sadness, confusion, anger, wanting to hide or disappear? If so, this is probably what we are referring to in this model as your wounded self. Check in with this part of you. Write whatever you sense.

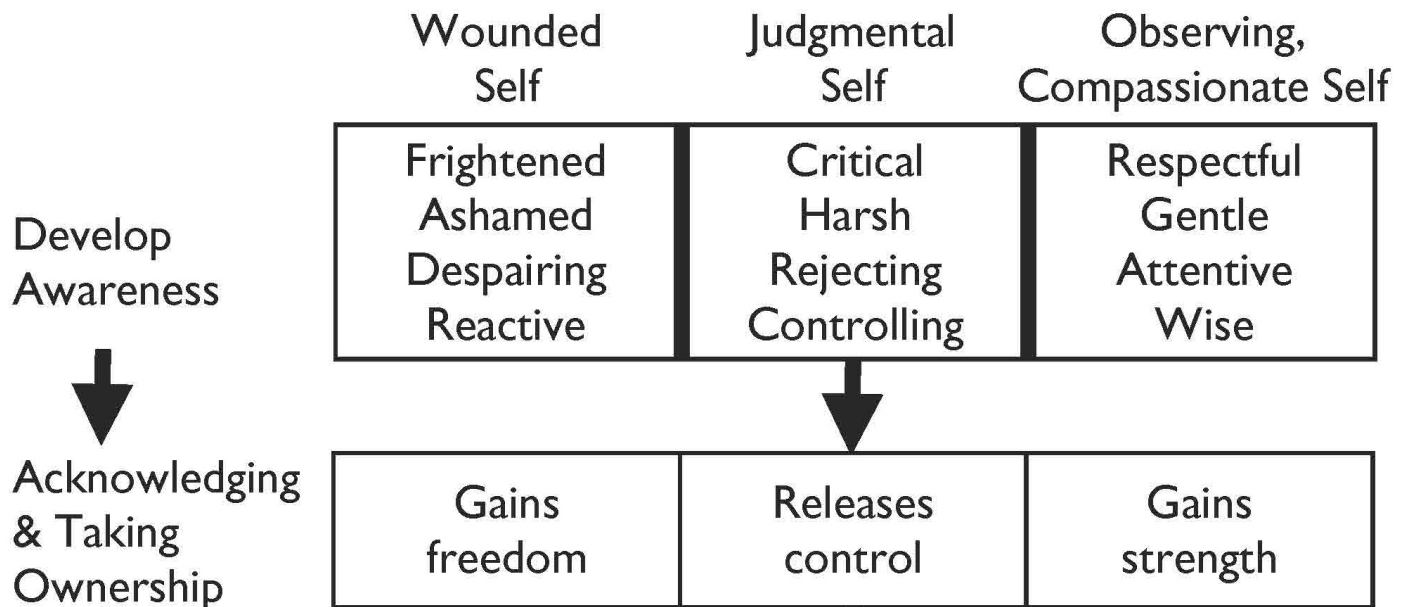
3. Are you aware of critical thoughts you have toward yourself? If so, this is probably the judgmental part of you. What is this part of you saying about you? What is it like to hear these judgements against yourself?

4. Are you aware of any compassion toward yourself? If so, what is this part of you wanting to say to your wounded self and to your judgmental self?

5. What might someone who knows you and loves you say in response to your wounded self and your judgmental self?

## Session Four: Acknowledging and Taking Ownership

The next process of this healing journey is about taking ownership of each of these parts of ourselves. Taking ownership moves us beyond awareness to a growing acknowledgment that the wounded child self, the harsh and controlling judgmental self, and the observing, compassionate self are truly parts of our psyche. The goal of taking ownership is to allow God's Spirit to transform us. The compassionate part of us gains strength, the wounded part of us gains freedom, and the judgmental part of us begins to release control. All of this leads to less internal division and moves us toward integration, or wholeness.



### Questions for Reflection

1. Light a candle for yourself from the compassionate part of yourself. Light it for your younger selves. If you choose, you might say "The Light of God" or the "The Light of Christ." Sit quietly noticing the gentle presence of this light.

As you sit in this light ask yourself what it is like to say: "This is me" about your compassionate self.

