

Quick Start Field Guide

for

Emotional Trauma Survival Groups

Version 3.9

Essentials for
peer based support groups
for emotional trauma

“Laughter is the best medicine to cure
a wounded heart” - Anonymous

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TO PRINT POCKET-SIZED BOOKLETS

1. Download Quick Start Booklet.pdf
 - Pages arranged to print side by side & fold
2. Take the downloaded file to a printer, like FedEx Office/Kinkos, and specify:
 - Light colored card stock for the cover
 - Booklets 3.5" x 6.5" with staples
 - Number of booklets; each participant should get a booklet
3. Pay for setup and printing

REMEMBER

You may be in great pain or you may be numb
But you are not alone
You are not at fault for what was done to you
You are worthwhile and valuable
Your future can include freedom and joy

DISCLAIMER

Emotional Traumas Survival Groups are volunteer, peer based support groups.

Recovery from emotional trauma is serious business. Use this material at your own risk

Beatings, emotional domination, rape, incest, childhood sexual abuse, spiritual abuse, and severe neglect are among the many traumas that can stunt our social and emotional development as children, shred our dignity and confidence as adults, and tear us away from the communities that might otherwise help us heal.

Recovery from emotional trauma can be extremely painful, negatively affecting your health and wellbeing. If you have suffered severe emotional trauma, you should seek professional assistance from a licensed therapist, a psychologist, or a psychiatrist. Healthy relationships in Emotional Trauma Survival Groups can greatly benefit your recovery, but the path to restoration has risks.

Your physical, emotional, and psychological safety is your own personal responsibility. By using the material in this Quick Start Field Guide for Emotional Trauma Survival Groups or by participating in groups or other settings in which this material is used, you agree that you are responsible for all risks resulting from your participation, and you agree that you will stop and seek assistance if you do not believe you can safely continue to participate.

End Notes

1. Recovery is too often separated into silos: addiction, trauma, mental illness. This material addresses crossover between addiction and emotional trauma but we recommend professional referrals for individuals with mental illness.

Most addicts have emotional trauma. Most trauma victims self medicate their emotional pain with addictive behaviors.

2. The work of recovery cannot be done alone. We can prepare our minds with solitary activities like reading or journaling, but restoration of our hearts depends on healthy relationships – within our recovery team and ultimately with other people.
3. Herein are suggestions how to conduct effective recovery/support groups based on what actually works. Not a 12-step program but with similarities. We focus explicitly on healing through authentic relationships.
 - We need wisdom and guidance
 - We are not alone, we are not freaks
 - We need to tell our stories, safely
 - Together we seek freedom and joy
4. Over time we plan to provide additional support and reference materials at: www.EmotionalTraumaSurvival.com

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for

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www.EmotionalTraumaSurvival.com

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Essentials to start, facilitate, and participate in Emotional Trauma Survival Groups

Our Vision

1. Mutual support for trauma victims, addicts and alcoholics in peer based, volunteer support groups sharing similar emotional trauma but seeking freedom and joy
2. Recovery and restoration through authentic, healthy relationships
3. You choose how to run your own groups

Suggestions for Roles

Facilitator

1. Draws the best out of others without controlling meetings
2. Is not the focal point, allows others to initiate and lead discussions, but is ready to redirect if the meeting wanders off track
3. Is also a participant, tells own personal story, and accepts feedback and guidance from other participants.
4. Keeps environment safe for participants; intolerance and condemnation not allowed
5. Gives everyone a chance to tell their story
6. Is flexible when needs disrupt an agenda
7. Redirects when boundaries are crossed, or when there is deflection and denial
8. Emphasizes progress made together and hope for the future, if the group begins to slide into shared misery
9. Reinforces vision and meeting guidelines

