

# THE TRUTH ABOUT LIVING WITH PTSD

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## The Truth About Living with PTSD

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If you know you have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or just suspect you do, there are some ground rules for understanding what's going on and what to do about it. A mass of clinical and factual information exists on [www.healmyptsd.com](http://www.healmyptsd.com). The world wide web, actually, is full of clinical details about what PTSD is, plus how to diagnose and treat it.

None of that, however, talks about PTSD from the survivor experience. As someone on the inside of PTSD you know that this disorder (*not* a disease!) is about a whole lot more than three simple categories of symptoms. Since you're living it, you know it's about a mindset, a lifestyle and an enormous bundle of feelings. Sometimes, clinical research can only hypothesize. You know the real deal.

What you will find in this ebook are aspects of the PTSD experience that the media and clinicians often don't talk about. In the following fifteen items you will learn what only a survivor could, would and should know. You will recognize elements of your experience and, in some cases, discover issues you haven't yet encountered. All of this awareness will make you more prepared as you go forward in recovery. You may find yourself using this new knowledge throughout your PTSD journey as you navigate how to manage, cope and heal. What read here is meant to help you find your footing so that as you progress your recovery you are prepared, educated and action oriented.

The details here are compiled from my own PTSD recovery experience (I am now 100% free of PTSD symptoms), my extensive research about PTSD recovery, plus the hundreds of survivors I've come in contact with through my PTSD advocacy work, and my private and group clients.

Before you read further you should know that the ideas in this ebook:

- Are not clinically based
- Do not come from traditional research
- Are not documented in medical journals, papers and conferences

Instead, the ideas compiled here are:

- Based on the actual experiences of survivors
- Applicable to every type of trauma
- Elements that will impact your healing process

After reading these pages you will have choices to make and actions to take in order to progress your PTSD experience. Don't worry: You'll be prepared to do both.

To help you along the way, Heal My PTSD offers the following community supports:

**['Changing Direction'](#)** – *Changing Direction* is a bi-weekly radio program designed to bring support and information to trauma survivors, plus their caregivers and healing professionals. Hosted by me, Michele Rosenthal (a trauma/PTSD survivor and certified coach), *Your Life After Trauma* provides resources, inspiration, hope and specific actions to help anyone learn about life after trauma, how to formulate a recovery plan, access healing potential, and apply personal strengths to post-trauma recovery.

**[Heal My PTSD Teleseminar Archives](#)** – I designed these hour-long seminars to offer practical lessons for how to approach PTSD recovery. Outlining everything from how to create a healing intention, how to educate yourself and others, how to manage PTSD during the holidays and even how to stop sabotaging your recovery, these audio downloads give you simple and achievable tools to add to your healing activities.

**[Heal My PTSD Virtual Support Groups](#)** – PTSD has not yet built a foundation for an in-person support network. But I am — and it doesn't matter where you live! [Sign up today to receive more information about posttraumatic stress disorder telephone support groups.](#) In addition to receiving information about how to participate in these groups that meet via telephone, you'll also receive a weekly PTSD recovery tip designed to help you access your healing potential more and more each week.

**[Healing Thought of the Day](#)** – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder recovery can sometimes feel even worse than actually living with post-traumatic stress. Why? Because while in the grips of post-traumatic stress symptoms you are emotionally numb, avoiding and dissociated – healing is *exactly the opposite!* You are learning to feel, facing your fears, and developing skills to live in the moment. The complimentary *Healing Thought of the Day* delivers to your inbox little reminders of why you're doing this, how to do it, and the purpose of it all.

**[Heal My PTSD Facebook Fanpage](#)** – Sometimes you just need to know that others are walking the same path, feeling the same thing, facing the same challenges. Each day the Heal My PTSD fanpage offers support, and also, a place for the PTSD community to voice its opinions, make connections and relieve the isolation that PTSD can impose.

*Now, let's get clear on some things so that you can progress your recovery with strength, confidence, support and creativity!*

## #1

### PTSD Does Not Heal Itself

The tendency is to feel the pain of PTSD and hope that if you wait long enough your symptoms of posttraumatic stress will just naturally fade away. Unfortunately, as much as we would like for it to, PTSD does not get better if you ignore it. As a matter of fact, the opposite is true: The longer PTSD remains untreated the worse it becomes.

