

Dr. Monique Thompson

DHA, LPC-S

25 Years in Private Practice

EMDRIA Certified Therapist™

Infidelity & Mental Health Expert

Bestselling Author

Texas & Florida Therapy

International Trauma-Informed
Relationship + Life Coaching



What Are We Passing Down?

Trauma, the brain, generational patterns, and the possibility of change. Domestic violence is not only her problem; it belongs to the whole culture.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS | EASTGATE
OCTOBER 17, 2026

WHAT EPIGENETICS MEANS

Chemical markers such as **DNA methylation** help regulate gene activity. They **do not change the DNA sequence** and are not a diagnosis.

What we can say: violence can affect people beyond the person directly harmed, biologically, emotionally and socially. **No one is destined to repeat abuse or remain harmed.**

HOLOCAUST STUDY | 2 GENERATIONS

Yehuda et al. (2016) studied 32 Holocaust survivors and 22 adult children. They found differences in methylation of **FKBP5**, a gene tied to the body's stress response, in both parents and offspring, with patterns linked across generations.

A biological association, not proof of a specific inheritance mechanism.

SYRIAN FAMILIES | 3-GENERATION DESIGN

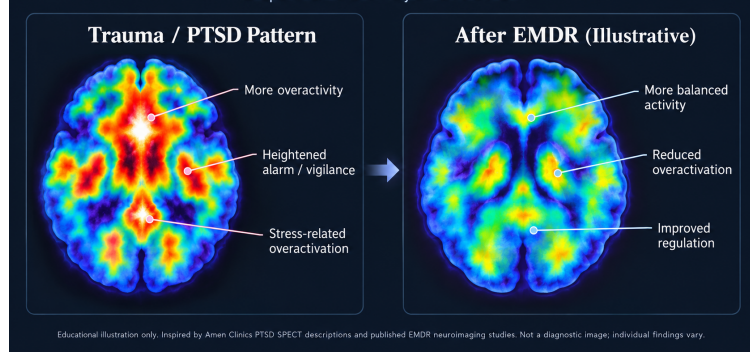
Mulligan et al. (2025) studied 48 families (131 people): grandmothers, mothers and grandchildren. They found **14** methylation sites linked to germline exposure and **21** linked to direct exposure to violence.

A pregnant grandmother, her fetus, and that fetus's developing cells can all be exposed at once; this is not proof of transmission through unexposed generations.

THE BRAIN CAN RESPOND TO ADVERSITY, AND TO TREATMENT

Trauma and the Brain

Simplified SPECT-style illustration

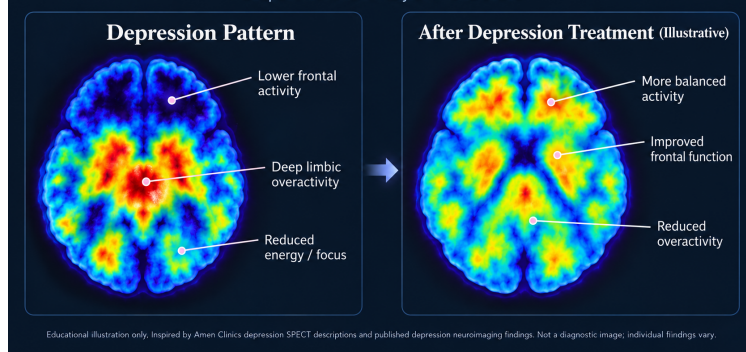


Trauma / PTSD: Research shows changes in stress-related brain activity; small imaging studies have found changes after EMDR. Patterns vary by person.

Both images are educational illustrations in a SPECT style, not actual patient scans. Brain images cannot diagnose a condition or predict recovery.

Depression and the Brain

Simplified SPECT-style illustration



Depression: Linked to changes across several brain circuits. Treatment can change both symptoms and measurable brain function.

HELP AND SUPPORT

Immediate danger: 911

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-SAFE (7233)

| Text START to 88788 | thehotline.org

Emotional crisis: call or text 988

Leaving can increase danger in some situations; a confidential advocate can help with safety planning. Use a device a controlling person can't monitor.

