

# Trauma-Informed Pastoring Workshop

Western Theological Seminary  
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## Today's Schedule

**12:00pm Lunch & Introductory Material**

**1:00pm Understanding Trauma**

*1:45pm Break*

**2:00pm Trauma-Informed Care & Trauma-Sensitive Theology**

*2:45pm Break*

**3:00pm Building Trauma-Safe Churches**

## Clergy as Frontline Mental Health Responders

- 15-40% of individuals in the US w/ mental health concerns initially contact a member of the clergy rather than a medical or mental health professional
- Clergy frequently sought out for counsel regarding relationships and relational distress (common concern for adults with complex trauma)
- 20% of military veterans report seeking assistance from clergy
- 15-40% of women who experience intimate partner violence turn to members of the clergy for counsel

## Clergy's Role in Providing Trauma Care

*Every trauma survivor needs  
a great cloud of witnesses around them*

### Goals for Today

- To be equipped to be a companion to those who are on the journey of healing
- To begin to understand what it means to lead a “trauma-safe” church

## Clergy Trauma Exposure (Pennock, 2021)

*Based on responses to BTQ (Schnurr et al., 1999)  
N=235 pastors in Florida*

	n	% Yes
1. Served in a war zone or exposure to war related casualties	24	10.2 %
3 <sup>rd</sup> 2. Serious car accident, accident at work, or other accident	84	35.6 %
1 <sup>st</sup> 3. Major natural disaster	152	64.4 %
4. Life-threatening illness	51	21.6 %
5 <sup>th</sup> 5. Childhood physical abuse	62	26.3 %
6. Other physical assaults (attacked, beaten, mugged)	62	26.3 %
4 <sup>th</sup> 7. Sexual assault (childhood or adult)	68	28.8 %
8. Other situation that caused serious injury	66	28.0 %
9. Close family member or friend died violently	52	22.0 %
2 <sup>nd</sup> 10. Witnessed someone else be seriously injured or killed	120	50.8 %

## Clergy Trauma Exposure (Pennock, 2021)

	Number of BTQ items endorsed	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
	0	14	6.0 %	6.0 %
	1	35	14.9 %	20.9 %
	2	49	20.9 %	41.7 %
	3	42	17.9 %	59.6 %
	4	41	17.4 %	77.0 %
	5	30	12.8 %	89.8 %
	6	10	4.3 %	94.0 %
	7	8	3.4 %	97.4 %
	8	4	1.7 %	99.1 %
	9	2	.9 %	100.0 %
	10	0	0 %	--

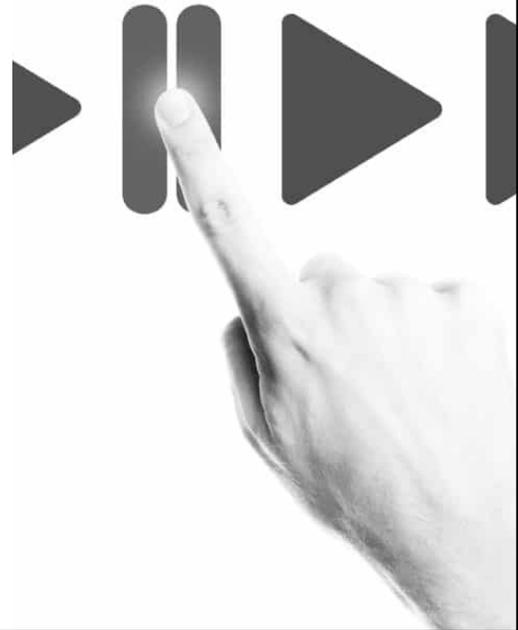
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## PAUSE

*“A person has to be present and growing in kindness in order to enter the narrative of the trauma.*

*Unless there is presence and kindness, entering the story will only do more harm.”*

- Dan Allender, PhD



## Presence and Kindness in Pastoral Care

### What we offer to others:

- We must learn how to be **present** in the stories of those who receive care – to skillfully and carefully listen and respond
- We must learn what it means to offer and receive **kindness** places of deep vulnerability and hurt.
  - Often kindness means patience.
  - It means creating safety and consistency before asking someone to share their story.
  - Kindness means giving the care recipient both choice and voice. We cannot demand.