The main symptoms of PTSD fall into three categories: avoidance, arousal and re-experiencing. All of the symptoms in each category dig deeper roots in your mind and behavior the longer you allow them to remain. Your nightmares, flashbacks, and all of those intrusive thoughts will continue to pop up and multiply the longer you wait to wrangle them and show them who's boss.

*Don't wait. As unpleasant as PTSD recovery is, the final freedom will be so much better than allowing your present symptoms to worsen over the years.*

#### **For more information:**

Watch these videos about [Is PTSD Treatment Effective?](#) and [How Michele Healed from PTSD](#).

Read here to see the [most popular PTSD questions answered](#) and [PTSD symptoms](#).

Not sure whether or not you have PTSD? [Take a PTSD Self-Test](#).

## #2

### You Don't Have To Talk (or Even Remember) In Order to Heal

Since the beginning of trauma theory in the 1800s, the process has focused recovery on the need for integration. When you are stuck in PTSD, the trauma (or the possibility of it) seems to be recurring over and over; you exist in a constant state of anxiety based on your experience in the past. Part of integration means coming to understand that the trauma you experienced resides in the past but does not define or pose a real threat in your daily present. (Judith Herman's book, *TRAUMA AND RECOVERY*, offers an excellent overview of trauma theory and recovery process.)

In the beginning, it was assumed that the process of recovery needed to include the ability to tell your story. Today, we know that's not true. In fact, there's no reason for you to tell your story at all if you don't want to. Actually, you don't even have to remember any of the details in order to free yourself from PTSD. In the past thirty years many fabulous methods for healing have been developed that allow you to skip the talk and remember phase if that feels better for you. (Babette Rothschild's book, 8 KEYS TO SAE TRAUMA RECOVERY, has a great chapter about this.)

*Assess how possible it feels to you to discuss or retrieve your memories. Knowing that you can heal without doing either allows you to begin the recovery process from a place of more comfort.*

**For more information:**

Watch this video: [Can PTSD Be Healed If I Can't Remember Everything?](#)

Read here about what to do with the memory fragments you do have: [PTSD Professional Perspective: Writing Heals](#) and [Writing PTSD](#).

**#3**

**There Are Many Ways To Treat Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

Originally, therapy was centered on the idea of a 'talking cure'. With trauma though, you may not feel like talking all the time. Or, you may feel like talking in the beginning and then find you don't want to talk anymore. The beauty of how the trauma recovery industry has evolved over the past few decades means you can choose what feels right to you.

Of course, there will always be **traditional methods**, including talk therapy, cognitive behavior therapy, prolonged exposure therapy and dialectical behavior therapy. These help an enormous number of people. They may even help you gain more control and better coping skills when dealing with your daily symptoms. Many survivors begin recovery with talk therapy and cognitive behavior therapy. Both provide a foundation for learning to express what you're feeling and find a way to lessen and manage it.

However, many survivors become frustrated that talking doesn't lead to freedom. While they gain control and coping skills their symptoms continue to persist, albeit with less frequency and intensity. At this point, many survivors seek additional **alternative**

**recovery processes.** Information processing therapies, hypnosis, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Somatic Experiencing and bodywork such as massage are all very popular and can be extremely effective.

*Try whichever techniques resonate with you. When one no longer seems to be helpful, replace it with something new.*

**For more information:**

Click here for a video about [PTSD treatment options](#).

Read here for an overview of [popular PTSD treatment methods](#).

Listen to these archived YOUR LIFE AFTER TRAUMA episodes about [Overcoming Trauma Through Yoga](#), and [How Massage Helps PTSD Recovery](#).

#### #4

### What Worked For Someone Else May – Or May Not – Work For You

Ask around, get everyone you know to give you ideas and suggestions for how you might recover. Listen to the stories of other survivors and research all possibilities for healing. Uncover all ideas and then remember this: **There is no single cure for posttraumatic stress.** What this means is that everyone – including you – has a personal and individual journey.

