

HURT NO MORE

**GROW A FOUNDATION
FOR HEALING**

**REBECCA E CHANDLER
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Note to the Reader:

If you feel you need to speak to someone, please dial 988 to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in the United States providing 24/7 service. It is available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.

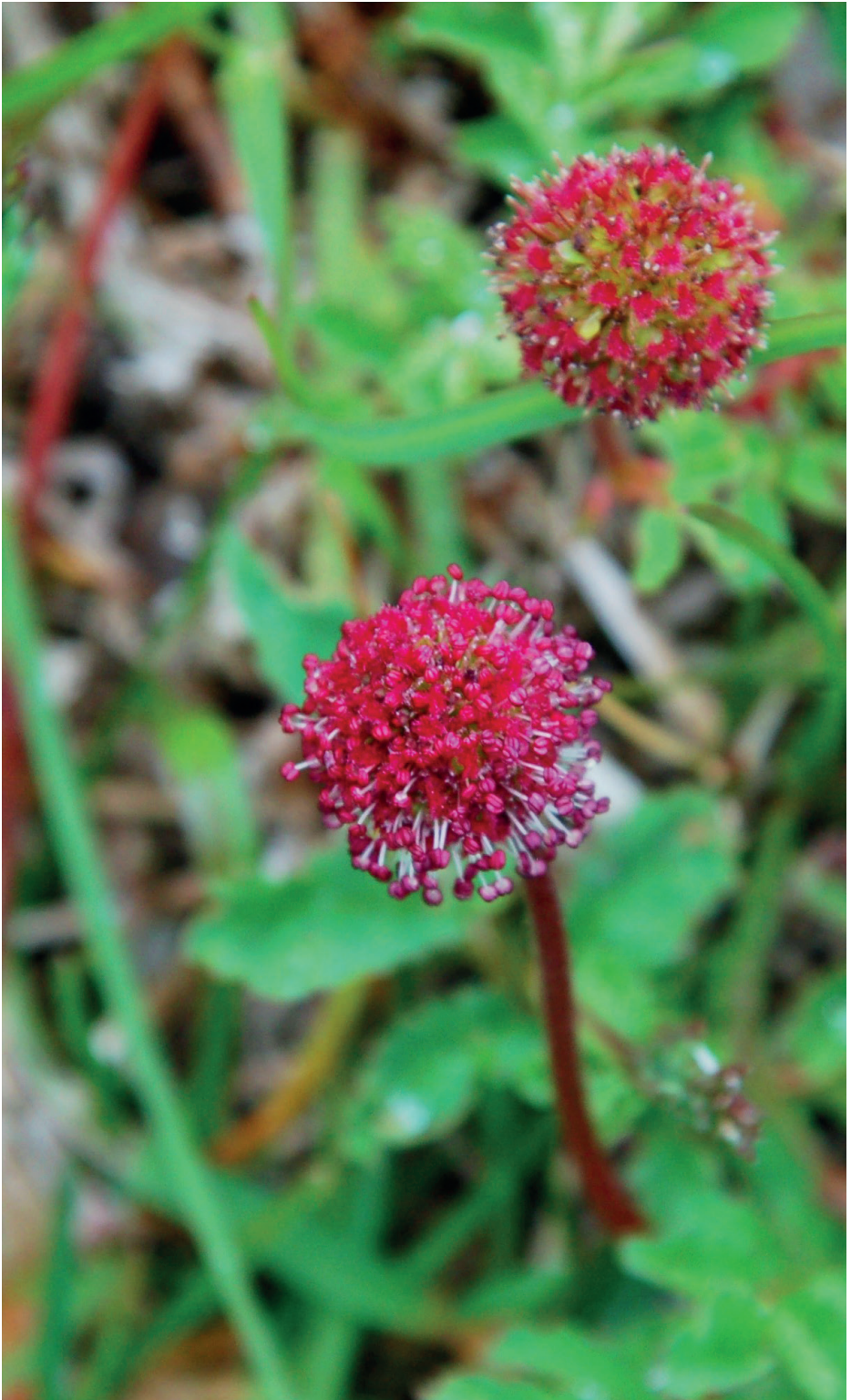
Dial 911 if you think you are having an emergency and are in danger.