FOLLOW ALONG



Today's Eastgate page

GET YOUR HANDOUT



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Dr. Monique Thompson, DHA, LPC-S | doctormoniquethompson.com

Choose To Heal. Choose To Learn. Choose To Grow.™

Sources: Yehuda et al. (2016) Biol Psychiatry 80:372-380; Mulligan et al. (2025) Sci Rep 15:5945; Levin, Lazrove & van der Kolk (1999); Pagani et al. (2007). Educational handout only; not therapy or medical advice.

FAITH · THERAPY · SCIENCE

The Science Behind Stress

An Explanation for the Faithful

CHOOSE TO HEAL. CHOOSE TO LEARN. CHOOSE TO GROW.™

Many faithful people believe that if they just prayed harder, the stress would lift. But faithful people in Scripture felt every kind of stress, and God met each one differently.

Each stress type includes a Bible story, what science says is happening in your body, and what actually helps.

1. First, notice how it feels

Before you name the kind of stress, notice where your body is. Clinicians call this your **window of tolerance**.

TOO REVVED UP

Fight, flight, urgency, overwhelm

THE WORKABLE MIDDLE

Present enough to notice, feel, reflect and choose. This is where prayer, wisdom and good decisions come most easily.

SHUT DOWN

Numbness, disconnection, going blank

Framework: Siegel, D. J. (1999), *The Developing Mind*; Ogden, P. (2009).

EUSTRESS

A blessing can still feel heavy.

Graduation, a new calling, a promotion. Excited and overwhelmed at once.

Joshua felt it stepping into Moses' shoes, and God told him again and again, "Be strong and of a good courage." (Joshua 1:9)

THE SCIENCE

Training for a first marathon.

Short bursts of stress hormones boost energy, focus and performance.

Nerves before a big presentation. Your heart rate and breathing rise to get you ready to perform.

Starting a job you prayed for.

Good stress and bad stress start the same way in the body. What differs is how you see it: as a challenge you can meet.

Source: Psych Central, "Stress Response: What's the Difference Between Eustress and Distress?" (medically reviewed 2021).

[Learn more](#)

WHAT HELPS



Self-help

HELPS

Rest, planning, celebrating the win



Spiritual help

HELPS

Gratitude and prayer



Professional help

OPTIONAL

Optional: coaching if the overwhelm lingers

DISTRESS

“This is too much for me.”

A felt loss of control, like drinking from a fire hydrant. Painful, but not always trauma.

Moses carried a whole nation alone until Jethro said, “This thing is too heavy for thee.” (Exodus 18:18)

THE SCIENCE

Facing possible foreclosure.

Worry and a sense of threat bring irritability and trouble sleeping.

Living with ongoing pain.

Distress can disrupt appetite and sleep, which makes coping even harder.

A workload with no training or support. When distress lasts, it is linked to heart disease, high blood pressure and depression.

Source: Psych Central, “Stress Response: What’s the Difference Between Eustress and Distress?” (medically reviewed 2021).

[Learn more](#)

WHAT HELPS



Self-help

HELPS

Rest, boundaries, asking for help



Spiritual help

HELPS

Prayer and wise counsel



Professional help

HELPS

If it persists or disrupts sleep, work or relationships

2. Then ask: what season is this?

ACUTE STRESS

A time to act

Can this be changed? A harsh boss or a toxic workplace. Set the boundary, change teams, or leave, and the stress lifts.

In Scripture: When King Saul threw a spear at him in the palace where he served, David didn't stay and wait for it to pass. "And David fled, and escaped that night." (1 Samuel 19:10)

It needs: wisdom and courage to move.

THE SCIENCE

A tense meeting with your supervisor. Your nervous system's fight-or-flight response speeds up your heart rate and breathing so you can respond.

A near-miss in traffic on the way to work. The jolt is short-term, and your body settles once the danger has passed.

One deadline after another. When acute stress keeps repeating ("episodic acute stress"), your body never gets time to return to calm.