## Presence and Kindness in Pastoral Care

### Offering it to ourselves:

- What does it mean to be present to the harm we have experienced in our own lives?
  - To listen to our souls, our emotions, and our bodies?
  - To choose to stay present when it would be easier to numb or escape?
- What does it mean to offer ourselves kindness this afternoon?
  - In our “performance” as pastors / care providers?
  - In our anxiety? In light of our own stories of trauma?

## A Moment to Reflect

- What ministry questions are you bringing today?
- What personal experiences are you bringing today?
- Notice when you feel present & connected, as well as when you feel distant & checked out.
- What might kindness look like for you today?



## **Definitions of Trauma** (*non-clinical*)

- **Trauma** (from the Greek) = wound or injury
- We become traumatized when our ability to respond to a perceived threat is in some way overwhelmed.
  - Trauma v. trauma (both have an impact)
- Debilitating symptoms that many people suffer from in the aftermath of perceived life-threatening or overwhelming events.

## Impacts of Trauma



**Loss of connection**



**Loss of safety**



**Loss of hope**



**Loss of a sense of agency**

## Clinical Definition of Trauma (PTSD)

- From the *Diagnostic & Statistical Manual (DSM-V)*
  - Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS)
  - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Trauma includes both an event and a response.

## Clinical Definition of Trauma (PTSD)

### Traumatic Event Exposure

- Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violation, includes:
  - Direct experiencing
  - Witnessing the event in person
  - Learning the event occurred to a loved one
  - Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of traumatic events

## Clinical Definition of Trauma (PTSD)

### Trauma Response in PTSD

- **Intrusion symptoms** (flashbacks, dreams, dissociation, distress in response to triggers)
- **Avoidance symptoms** (internal & external reminders)
- **Alterations in mood or cognition** (negative or distorted beliefs, negative emotional state, decreased interest, detachment)
- **Arousal & Reactivity** (irritability, reckless or self-destructive, hypervigilant, sleep issues)

## Prevalence of Trauma (*Exposure & Response*)

- The majority of adults are exposed to at least one significant traumatic event during their lifetime (60-80%)
  - Community mental health population (>90%)
- Only 6% go on to develop full PTSD
  - (Many more experience sub-clinical levels of symptoms)
- **All pastors will have parishioners who experience the ongoing impact of trauma.**

## Simple vs. Complex Trauma

**Simple  
Trauma**  
*single-incident*

**Complex  
Trauma**  
*repetitive*

## Complex Trauma

“The term complex trauma describes both [one’s] exposure to multiple traumatic events, often of an invasive, interpersonal nature, and the wide-ranging, long-term impact of this exposure.

The events are severe and pervasive, such as abuse or profound neglect. They usually begin early in life and can disrupt many aspects of the child’s development and the very formation of a self.”

Definition from The National Child Traumatic Stress Network ([www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org))

## Review: PTSD symptoms

- **Intrusion symptoms** (flashbacks, dreams, dissociation, distress in response to triggers)
- **Avoidance symptoms** (internal & external reminders)
- **Alterations in mood or cognition** (negative or distorted beliefs, negative emotional state, decreased interest, detachment)
- **Arousal & Reactivity** (irritability, reckless or self-destructive, hypervigilant, sleep issues)

## Symptoms of Complex Trauma: C-PTSD *(from ICD-11)*

- **Affective Functioning:** Emotional dysregulation, heightened emotional reactivity, violent outbursts, tendency towards dissociation under stress
- **Self Functioning:** Persistent beliefs about oneself as diminished, defeated, or worthless; pervasive feelings of shame, guilt.
- **Relational Functioning:** Difficulties in sustaining relationships or feeling close to others.

