

We Need a Healing Movement

What if you had developed a cure for the most painful and costly public health problem in America, you had proven that it worked, and you were offering it for free, but could not reach those who need it most because no one wants to talk about the problem? Tragically, this is my reality and the truth about human nature. It is easier to suffer in silence than acknowledge the painful things that happen to us.

Over 20 years ago, researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente discovered that [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#) (ACEs) were the underlying cause of the largest and most costly public health problems in America. Since then, many of the health effects of ACEs and adult trauma (e.g., mental illness, addiction, suicide, overdoses) have steadily grown worse despite the enormous healthcare investments made to address them. The primary reasons we have not made progress are:

- Most people who suffer from ACEs and adult trauma do not seek medical help due to the stigma and shame associated with their experiences. They also have no idea that healing from the effects of ACEs and trauma is possible, so they naturally seek pain relief instead.
- Those who do seek professional help normally receive only symptom relief, so their health status and living situation often get worse.
- Most healthcare providers don't know that a cure for the effects of ACEs and trauma is possible. And they are not motivated to provide one because the behavioral health industry depends on repeat business for therapy and prescription drugs that are normally not curative.

How do I know these things? From years of research, my own healing experience, and my experience helping others heal from trauma. In late 2014, I lost my daughter Katlyn to suicide after she had been sexually assaulted and before I had learned what happened. She was too ashamed to tell me. It was easier for her to end her life. Since then, I have been working to understand what could have been done to help her. I wrote a book, [For the Love of Katlyn](#), to teach the lessons I learned from my daughter's loss and my own healing journey, then developed a [Healing Workshop](#) with the support of a sexual assault and domestic violence crisis center, a community health center, and an addiction recovery center.

In my four plus years of work, I've developed a program that is effective for healing from the effects of ACEs and adult trauma. It's based on the latest trauma recovery science/research and is suitable for individuals or groups. This [Healing Support Program](#) is now available online for free, is educational and experiential in nature, and has been proven with a wide range of clients. During my Healing Workshops, I learned an important lesson about trauma survivors; that when they understand the effects of their experiences and what can be done to heal, they act to heal themselves out of their own self-interest, once they feel safe and supported by others. So, why doesn't a healing program like this already exist?

Research on trauma recovery has been available since Dr. Judith Herman's groundbreaking book, [Trauma and Recovery](#), was published in 1992. Dr. Herman states, *"The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation."* But what do the words *connection, relationships, and empowerment* really mean to a trauma survivor? And why have we not yet learned how to put Dr. Herman's trauma recovery theory into effective practice? There is a famous childhood trauma survivor who sheds some light on these questions for us. Her name is Oprah Winfrey.

In a recent *60 Minutes* segment on *Trauma-Informed Care*, hosted by Oprah, she asks Dr. Bruce Perry, a leading expert on childhood trauma, the key factor in being able to overcome traumatic childhood experiences. Dr. Perry says the answer comes down to something simple: “relationships.” But in a follow-up interview on [60 Minutes Overtime](#), Oprah tells us what kind of relationship a trauma survivor needs to recover; “*What he really means is love. He’s a scientist. He’s not going to use the word ‘love.’ But it really is about how you are responded to, valued, trusted, and loved by those around you.*”

In Oprah’s words, we can clearly see the disconnect between trauma recovery theory and real-life practice. Childhood and adult trauma survivors need loving relationships in order to heal. This is not the job of scientists or healthcare providers. The love they need must come from those around them. Therefore, if we want to effectively address our most painful and costly public health problem, we need a [Healing Movement](#); 1) to raise awareness about the pervasiveness and effects of ACEs and adult trauma, 2) to build understanding of the environmental conditions, self-care practices, and learned skills that lead to healing, and 3) to encourage individuals and communities to provide the loving support survivors need to make the healing journey.

There is no other way to solve this problem. Survivors and their families and friends understandably don’t want to talk about these painful experiences. So, we need to reach out to them directly and let them know healing is possible. But this is not easy, because establishing a connection to someone who is suffering from the effects of trauma and adversity requires the right:

- Message – that shows compassion and understanding to help them overcome fear, stigma, blame and shame. We’ve worked with survivors to develop a message for materials used to promote our Healing Program. It begins with, “[It’s not your fault. You deserve to heal.](#)”
- Messenger – who is authentic, trustworthy, and empathetic, and who has already begun the healing journey, because survivors learn through the healing experience of others. One of our clients wrote about the power of seeing someone who had, “[trudged through the fire and agony of loss and trauma and made it to the other side.](#)” Oprah is a perfect example of this.

At the beginning of the *60 Minutes Overtime* segment mentioned above, Oprah states, “*It is my hope that our story on trauma-informed care will not just be impactful but will also be revolutionary. It certainly has caused a revolution in my own life.*” I have had a similar experience. Losing my daughter caused a revolution in my world. And working with trauma survivors to develop a cure for their suffering was impactful and healing for me. But I still struggle with how to start this “revolution” Oprah speaks of (i.e. *Healing Movement*) that could save so many lives that would otherwise be lost, like my little angel.

We all want justice for victims of childhood adversity, sexual assault, domestic violence, and other types of trauma. But there is no justice without healing. The healing journey begins when survivors learn that healing is possible and are given the resources and loving support they need to start feeling better. All humans intuitively understand and respond to the healing power of love. So, if you care for the many ACEs and adult trauma survivors who suffer in silence through no fault of their own, and have the courage and compassion to provide the love and support that they need to start healing, please join Oprah and me in reaching out to them so we can get this revolution started. We have much work to do.

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