

HEALING AFTER ABUSE WORKSHOP

FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

A Workshop on Empowerment and
Recovery | Presented by: Heidi Mercado



Workshop Overview

Healing from abuse does not take place overnight. Healing is a journey. This workshop is designed to provide survivors with encouragement, empowerment and practical tools to transition from surviving the effects of abuse to thriving in healing and hope.

Participants will learn about the impact of abuse, understand trauma, rebuild self-worth, develop healthy coping skills and create a plan for a desired future.

Time: 2 Hours

Audience: Survivors of Domestic Violence

Format: In-Person or Virtual



Workshop Objectives

By the end of this workshop, participants will:

- Understand the impact of abuse.
- Recognize and understand trauma.
- Rebuilding self-worth.
- Develop healthy coping skills.
- Develop a personal healing action plan.
- Discover hope for the future through faith.



Welcome



Group Guidelines

- Please maintain confidentiality
- Show respect for all experiences shared
- No judgment
- Participating in discussion is voluntary



Icebreaker

Share one word that describes how you are feeling today.



FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF ABUSE

Abuse affects every area of life. Recognizing the impact of abuse is one of the first steps toward healing.

Some forms of abuse:

Physical: Intentional bodily harm or injury

Emotional: Manipulation, humiliation, or control

Psychological: Threats, gaslighting, and fear tactics

Sexual: Any non-consensual sexual act or coercion

Neglect: Withholding basic needs, care, or support



THE IMPACT OF ABUSE

*"I didn't realize how much the abuse affected my mental state — until I started to heal."
— Survivor*

Trauma rewires the brain, affecting memory, trust, and emotional regulation. Survivors often experience anxiety, depression, PTSD, and low self-worth. The effects of abuse can last years without proper support and intervention.



The Impacts of Abuse

Domestic violence and abuse affect much more than a person's physical safety. Abuse can impact every area of life, including emotional well-being, mental health, physical health, relationships, finances, and spiritual beliefs. Many of these effects can continue long after the abuse has ended.

Emotional Impacts

Survivors may experience:

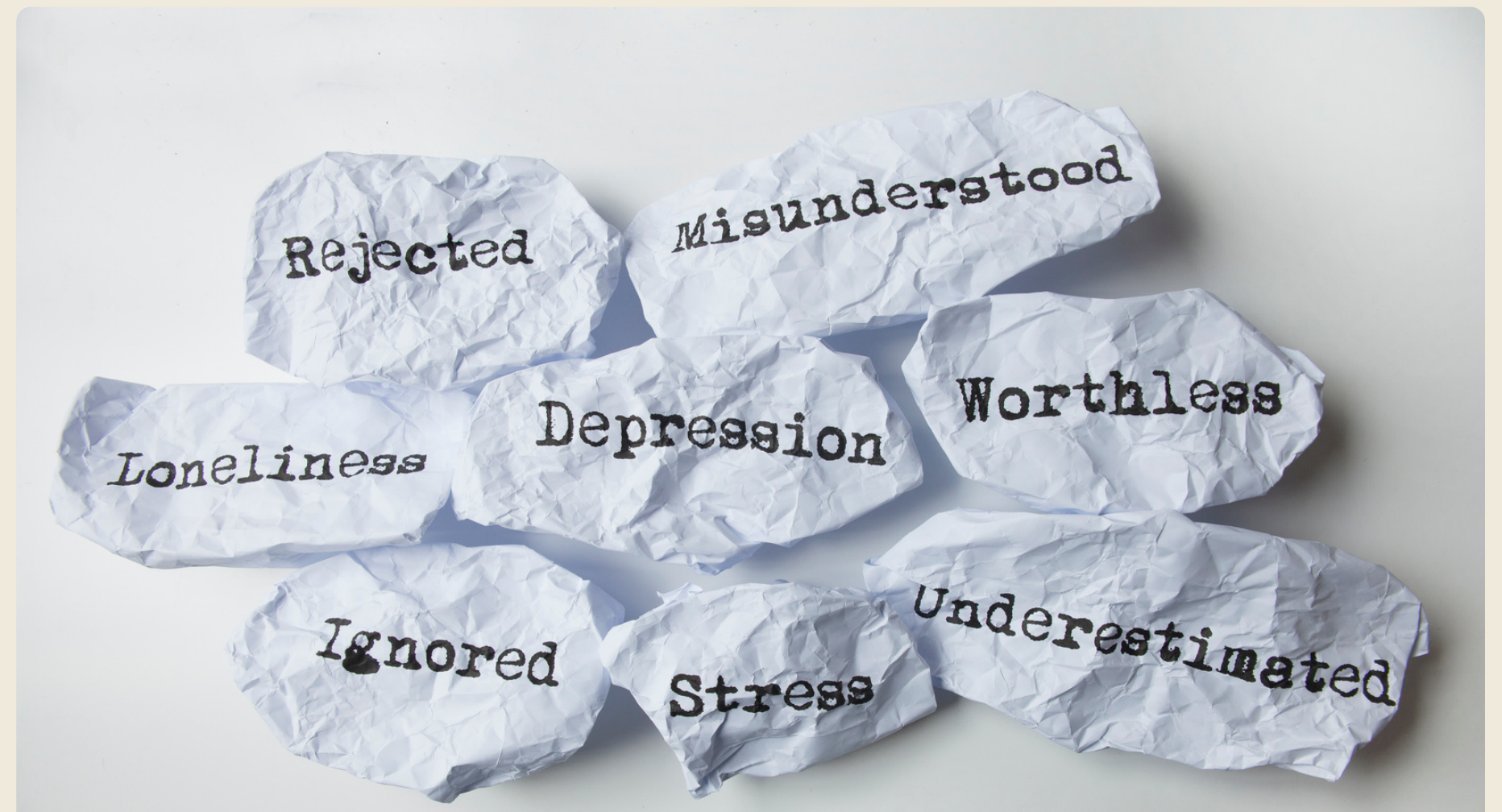
- Fear and anxiety
- Sadness and depression
- Shame and guilt
- Anger and resentment
- Low self-esteem
- Feelings of helplessness
- Loss of confidence
- Emotional numbness