## ACE Study by the CDC & Kaiser Permanente,

### Adverse Childhood Experiences

- The study investigates link between childhood trauma & later-life well-being.
- 17,000 respondents, original data collection in 1995-1997
- Scores range from 0 to 10
- 67% of respondents reported at least one ACE, more than 10-20% reported 4+.

## **ACE Study** by the CDC & Kaiser Permanente, began in 1995

### **ACE Categories**

- Physical, emotional, & sexual abuse
- Living with someone who abused drugs or alcohol
- Exposure to domestic violence
- Living with someone with serious mental illness
- Living with someone who has gone to prison

## **ACE Study** by the CDC & Kaiser Permanente

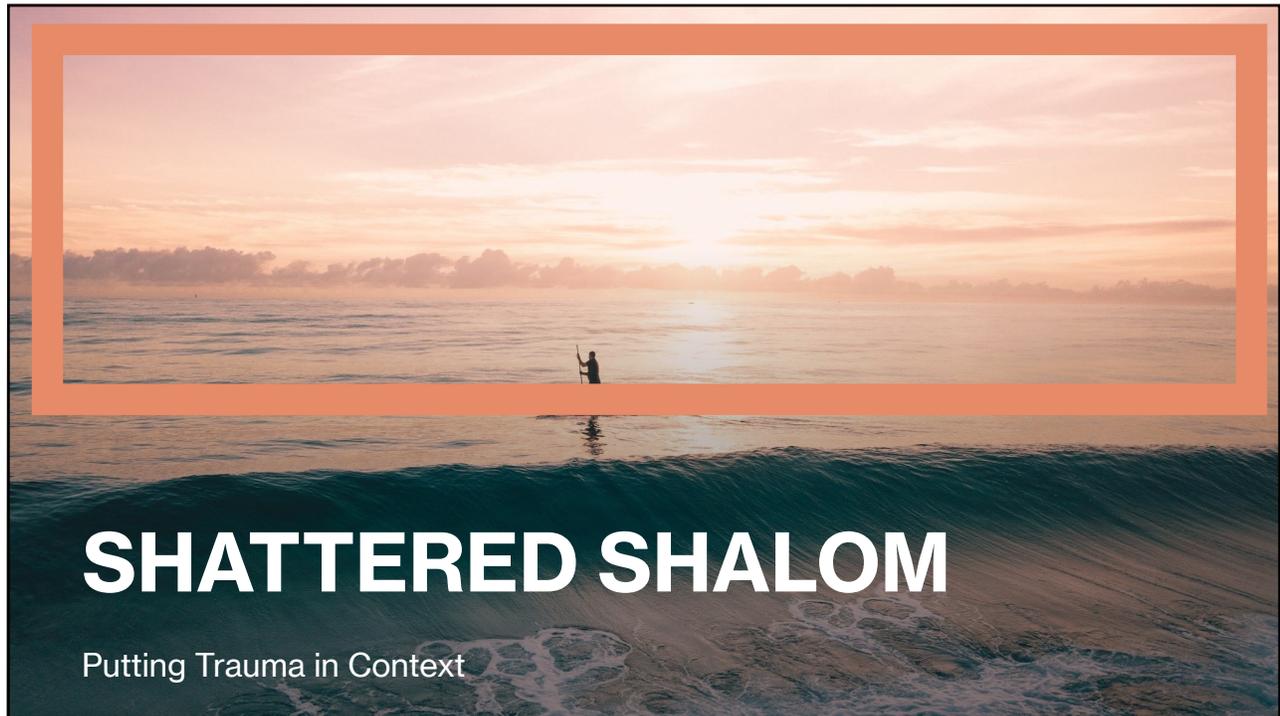
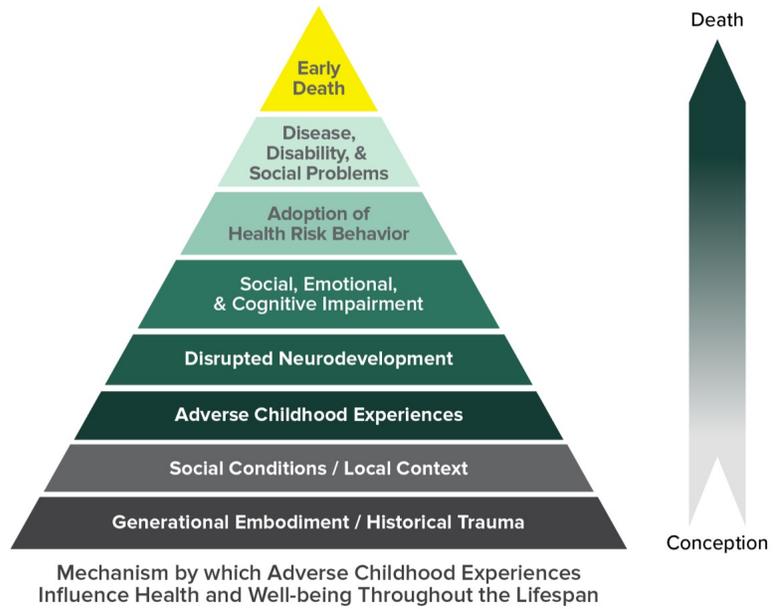
**As ACE score increases, so do the following health problems:**

