

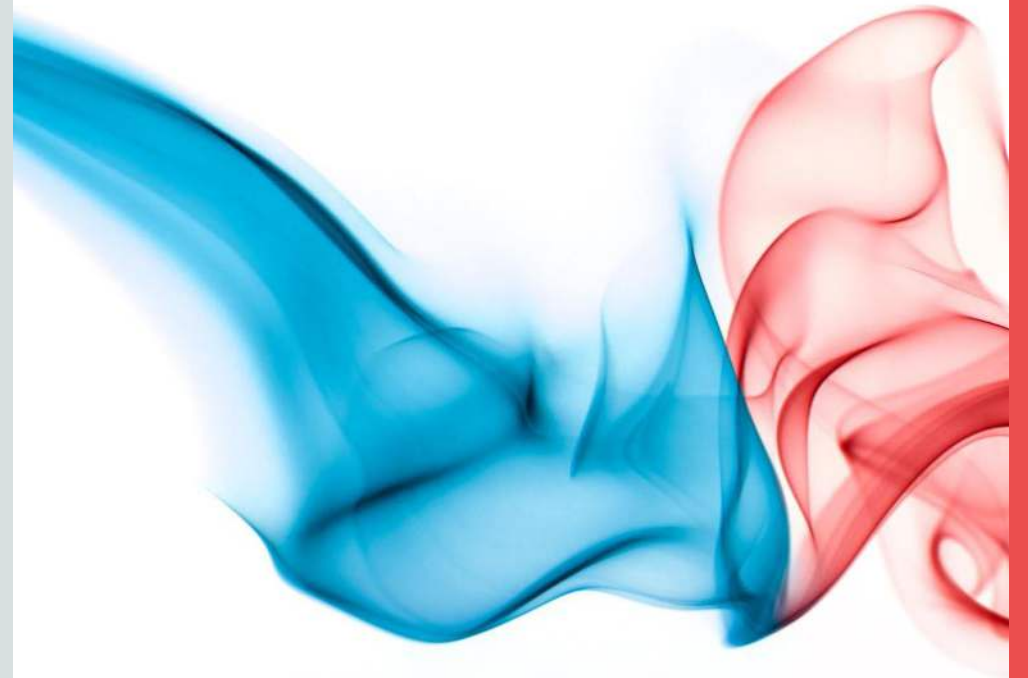


Intimate Betrayal Trauma

Kathy Barnum, LCPC, CMHC, NCC

“The spirit in each of us naturally yearns for family love to last forever,” taught President Russell M. Nelson.

The desire for this eternal connection to others is ingrained in our spirits, but sometimes because of relationship traumas we aren’t sure we’ll ever be able to have these eternal relationships, including celestial marriage. In acknowledging the journey that many of us and our brothers and sisters are enduring, we can provide comfort and bless those who mourn.



Today's presentation will touch on several aspects of betrayal-

Definition

The betrayal dynamic

How it alters the brain

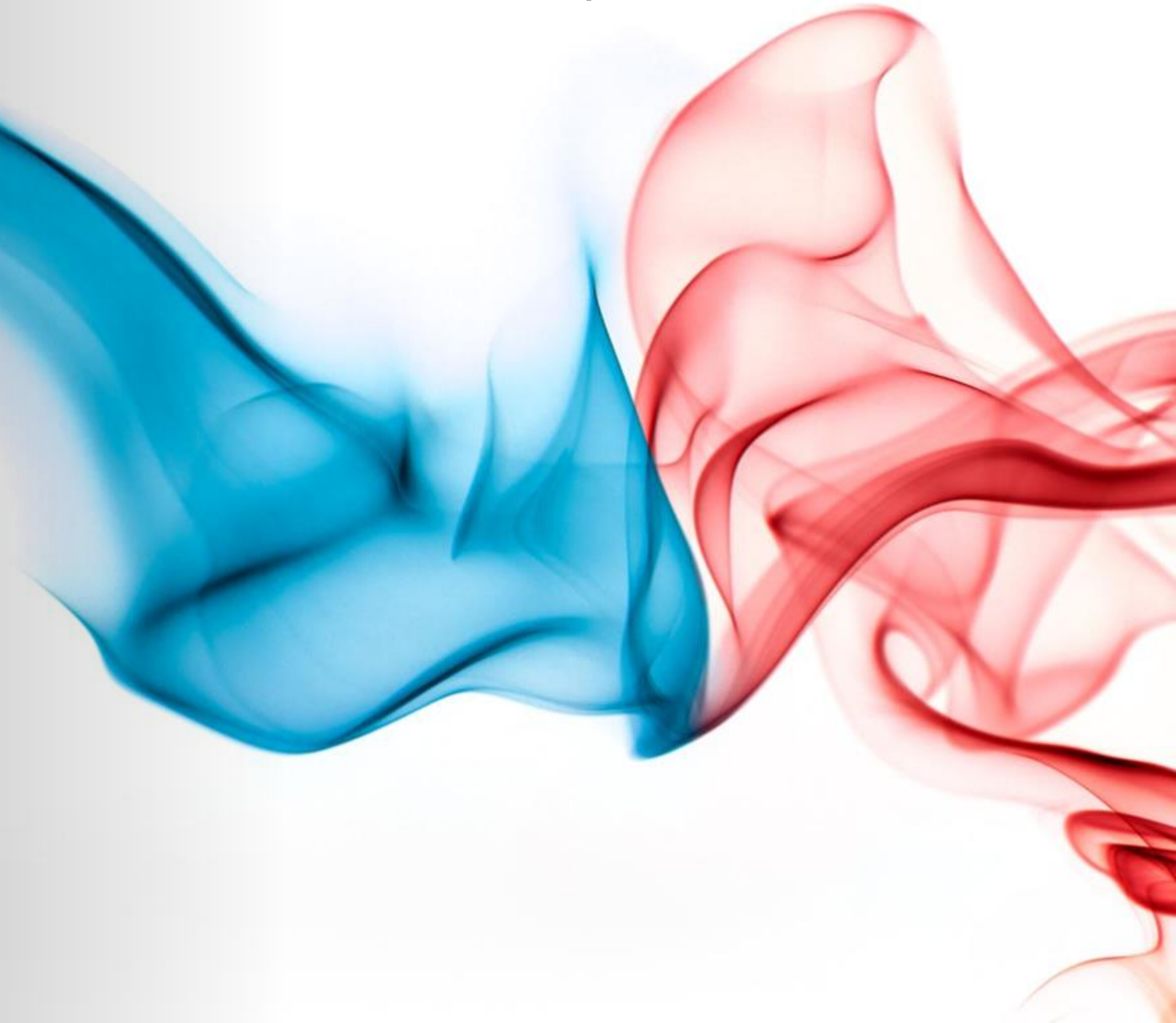
Common clinical diagnoses

Symptoms

Stages of betrayal

Common behaviors

The healing process





I anticipate that there may be some of you who have either gone through or are going through betrayal trauma, and you may feel dysregulated or become dissociated. Because of this we will stop for short mindfulness exercises as needed throughout the presentation, a way to ground you and bring you back to the present, hopefully a space where you feel safe and calm.