If you are being hurt, know someone who might be hurt, or afraid you might hurt another, dial 911 or call the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-422-4453 or visit <https://childhelphotline.org>. Your chat with one of their professional crisis counselors will be a first step in breaking the silence and getting help.



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Foreword

Once my memoir “It Won’t Hurt None” was ready for publication, I was relieved. A five-year writing odyssey was over. The onus to share my truth was lifted.

But it didn’t take long to realize that sharing my truth was only part of my story. I felt a growing responsibility to more broadly share what I learned about healing beyond the narrow lens of my own life.

After all, reading about another person’s trauma may be powerful, but it may not necessarily feel personal because the details of our experiences make us unique.

While it is true the details of our lives, our seasons, are different, your truth carries the same weight as my own. We are equally affected in our minds and bodies by our trauma.

Our foundations are more similar than you might think because we share some familiar truths about our pain, isolation, and yearning to feel joy. We use some of the same systems, reinforcements, and instincts to survive.

Perhaps we are more alike than our varied experiences suggest. I believe that in sharing our truths, we begin to understand that we belong to a community. We are not alone.

The lessons and tools shared in this journal reinforced and strengthened my own healing.

I believe they will support your journey and help you break free from trauma’s grasp to embrace life as your whole, authentic self.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'R' followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.



Foreword

When Rebecca shared her trauma history with me, I was honored to be trusted with her devastating truth. I was deeply saddened to learn that she had to experience and deal with such immense pain and betrayal. I was upset that the adults in her family did not protect her as a child or support her as she needed once they learned the truth. And I felt more sure than ever that the only way to prevent this type of horrific abuse is to create a society in which we call out perpetrators publicly and hold them accountable rather than blaming, shaming, and silencing their victims.

I am amazed by Rebecca's perseverance to heal and her courage to share that journey with the world. When she asked me to collaborate on this guide, I jumped at the chance to be a small part of helping others heal from trauma.

Like Rebecca, and like many of you, I experienced trauma at a young age too. One of my first memories is hiding behind the couch while my parents fought. I can recall the sound of my dad slapping my mom. I can feel how scared I was when my mom left the house, wondering if she would come back. She did - and over the years, my dad continued to exert his expectations and will on our family. Sometimes by force, sometimes by fear, and sometimes by controlling the finances.

Sadly, I came to learn that our experience isn't uncommon. Throughout my career, I have strived to understand and prevent relationship and family violence. The causes are many and complicated, rooted in distorted notions of power and control. They are found in every community and culture, regardless of education or income. And across the board, abusive relationships have severe negative effects on a person's health and well-being.

Healing from abuse and other forms of trauma can be a complex life-long process. My hope is that this journal guides you to build a foundation to start healing and growing - whatever trauma you have experienced.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aparna R." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



What to Expect

This journal provides tools, techniques, and exercises designed to help you start your own healing journey. We'll begin by identifying your trauma and how it has impacted your life. Next, the journal will take you through 8 important steps to nurture your healing journey.

For each step, the journal shares:

- Learning's and advice from Rebecca
- Reflection questions
- Tips to develop new practices and perspectives
- Ideas to get started

At the end, there are a number of resources to help you share your truth and support your healing journey.

As you reflect, it's a great idea to write your responses by hand, as it helps you access the intuitive part of your brain-your "gut feelings." As you work through this journal, try to let go of any expectations you may have about yourself. This is not a test or a quiz. There is no pass/fail. Go at your own pace and always prioritize your own health.

There is no quick solution to healing from trauma. The journey is complicated and holds as many failures as it does victories. I hope that the work you're about to begin will help facilitate a new chapter in your life that promotes healing, positive growth, and building a future full of love, acceptance, and kindness.

Section 1

Understanding Trauma



Trauma is the Greek word for “wound”.¹

It is a person’s emotional response to a distressing experience. Unlike ordinary hardships, traumatic events tend to be sudden and unpredictable, involve a serious threat to life—like bodily injury or death—and feel beyond a person’s control.² Trauma has no boundaries regarding age, gender, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.³

Although many people who experience a traumatic event will go on with their lives without lasting negative effects, others will have difficulties and experience traumatic stress reactions. How someone responds to a traumatic experience is personal.⁴

There is no trauma “sliding scale”. Your trauma, or the trauma of someone close to you, is as serious as anyone else’s. We are equally affected in our minds and bodies. The details may differ, but your truth carries the same suffering. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event.⁵ People who have PTSD may feel stressed or frightened, even when they are not in danger.⁶ Some PTSD symptoms include recurring flashbacks and memories, and distressing thoughts. Some of my PTSD symptoms include feeling irritable and having angry or aggressive outbursts, feeling tense, on guard, or “on edge”, and negative thoughts and emotions.