Even though your journey will be uniquely yours, you can incorporate lots of others' experiences. When you do that, keep in mind that you are an individual. You are one of a kind. Your particular experience and perceptions of trauma is unlike anyone else's. While you will recognize your own response(s) in the stories of others, all of the factors of who you are and your history make your situation completely special to you. This means your healing journey will be unique to you, too.

So, while hypnosis may have been the cure for one person (as it was for me), it may not be the cure for you. Where you are today – your attitude, perspective and beliefs – will all impact how each treatment modality affects you. **There's also the factor that every healing act you take (successful or not) adds to your recovery bank**, which means the benefits can be seen later, at a time you are using some other technique. Healing is cumulative. All you can do is try one modality after another until you get the job done.

*Keep an open mind. Try what has worked for others and give yourself permission for it to work, or not work, for you. And then, try something new.*

**For more information:**

Watch this video to learn [5 Things You Can Do To Progress PTSD Treatment](#).

The '[Survivors Speak](#)' feature on the [Heal My PTSD blog](#) highlights the personal experiences of survivors coping with, managing and recovering from PTSD. Read their contributions for ideas about what may help you.

**#5**

**PTSD Recovery Does Not Happen Overnight**

It took a major event (and probably a bit of time) for you to get where you are today; it will take a bit of time to unravel it all. Some people overcome PTSD within a few months of entering treatment. Others take longer.

Everything you do to move your recovery forward goes into the bank of your recovery. At first that may only amount to pennies and you may not see much progress. However, as you get used to navigating the journey you will make larger and/or more frequent deposits into your healing account.

Ultimately, recovery happens both slowly and all at once: the work you do adds up over the time you spend facing what needs to be faced. And then, there are days when one enormous piece of the puzzle falls into place and you reach a new level of recovery and you know that while recovery doesn't happen overnight it can, in fact, happen.

*Do not judge your healing process by anyone else's. Keep your eyes focused on your own path, your mind listening to your own voice, and your heart seeking its own freedom.*

**For more information:**

Watch this video for an answer to the question: [How Long Does It Take To Heal PTSD?](#)

Read here for [Nine Ways To Become More Resilient](#) during your PTSD recovery process.

Listen to **YOUR LIFE AFTER TRAUMA: [What is PTSD and Can it be Overcome?](#)**



## Do What Feels Right To You

Everyone you ask will have an opinion about what you should do to overcome symptoms of posttraumatic stress. The question to ask yourself is, What do *I* think?

If you're lucky enough to have support this means you will have at least one person if not more researching, seeking and digging for information on your behalf. What's fabulous about this is that you have someone else with energy and focus contributing to your process. The drawback is that what may seem like a great idea to someone who's well – or even a professional – may not feel like such a hot idea to you. While it is important to listen to other, outside views, it is equally important to pay attention to your own internal voice. For example, if someone keeps insisting that Prolonged Exposure Therapy seems like it has great success rates (at 70%, it does), but it feels all wrong to you to put yourself in a situation that mimics your original trauma then... TRUST YOURSELF. Even if you can't explain why something feels wrong trust the fact that your mind and even your bodily sensations are sending you the message for a reason.

Likewise, when some healing technique or modality feels, sounds or looks right for you – try it out! Your body and mind will send you messages about what's good as often as they send messages about what's bad. Your job is to be open to receiving the messages, interpreting them, and taking appropriate action.

*Listen for that small, internal voice. Even in these confusing times that voice knows things that will be useful to you. Practice hearing it, and learn to heed its warnings and act on its ideas.*

### **For more information:**

Watch this video about [What To Do When PTSD Recovery Stalls](#).

Read here for Peter Levine's (author of WAKING THE TIGER: HEALING TRAUMA) thoughts on [your instinctual resources](#).

And this piece about [why trusting your instincts is important and how it works in PTSD recovery](#).

Listen to this episode of YOUR LIFE AFTER TRAUMA for [tips on how to become more functional in PTSD recovery](#).

## #7

### Take PTSD Recovery SLOWLY!

Since you're miserable, you will want to feel better as soon as possible. I want you to feel better that fast, too! Here's the hitch: In order for recovery to really happen you will need to do the work. You will need to feel, face and figure out many things. You cannot do all of this at the same time all at once. That's a lot to do, especially while you manage your symptoms and cope day to day. Your brain is seeking to make order. It can do this best if you give it space, room, time and resources in which to do that. More chaos will only impair the process.