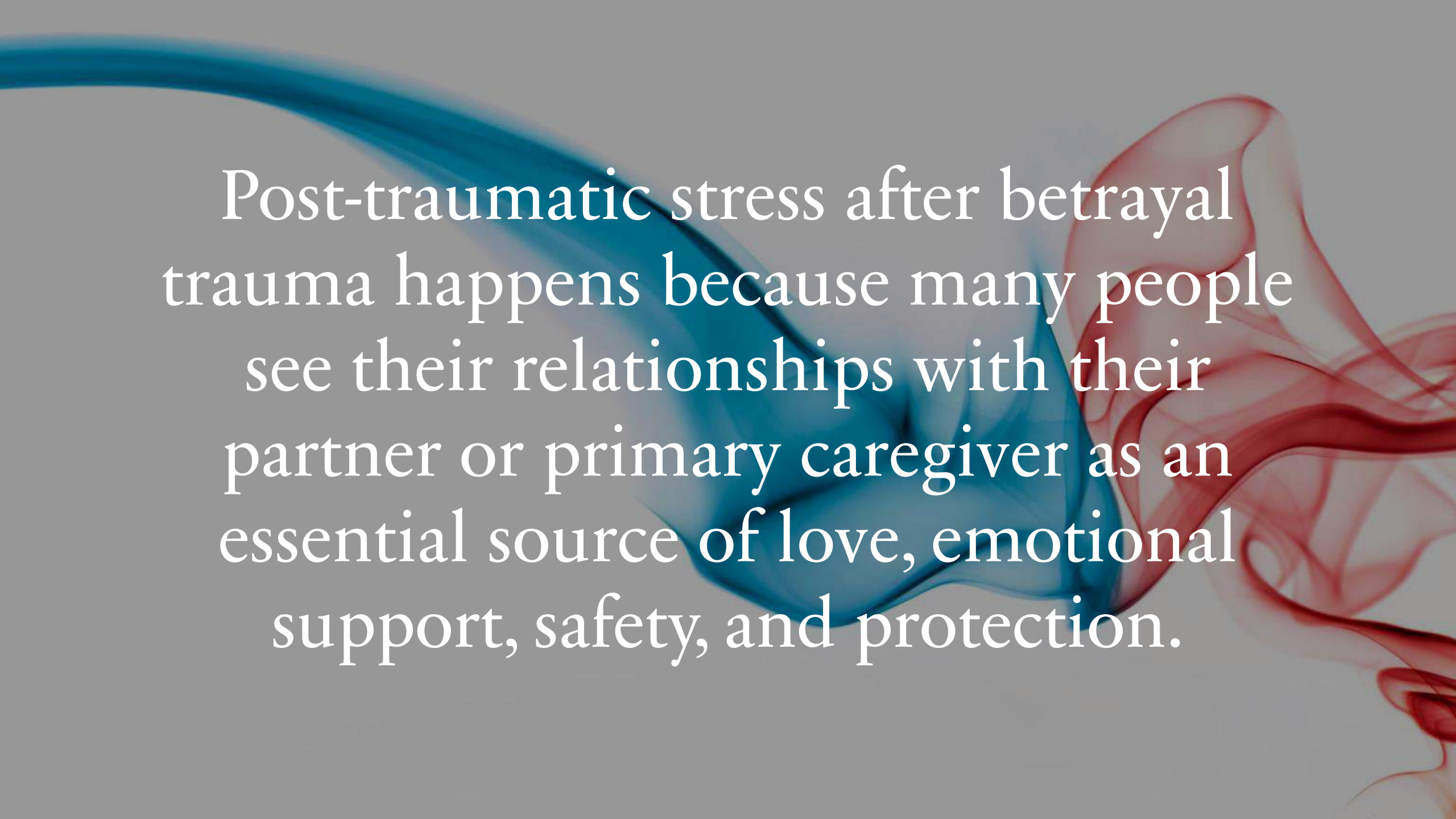
Traumatic betrayal occurs when there has been a significant breach of trust in a relationship.

- **Betrayal trauma can stem from any situation that upends the trust and expectations of a relationship.**

- **Examples include:**

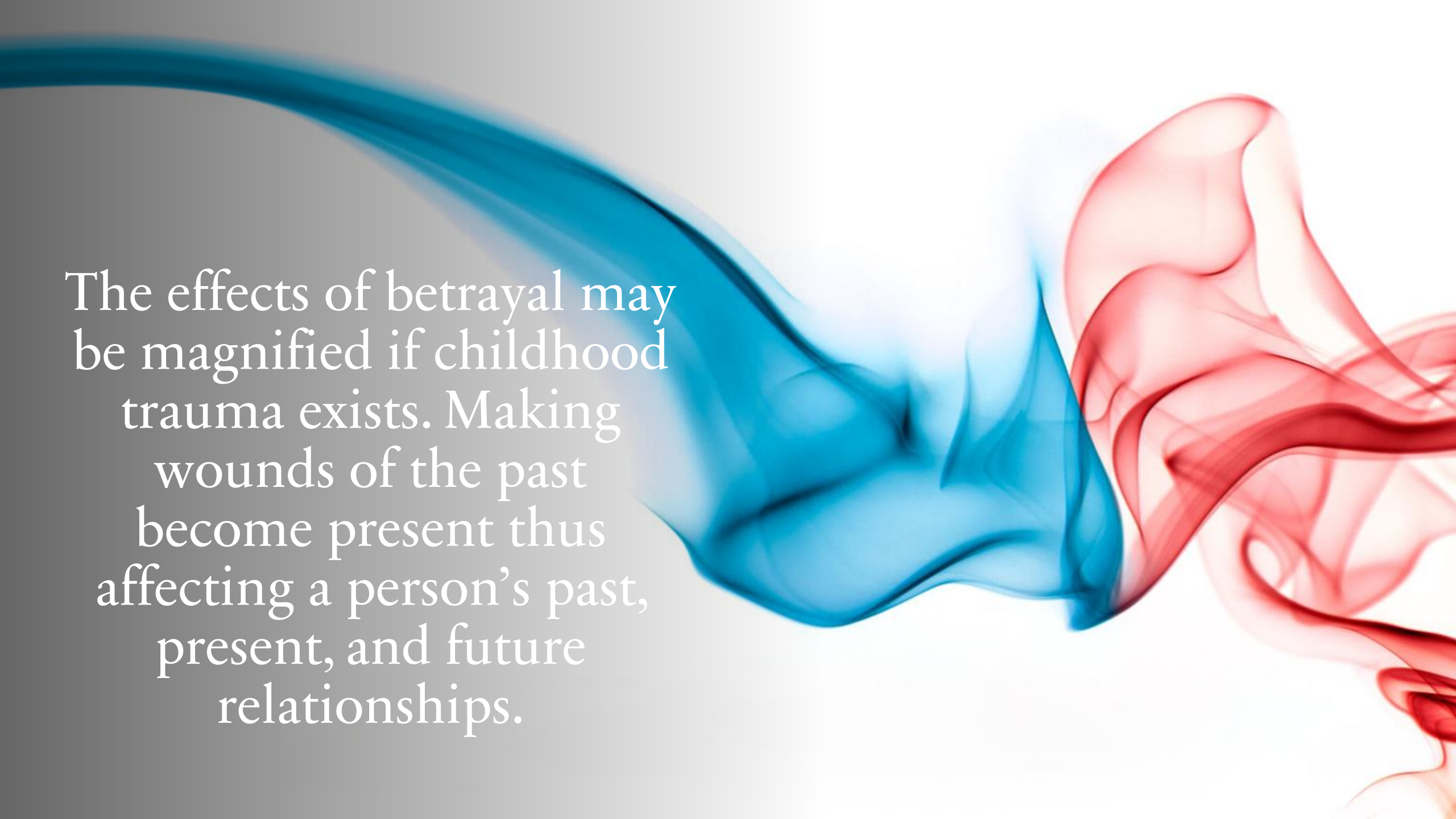
- **Emotional or sexual infidelity**
- **Discovering lies or duplicity**
- **Financial deception or exploitation**
- **Any form of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse**

What is betrayal trauma?



Post-traumatic stress after betrayal trauma happens because many people see their relationships with their partner or primary caregiver as an essential source of love, emotional support, safety, and protection.

The effects of betrayal may be magnified if childhood trauma exists. Making wounds of the past become present thus affecting a person's past, present, and future relationships.