- Substance abuse
- Depression
- Liver, heart & lung diseases
- STD's
- Suicide Attempts
- Early sexual activity



## ACE Study

How do ACEs increase risks to health and well-being across the lifespan?



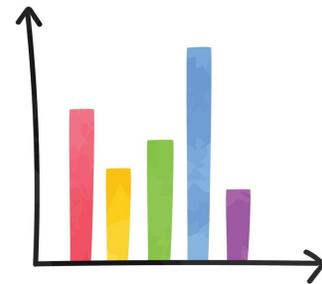
## shalom

“In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight – a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator & Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. ***Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be.***”

Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*

## A warning against comparison

- While there are meaningful differences in the severity of traumatic experiences, **don't dismiss the impact of any trauma.**
- **All trauma leads to shattered shalom**
  - Needs to be grieved
  - Causes a wound that needs to be healed





## Shattered Shalom

Understanding Our Brokenness in Five W's  
*a perspective from M.J. Cusick*

### **wickedness**

- Self-centered defiance of God
- Our depravity shapes how we respond to life
- Sometimes the church leaves it here



## **weakness**

- A limitation or vulnerability
- The results of the Fall are far reaching and include living in bodies that are “not the way they’re supposed to be”
- Stewarding our weaknesses



## **woundedness**

- Experiences of pain or harm that shape us  
*(Trauma: wounds that overwhelm us)*
- **Wounds of presence** (abuse)
- **Wounds of absence** (neglect)