While it may seem intuitive, the more slowly, safely and securely you approach recovery the better (and, actually, more quickly) you will achieve long-lasting results. Give yourself small, slow, achievable goals on which to build success. The more confident you become in your ability to achieve small steps the more they add up to big steps; the more courage you have to tackle the bigger problems with strength, power and efficacy.

*Give yourself permission to take recovery at a pace that allows you to feel as comfortable as possible. Identify an area that needs to be addressed, make a list of the issues, and then approach them one by one.*

#### **For more information:**

Watch this video about [Slowing Down PTSD Recovery: Why You Should Think Small](#).

Read this piece about [Self-Care: Small Steps Toward Valuing Yourself](#), which will help you gain strength and progress while slowing down.

## #8

### The #1 Factor That Blocks PTSD Recovery is: FEAR

You know already that you live in a state of fear; if you didn't you would not have PTSD. You can imagine then, that fear – managing it, facing it, and processing it – will be a part of your recovery journey.

The fact is, fear is also the thing that most often gets in the way of recovery progress. You will not want to look at, admit, face or deal with many things. When you feel your

recovery stall (and it will!) ask yourself what you are most afraid of in that moment. Gaining clarity around that subject, and discovering what to do to release the fear, will allow you to move forward toward your recovery goals.

*During PTSD recovery fear can be your friend. It can be that part of you that lets you know when there is something important coming up or hanging around. Accept the message of fear as you would a note: open it, read it, and decide how you will act on the information inside.*

**For more information:**

Watch this video about [PTSD Recovery Fears](#) and also this one about [Whose Voice Is In Your PTSD Head](#) (I'll give you a hint: the voice can really increase your fear!).

Read this piece about [never letting fear get in your way](#) and this piece about [how to keep calm under pressure](#).

**#9**

**You Will Succeed and You Will Fail – And then You Will Succeed Again**

Let's just dispel the myth of an easy recovery right now! There is no straight path in PTSD healing. My mom called my recovery 'a long and winding road' – we all face that. Sometimes, you won't even be able to see a few feet past where you stand in any given moment.

The good news is, you don't need to see where the road leads. There will be days when you feel you are being successful. And there will be days that you feel you have slipped back.

The truth: You are always moving forward. Even on the days you feel you fail you are learning something new, gathering information that you can use to move you ahead again.

*There is no such thing as failure, only results. On the days you feel you are failing take note of what you can learn. Use this new knowledge to help you develop new processes, a new area of focus, and new ideas for what to do in order to feel better.*

**For more information:**

Watch this video for tips on what you can do to help you succeed more often than you fail: [3 Ways To Train Your PTSD Brain](#).

The Heal My PTSD blog has a weekly feature called '[Professional Perspective](#)', which highlights the contributions of healing professionals and what they feel helps gain success in PTSD recovery.

**#10**

**You Can Handle Your Emotions**

After a trauma emotions seem ENORMOUS! In your fragile, post-trauma state it can seem like the strength of your emotions just might cause you to become completely unglued. Who wouldn't feel that way? You've experienced an enormous shock that your mind is still grappling to accept.

In order to cope with this enormous surprise we all find ways to numb the pain. Whether you do this through self-medicating, addiction or pure will it's absolutely normal to try to quell the emotional chaos and agony that suddenly explodes in your mind.

Healing, however, requires that you stop all of that. Healing requires that you learn to live and accept and function within your emotions. In your mind, emotions may seem to loom large and out of control. In reality, emotions move: they swell, peak and subside.

You can learn to manage emotions without becoming completely undone. Emotions are, after all, products of your own thoughts, which means the more you gain control over your thought processes the more you will gain control over your emotions.

*The next time you feel an emotion threaten to come on full force, do something that grounds you in the moment. Often, some physical action can reconnect you to the present moment at the same time as it moves you out of freeze mode.*

**For more information:**

Watch this video about three simple tips for [How To Handle PTSD Flashbacks](#).

Read this post about [Eighteen Ways To Handle Flashbacks](#).