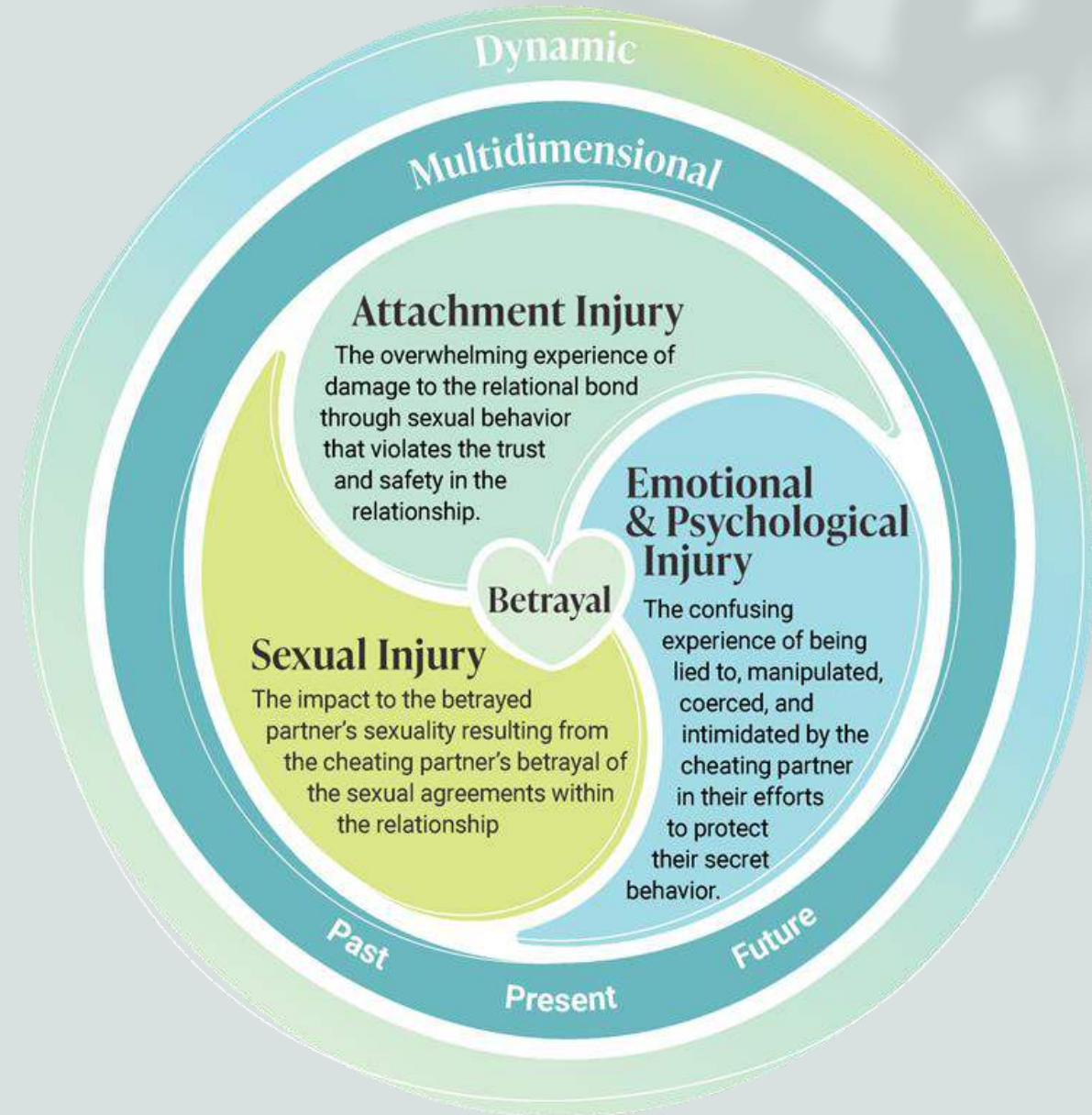


Betrayal Dynamic

Attachment Injury: The overwhelming experience of damage to the relational bond through sexual behavior that violates the trust and safety in the relationship. Seeing their partner as someone they do not recognize can be disorienting and heartbreaking.

Emotional & Psychological Injury: The confusing experience of being lied to, manipulated, coerced, and intimidated by the cheating partner in their efforts to protect their secret behavior.

Sexual Injury: The impact to the betrayed partner's sexuality resulting from the cheating partner's betrayal of the sexual agreements within the relationship.



What Happens in the Brain When One is Betrayed?



Betrayal trauma, coined by Jenny Freyd in 1991, alters the mind. It impacts the brain and its natural ability to react to stress. A critical region changed by betrayal is the Limbic and Hippocampal regions, better known as your emotional response center and memory data bank. It is responsible for sexual arousal.



The two systems usually work together to tell you what is safe in a relationship and what you can trust to be accurate. Following a betrayal, this upset system goes into survival mode, where the limbic system acts as a fire alarm. As this system warns of danger, your memory center, the hippocampus, scans for memories.



You may begin questioning what you thought you knew. Or start doubting whether a particular vacation was as amazing as you once thought. You may even struggle to know what was truly real in your relationship. Every memory feels dislocated and unsafe.

Our Acute Stress Response is Activated

As the limbic region experiences more stress over time, you may enter a prolonged state of hyper or hypo-arousal, where your mind changes to see memories and the world as threatening.

Everyone's response to trauma is different. People may "freeze" and others may "fight or flight."

Hyperarousal in betrayal trauma resembles a heightened flight or fight response. This response may include intense anger, fear, or panic.

The opposite of a hyper-aroused state, a hypo arousal state may resemble disconnection with your body, mind fog, memory lapses, dissociation, and emotional numbness.

Prolonged experiences in either of these states can drastically alter the brain's ability to process memory, feelings, time, location, and your ability to be present in the moment.

How Does Betrayal Trauma Change a Personality?



A third state resulting from betrayal trauma is appeasement or people-pleasing.

This state may look like you are ignoring, validating, or catering to the needs of others to preserve relationships.

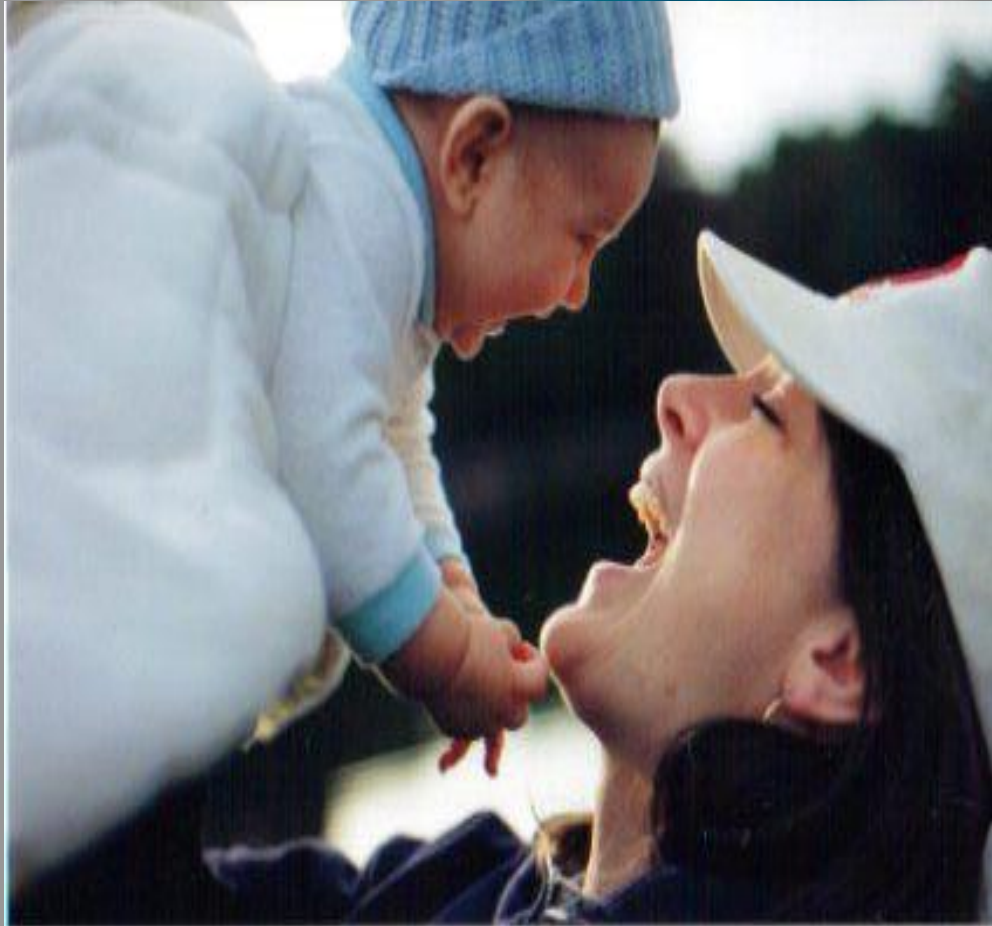
This appeasement may result in loss of identity, create resentment, and lead to experiencing more betrayal in the future.

How Does Betrayal Trauma Alter the Mind?

The brain wired with oodles of neurotransmitters, sends messages and hormones from one part of the brain to another. One of the hormones that these neurotransmitters send from the Deep Limbic System of the brain is oxytocin. Oxytocin promotes bonding and attachment; it makes us feel good and close to others when it is active.

Oxytocin has been dubbed the “cuddle hormone” or “love hormone” because it simply does that. It creates bonds, trust, and generosity in us. In fact, whenever you feel comfort or secure, oxytocin is involved. It’s number one duty is to create human bonding.

Oxytocin is also the predominant hormone released when we are expressing selfless love. So as we feel the true love of Christ through charity, we increase the release of oxytocin.



Oxytocin not only promotes bonding during birth and breast-feeding; it also increases trust and empathy. It is also released during a hug and kiss of a loved one.

The other crucial time oxytocin is released is during sex. During sex, this chemical is produced in each individual and creates both a physical and emotional bond between the partners.

How Does Betrayal Trauma Alter the mind?

When the Limbic system is not working properly, you will experience symptoms of depression and lethargy. It is therefore important to recognize that when a sexual betrayal occurs, especially in a committed marriage, there is a shift in brain chemistry that causes an attachment disruption leaving the betrayed person deeply wounded both mentally and physically.