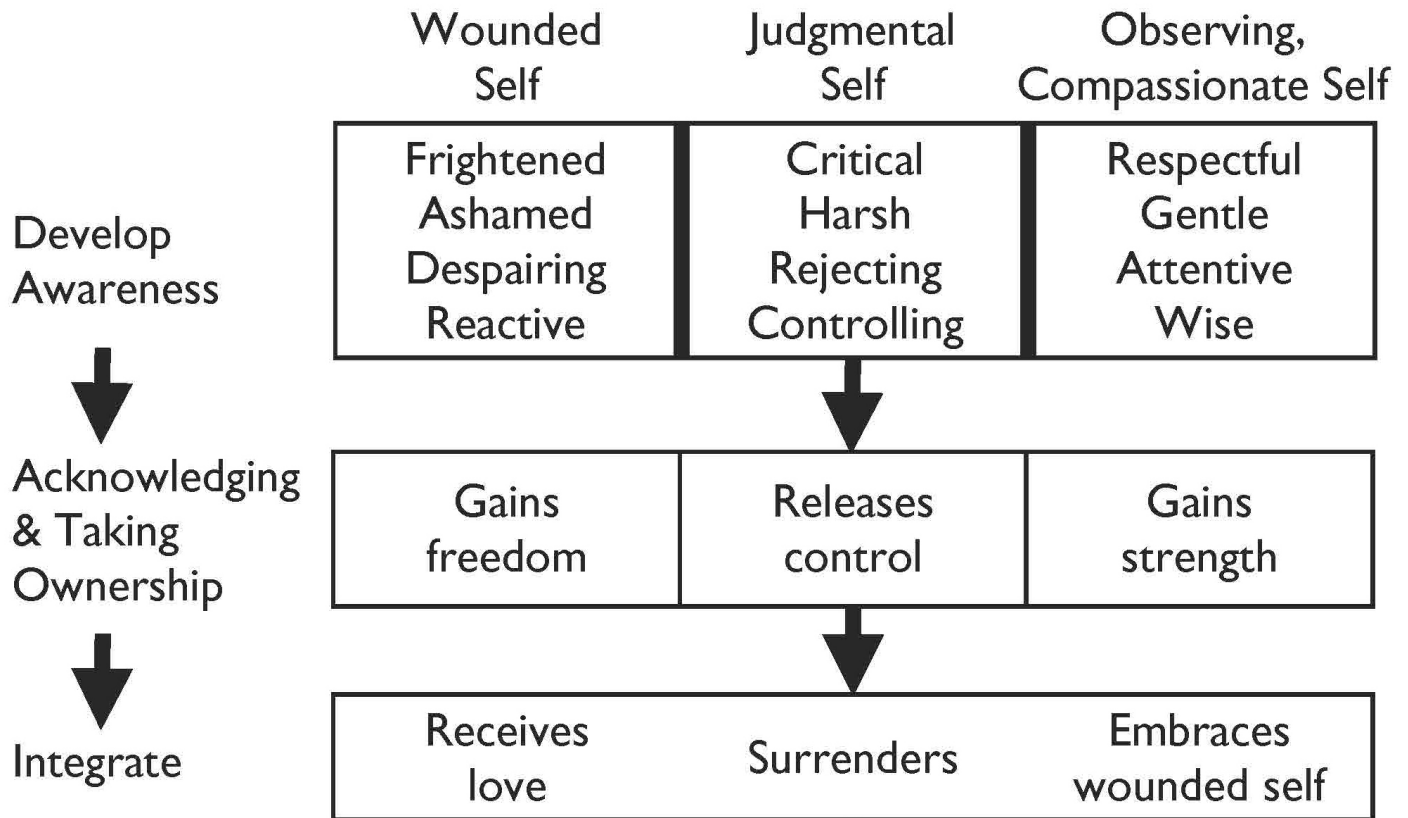
2. As you sit in this light ask yourself what it might be like to say: “This is me” about the judgmental part of yourself.

3. As you sit in this light ask yourself what it might be like to say: “This is me” about the wounded part of yourself.

4. What might the compassionate part of you want to say or do to extend compassion to your younger selves?

## Session Five: Integration

The third process of this cyclical journey is integration. The process of integration involves bringing parts that have been separated together into a whole. Integration happens as our compassionate self embraces our wounded self, as our wounded self takes in love from God, from others and from ourselves, and as our judgmental self releases its defensive pride and its desperate attempts to control and surrenders to God's loving care.



### Questions for Reflection

1. Write a prayer for the judgmental part of you.

2. Write a prayer for the wounded part of you.

3. What might it be like for your younger self (or selves) to rest in Jesus' arms?

4. What might it be like to welcome your younger selves into your arms?



## Session Six: Final Reflections

The core wound of childhood trauma is a wound to the child's developing sense of self. As we have seen, the child comes to believe terrible things about himself or herself. Most commonly, traumatized children who are not assisted to heal as children, will carry with them into adulthood beliefs that they are unlovable and without intrinsic value. These beliefs, whether conscious or unconscious, form the basis of the person's identity. Letting go of these beliefs, therefore, may feel like annihilation. It may feel like letting go of all there is of oneself.

But as we experience the kind of healing love we have been discussing, we begin to experience ourselves in new ways. We begin to experience ourselves as loved and valued.

### Questions for Reflection

1. What angry, anguished thoughts and feelings have you had (or do you still have) about God in relation to the trauma you have experienced in life?

2. Write a prayer expressing to God whatever is on your heart in relation to God.

3. What might it be like to let go of despair, shame, rage, fear?

4. What might it be like to know yourself to be loved and valued by God?

5. What stories from your own healing journey are especially meaningful to you?

**Thank you for participating in this workshop!**

**If you found some of the writing suggestions or the audio meditations to be particularly helpful it might help your healing to continue to use them.**

**Blessings as you continue on your healing journey.**

**Please feel free to share this material with others.**