## #11

### You Will Lose Friends and/or Family Through Your PTSD Recovery Process

There's no way around it: PTSD and its recovery is going to change you. The you that everyone has become used to after trauma can evolve into a strong, dynamic and empowered self. If you've made friendships or entered relationships during your PTSD experience be prepared for things to shift as you heal. There will be people who relate to you better when you are struggling and then don't know how (or don't want to!) be around you when you are healthy and feeling good.

This ebb and flow in relationships during PTSD and recovery happens to all of us. As you recover you will make better and better choices in whom you choose to have surround you. You will find out who your real friends are, release those who do not want the best for you, and discover new friends and partners who more truly value you, your journey and the person you will become.

*Remember that not everyone understands or accepts PTSD. Build a circle around you of those who support your recovery and immediately accept and begin the process of letting go those who don't.*

#### **For more information:**

[Watch this video about PTSD Support: What To Do When People Let You Down](#) and this video about [PTSD and Boundaries: 3 Tips to Better Manage Your Borders.](#)

Read this series about [Educating Others](#) for tips for how to manage, engage with and educate your friends and family during your recovery.

Give your family and friends information to help them: [Support for PTSD Caregivers.](#)

Listen to this episode of [YOUR LIFE AFTER TRAUMA support for caregivers.](#)

## #12

### You Are Not As Alone As You Feel

In PTSD we all have a tendency to isolate. It's just so much easier to control your world the smaller it is. So, you go out less, you see people less, you engage in the world less in an effort to make it easier to deal with symptoms of PTSD. This kind of behavior can

make you feel as if you are the only person in the world struggling with PTSD, and that no one can possibly understand what you're going through.

All of that, of course, is completely false!

The fact is: at any given time over 5% of the U.S. population struggles with PTSD. That's more than *15 million people*. You are hardly alone. No matter what your trauma was, other PTSD survivors will understand what you feel today. More than that, you will understand them. While we are all individual in our traumas, we are universal in our experience of PTSD.

*Reach out. It helps to have others who understand you during the recovery process. The more you connect with others who are walking the same road the more support, connection and strength you will feel.*

#### **For more information:**

Watch this video of [my keynote address to the PHCC PTSD Symposium](#): You will learn PTSD facts and statistics, plus gain many insights into how much you are a part of a large community and how PTSD can be overcome.

Read up on [PTSD statistics](#) and [PTSD causes](#) so that you are informed about how enormous the PTSD community actually is. Plus, read [how survivors define PTSD](#).

## #13

### You Have Enormous Healing Potential

According to many PTSD experts, PTSD is 'imminently healable.' One study claims that 90-92% of all PTSD cases are treatable. Those are terrific odds!

But enough about the experts. You can hear proof from the PTSD community itself. After over 25 years of PTSD I healed. One of my clients – struggling with PTSD since age 2 – finally found freedom at age 51.

PTSD is a *disorder*, it not a disease. This means that healing is absolutely possible for each and every survivor. If there is anyone who tells you this is not true, get as far away from him/her as possible. During recovery you need to be surrounded by people who believe and are educated enough to know that you do, in fact, have a chance at reclaiming your life.

*Approach PTSD recovery as an expedition – better yet: an adventure. You are about to discover new things about yourself, plus how to access a part of yourself that is full of power and strength. The very fact that you want to heal lets you know there is a part of you that is ready to rise up and take back your life.*

**For more information:**

Watch this video about [Self-Discovery in PTSD Recovery](#).

Read this piece about the fact that [you are braver than you believe](#).

Listen to the featured 'Your Life After Trauma' archive, ['How Trauma Affects the Brain'](#), to understand why your healing potential is so possible.

## #14

### The Person Who Can Best Help You Is ... YOU

It will take the support and expertise of more than one person to get you to freedom. Some friends and family will give you the love and comfort you need to feel secure through a difficult process. Professionals and practitioners will give you the knowledge and techniques to help you inch forward until you have achieved what you set out to do.

Despite all of those people, however, the person most qualified to help you is **you**. You are an expert in yourself. You know what feels right and wrong. You know what sounds okay. You know which way looks all right and which looks dangerous (and which scary subject is really necessary to address). Trust your intuition. Trust the clues your mind and body send you. Trust what you feel but cannot explain. Trust yourself. This is the #1 component that will get you through your entire PTSD experience.

