

CULTURALLY INFORMED TRAUMA AND GRIEF RECOVERY TOOLKIT



I Can Do Bad All By Myself: Knowing When & How to Reach Out For Help

*“I know I’ve been struggling because of what happened. Is it bad enough for me to get help?
And who would understand what I’m going through anyways?”*

There are many reasons why a person wouldn’t tell anyone that they’re struggling. Research tells us that these include not having anyone they trust, wanting to not burden other people with their problems, and being worried they’ll be blamed for what’s happened to them. Being alone with our pain can become a habit. Getting help is important: whether we are feeling depressed, suicidal, and/or just not living our best lives.

There are different kinds of help for people who have experienced or are experiencing interpersonal trauma, violence, and abuse, collective trauma, and grief. The first is formal therapy. Individual therapy involves sessions with just you and the therapist. Group therapy has one or more therapists who work with a group of people together. Therapists have education and training in how difficult experiences, like an assault, the pandemic, or the death of child, impact people and how to help them heal. That said, not every therapist is right for everyone. In finding a therapist, you can look at their website or brochures and ask for a free initial consultation to see how they approach therapy: Do they see their clients as damaged and in need of fixing? Do they think hold prejudicial or antagonistic beliefs about their clients’ cultures, communities, and religions are corrupt? Or do they understand the many strengths that people from different cultures have and want to work in collaboration with their clients along the road to healing? In preparation for your first appointment, you can think about your therapy goals. Because therapy is a new experience, it is normal to feel anxious during your first sessions. However, if something feels off, you don’t have to stay with that therapist. Because research shows the importance of fit between therapist and client, it doesn’t mean therapy isn’t for you if you don’t like a therapist. It may just mean that you haven’t found the right therapist for you yet.

Researchers have documented healing strategies outside of therapy. This includes reaching out to leaders at your religious/spiritual institution, like your mosque, synagogue, or church, telling someone close to you, like your romantic partner(s), loved one, close friend, or family member, and/or calling a national hotline or joining an internet forum that helps people who are struggling like you are. Thoughtfully choosing who to reach out to is important because research shows that other people’s negative reactions are harmful. Qualities to look for include being empathetic and caring; qualities to avoid could be being judgmental or making fun of people who have experienced what you have. If you’re not sure how someone will react, you can disclose a small piece of what you’re going through or share the story of someone else who has experienced what you have (without disclosing their name). If they respond well, then you can try sharing more. To help others understand and respond well to you, you could share with them information about interpersonal trauma, violence, and abuse ([here](#)), collective trauma ([here](#)), grief and loss ([here](#)), and how to be supportive when someone tells them they’ve been abused ([here](#)).

Researchers have found activities you can incorporate into your daily life that promote healing. These include doing arts and crafts, playing or listening to music, watching or acting in theatre, drawing strength from your spirituality, enjoying nature, engaging in activism, and writing poetry or journaling. You can ask yourself “What would being free look like for me?” This question can lead to better understanding of what you want in your life and what you can do to start or continue living the life that you want. Feeling joy and happiness while having a good life is possible, no matter what you’ve gone through. For more information on interpersonal trauma, violence, and abuse, see [here](#). To learn about collective trauma, see [this](#). To learn more about how to heal and thrive, go to [here](#).