Spiral Technique:

Pull together the sensations of things that are bothering you into one place in your body.

Notice which direction it is spinning naturally and then with your mind spin it in the opposite direction as long as needed for it to dissipate.

Common Clinical Diagnoses Associated with Betrayal Trauma

Betrayal trauma can have a severe impact on the person and cause them to experience symptoms or health conditions such as:

Post-traumatic stress
disorder (PTSD)

Depression

Anxiety

Dissociation

Trust and relationship
issues- may spread to
even your closest
relationships

Physical pain and
gastrointestinal
issues

Substance abuse

Eating disorders

Symptoms of Betrayal Trauma

Physical Symptoms:

- Panic attacks
- Isolating from a support network
- Loss of appetite or overeating
- Using substances or risky behaviors to cope
- Insomnia or sleeping too much
- Body aches and pains
- Headaches
- Stomach distress/vomiting
- Increased heart rate
- Elevated blood pressure
- Hair loss

Sexual Symptoms:

- Decreased libido and aversion to sexual activity
- Fear of sex with your partner who betrayed you
- Discovering STI's from your partner
- Flashbacks and intrusive thoughts during sex
- Feeling sexually undesirable to your partner
- Engaging in performative sex with your partner
- Experiencing inability to orgasm during sex with your partner
- Feeling unsafe sexually with your partner
- Pain or general discomfort during sex

Symptoms of Betrayal Trauma – continued

Emotional Symptoms:

- **Anger/Rage**
- **Tremendous grief**
- **Shame**
- **Guilt**
- **Helplessness**
- **Experiencing distressing nightmares**
- **Feeling emotionally numb**
- **Diminished self-esteem and self-worth**
- **Emotional dysregulation manifested as emotional outbursts or crying episodes**

Spiritual Symptoms:

- **Loss of faith in spiritual beliefs**
- **Anger towards faith/higher power**
- **Feelings of being punished by faith/higher power**
- **Feeling unprotected by faith/higher power**
- **Feeling confused about yourself and the world you thought you knew**
- **Disruption or abandonment of once held values**

Cognitive Symptoms:

- **Intrusive thoughts about the betrayal**
- **Paranoia**
- **Hypervigilance towards partner**
- **Difficulty concentrating**

Stages of Betrayal Trauma

Shock

The first stage of betrayal trauma is often shock and disbelief. This is when the person first learns of the betrayal and can't believe that it has happened. They may feel like they are in a dream or that they are going to wake up and everything will be okay. This stage can last for a few days or weeks, depending on the severity of the betrayal. They may also feel numb and disconnected from what is happening around them. This stage can be very confusing and overwhelming.

Denial

The denial stage is when the person tries to push away what has happened and pretend it didn't happen. This stage can last for a few weeks or months and can be very frustrating for friends and family members who are trying to support them. They may try to rationalize or justify the betrayal, or they may just ignore it altogether. This can be a way of coping with the trauma, but it often does not last long.

Obsession

The obsession stage is when the person becomes fixated on the betrayal and can't stop thinking about it. This stage can last for a few weeks or months and can be very disruptive to their life. They may spend a lot of time obsessing over the details of the betrayal and trying to figure out what went wrong. They may also have trouble focusing on anything else. This stage can be very damaging, as it often leads to further isolation and distress.

Anger

The anger stage is when the person finally starts to express the rage and hurt, they are feeling. This stage can last for weeks or months and can be very destructive. They may lash out at friends, family, and even strangers. This anger can also be directed at the person who betrayed them, or it may be turned inward.

Stages of Betrayal Trauma - continued

Bargaining

The bargaining stage is when the person tries to make a deal with God or the universe to fix things. It often involves making promises to God or pleading with the person who betrayed them to make things right. This stage can be very frustrating for those around them, as it often delays the healing process. They may plead for forgiveness or offer to do anything in order to make things right again. This stage can be very self-destructive.

Depression

The depression stage is when the person sinks into deep sadness and despair. They may lose interest in things they used to enjoy and feel like there is no hope left. This stage can be very debilitating and often leads to suicidal thoughts or actions.

Acceptance

The acceptance stage is when the person finally comes to terms with what has happened. They may not be happy about it, but they are able to move on with their life. This stage can be very liberating and often leads to a stronger sense of self. This stage can be exceedingly difficult, but it is also ultimately healing.

Common Behavior of Intimate Partner Betrayal Trauma

Detective work: Betrayed partners will search for evidence of cheating, checking phone bills, browser histories, emails, texts, wallets, credit card bills, phone apps, etc. They might also hire hackers and/or private detectives, surreptitiously install tracking and monitoring software on digital devices, etc.

Mood swings: Betrayed spouses can be sad and depressed one minute, filled with rage and anger the next, and then desperately affectionate, loving, and even sexual the next. And their moods can swing from one extreme to the other with little to no warning.

Common Behavior of Intimate Partner Betrayal Trauma -continued

Global shame: After being cheated on, self-esteem can take a huge hit. Betrayed partners can suddenly feel unattractive and unlovable, even when those feelings do not mesh with reality.

Sexualization: Betrayed spouses sometimes seek out lots of sex with their cheating partner. Maybe they are trying to feel desirable again; maybe they are trying to use sex to control the cheating partner; maybe they think that if they offer enough sex at home, their partner won't feel a need to continue cheating; etc.

Common Behavior of Intimate Partner Betrayal Trauma - continued

Global mistrust: Because their trust has been violated by the person they most believed in, betrayed spouses may question absolutely everything that anyone, not just the cheater, says and does.

Controlling behaviors: Because their relationship feels out of their control, and they no longer trust anything their partner (or anyone else) says or does, betrayed partners might try to micromanage all aspects of life—family finances, childcare, chores, free time, etc.

Common Behavior of Intimate Partner Betrayal Trauma- continued

Rage and attacks: Betrayed spouses sometimes behave like a feral cat backed into a corner—snarling and lashing out in any number of ways. They call the cheater names, devalue the good things the cheater does, tell the kids and neighbors what the cheater has done, lawyer up, etc.

Obsessive questioning: Sometimes, betrayed partners want to know every little detail of the cheating—what happened, with whom, where it occurred, how many times, and all sorts of other very specific information.

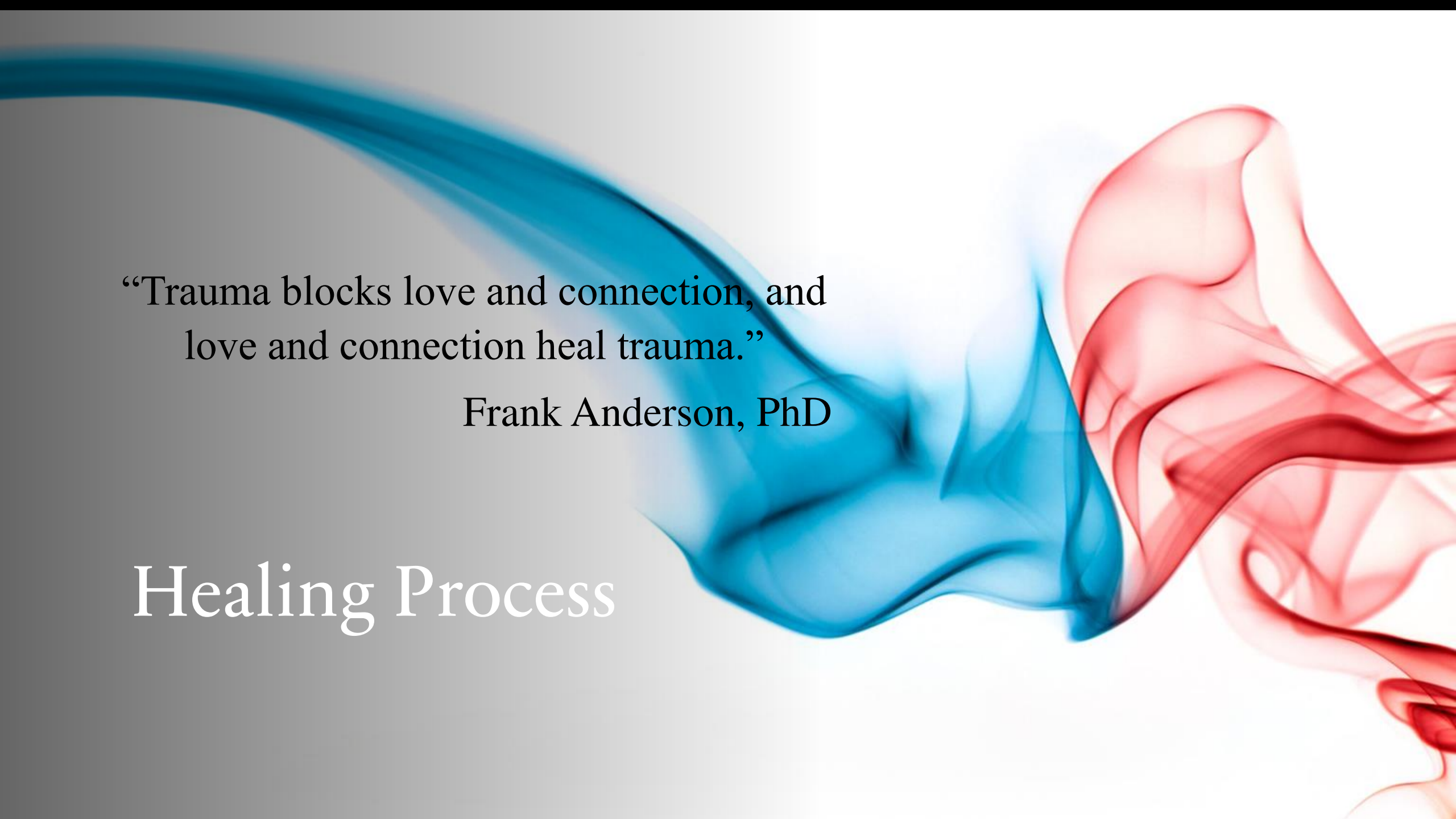
Common Behavior of Intimate Partner Betrayal Trauma - continued