## wiring

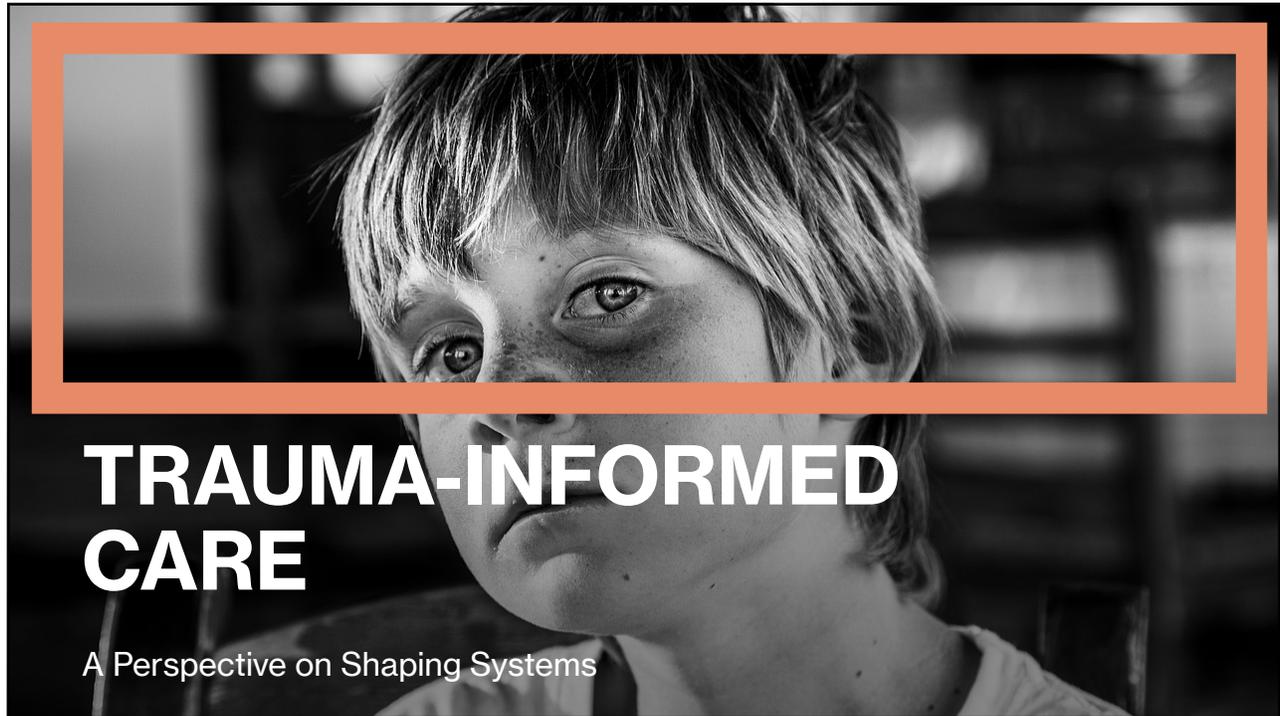
- Our physiological reality
  - Body / Nervous system
- Shaped by early experiences and relationships
- Residual effects of trauma



## warfare

- We battle evil forces that aim towards the destruction of faith, hope, & love
- The lies that come against us:
  - About who we are
  - About God





***“Working with trauma  
is as much about  
remembering how we survived  
as it is about what is broken.”***

*-Bessel van der Kolk*

## Trauma-Informed Care *defined*

### Care\* that is directed by:

- A thorough understanding of the profound neurological, biological, psychological and social effects of trauma and violence on the individual and,
- An appreciation for the high prevalence of traumatic experiences in persons who receive care.

*(\*Mental health services, education, health care, criminal justice practices, pastoral care, etc.)*

## Trauma-Informed Care (TIC)

### The **core domains of TIC** include:

1. Workplace development (e.g., required staff training, addressing vicarious trauma in staff, etc.),
2. Trauma-focused services (e.g., evidence-based practices, etc.), and
3. Organizational environment and practices (e.g., strengths-based focus, safe environment, etc.).

## Trauma-Informed Care (TIC)

Emphasis on **complex trauma**, also known as developmental trauma, which is defined as both the exposure to multiple traumatic events, often of an invasive, interpersonal nature, and the wide-ranging, long-term impact of this exposure.

### ***Trauma-informed vs. trauma-specific treatment***

The TIC movement focuses on the creation of organizational environments that are sensitive to trauma-related issues, while *trauma-specific* knowledge and skills are the specific competencies a counselor would need to possess in order to provide evidence-based treatment to someone who presents with trauma-related symptoms.

## Trauma Symptoms as Adaptations

- Symptoms represent a person's attempt to cope the best way they can with overwhelming feelings.
- When we see “symptoms” in a trauma survivor, it is always significant to ask ourselves: What purpose does this behavior serve?