Discussion Question:

"How has abuse affected the way you feel about yourself?"

Common Feelings

- Fear
- Shame
- Guilt
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Confusion
- Isolation



Mental and Psychological Impacts

Abuse can affect how a person thinks, processes information, and views the world.

Common effects include:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Memory problems
- Confusion
- Hypervigilance (constantly being on alert)
- Intrusive thoughts
- Difficulty making decisions
- Post-traumatic stress symptoms
- Negative self-talk

Example:

A survivor may struggle to trust their own judgment after years of being criticized, manipulated, or gaslighted.

Physical Impacts

Stress and trauma can affect the body.

Common physical effects include:

- Headaches
- Chronic pain
- Fatigue
- Sleep disturbances
- Digestive problems
- Increased blood pressure
- Muscle tension
- Weakened immune system

Important Point:

Trauma is stored not only in memories but can also affect the body's stress response systems.

Social and Relationship Impacts

Abusers often isolate victims from family, friends, and support systems.

As a result, survivors may experience:

- Difficulty trusting others
- Isolation and loneliness
- Fear of new relationships
- Challenges setting healthy boundaries
- Difficulty asking for help
- Strained family relationships

Reflection:

"What relationships were affected by the abuse?"

Financial Impacts

Many survivors experience financial abuse or economic hardship.

Examples include:

- Restricted access to money
- Damaged credit
- Employment disruption
- Loss of housing
- Debt created by the abuser
- Difficulty achieving financial independence

Example:

A survivor may remain in an unsafe situation because they lack financial resources to leave.

Spiritual Impacts

For survivors of faith, abuse can affect their relationship with God and their faith community.

Some may experience:

- Spiritual confusion
- Feelings of abandonment by God
- Misuse of Scripture by the abuser
- Distrust of faith leaders
- Difficulty praying or attending church

Others may find that faith becomes a source of strength and healing.

Impact on Children

Children who witness domestic violence may experience:

- Anxiety and fear
- Behavioral challenges
- Difficulty in school
- Sleep problems
- Low self-esteem
- Challenges forming healthy relationships later in life

Even when children are not directly abused, witnessing violence can have lasting effects.

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). Intimate Partner Violence Prevention.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014). SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach.

Judith Herman. (2022). Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror.

Group Activity

The Invisible Backpack

Identify emotional burdens you have carried because of abuse.

Ex: Fear, Rejection, Self-doubt, Anger



Now that we are aware of what we have been carrying,
let's discuss ways healing helps to lighten those burdens.



FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA AND THE HEALING PROCESS

Abuse affects every area of life. Recognizing the impact of abuse is one of the first steps toward healing.

Some forms of abuse:

Physical: Intentional bodily harm or injury

Emotional: Manipulation, humiliation, or control

Psychological: Threats, gaslighting, and fear tactics

Sexual: Any non-consensual sexual act or coercion

Neglect: Withholding basic needs, care, or support



What is Trauma?

"An event, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being."

Trauma is a person's emotional, psychological, spiritual, or physical response to a deeply distressing, frightening, or overwhelming experience. Trauma occurs when an event or series of events exceeds a person's ability to cope and leaves a lasting impact on their sense of safety, well-being, and ability to function.