Source: Cleveland Clinic, "Stress: What It Is, Symptoms, Management & Prevention."

[Learn more](#)

WHAT HELPS



Self-help HELPS

Problem-solve and take action



Spiritual help HELPS

Wisdom and courage to move



Professional help OPTIONAL

Optional: coaching to plan your next move

CHRONIC STRESS

A time to endure

Will this stay? Caring for a parent with dementia. Love doesn't make it light, and it won't go away.

In Scripture: Ruth stayed beside her grieving mother-in-law Naomi. God met them through daily work in the fields and a community that helped carry the load. "Whither thou goest, I will go." (Ruth 1:16)

It needs: coping skills, rest, and people to share the load.

THE SCIENCE

Long-term caregiving. Normally adrenaline and cortisol drop once a threat passes. When stress never lets up, the fight-or-flight response stays turned on.

Ongoing money strain. Constant cortisol is linked to anxiety, depression, sleep problems and trouble with memory and focus.

A long-term illness in the family. Over time, chronic stress raises the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease and a weaker immune system.

Source: Mayo Clinic, "Chronic stress puts your health at risk."

[Learn more](#)

WHAT HELPS



Self-help HELPS

Coping skills, rest, routines



Spiritual help HELPS

Community, endurance, lament



Professional help HELPS

Support so you don't carry it alone

TRAUMATIC STRESS

A time to heal

Did this wound me? Something terrible you never chose. It leaves real marks on the brain and body.

In Scripture: Joseph was betrayed by his own brothers, sold into slavery, and falsely imprisoned. His healing took years, and his brothers had to face what they did before reconciliation came. “Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good.” (Genesis 50:20)

It needs: treatment for the wound, and accountability for the harm. Justice is part of healing.

THE SCIENCE

Always on alert. The amygdala, the brain’s alarm, stays overactive. That can show up as jumpiness, hypervigilance and poor sleep.

Memories that intrude. The hippocampus, which files memories, can let trauma resurface as flashbacks or nightmares. It may also be smaller in people with PTSD.

Hard to feel safe. The prefrontal cortex, which tells the alarm “the danger has passed,” is less active. This is linked to avoidance and emotional numbness.

Source: BrainLine (WETA/PBS), “The Anatomy of PTSD,” with Michael Roy, MD.

[Learn more](#)

WHAT HELPS

 **Self-help**
NOT ENOUGH ALONE
Grounding helps, but it isn’t treatment

 **Spiritual help**
HELPS
Comfort, refuge and community

 **Professional help**
HELPS
Essential: trauma-informed treatment

3. Pray first. Then take the next faithful step.

Prayer helps you discern which season you're in. Daniel prayed, and he also asked his companions to pray with him (Daniel 2:17–18). Turning to God and reaching for people both honor God.

Getting help is not a lack of faith. A panic attack can be a signal to cope differently, not a sign of weak faith. Counseling can be one of the ways God brings healing.

“I first asked to walk when I couldn’t find the words or feelings to express what I was thinking.”

A client, sharing why she chose a walking session (shared anonymously)

Healing doesn't always happen sitting still. In one Stanford study, a 90-minute walk in nature reduced rumination, the mental loop of replaying the same worry, compared with a walk along a busy road.

Bratman, G. N., et al. (2015). *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112(28), 8567–8572.

***From Sitting to Walking: The Women's Walk–Verisimilitude Model™ —
A Multicomponent, Culturally Responsive Wellness Intervention for Black Women***

We keep telling women to move their bodies. But they don't have any more time.

The research is clear: movement improves health. So we keep telling women to exercise. But for many women, especially Black women, the time simply isn't there. Time poverty is a structural reality, not a scheduling problem.

So this past summer I started **The Women's Walk** with Black women, built around one idea: **combine movement with the healing experience itself**. Instead of asking women to find extra time for exercise, we walk while we do the work. That opens access to better health outcomes, not just emotional and mental health support.