Avoidance: This is the opposite of obsessive questioning, but equally likely. Betrayed spouses may try to avoid thinking and/or talking about infidelity. Even more perplexing is that they might flip-flop between obsessive questioning and avoidance. One minute they want to know everything, the next minute they want to bury their heads in the sand.

Escapist (and maybe addictive) behaviors: Betrayed partners sometimes try to escape their emotional discomfort by drinking, drugging, gambling, binge eating, spending, exercising, acting out sexually, etc.

Half-smile (or full smile):

Sit in a chair and take a couple of deep breaths. As you continue to breathe, slowly start to turn the sides of your lips upward to make a small smile. Relax your face and take on this more serene look. Notice whether your emotions begin to change as your face communicates acceptance to your brain. Alternatively, look in a mirror, make a peace sign with your first and middle fingers, and use those fingers to push up the sides of your mouth into a goofy smile. This moment need not be so serious, even if your life sometimes is!



“Trauma blocks love and connection, and
love and connection heal trauma.”

Frank Anderson, PhD

Healing Process

Begin with Safety!

It takes two!

No secrets: Secrets destroy safety. Remember addiction grows in silence. It is important to share your experiences with either someone that you already trust or with someone with whom you can develop a trusting relationship. Be honest and truthful!

Take responsibility for your actions: Stop blaming your spouse for your actions! Safety thrives when individuals take accountability for their own actions. For the betrayed partner it may sound something like, "I will not be in a relationship where pornography is present."

Eliminate toxicity: Healthy relationships are formed in safe environments. Name calling, criticism, lying, blaming, and any form of contemptuous behavior does not promote safety. Set firm boundaries as to what is or is not allowed within your relationship.

Safety

Be pro-active in healing: Be engaged in your own healing process. This is how the dynamic of the relationship changes. When both partners choose recovery change becomes evident and trust grows.

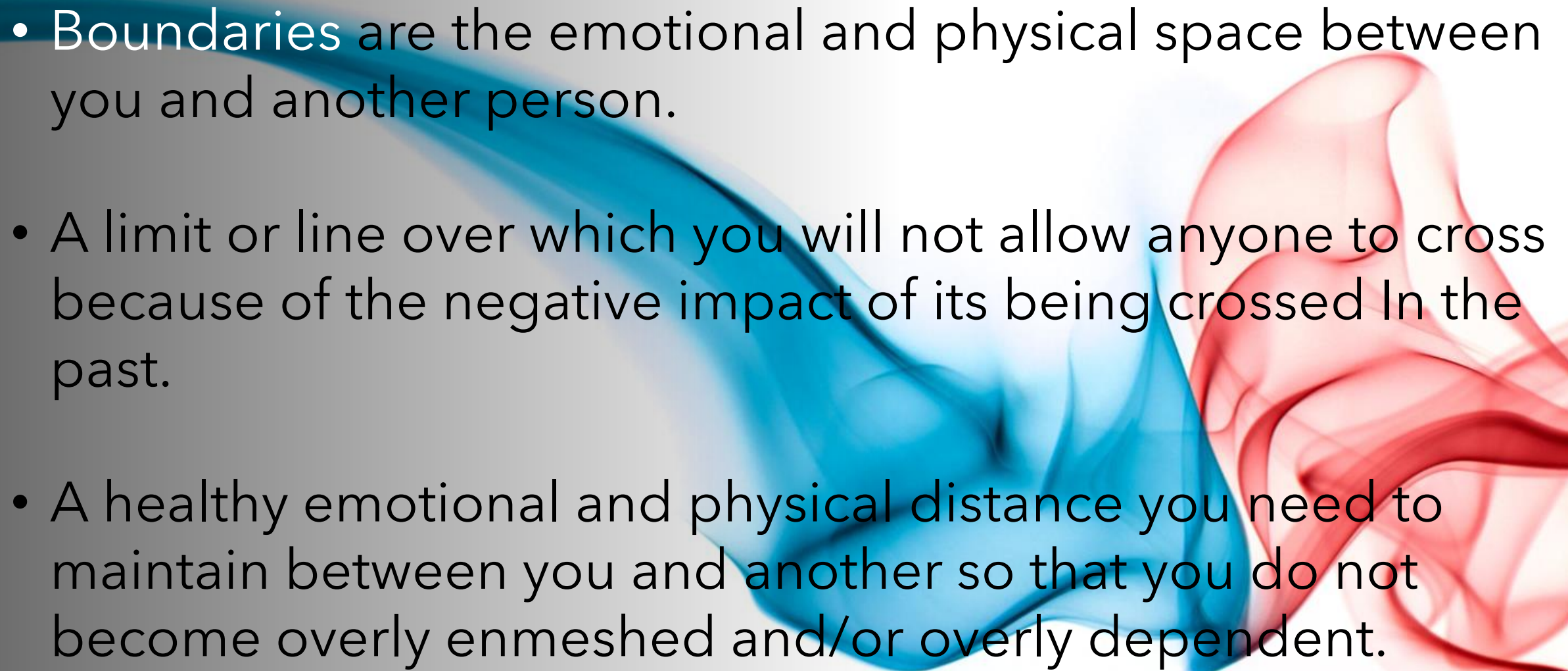
Seek support: Both parties need a reliable support group, whether it be a 12-step group through the church or otherwise. Seek out a trauma informed and trained Licensed (Clinical) Professional Counselor (LCPC, LPC), Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT), or Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW). Rely on a religious leader, trusted friend, supportive family member, and/or sponsor that understands addiction and betrayal trauma.

Establish financial security: Putting money aside and establishing credit is another way to create safety within the relationship. This may look like placing utilities, Deed of Trust, mortgage, and car loans in both names written in and/or language. Even a credit card that you pay off each month is a method for establishing credit.