## **Trauma Symptoms as Adaptations**

- Every symptom helped the person cope at some point in the past and is still in the present – in some way.
- As humans, we are incredibly adaptive creatures. If we help the person explore how behaviors are an adaptation, we can help them learn to substitute a less problematic behavior.

## **Trauma Symptoms as Adaptations**

- Survivors of repetitive early trauma are likely to ***instinctively*** continue to use the same **self-protective** coping strategies that they employed to shield themselves from psychic harm at the time of the traumatic experience.

## Trauma Symptoms as Adaptations

- **Hypervigilance, dissociation, avoidance** and **numbing** are examples of coping strategies that may have been effective at some time, but later interfere with the persons' ability to live the life s/he wants

## TIC Core Principles

- Avoid re-victimization
- See problem behaviors as understandable attempts to cope
- Maximize choices for the survivor and control over the healing process
- View each survivor in the context of life experiences and cultural background

## TRAUMA-INFORMED PRINCIPLES

ADAPTED FROM SAMHSA'S CONCEPT OF TRAUMA AND GUIDANCE FOR A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH. (9)

Safety	Trustworthiness & Transparency
Peer Support	Collaboration & Mutuality
Empowerment, Voice, & Choice	Cultural, Historical, & Gender Issues



## Commitments of Trauma Sensitive Theology

### 1. Commitment to the priority of bodily experience

- Western theology has emphasized the mind/rationality over the body/emotions
- Trauma is fundamentally a bodily experience
- Christian anthropology that considers that our bodies are good and part of how we are created in the image of God

Taken from *Trauma Sensitive Theology* by Jennifer Baldwin

## Commitments of Trauma Sensitive Theology

### 2. Commitment to the acceptance of trauma narratives

- After disclosure, don't respond by initially trying to verify the narrative
- Understanding traumatic memory
- Expect the narrative to shift as experiences are processed

Taken from *Trauma Sensitive Theology* by Jennifer Baldwin

## Commitments of Trauma Sensitive Theology

### 3. Commitment to the natural givenness of human psychological multiplicity

- More than one thing can be true at the same time.
  - Part of me wants to do A, but another part of me wants to do B.
  - Multiplicity is not pathological, it's part of the human experience
- Create a paradigm that can honor a person's experience of trauma AND hold on to their dignity and capacity for resilience

Taken from *Trauma Sensitive Theology* by Jennifer Baldwin

## Commitments of Trauma Sensitive Theology

### 4. Commitment to a robust faith in human resiliency

- We do harm when we only see brokenness, without seeing the reality of the dignity & glory of the person
- Hold and fiercely to the truth that survivors do have the capacity to process trauma, to recover, to be resilient when they are provided with support and guidance.
- Trauma is not the end of the story: Resurrection & Restoration have the final word.

Taken from *Trauma Sensitive Theology* by Jennifer Baldwin



## TRAUMA-SAFE CHURCHES

from *Dawn of Sunday: The Trinity and Trauma-Safe Churches*

## Impacts of Trauma



**Loss of connection**



**Loss of safety**



**Loss of hope**



**Loss of a sense of agency**



## Do No Harm

*from Dawn of Sunday: The Trinity and Trauma-Safe Churches*

- Help survivors recover a sense of “Big picture safety”
- Those who are vulnerable to trauma must be protected
- Trauma-safe churches never value the social image of the church above the safety of its members.
  - Take decisive, public action when harm has been done.