Of course, right now it may seem like you can't trust anyone or anything, least of all yourself. That's only natural given where you are today. However, it is still true that you know yourself better than anyone, so you know best what is right for you, what you are ready for, and what it will take to get you where you need to go.

*Absolutely take the advice of all people on your journey who you feel have your best interest at heart. And then, filter it through your own mind and body. Notice when you feel more emotion, or less. Notice what topics seem important. Accept that you will need to feel uncomfortable in order to get to a place of comfort, frightened to get to a place of security. Know that the strength you pull up in yourself is the most important support you will receive.*



**For more information:**

Watch this video about [Post-Traumatic Stress and The Fight Inside You](#).

Read these pieces about how to support your recovery journey by [Defining What You Want, Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), and [Part 3](#).

**#15**

**You Cannot Go Back To Who You Were Before**

Every single one of us mourns who we were before the world intruded. We grieve over the part(s) of ourselves we have lost; we mourn the parts of ourselves we never had the chance to meet, and we mourn how differently our lives might have turned out if only the trauma(s) had not happened. The natural tendency is to try to go back to who you were before, or, if your trauma was in early childhood, mourn the fact there is no 'before' to go back to. Getting stuck in either of these options will hold back your recovery process and intensify your PTSD experience.

1 – It is appropriate to grieve. Allow yourself the time and process to do that.

2 – And then, start looking toward the future.

You are not the sum total of your trauma and what it stole from you. Regardless of how old you were when trauma struck there is an entire part of you that exists outside of, despite and beyond your traumatic past. Maybe you already feel its existence. Maybe the idea feels foreign to you. Either way, it is the truth. Make the commitment that going forward, starting today, you begin looking ahead at who you wish to become when all of this is finished.

*You have an entire post-trauma identity to construct. This will take time, focus, dedication and desire. It is time to begin learning how to decide what and who and how you want to be. No matter where you are in your healing journey, the process of constructing your post-trauma identity can be done at the same time.*

**For more information:**

Watch this video about [PTSD Recovery: What To Do When You Can't See the Path](#).

Read this piece for [ideas and exercises about how to begin constructing your post-trauma self](#).



## Wrapping It All Up

Survivors often speak of PTSD recovery as seeming like ‘an enormous mountain.’ Make no mistake, it is. The process is tough, demanding, demoralizing and energy-sapping. It is also enlightening, invigorating, transcending, exciting and fulfilling.

The process of climbing the PTSD mountain, however, doesn’t have to be so overwhelming that you can’t even begin. Armed with knowledge and education, clear on the idea that you have choices and can take actions, you can discover what you need to do – and how – so that you climb the mountain step by step.

You now have choices to make about who you will involve in your PTSD recovery – that means friends, family and professionals. You also have choices to make about what type of treatment(s) you wish to try. Then, you have actions to take in terms of figuring out what the process of coping and recovery will be, the steps that will require, and where to begin. As I outlined on page 4 of this ebook, *Heal My PTSD* has complimentary support programs to be with you every step of the way. Take advantage of them so that you are not alone as you move toward your future.

You have enormous healing potential. The goal is learning to access it. Dig deep. You can do this. I believe in you!

*Michele*



Michele Rosenthal is a trauma survivor who struggled with undiagnosed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for 24 years. Then, she was diagnosed and went on a healing rampage! Today, Michele is 100% PTSD-free and the founder of <http://www.healmyptsd.com>, a website devoted to PTSD education and support. Michele is also a Post-Trauma Coach, helping survivors and PTSD caregivers learn to cope with and strategize PTSD recovery. As a mental health advocate, popular keynote speaker, award-winning PTSD blogger, award-nominated author and workshop/seminar leader Michele uses her personal experience, education, research and professional training to help others further their trauma and PTSD recovery. She is the host of [Changing Direction](#) radio. Her PTSD recovery book, [Before the World Intruded: Conquering the Past and Creating the Future](#) was nominated for the Books For A Better Life Award, Next Generation Indie Book Award, and International Book Award. Her next book, *YOUR LIFE AFTER TRAUMA: Powerful Practices to Reclaim Identity* (Norton), will be released in 2014.