Trauma is not defined only by what happened to someone—it is also defined by how the experience affected them.

References

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014). SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



Survival Responses

Trauma responses are survival responses.

Until a person is healed, they will respond from a place of survival.

Trauma Responses include:

- Fight
- Flight
- Freeze
- Fawn

Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fawn

Fight Response

What It Is:

The fight response occurs when a person confronts or resists a threat.

The brain signals the body to prepare for action by increasing adrenaline, heart rate, and energy.

What It May Look Like:

- Arguing back
- Defending oneself verbally
- Setting firm boundaries
- Becoming angry or confrontational
- Protecting children or loved ones

Example:

A survivor stands up to an abusive partner by refusing to comply with controlling demands.

Flight Response

What It Is:

The flight response occurs when a person attempts to escape danger. The brain believes the safest option is to get away from the threat.

What It May Look Like:

- Leaving the room
- Avoiding conflict
- Running away
- Constantly staying busy
- Anxiety and restlessness

Example:

A survivor leaves the house whenever tensions rise to avoid violence.

Freeze Response

What It Is:

The freeze response occurs when the brain determines that fighting or escaping may not be possible. The body may become immobilized, numb, or unable to act.

What It May Look Like:

- Feeling stuck
- Going blank during conflict
- Difficulty making decisions
- Emotional numbness
- Feeling disconnected from surroundings

Example:

A survivor remains silent during an abusive incident because their body shuts down in response to fear.

Fawn Response

What It Is:

The fawn response occurs when a person attempts to stay safe by pleasing, appeasing, or accommodating the threat. The individual learns that meeting the abuser's demands may reduce conflict or violence.

What It May Look Like:

- People-pleasing
- Difficulty saying no
- Avoiding disagreement
- Putting others' needs above one's own
- Seeking approval to stay safe

Example:

A survivor constantly agrees with an abusive partner, even when uncomfortable, to avoid anger or punishment.

References

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014). SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach.

Bessel van der Kolk. (2015). The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma.

Pete Walker. (2013). Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving.

What does healing look like?

- Feeling Safe
- Processing Emotions
- Building Healthy Support Systems
- Learning New Coping Skills



Let's Reflect

What helps you during difficult moments?



FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

REBUILDING SELF-WORTH

Abuse affects every area of life. Recognizing the impact of abuse is one of the first steps toward healing.

Some forms of abuse:

Physical: Intentional bodily harm or injury

Emotional: Manipulation, humiliation, or control

Psychological: Threats, gaslighting, and fear tactics

Sexual: Any non-consensual sexual act or coercion

Neglect: Withholding basic needs, care, or support



Reality: Abuse often damages:

- Confidence
- Trust
- Self-Esteem
- Identity

How can we rebuild our self-worth?

Proverbs 23:7 says,
"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he"



For every lie, replace with a truth

I am not good enough...

I am called His from before my birth. Isaiah 49:16

I am worthless...

I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Psalm 139:13-14

I am abandoned...

I will never leave you and I will never forsake you. Hebrews 13:5

I am unwanted...

I am chosen and I am made by God. Isaiah 44:1-2

Rebuilding

Restoring your sense of self, safety, and trust. Setting boundaries, developing new routines, and reconnecting with your identity.

Thriving

Moving beyond survival — finding joy, purpose, and empowerment. Building a life defined by your strength, not your past.





Write 3 positive qualities about yourself.



FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

HEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES

Abuse affects every area of life. Recognizing the impact of abuse is one of the first steps toward healing.

Some forms of abuse:

Physical: Intentional bodily harm or injury

Emotional: Manipulation, humiliation, or control

Psychological: Threats, gaslighting, and fear tactics

Sexual: Any non-consensual sexual act or coercion

Neglect: Withholding basic needs, care, or support



Unhealthy Coping

- Isolation
- Substance use
- Self-blame
- Avoidance



Healthy Coping

- Prayer
- Worship
- Talking to a trusted friend
- Journaling
- Support Groups
- Counseling
- Work out/Exercise

Activity

Create a Personal Self-Care Plan

Categories to plan for:

- Emotional
- Physical
- Spiritual
- Social

STRATEGIES FOR THRIVING

From surviving mode to thriving mode — your journey, your power.



Building supportive relationships: connect with trusted people and communities.

Practicing self-care and mindfulness: nurture your body, mind, and spirit daily.

Seeking professional help: therapy, counseling, and community resources.

Setting personal goals and boundaries: reclaim your voice and define your path.

Before (Surviving): fear, isolation, self-doubt, hypervigilance

After (Thriving): empowerment, connection, confidence, and hope

**MOVING
FORWARD**

**YOU ARE
NOT
ALONE.**

Healing is possible.

heidi@iamrise.org

www.iamrise.org