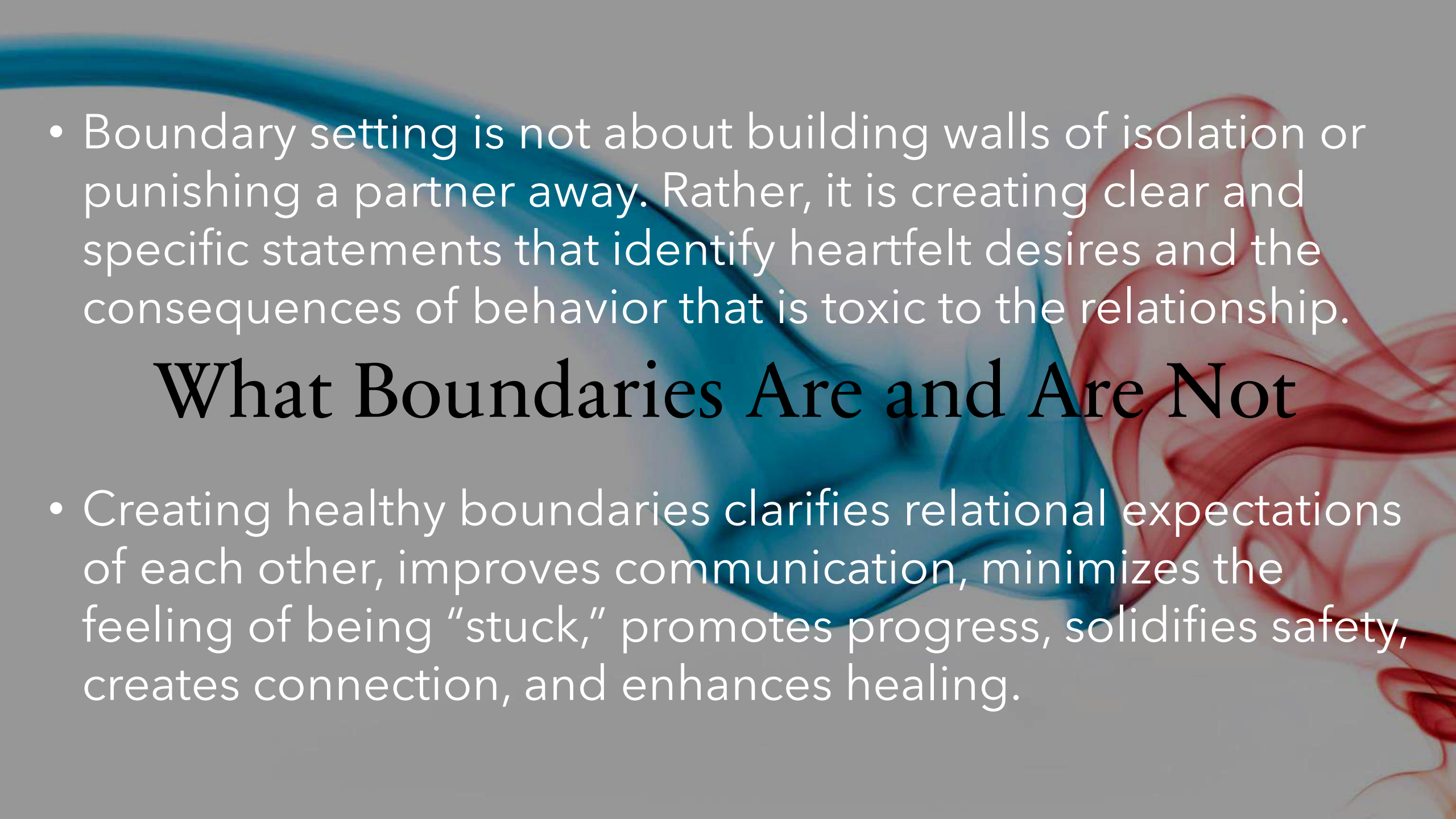


Healing requires safety. Safety requires boundaries.
In other words, there will be no healing without
boundaries.

Healing Process

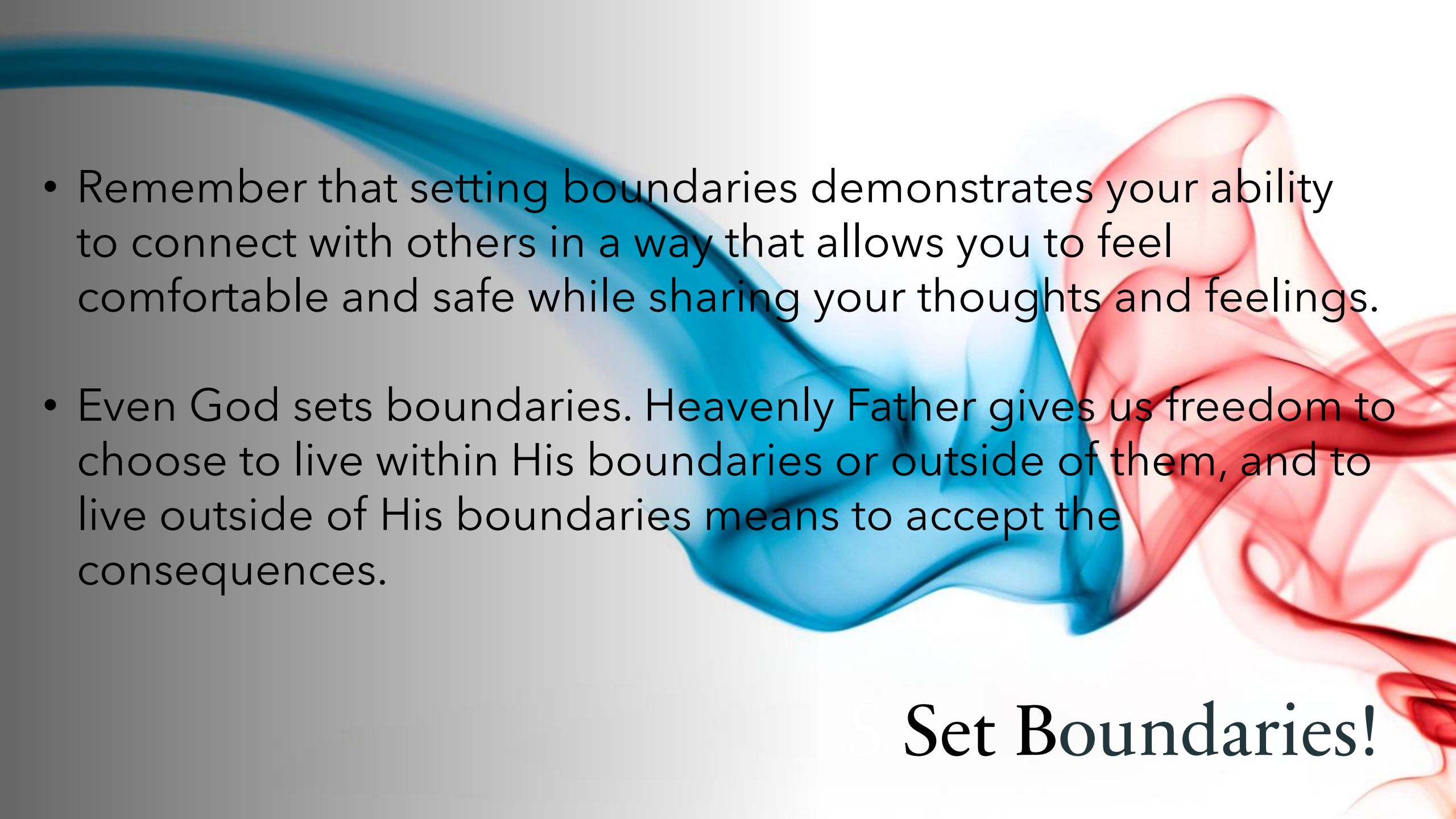
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- **Boundaries** are the emotional and physical space between you and another person.
 - A limit or line over which you will not allow anyone to cross because of the negative impact of its being crossed In the past.
 - A healthy emotional and physical distance you need to maintain between you and another so that you do not become overly enmeshed and/or overly dependent.

Definition of Boundaries

- 
- Boundary setting is not about building walls of isolation or punishing a partner away. Rather, it is creating clear and specific statements that identify heartfelt desires and the consequences of behavior that is toxic to the relationship.

What Boundaries Are and Are Not

- Creating healthy boundaries clarifies relational expectations of each other, improves communication, minimizes the feeling of being “stuck,” promotes progress, solidifies safety, creates connection, and enhances healing.

- 
- Remember that setting boundaries demonstrates your ability to connect with others in a way that allows you to feel comfortable and safe while sharing your thoughts and feelings.
 - Even God sets boundaries. Heavenly Father gives us freedom to choose to live within His boundaries or outside of them, and to live outside of His boundaries means to accept the consequences.

S Set Boundaries!