9. To be free of resentment
 - By forgiving those who wronged us
 - By forgiving those who failed to protect us from emotional trauma
10. To be free of self condemnation
 - By accepting that our past is the best it can ever be
 - By forgiving ourselves for mistakes, imperfections, and poor choices
11. To work effectively with others
 - By understanding our personal strengths and limitations
 - By pursuing important goals as part of a team
 - By laughing with each other at our own absurd behaviors and situations
12. To avoid addictive substances and behaviors
 - By being thankful for sobriety one day at a time
 - By seeking support in stressful situations
 - By taking responsibility for our own care and recovery
 - By planning a response to relapse triggers, not waiting until they happen

5. To retrain misguided parts of the brain
 - By questioning our first thought which may be reflexive and wrong
 - By decoupling false associations
 - By practicing healthy behaviors
6. To be authentic
 - By recognizing, building, and defending appropriate boundaries.
 - By speaking and acting as we really are, not pretending or hiding our true selves
 - By escaping shame from an unchangeable past and fear of an unpredictable future
 - By learning to live in the present moment
7. To learn to trust appropriately
 - By distinguishing people who are safe from those who are toxic to us
 - By active listening, paraphrasing what we heard to confirm understanding
 - By accepting the inherent risk of relationships and emotional intimacy
8. To manage adversity, conflict and disappointment
 - By developing robust relational skills
 - By learning from our mistakes and failures
 - By giving up trying to be perfect

Participant

1. Shares responsibilities with facilitator, which is essential for long term success
- TAKES RESPONSIBILITY FOR OWN SELF
2. Tells own personal story. The more we tell our story the less power it has over us
 3. Is willing to consider suggestions and feedback from other participants
 4. Is willing to risk being triggered. In a safe environment, these moments may be an opportunity for healing, to rework our subconscious reactions and feelings
 5. Is unafraid to say no, I'm not ready to reveal that, or I'm not ready to answer that question. We heal at our own pace
 6. Laughs at own self and own odd behaviors

RELATES WELL TO OTHER PARTICIPANTS

7. Doesn't take on others' emotional burdens
8. Doesn't preach or try to fix others
9. Gently asks probing questions. We easily see in others what we reflexively deny and are blind to in ourselves.
 - How does that make you feel?
 - What I heard was . . . Is that accurate?
 - How's that working for you?
 - My experience is . . . Does this fit your experience and understanding?
10. Reinforces that we are not at fault for the trauma we experienced, that we are all worthwhile and have value

How to Start a Group

1. Gather a core group of at least four or five who share the vision
2. Decide what emotional trauma, or related traumas, will be the focus of the group.
3. Remember that many alcoholics and addicts also have emotional trauma
4. Establish the purpose of the group
 - Stage One PRESENT: practice healthy coping strategies and relationships
 - Stage Two PAST: work on trauma and journey together toward recovery
 - Stage Three FUTURE: reconnect the marginalized with society
5. WHO – meetings only for survivors of emotional trauma? Open or by invitation? Females or males only, or mixed gender? Allow perpetrators to participate?
6. WHEN – how often will the group meet and when? Plan to meet at least weekly – less often will lose momentum. Will there be an ending date for meetings, or will they continue indefinitely?
7. WHERE – at churches, public buildings, libraries, recreation centers? Accessibility?
8. Have participants sign a legal release of liability, and agreement follow guidelines? What to do if guidelines or boundaries are breached?
9. What to do in case of emergency?
10. Advertise open groups? Notify therapists?

Recovery Tasks

1. To choose growth and life over stagnation and death
 - By awareness that our reactions to past emotional trauma cause chaos in our lives today
 - By acknowledging that we cannot recover by ourselves; we need the guidance and help of wisdom and experience greater than our own
2. To relieve burdens of secrecy and shame
 - By telling our personal stories in a safe place, without being condemned
 - By learning to laugh at our selves
3. To experience belonging
 - By realizing we are not alone
 - By accepting that recovery is not an event, but a process which takes time
 - By regular participation in recovery or support groups
4. To escape false beliefs/reflexive behaviors
 - By working through devastating and overwhelming feelings
 - By planning a positive response to emotional triggers and reaching out for help from our recovery group
 - By choosing how to act rather than just reacting reflexively to circumstances