## Do No Harm

from *Dawn of Sunday: The Trinity and Trauma-Safe Churches*

### Practical Suggestions:

#### Safeguarding / Child Safety Policies

- Mandatory reporting (to appointed Trauma Safety Advocate)
- Training for those working with children/youth

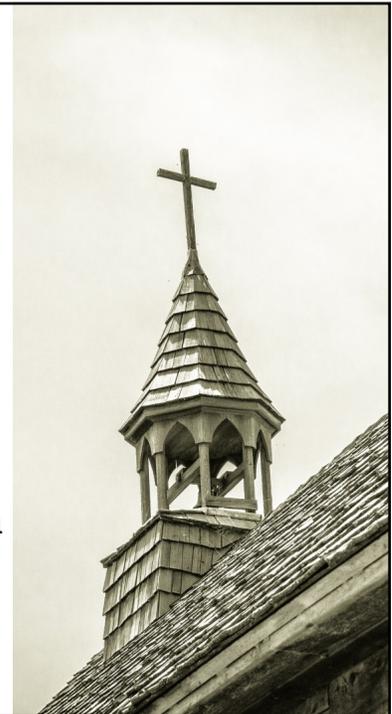
#### If support or an investigation is needed:

GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in Church Environments) – [netgrace.org](http://netgrace.org)

## Listen to Survivors

from *Dawn of Sunday: The Trinity and Trauma-Safe Churches*

- Give survivors a real experience of being safely loved by others
- Invite survivors to speak their trauma out loud to others
  - “You cannot heal from what you have not named”
- A compassionate witness to stories of trauma
- A trauma-safe church is not threatened by stories of trauma



## Listen to Survivors

from *Dawn of Sunday: The Trinity and Trauma-Safe Churches*

- Counteracts the isolating and silencing effects of trauma and shame
- Requires vulnerability from the teller and the hearer
- Can be a difficult task (easier to shut down & numb)



## Listen to Survivors

from *Dawn of Sunday: The Trinity and Trauma-Safe Churches*

### **Caveats:**

- Be wise about when/where/how
  - Safe, structured, private, accessible, guided settings
  - Trust must be built and maintained over time
- Recognize our limits / needs as care providers



## Listen to Survivors

from *Dawn of Sunday: The Trinity and Trauma-Safe Churches*

### **Caveats:**

- Believe survivors
  - "A traumatic event needs to be treated as valid, regardless of how the event appears to anyone else."
- Trauma-safe churches never value the freedom of one person over the safety of another.



## Listen to Survivors

from *Dawn of Sunday: The Trinity and Trauma-Safe Churches*

### **Practical Suggestions**

- Teach that justice and forgiveness are not at odds with one another.
- Take care in how you use terms like *trauma*, *traumatize*, and *PTSD*



## **Take Action to Empower Restoration**

*from Dawn of Sunday: The Trinity and Trauma-Safe Churches*

### **Restorative practices**

- Empower survivors
- Mutually negotiated

In creating trauma safety, we defer to the perspective of the survivor

- In these settings, survivors are safely invited to explore their healing and own it for themselves



## **Take Action to Empower Restoration**

*from Dawn of Sunday: The Trinity and Trauma-Safe Churches*

### **Practical Suggestions**

- Start support groups to support trauma healing– Remember this is not only a ministry “to” survivors, but a ministry “with” for the well-being of the broader church community.
- Don’t make a divide between helpers and wounded. Invite survivors into active ministry within the broader church community.



## Get Moving: Embodiment

from *Dawn of Sunday: The Trinity and Trauma-Safe Churches*



- Safety always begins with the body
  - How are the bodies of people in the church engaged in safety and blessed (acknowledging the wounds they carry)
- Not simply inviting calm, but encouraging survivors to engage their bodies in ways that are empowering

## Get Moving: Embodiment

from *Dawn of Sunday: The Trinity and Trauma-Safe Churches*



- Trauma-safe churches are not threatened by bodily engagement but view this as central to trauma recovery and to the wholeness and goodness of human flourishing
- Blessing our bodies:
  - Counteracting self-disgust & shame; invite kindness & blessing
  - Physical engagement of the liturgy

## Get Moving: Embodiment

from *Dawn of Sunday: The Trinity and Trauma-Safe Churches*



### Practical Suggestions

- Implement liturgies that help the body get moving, especially those that incorporate the power and practice of lament
- Implement an explicit policy for church leaders and members that the rule of all our socializing is “always ask before touching”