Rational Boundary-Building Thinking

Unhealthy Belief	Healthy Boundary Builder
I can never say "no" to others-	I have a right to say "no" to others if it is an invasion OF my space or a violation of my rights.
It is my duty to hold them together.	I have a right to take care of myself. If they want to stay together as a family or group, it is up to everyone to make such a decision. We all share responsibility to create the interdependency needed to keep us a united group.
I can never trust anyone again.	I have a right to take the risk to grow in my relationships with others. If my rights are being violated or ignored, I can assertively protect myself to ensure I am not hurt.
I would feel guilty if I did something on my own and left my family or group out of it.	I have the right and need to do things which are uniquely mine so that I do not become so overly enmeshed with others that I lose my identity.
I should do everything can to spend as much time together with you or else we won't be a healthy family or group-	I have a right and a need to explore my own interests, hobbies and outlets so that I can bring back to this family or group my unique personality to enrich our lives rather than be lost in a closed and over enmeshed system.
It does not matter what they are doing to me. As long as I keep quiet and don't complain, they will eventually leave me alone-	I will stand up for myself and assert my rights to be respected and not hurt or violated. If they choose to ignore me, then I have the right to leave them or ask them to get out of my life.
As long as I am not seen or heard, I won't be violated or hurt.	I have a right to be visible and to be seen and heard. I will stand up for myself so that others can learn to respect my rights, my needs and not violate my space.
I'd rather not pay attention to what is happening to me in this relationship, which is overly intrusive, smothering and violating my privacy. in this way I don't have to feel the pain and hurt that comes from such a violation.	I choose no longer to disassociate from my feelings when I am being treated in a negatively painful way so that I can be aware of what is happening to me and assertively protect myself from further violation or hurt.
I have been hurt badly in the past and will never let anyone in close enough to hurt me again.	I do not need to be cold and distant or aloof and shy as protective tools to avoid being hurt. I choose to open myself up to others trusting that I will be assertive to protect my rights and privacy from being violated.
I can never tell where to draw the line with others.	There is a line I have drawn over which I do not allow others to cross. This line ensures me my uniqueness, autonomy, and privacy. I can be me the way I really am rather than the way people want me to be by drawing this line. By this line I let others know this is who I am and where I begin and you end; this is who you are and where you begin, and I end; we will never cross over this line so that we can maintain a healthy relationship with one another.

How to Establish Healthier Boundaries



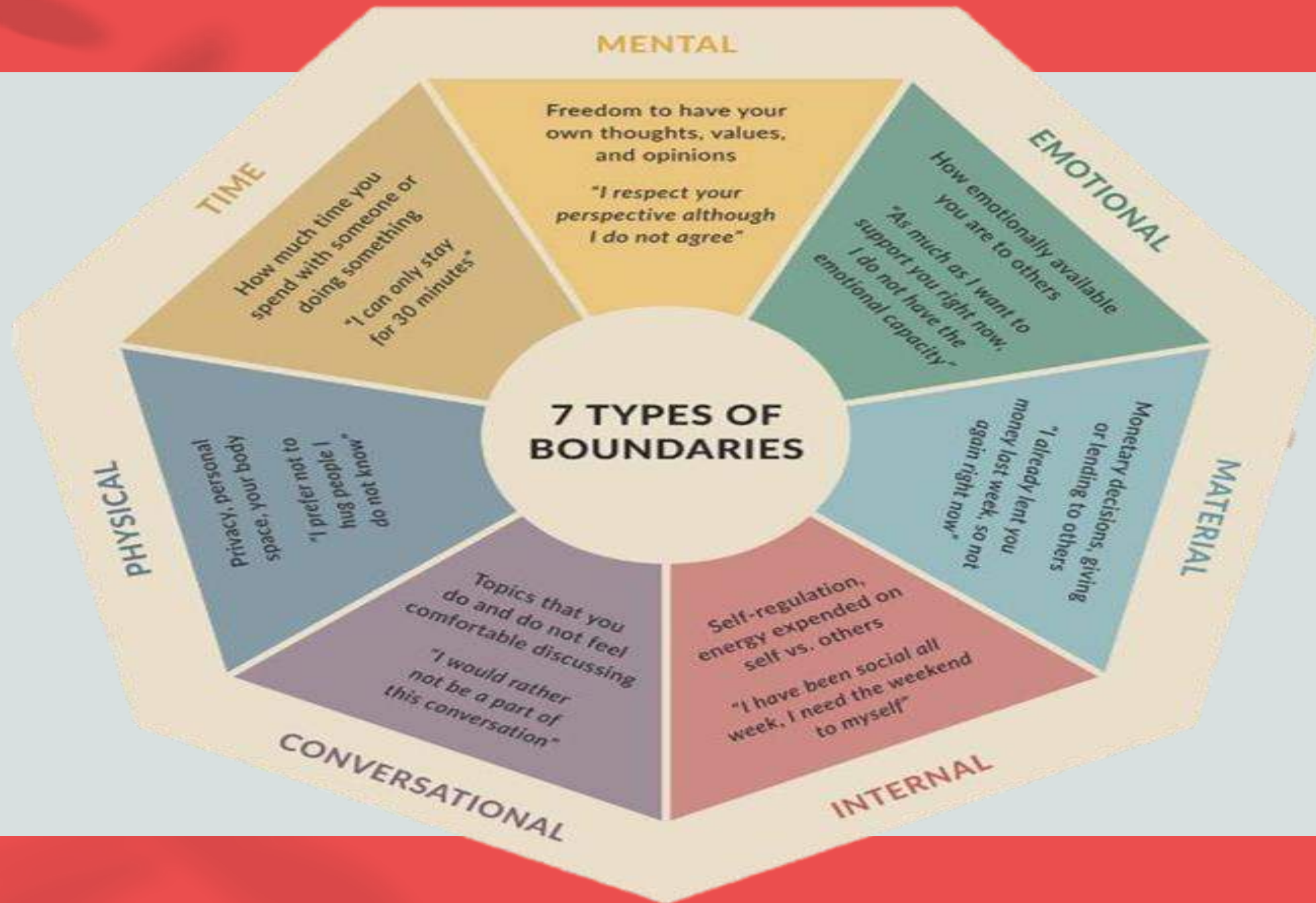
Examples of Setting Boundaries

Deal Breakers: "I want to have a healthy relationship with you, but if you have another affair (could specify contact with prostitutes, meet up with a person for sex, engage in online pornography viewing or sex, have emotional affair, etc.), you will need to find somewhere else to live while I make decisions for my future and what that may look like."

Physical Boundaries: I need to feel safe in this relationship. "If you come into the bathroom while I am showering, I will ask you to give me physical space for the rest of the day."

Sexual Boundaries: "I would like to be the only woman in this house (or your life) that you are intimate with. If you continue to invite other women into our home by looking at pornography, I will ask you to sleep somewhere else for a week."

Emotional Boundaries: "I will engage in conversations when I feel respected and heard. When there is yelling or disrespectful or offensive language, I will leave the room or house and continue the conversation when I feel a respectful conversation is possible."



10 details:

Anyplace, anywhere, pause and *Observe and Describe* 10 details you would not have otherwise noticed in the space.

Practice S-E-L-F-C-A-Re

Practice Acceptance

Accept difficult emotions!

- Avoiding or masking upsetting emotions might seem easy and safe, however, overall it makes them more difficult to regulate.
- Putting a name to specific emotions like anger, regret, sadness, loss, etc. can help in navigating them more effectively.
- Recognizing what we are dealing with can make it easier and less frightening to sit with those emotions and slowly increase awareness of them.
- Greater emotional awareness, in turn, can help with identifying strategies to cope with those feelings more productively.

Seek Support

Turn to others for support!

- You may have a hard time opening up or trusting anyone at all, yet we all need emotional support, especially in difficult times.

Exercise Self-Compassion

Practice daily self-compassion!

- With self-compassion we mindfully accept that the moment is painful, and embrace ourselves with kindness and care in response, remembering that imperfection is part of the shared human experience.

Practice Self- Love and Release Stress

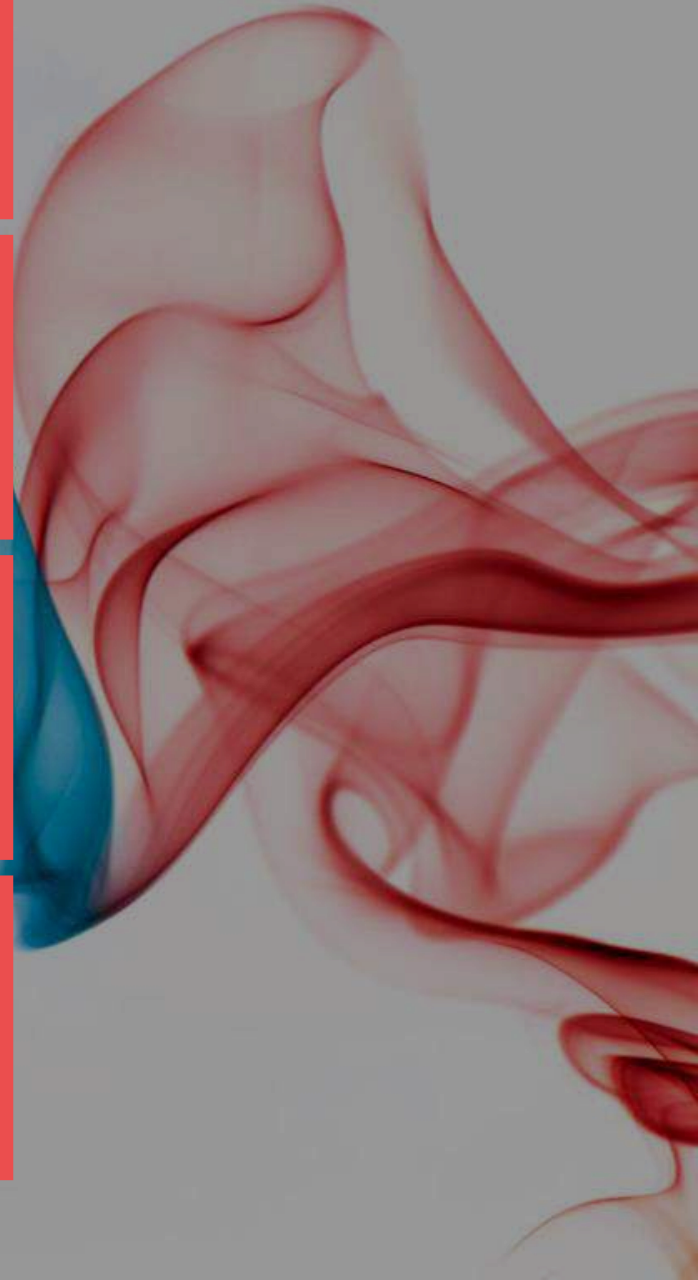
Find ways to release stress and focus on your needs. Truly love yourself!