Certain triggers can set off your PTSD. They bring back strong memories. You may feel like you’re living through it all over again.

When faced with danger, your body gets ready to fight, flee, or freeze.⁷ Your heart beats faster. Your senses go on high alert. Your brain stops some of its normal functions to deal with the threat. This includes your short-term memory.

With PTSD, your brain doesn’t process the trauma right way. It doesn’t file the memory of the event as being in the past. The result: You feel stressed and frightened even when you know you’re safe. The brain attaches details, like sights or smells, to that memory. These become triggers. They act like buttons that turn on your body’s alarm system. When one of them is pushed, your brain switches to danger mode. This may cause you to become frightened and your heart to start racing.

The sights, sounds, and feelings of the trauma may come rushing back. This is called a flashback. Anything that reminds you of what happened right before or during a traumatic event is a potential trigger. They're usually tied to your senses. You may see, feel, smell, touch, or taste something that brings on your flashback.⁸

What does it all mean? When I think of trauma, I'm reminded of a tangled network of roots. Strong, healthy roots fortify trees, shrubs, and flowers. They spread out and make the plant healthy and able to stand strong against all manner of storms.

When trauma enters the system, it likes to intertwine with your healthy roots. As it grows, it wraps itself around you and slowly starts to choke your entire system. Over time, your foundation becomes weak as trauma's roots grow stronger. The only way to stop the invasive species is to heal from the ground up. It reminds me of my own experience.

I was sexually abused by my grandfather from the age of five to the age of thirteen. The abuse included, but was not limited to, rape. The trauma I experienced was chronic as it happened over several years.

My mind didn't file the traumatic memories in the past. Instead, it held onto the experiences and kept them in the present no matter how much time had passed after the abuse ended. In response to my chronic trauma, I developed complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (c-PTSD). It's a condition where I experience symptoms of PTSD along with some additional symptoms, such as feeling very angry or distrustful towards the world.

As a result, before I processed my trauma, I lived every day in a state of hypervigilance that's known as "fight or flight". My mind and body lived as if I was still being abused. My brain attached details like sound, smell, and touch, to the chronic trauma and those details became triggers.

I was assaulted several times in my grandfather's photography studio. It had a cold, cement floor; the air was stale; it had very few windows, and smelled of chemicals. To this day, whenever I go into a space with cold cement floors, or where the air is stale, or I feel confined in a space without any light, or smell certain cleaning products, I am triggered. My mind and body pull me back into the past. The triggers flip a switch in my body and my heart races a little, while anxiety creeps into my mind. My body responds as if I am reliving my trauma all over again. The triggers set off one or more of my c-PTSD symptoms.

My roots, from a very early age, tried to grow despite trauma's efforts to weaken my foundation. My trauma and c-PTSD choked hope and joy from my life until I got the healing I needed and was able to disentangle myself from trauma's web.

Let me share an example of how trauma, c-PTSD, and triggers work together within me on a typical day.

During the summer, I like to take a walk to a nearby lake around 4PM to enjoy the afternoon sun and take a swim. When I leave the house, I feel excited to be at the lake. I love swimming, I'm in a great mood when I lock the door and start walking.

Suddenly, I get a news alert on my phone. I look down at the screen and read a headline about a woman who was sexually assaulted.

Immediately, I feel a knot in my stomach. My pulse increases. Flashbacks of my own abuse come into my mind. I start looking over my shoulder to make sure I am safe. Every response in my mind and body happens completely outside of my control.

I am "triggered."

When that happens, I stop and take time to breathe, remind myself that I am not in any danger, and I relax back into the present and keep walking.

It's taken me years of healing to be able to identify my body's responses to triggers and work through them instead of being paralyzed by the process.

If I can heal, so can you.

This journal is only the beginning. We're just breaking ground. It's up to you to continue the work, establish a healthy foundation, and grow a positive future for yourself.