It also raised a question I couldn't let go of: *Why do we ask people to sit still while talking about the hardest moments of their lives?* That question is behind **NatureMind™**, my walking-integrated approach to healing. In September I presented this work at the University of Phoenix College of Social and Behavioral Sciences Research Symposium.

In August, six women from The Women's Walk joined me for the inaugural **Black Women's Verisimilitude Retreat™**. We walked outdoors using NatureMind™ and my **Emotion Integration Network™ (EIN)**, both grounded in Eugene Gendlin's *Focusing*: listening to what the body and emotions are saying instead of thinking our way through. The experience was remarkable. All six women said that walking helped them reach thoughts, feelings and memories differently than sitting would have. They described approaching painful memories without the usual alarm, feeling clear, and leaving with new insight about

themselves. By the end, they named themselves the *Patchwork Collective*: distinct stories, stitched into one whole.

“Sitting, I tend to stay in the analytical mindset. The walking allows you to focus on you and hear nature.”

Retreat participant, shared with permission

The building blocks are well supported: walking and time in nature can quiet rumination, and walking therapy has been shown to be feasible. Early feedback from participants is encouraging. What hasn't been tested yet is whether walking itself is what makes the difference, and for whom. That is the next research question, and I'm building the studies to answer it.

Interested in partnering on this research, or bringing this conversation to your organization? Let's talk.

Your reflection

Take two minutes with God and ask:

- What could change if I moved? (*a time to act*)
- What am I carrying that won't go away? (*a time to endure*)
- What wounded me that I never chose? (*a time to heal*)

You don't have to write details. A single word is enough.

TAKE THE NEXT STEP ON PAPER

Blueprint for Self-Care: Thriving Version

A guided journal grounded in faith, backed by science

Why write it down? Putting experiences into words is one of the most studied self-care tools in psychology. In a landmark study, college students who wrote about a difficult experience for just 15 minutes a day, four days in a row, made fewer visits to the health center in the months that followed.

Pennebaker, J. W., & Beall, S. K. (1986). *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 95(3), 274–281.

Timing matters, too. Research shows writing helps most when you go at your own pace, so this journal doesn't ask you to start with your hardest story. It walks you through it, step by step.

Pennebaker, J. W., & Chung, C. K. (2007). In *Foundations of Health Psychology*. Oxford University Press.

Inside:

- ✓ Science-based self-care practices that fit into time you already have
- ✓ Guided journaling prompts to help you name what you're carrying
- ✓ Education on recognizing harmful and controlling patterns
- ✓ Local and national resources for anyone whose life has been touched by domestic violence

Ready to begin? Order your copy online.

Order the Journal

Buying for your women's ministry, shelter or group? **Ask about bulk copies.**

Want this message for your church, ministry or team?

Women's ministries, conferences, sororities and workplaces: I bring keynotes and workshops on faith, stress and the science of healing, in person or virtual.

Book Dr. Thompson

FREE · WEEKLY COURTESY

Science-Based Self-Care Resources

Self-care that requires finding new time has already failed the women who need it most. Time poverty is real, not a scheduling problem.

The good news: small doses count. Research shows that a **2-minute movement break every 20 minutes** measurably changes how your body responds to long stretches of sitting. That's why I start with two minutes.

Dunstan, D. W., et al. (2012). *Diabetes Care*, 35(5), 976–983. Hyde, E., Greene, M. E., & Darmstadt, G. L. (2020). *Journal of Global Health*, 10(2).

Sign up and receive a **2-Minute Pause** reset right away. Then, each week, I'll send you a simple, science-based self-care practice to help you steady your body and spirit in any season.

Get My 2-Minute Pause

If you recognized a season you don't want to walk through alone, I'm here.

Start Here: Coaching or Therapy

With Care,

Dr. Monique Thompson

DHA, LPC-S · EMDRIA Certified Therapist™

Choose To Heal. Choose To Learn. Choose To Grow.™

Dr. Thompson Coaching + Counseling

doctormoniquethompson.com

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This page is for education and encouragement and is not a substitute for therapy. If you are in crisis, call or text 988.

If you are experiencing domestic violence, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or text START to 88788.