- Start implementing some basic steps to relax your mind and reduce the constant feelings of stress and trauma.

Form Patient Habits

Be patient with yourself and your process!

- Sometimes we may believe we need immediate relief, but **healing is a process.**



Communicate

Begin truly communicating!

- It might be painful or uncomfortable, but one of the biggest aspects of rebuilding trust after betrayal is talking to your partner about the situation.

Acknowledge

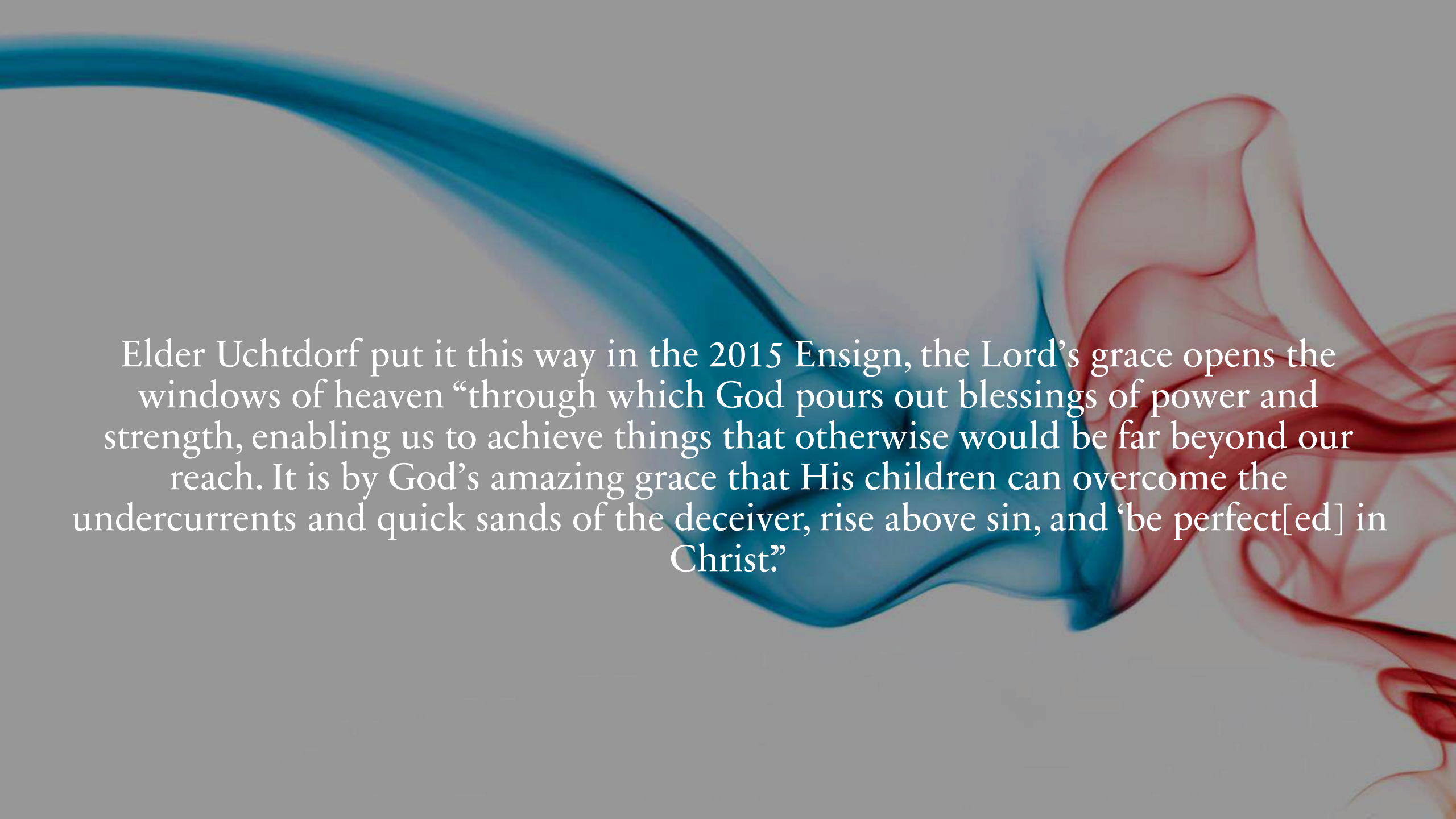
Acknowledge instead of avoid!

- Healing requires that first we come to terms with what happened.
- Acknowledging it allows for the exploration of reasons behind the betrayal and kick starts the healing process.

Restore

Restore your spiritual confidence!

- Rebuilding spiritual confidence comes through trusting in the enabling power of Jesus Christ and His atonement and turning our lives over to Him.

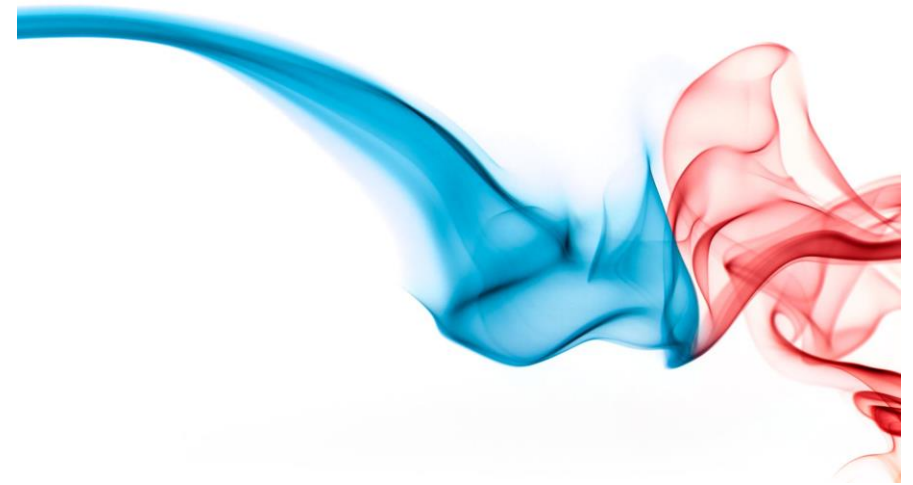


Elder Uchtdorf put it this way in the 2015 Ensign, the Lord's grace opens the windows of heaven "through which God pours out blessings of power and strength, enabling us to achieve things that otherwise would be far beyond our reach. It is by God's amazing grace that His children can overcome the undercurrents and quick sands of the deceiver, rise above sin, and 'be perfect[ed] in Christ.'"

Closing

"Men and women who turn their lives over to God will discover that He can make a lot more out of their lives than they can. He will deepen their joys, expand their vision, quicken their minds, strengthen their muscles, lift their spirits, multiply their blessings, increase their opportunities, comfort their souls, raise up friends, and pour out peace."

President Ezra Taft Benson



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[Sex and Glue: The Emotional Bond of a Physical Act - The Blog of Bryan A. Sands \(wordpress.com\)](#)

How Does Betrayal Trauma Alter the Mind?

When we are intimately involved with someone and the physical act of sex, there is a tremendous amount of emotional bonding created.

We can think of this bond as the glue that ties two people together.

This bond can have a positive effect as well as a negative one.