Key Terms

1. Guilt – Knowing you have done something wrong by personal or social standards
2. Shame – Believing you are a bad or unworthy person as shown by your disgraceful behavior
3. Vulnerability – Sharing painful feelings or personal experiences. This feels like weakness but can invite relationships
4. Boundaries – Distinguishing between what you are responsible for (who you are) and what others are responsible for
5. Transactional Relationships – Doing things for others with the expectation of obligation or repayment
6. Authentic Relationships – Giving and receiving selflessly out of concern for another’s welfare and joy, while respecting boundaries.
7. Addictive behaviors – Self medicating our emotional pain with drugs, alcohol, or obsessive behaviors
8. Addiction – Our drug, genetics, and stress change brain chemistry. Subconsciously we need the drug to survive and we lose the ability to choose whether to “use”
9. Freedom – Ability to choose our words and actions instead of just reacting reflexively to circumstances
10. Joy – Deep and lasting happiness from healthy, authentic relationships.

Possible Meeting Activities

1. Meal or snack before or after the meeting; opportunity to build relationships
2. Participants check in – How am I physically, emotionally, spiritually? Answer questions
3. Participants tell their stories
 - What happened to me?
 - How did I react?
 - What have I been doing to recover?
 - How is that working for me?
4. A reading or lecture topic about recovery
5. Discuss relational skills
www.RelationalMatrix.com
6. Many trauma victims self medicate their emotional pain. Include content and open discussion about addiction and alcoholism
7. Open discussion

Advice about Sharing

When you find freedom from shame you may want to tell everyone your story – be careful.

1. With your Recovery Team (Therapist and Emotional Trauma Survival Group) be as honest and open as you feel safe
2. With family or supporters – share fewer details, be honest but don’t do them harm
3. With acquaintances – share no details, and be sure you have a compelling purpose before sharing anything
4. With others, including at your workplace – it might be best not to share

Guidelines to Consider

1. Not professionally lead. Volunteer and peer based. Mutual support where participants have similar emotional trauma
2. Doesn't replace counseling or therapy
3. Participants over eighteen years of age
4. Sobriety and abstinence during meetings; otherwise very little is accomplished
5. Confidentiality within legal limits; except
 - Threats of suicide or homicide
 - Ongoing abuse of a minor/the elderly
 - Plan to commit a felony
6. No condemnation. Don't preach or try to fix others. Describe your own situation, feelings, actions, successes and failures
7. Respect personal space and boundaries
8. One conversation at a time
9. Avoid divisive topics like politics
10. Limit graphic descriptions
11. Allow participants to delay sharing their stories until they feel safe
12. Allow participants to come and go as needed because of intense feelings
13. Anonymity – don't disclose who attends or what is said without permission
14. No sermonizing – God may have an important role in our stories but the main focus should be our experiences, our needs, our feelings, and our recovery
15. Laugh with each other at our own absurd behaviors. Humor can be healing

Risks and Challenges

1. Group descending into shared misery, possibly triggered by troubling stories
2. Inconsistent participation due to shame or fear; regular participation benefits the group as well as individuals
3. Only working on issues during meetings; no therapy or other work, limited progress
4. If we have unachievable goals, like to recover as if trauma had never happened
5. Domination of a group by an individual
6. Re-traumatizing participants
7. Stealing the meeting agenda, such as for the purpose of evangelizing
8. Emergency room visits for extreme anxiety from flashbacks or stirred up emotions
9. Signs that traumatic emotions may have been triggered
 - Abruptly leaving the meeting, or emotional withdrawal
 - Defensive body language
 - Dry mouth, intestinal discomfort
 - Rapid blinking indicating mental reset
 - Halting speech and overly careful choice of words
 - Holding our breath
 - Distraction, constantly looking away
 - Agitation, or anger/resentment transferred to the questioner
 - Increased cravings
 - Addictive thinking and behaviors